

# [***The Mouse That Rampaged: What Happened Since The Original Mickey Lost His Copyright***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B1G-5R71-JBCM-F3K8-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** The published version of Forbes' CMO newsletter delivers the latest news for chief marketing officers and other messaging-focused leaders to inboxes every Wednesday.

**Body**

**This is the published version of Forbes' CMO newsletter, which offers the latest news for chief marketing officers and other messaging-focused leaders. Click here to get it delivered to your inbox every Wednesday.**

Happy 2024!

As the clocks struck midnight on January 1 and the calendar changed,**several beloved characters and stories copyrighted in 1928 entered the public domain**. Creators are now free towrite their own versionsof**Lady Chatterley s Lover**by D.H. Lawrence, change the lines of the stage version of J.M. Barrie s**Peter Pan; Or The Boy Who Wouldn t Grow Up**, and do what they will with the original versions of Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse. Yes, the first version of the mouse that launched the Disney entertainment empire and that led Disney to successfullylobby Congress to extend copyright timelines is no longer protected by copyright. Through the years, Disney has earned a reputation for using litigation to protect its signature characters, and this year has been anxiously anticipated by many content creators.

It s only been a few days, but Steamboat Willie -era Mickey Mouse has**already appeared in places Disney likely would not sanction**.There s Infestation 88, a horror game with a bloody Mickey Mouse as its main villain. The trailer for upcoming slasher film Mickey s Mouse Trap dropped on social media. Andon social media, Mickey is wielding a machine gun, crashing the Titanic into an iceberg and sportinga variety of new looks.

It s not likely that a nice Mickey Mouse, like the character Disney protected for so many years, will be introduced in a big way any time in the near future. Winnie the Pooh, which became another beloved Disney character, actually entered the public domain in 2022 after the copyright on A.A. Milne s original stories about the bear expired. Last year,**the stuffed-with-fluff bear starred in a slasher film of his own**:**Winnie-the-Pooh: Blood and Honey.** That movie, which grossed about $5.2 million at the box office, is apparentlygetting a sequel this year. And it s just in time: Milne s ever-bouncy Tigger character also entered the public domain in 2024.

**RIGHTS + SPONSORSHIP**

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Headquarters of Lionsgate Films in Los Angeles, California, December 10, 2018. (Photo by Smith Collection/Gado/Getty Images)

Getty Images

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It s been said that 2024 islikely to be a year of media company consolidation, M&A and new rights negotiations.**Deals, both planned and potential, dominated the headlines**at the end of 2023. Lionsgate, the movie studio behind**The Hunger Games,John Wick, Saw**and**Twilight**franchises, isseparating from Starz TV**through a merger with a special-purpose acquisition company**. The deal values the studio at $4.6 billion. Lionsgate announced last February it was interested in spinning off its studio business. Starz, a premium network and streaming service, has seen more difficulties in the last year, laying off 10% of its employees and exiting several countries.

Several media outlets reportedParamount Global and Warner Bros. Discovery began potential merger talks at the end of the year, though neither company responded to**Forbes** request for confirmation. Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav and Paramount Global CEO Bob Bakish reportedly discussed ways to combine their streaming services, Max and Paramount+.A tie-up of these two companies**could create another streaming behemoth, which could more readily compete with Netflix and Disney+**. A merger could bring Paramount s content from CBS, Showtime, MTV, Paramount Pictures, Nickelodeon, Comedy Central, BET and PlutoTV; and Warner Bros. Discovery s content from CNN, HBO, DC Comics, HGTV, Food Network, TNT, Eurosport and Animal Planet into a single channel. Both Paramount and Warner Bros. Discovery also have live sports streaming rights, representing some games from the NFL, NBA, NHL, NCAA basketball and several soccer leagues. Right now, Netflix has nearly 250 million subscribers and Disney+ has 105 million. Max has 95 million and Paramount+ has 63 million.

**NOW TRENDING**

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Crowds of shoppers along the streets of Myeong-dong in Seoul.

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South Korea iscapitalizing on its biggest export: pop culture. The Asian nation is launching a new visa that will allow non-Koreans registering at local performing arts academies to stay in the country for two years. The**Hallyu visa, which translates to Korean Wave, refers to the popularity of K-pop culture**in music, films and television shows. A report last year from South Korea s culture and tourism ministry found K-pop was the most cited reason foreign tourists visited the country already. South Korea has been leaning into its cultural popularity, with the national tourism organization producing marketing videos starring**Squid Game**actor Lee Jung-jae and K-pop megastars including BTS and Blackpink. There aren t many details yet on how to qualify for the visa, but specific requirements are expected by the second half of the year.

**ON MESSAGE**

**A Piercing Conversation With Claire s CMO Kristin Patrick**

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Claire's CMO Kristin Patrick

Claire's

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**For more than 60 years, Claire s has been a destination for the young and young at heart to find fun accessories to express themselves (and for**many **ear piercings). Before Kristin Patrick joined the company two years ago, Claire s was focused on its store locations. Patrick, who was previously CMO for PepsiCo s global beverage brands, brought the accessories retailer a new digital presence, refocused the brand, and is forging new content partnerships. I talked with her about the Claire s brand and its path toward the future. This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.**

**Claire s has been around for generations. How do you keep that brand recognition strong, especially with so many recent changes?**

**Patrick:** Most people enter the brand during a rite of passage, which is a first piercing. In general, you experience it with something that is incredibly important to you, and you end up staying with the brand through generations. We re there for your proms and your graduations and your communions and your bar mitzvahs and your bat mitzvahs, whatever it may be.

