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Interview: John Crooke (PlayNetwork)



I was in a Chuck E. Cheese's for a party early this fall and while I was absent-mindedly watching the video loop on the TVs next to the giant (and silent) animatronic animals, I was shaken out of my reverie by the appearance of the [great video for "\\$9.99"](#) by [Caspar Babypants](#) (AKA Chris Ballew). Hunh? When exactly did Chuck E. Cheese enter the indie scene?

I sent off an e-mail to Ballew, and he mentioned that he'd licensed the video for use to [PlayNetwork](#), which, among other things, provides in-store background music and video media. Which then led me to John Crooke, Senior Director for Creative Development, who answered some questions about PlayNetwork and what it looks for in music.

**Zoogobble: First off, can you briefly explain what PlayNetwork does?**

John Crooke: PlayNetwork produces experiences for consumers that are centered around media for retail environments. From music to TV, video and design, we're telling stories through media and building partnerships with the most talented and creative individuals in those areas. We create, produce and deliver exceptional content and media experiences.

**How often do you need to find music appropriate for a family setting?**

Many of our clients require family-friendly music and video, reaching from rock, pop and country to children's programming. When it comes to younger audiences, we deliver a lot of kid-friendly content and are constantly on the search for new, fun content for those environments. Dependent on the client, we seek new content on a monthly, bi-monthly and quarterly basis. We also like creating original content for our clients and mixing it in with popular children's properties. We work more like a TV network rather than a digital signage company; we understand our audiences and want to provide content that speaks to and entertains them. Kids are particularly media savvy and we want the content we provide them to be as seamless and relatable as the programming they consume at home.



**This may be a nebulous question to ask without a specific client, but what do you listen or look for in deciding whether a family music song/video is appropriate for the service you're setting up?**

The most important thing I look for in a song is a hook. I seek proven titles and melodies, such as Yo Gabba Gabba, They Might Be Giants, Dan Zanes and Ralph's World. We have an intuitive understanding of the client's needs and we have them in mind when listening or watching content. We listen for what works and look for the most

visually engaging content that will resonate with a particular audience in the retailer's environment.

**Have you found that there is more interest from clients in incorporating family music into their settings?**

Many companies are very clear in their vision and have been since the beginning of our relationships, so there hasn't been a surge in family-friendly programming. However, the companies that do cater to families have gotten better at investing in and speaking to their clients. We believe we have a role in that by offering welcoming audiovisual experiences that appeal to the whole family. We span genres and demographics, but also cater to those companies that don't want to focus families and want to reach a more edgy youth culture. We're targeted in our approach and strategic with our content offerings on every level.

**How do you go about finding family music/videos? Can musicians submit their music directly to you?**

Absolutely. For example, Chris Ballew and Caspar Babypants came to us through an internal PlayNetwork connection. We tap into labels, studios, broadcasting companies and kids programming, but we also put our ears around everything we can. In addition to doing our homework and aggregating content, we encourage artists to submit via the PlayNetwork website. Once we have the content, we pull it together and build an entertaining show for our clients.

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