



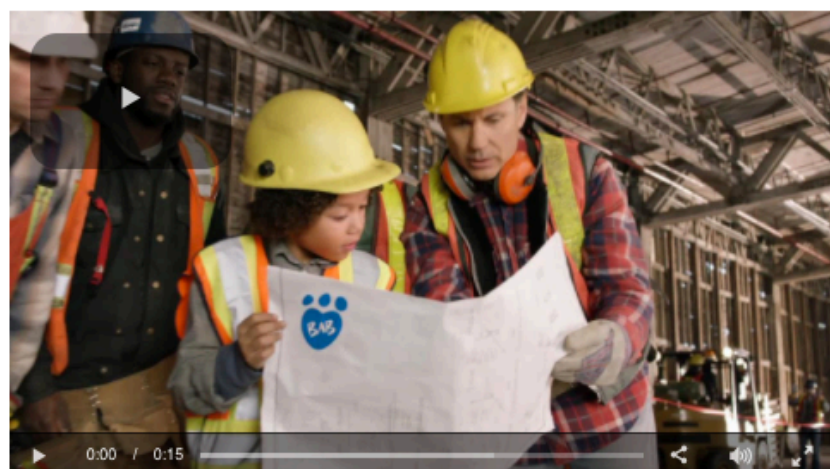
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Sans CMO, Build-A-Bear Tries TV

By [Adrienne Pasquarelli](#). Published on April 10, 2017.



George, that curious little monkey, is getting a new playmate: a bear he could stuff himself.

Beginning today, toy brand Build-A-Bear Workshop is investing its marketing dollars in two PBS Kids programs, "Curious George" and "Wild Kratts." It's a first-time national PBS sponsorship for Build-A-Bear, but comes during a tough period for the 20-year-old retailer. The company recently parted ways with its chief marketing officer after a disastrous holiday sales season. Now, it's planning a return to traditional media like TV in order to reach more moms.

On a recent conference call, President-CEO Sharon Price John lamented that the brand had moved away from "historically effective traditional TV."

"TV advertising to both moms and kids continues to provide consistent performance for Build-A-Bear," she said in an interview, adding that it helps generate awareness for consumers of both stores and the brand's website. "Reminding viewers about our commitment to creativity and imagination over the past almost 20 years is important to us," she said. The company declined to provide specifics on its new TV spending.

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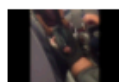
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But St. Louis, Mo.-based Build-A-Bear is beginning the new strategy with its top marketing post remains vacant. Gina Collins, who joined as chief marketing officer in 2014 and helped shepherd it through a brand refresh and store redesign, left in January. A former Coca-Cola marketer, Ms. Collins pushed Build-A-Bear into new markets, like cruise ships and movie theaters, as a way to diversify its

product mix and maximize the brand's potential as an experience-based retailer. She also helped spearhead digital initiatives like a YouTube series.

A company statement said Build-A-Bear chose to restructure its marketing department to improve the brand's ability to optimize the customer's experience online and in-store. "However, because it significantly reduced the current responsibilities of the chief marketing officer role, Gina Collins left the company to pursue other opportunities," it said in the statement. "Gina provided Build-A-Bear with valuable contributions throughout her tenure."

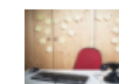
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Build-a-Bear has no plans to fill the CMO role.

The drastic restructuring is the result of a terrible fourth quarter, in which same-store sales fell 8.3%. Revenue for the quarter was \$110.3 million, a 6% drop from the year-earlier period. The 400-unit chain called out missed ecommerce opportunities in December because of an inability of company systems to handle increased website traffic.

On an annual basis, Build-A-Bear saw its first same-store sales decline in four years. The company spent \$6.5 million on measured media in the U.S. last year, according to [Kantar Media](#), which is basically flat with 2015.

The new sponsorship, which will last through the PBS shows' 13-week seasons, includes 15-second spots preceding both series. In one video, which was created with J. Walter Thompson Worldwide in Atlanta as well as the creative services team at

Sponsorship for Public Television, a girl uses tools and her own designs to build a giant heart.

On a recent conference call, Ms. John lamented the brand's move away from "historically effective traditional TV," and said that the change would be corrected in time for the Easter selling season.

Digital media has been taking a battering lately as ads have shown up on inappropriate video on YouTube, [JPMorgan Chase](#) has vastly culled the number of sites where it advertises and [Procter & Gamble](#) has attacked the entire ecosystem for not making faster progress on issues such as ad fraud and viewability.

Even before all that, media buying firm [Carat](#) found that TV ad spend increased 3% for the year ended September. It expects another 2.3% bump for the year ending this September.

Suzanne Zellner, VP-sponsorship group for public television at SGPTV, which handles buying for PBS programming, noted that research shows that parents have a positive view of PBS as an educational media brand, a view that transfers over to PBS Kids sponsors. "We call this the PBS halo effect," she said. Other sponsors in the space include Gymboree and Stride Rite.