We do work to make sure that we re constantly evolving the brand. When I joined the company about two years ago, it was a complete reboot from the top to the bottom. It entailed a rebranding. We ve been working on the store experience. We ve been opening new flagship stores. We have been working to put the brand in places where our consumers are. We took it out of its owned-and-operated stores and into other distribution channels. We created a game in the metaverse called ShimmerVille. I think it s a constant evolution, and at the center of it all is our product, and what we, what we pick and pluck in terms of trends.

**What is different about Gen Z and Gen Alpha, your main marketing target demographics?**

**Patrick:**I lovingly refer to them as the Zalphas. I think it s two of the coolest generations. They are incredibly creative, incredibly entrepreneurial. They morph their physical and digital worlds. They are very fluid in terms of the experiences that they want. They re fluid with their sexuality. They are very, very tech savvy, to the point where an Alpha will never have lived in a world without an Alexa. It is a very powerful group of consumers because they are harnessing social media and digital in a way that even millennials didn t.

It is very much about giving them command and a say in what your brand is doing, and being able to kind of turn your platforms over to them in a way that most brands and marketers weren t really trained to do. It s a completely different way of communicating with them as well.

**What are some of the things that you re doing to turn the platform over to them?**

**Patrick:** We created a five-part episodic series where we gathered kids together from all over the world, and we literally just let them talk. Frankly, we didn t know what the outcome was gonna be. We pulled them together. They talked about everything from family to friendships, to their bodies, body dysmorphia. They talked about some of the stresses in their lives. They talked about what makes them happy and what they do to feel confident. And we didn t step in, we didn t edit. We kind of just let them go. It s something that I really think is important, and we want to do more of that.

In addition, we have research feedback loops where we re constantly talking to them about what they re interested in, and what they think about Claire s, and what they think about their life and their generation. So we have a constant dialogue going on, and it s really important. We learn just as much from them, I think, as hopefully they re learning from us.

**Tell me about your new partnerships with and . Why are you entering these new spaces?**

**Patrick:** When we went along this new vision for the future, we talked to consumers and they told us a lot about Claire s and where we could go, and we sort of let them guide us. They told us, We love the brand. We actually would like more from you. So it was things like, We d love to get apparel to go along with the accessories. We d love for you guys to decorate our dorms and bedrooms.

They told us that they wanted more content and information from us. They said that it could be as close in to things like giving advice around styling and fashion. They also said that it could be things related to the generation, and information around what other kids were interested in. And so we set up two partnerships, and we are going to start to tell stories. With Sony, we re developing a live action series, so think maybe the next**Gossip Girl**. For Audio Up, we re gonna be telling audio stories around Claire and who Claire is, and who Claire and her friends are and what they re doing.

**In terms of messaging, there have been big changes for Claire s. Have there also been changes in what Claire s is and does?**

**Patrick:**We re thinking about Claire s as a brand and a lifestyle, right? We have our fleet of retail stores, we have our distribution around the world, and in other retailers as well. We ve got our e-commerce platforms, and there s a sort of fourth pillar around the brand and the brand lifestyle. I think that it s always gonna be about self-expression across all of the businesses. And it will always be about all of the things that people expect from Claire s, which is the fun. I think it s always about the treasure hunt and learning, and it s taking all of the equities of the brand and giving consumers new ways to experience it.

It s interesting because I don t think all retailers can do this, right? I think because Claire s has such a rich history, and there is a part of it that is so creative and imaginative. Because consumers said, We will let you guys take us there. We ll go along with you on this journey if you wanna expand.

**What can we expect to see from Claire s in 2024?**

**Patrick:** What you ll see from us is more content coming out. I think that you re going to start to see a realness and an authenticity. More about the kids and their lives. I think that you re going to start to see some really interesting collaborations. We re still gonna continue to dabble in AI. I m really looking forward to a great year. This will be kind of the continuation of this rebranding. I think there's a lot more to come from us.

**FACTS + COMMENTS**

Anew federal lawsuitbrought by a disgruntled consumer accuses the NFL and Fanatics of**illegally conspiring to squash competition for branded merchandise and drive up prices**of officially licensed items. Fanatics said this lawsuit is very similar to one previously decided in its favor, and the NFL did not respond to**Forbes** request for comment.

**3%:** Size of the NFL s stake in Fanatics, which it purchased for $95 million in 2017

**$31 billion:** Valuation of Fanatics as of last month

**Share the monopoly profits among themselves :** What the lawsuit says the NFL and Fanatics are doing

**VIDEO**

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**STRATEGIES + ADVICE**

Brand ***politics*** were pretty thorny in 2023, and that s**likely to get worse this year**. Here are someideas for navigating the landscape.

**QUIZ**

Lucasfilm sued a car wash in Chile,**claiming it plagiarized its business name**. What is it called?

A. Car Wars

B. Dirt Vader

C. Star Wash

D. Obi Wash Kenobi

See if you got it righthere.

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