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Licensed 'Star Wars' merchandise to make killing

When the first "Star Wars" movie opened on May 25, 1977, the movie licensing industry barely existed, there weren't any tied-in toys on store shelves and there was no forewarning that the film's unprecedented boxoffice bonanza would translate into frenzied demand for licensed products. But as the final episode in the series, "[Star Wars: Episode III -- Revenge of the Sith](#)," opens Thursday, Lucas Licensing has deals with about 400 licensees in more than 30 countries covering thousands of products. Since the first movie's release, the "Star Wars" [merchandising](#) machine has generated \$9 billion in retail sales, and expectations at Lucas Licensing are that "Sith" will trigger an additional \$1.5 billion. The exponential growth in the new movie's merchandising muscle is not just a reflection of the enduring popularity of the "Star Wars" franchise but also a testament to creator George Lucas' unique role in creating the template for the modern movie merchandising and licensing blitzes that have become a matter of course in the blockbuster era. (*Gail Schiller*)