

Applause Top Dog With "Yo Quiero Taco Bell" Plush Toy; Taco Bell to Sell Out Millions of "Yo Quiero Taco Bell" Chihuahua Toys Designed by Applause.

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WOODLAND HILLS, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Dec. 23, 1998--Millions of talking plush dogs can't be wrong: The "Yo Quiero Taco Bell" Chihuahua is a national craze.

First indications of the incredible success came when 12.9 million units shipped to Taco Bell's national markets flew off the shelves in record time. Now, with nearly 10 million more units arriving soon and customers still clamoring for more, these plush dogs are also on their way to a quick sell-out.

And, as reported in the recent Los Angeles Times, USA Today and Brandweek articles, customers are lining up out the doors, and cars are wrapped around the buildings with everyone trying to get complete sets of the dogs. One enterprising toy huckster even offered the four-dog set on the Internet for \$59.99.

Needless to say, executives at Taco Bell and Applause Inc. are ecstatic.

"We're absolutely thrilled with our partnership with Applause Inc.," said Taco Bell spokesperson Laurie Gannon. "We considered other companies, but the Applause quickness-to-market and quality put them over the top."

Indeed, Applause is the quickest-to-market premium company because of the dedicated Los Angeles-area office and Hong Kong-based premium teams. A cutting-edge, in-house design group plus peerless overseas manufacturing expertise have made Applause the ultimate partner for firms like Taco Bell.

For the "Yo Quiero Taco Bell" campaign, Applause approached the Irvine, Calif.-based fast-food conglomerate with the plush toy idea, produced various designs, gained approval and then manufactured nearly 23 million of the talking Chihuahuas -- all within two and a half months. For past partnerships, Applause has completed specialty programs in as quick as three weeks.

"Our marketing, design and manufacturing teams are tried-and-true veterans," said Applause Senior Vice President of Strategic Alliances Dave Czerwinski, "which enable us to instantly respond to consumer trends of this magnitude."

Selling from \$2.99 to \$3.99, these unadvertised national promotion pieces have proved to be fast-food sales powerhouses, each including one of four phrases like "Yo Quiero Taco Bell," "Viva Gorditas," "Here, lizard, lizard" and, for the holidays, "Feliz Navidad, Amigos" ... or is that "Fleas Navidad?" Regardless, this Applause plush toy craze isn't going to the dogs any time soon.

"After 17 wildly successful television commercials and over 20 million soon-to-be sold-out toys," said Applause Taco Bell Brand Manager Chris DeGroof, "this phenomenon can only strengthen current and future strategic alliances with Applause Inc."

Applause/Taco Bell premium programs have included "The Mask," "The Tick," Nintendo and the hugely successful 1997 "Star Wars" program. Having produced premium products for Taco Bell for several years, Applause will be providing all toys globally for Tricon's eagerly anticipated 1999 "Star Wars: Episode I program."

Company Background

Applause, with headquarters in the Los Angeles suburb of Woodland Hills, is one of the world's most diversified gift and specialty market marketers. Founded 31 years ago by Wallace Berrie, it offers specialty retailers an unequaled portfolio of classic licensed merchandise including some of the world's most popular characters from Disney, Looney Tunes, Sesame Street, Teletubbies and "Star Wars: Episode I." Applause is also a leading premium supplier for Pillsbury, KFC, Pentech and Pizza Hut.

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