

Valley Businessman Dreams Big

MEDIA: Public Relations CEO snags TV deal for side business.

By **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporter

Steve Syatt has turned bedtime stories—the ones he used to get his son David to go to sleep—into an enterprise that combines his musical talents and public relations savvy.

Syatt, who owns Sherman Oaks-based public relations firm **SSA Public Relations**, created the Shushybye characters in 2005 and has since brought them to children in books, cable and public television shows, DVDs, CDs and live stage performances. The newest outlet for Shushybye is cable channel **HDNet**, which will air “Shushybye Presents the Dreamsters” during the network’s Kidscene block of children’s entertainment programs.

Syatt has carved out a niche for himself in the TV



Syatt

market for children’s entertainment. That market is dominated by behemoths such as **The Disney Channel** and **Nickelodeon**, which create their shows in-house and have corporate divisions devoted to sales and marketing efforts and consumer products.

“It is tough to be an independent producer with a proprietary brand and move it in a global marketplace against studio-driven stuff,” Syatt said. “They have a leg up.”

But Syatt says he’s up for the challenge. And as CEO of SSA—a firm that largely caters to clients in the entertainment, consumer products and publishing industries—he knows what it takes to build a top

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brand. In the children’s and family entertainment sector, SSA has launched properties ranging from **Pokemon** and **Yu-Gi-Oh!** to **Bob the Builder** and **Berenstain Bears: The Animated Series**.

The premise behind Shushybye is simple: the Shushies are magical creatures living in Nap Valley and Snore Shores, and they create children’s dreams and pack them up in Dream Boxes for delivery by Conductor McCloud and his Shushybye train.

Music plays an integral role in the storylines, with Syatt writing and composing the songs himself. The Shushybye Dream Band appeals to infants and toddlers, while The Dreamsters play “harder-edged” music and are geared toward preschoolers and first-graders.

“They rock out a bit more,” Syatt said, of The Dreamsters. “The dialogue is much more sophisticated.”

Shushybye Success

Syatt’s characters first came to life in a self-published book in 2005. Since then, the bedtime characters have starred in four CDs, two DVDs and three books published by **St. Martin’s Press**, which can be purchased at the Shushybye online store. Other products include Shushybye characters plush dolls and themed sleepwear.

The 12,000 pieces of sleepwear made available for the holiday shopping season already have sold out at the online store, Syatt said. He declined to give exact revenue figures, but said total sales at the Shushybye online store have reached into the six figures.

In 2006, cable channel **BabyFirstTV** began broadcasting the short-form “Shushybye Baby” program. Syatt said he is currently writing scripts for a second series of 26 nine-minute episodes. Plans for that series include filming in North Hollywood and a spring debut.

Independent Los Angeles public television channel **KCET** produced a one-hour pilot of “The Dreamsters” series and several half-hour episodes, which are schedule to air next year. **KCET** brought in professional writers for that project and has plans to syndicate the series.

The station has consulted with a national syndication organization and received encouraging response, said **KCET** President and CEO **Al Jerome**. “If we like it, we think public television stations across the nation will

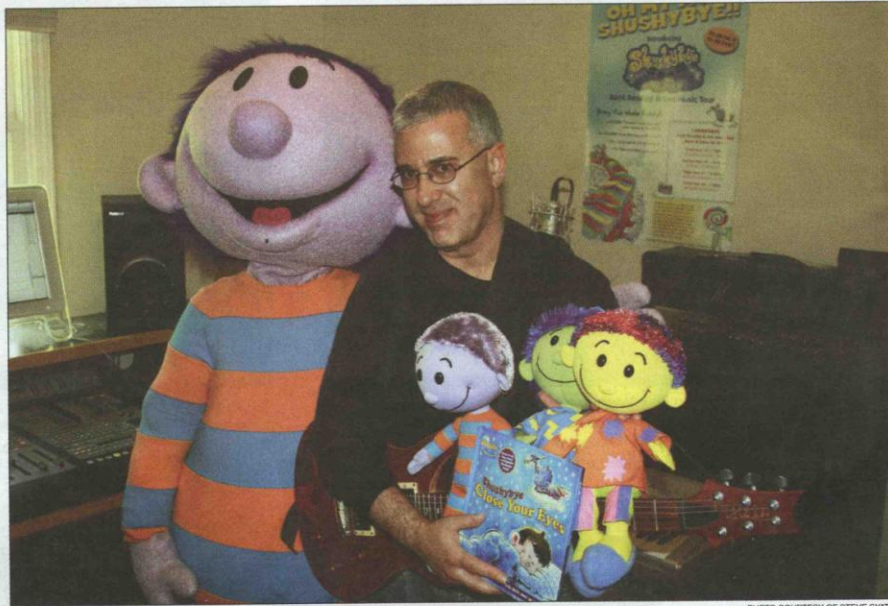


PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE SYATT

Sounds: Music plays a significant role in the Shushybye storylines. Steve Syatt writes and composes many of those songs.

feel similarly,” Jerome said.

The music Syatt and the Shushybye band creates is infectious and upbeat—qualities that children enjoy, Jerome said. He noted that the band played to a packed house at a children’s concert held earlier this year at the **House of Blues**.

Dr. David Cooper, an internist in New York and Syatt’s primary financier, said he’s invested millions into the Shushybye brand.

“When you put together his (Syatt’s) passion, creativity and a love of music, you have the makings of a fantastic product for kids and their parents and the whole culture,” he said.

Dr. Cooper said his e-mail in-box fills up daily with notes from parents praising Shushybye and its abilities to get their children to fall asleep—an important aspect to healthy living.

The brand also has the ability to address other important issues that children face, such as bullying, he said.

Public Relations: Not just a day job

Syatt develops story plots and song lyrics outside of the work he does as CEO of **SSA Public Relations**.

“It is hard to do during the business day,” he said. “I am thinking about client stuff, and I cannot stop to think about story ideas.”

Syatt said he has never considered giving up his public relations career to concentrate full-time on the Shushies. For one, he likes talking with the media. Plus, his son David now works full time at the firm, and he enjoys the professional relationship they share.

Syatt acknowledges he has quite a distance

to go before Shushybye reaches superstar status—though he says his experience building public relations and marketing campaigns for children’s programs certainly has helped with his success thus far.

It also has helped him to better serve his SSA clients.

SSA clients are aware of Shushybye, but Syatt said he assures them that it does not interfere with the time he devotes to his public relations company. Meanwhile, clients benefit from his first-hand knowledge about licensing deals, and his connections with agents and publishers. After getting Shushybye on **Comcast**’s video-on-demand, for example, Syatt has done the same for some of his clients.

“I don’t know many PR people who do that,” he said.