

Elevating Your Brand: Insights from Bridgerton's Licensing Success

April 23, 2024

By Marc P. Misthal



When *Bridgerton* returns, its influence won't be confined to the small screen. Now, thanks to a licensing arrangement with Ruggables, you can bring the elegance of *Bridgerton* into your home. Known for their diverse collaborations with iconic brands like Star Wars, Architectural Digest, Keith Haring, and Jonathan Adler, Ruggables has extended the *Bridgerton* aesthetic to your home. Since February, *Bridgerton* rugs have adorned homes, adding a touch of sophistication reminiscent of the beloved period drama. And the collaboration doesn't stop there – a partnership with Bath & Body Works brought *Bridgerton*-inspired scents into personal care this past March.

Given *Bridgerton*'s immense popularity, its expansion beyond the small screen should come as no surprise. In fact, it is following a path well-worn by other entertainment giants: licensing.

Licensing can be a powerful tool for expanding a brand's footprint, yet it carries significant risks. While a well-executed licensing program, such as the one that accompanied the release of last summer's *Barbie* release, can create the illusion of ubiquity and fuel a seemingly insatiable demand for branded merchandise, it's essential to recognize that success in licensing is not easily achieved. Behind every triumph lies diligent effort and meticulous planning.

The initial step involves figuring out which products seamlessly complement the brand. *Bridgerton*'s meticulous attention to detail and well-appointed sets, such as Danbury House or Aubrey Hall, coupled with the buzz surrounding the show's aesthetic, make a collaboration with Ruggable an ideal choice. This partnership effortlessly extends the visual appeal of the show into the homes of its audience.

Next up is the crucial step of ensuring that the brand to be licensed is protected, which involves filing trademark applications to protect the mark associated with the goods slated for licensing. Notably, Netflix owns a U.S. trademark registration for BRIDGERTON covering entertainment services. It has a pending application covering an array of goods and services (e.g., cosmetics, electronic devices, jewelry, handbags, home linens, dishware, clothing, toys, and food). However, it is worth noting that rugs are notably absent from this coverage.

One of the most critical parts of licensing is finding a partner you can trust (such as Ruggable, which boasts licensing arrangements with other major brands, likely facilitating its collaboration with *Bridgerton*). Why? Through licensing, you are giving up some control over your brand. It's imperative to have confidence that your partner will exercise the same care about your brand as you do and that they will work hard to make the license successful. Plus, ensuring they fulfill their obligations under the license, such as making timely payments and adhering to ethical standards like avoiding child labor, is crucial. Remember, your licensing partners are a reflection of your brand; any missteps on their part could tarnish your reputation, especially in the eyes of discerning observers like Lady Whistledown.

Of course, no one has a crystal ball, and unforeseen events can create issues. That is precisely why a well-drafted license agreement is essential to any licensing effort. This agreement should comprehensively outline all the pertinent business terms, including territory, duration, channels of trade, licensed products, royalty rates, and more. Additionally, it should have mechanisms for termination, should such action become necessary. If, for some reason, the license arrangement does not work out, it is the terms of the license agreement that will control the parties' relationship moving forward.

From a brand owner's point of view, the quality control provisions within a license agreement hold paramount importance. There are several compelling reasons for this. Firstly, the brand owner's primary objective is to uphold the brand's reputation by ensuring that licensed products maintain high-quality standards and reflect the brand's core values. Consequently, license agreements often grant brand owners the authority to approve prototypes and production items. It's imperative for brand owners to promptly provide approvals to avoid disrupting marketing plans. Secondly, failure to exercise quality control could result in what is known as "naked licensing," which can result in the potential forfeiture of their trademark rights. While a good quality control provision in the license agreement serves as a preventative measure to a naked license situation, the brand owner's active monitoring of product quality is essential. After all, consumers seeing a brand on a product will assume that the product meets certain standards of quality. And as you know, dear reader, Queen Charlotte can be exacting.

This year's diamond of the licensing season could well be the rug collaboration. If you are seeking to elevate your brand to new heights of success in the upcoming season, I'm here to provide professional guidance in crafting and executing a dynamic licensing program. Let's work together to ensure your brand shines brighter than ever before in the competitive world of licensing.