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R/C TOYS TAKE NEW PATHS TO INCREASE SALES

LIFE WITHOUT TOYS "R" US: WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

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On the Cover: Flush Force from Spin Master

Squishmallows Stackables from Kellytoy
LIKE THE REST OF THE TOY INDUSTRY, I am extremely saddened by the closure of Toys “R” Us’ U.S. stores. Toys “R” Us played an important role in our childhoods and our children’s childhoods; it stood for fun, for play—for being a kid. When I told my dad about the impending closures, he said, “Wow, I remember standing in the aisles, lurking by the stockroom, waiting for the pallets of Cabbage Patch Kids to come in so I could get one for you for Christmas.”

Personally, I remember buying my first bike there, buying a sandbox with real sand, and the tremendous moment when my brother and I spent our own money on a brand new Nintendo Entertainment System—with a Power Pad!

I’m not the only one with fond memories. I took my kids to my local Toys “R” Us—the same one my mom took me to when I was their age—on the day the news broke and found it to be much more crowded than usual for a Wednesday evening. The staff was unprepared, and the checkout line was at least 12 customers deep for the hour we spent in the store. I overhead a dad say, “This might be the last time we come here…” and I had to stop the tears from welling up.

But times sure have changed since the ‘80s, when Toys “R” Us seemed like the ONLY place to shop for toys. So much of toy retail dollar share now belongs to Walmart, Amazon, and Target. In this day and age, convenience frequently out-weighs experience, and new dolls and games are ordered online alongside granola bars and T-shirts, all of which is delivered to your doorstep the next day.

But to the toy industry, Toys “R” Us is seemingly irreplaceable. No one wants to see it gone for good. And in recent weeks, we’ve heard various perspectives on what will become of toy retail.

MGA Entertainment’s CEO Isaac Larian, along with a group of investors, set up a GoFundMe campaign to #savetoysrus. He is on a crusade to make it reality, having invested $100 million himself. If he is successful, much of the industry will breathe a sigh of relief, but I’m left pondering what a vertically integrated Toys “R” Us would look like, and what it would mean for the industry.

What would it mean for non-invested manufacturers? Would their shelf space be scaled back? Would their products be buried in less than ideal locations in the store? In other words, would their products be seen as competitors? Mattel was a huge supplier for Toys “R” Us. Surely that relationship would suffer under new ownership.

We’re also hearing about a KB Toys comeback. California company Strategic Marks, which bought the KB Toys brand in 2016, is currently in discussions with pop-up operators to re-open stores in malls before Black Friday. Strategic Marks’ CEO Ellia Kassoff is in talks with retailers, including Go! Retail Group, Spencer Spirit Holdings, and Party City to provide the real estate. Kassoff is also reportedly in discussions with toy manufacturers, including Mattel.

We’re also hearing that Amazon is interested in buying Toys “R” Us locations and using them as Amazon brick-and-mortar storefronts. However all of these possibilities play out, this is certainly going to be an interesting year for the toy industry. Be sure to check out Industry Analyst Sean McGowan’s take on what went wrong for Toys “R” Us—and what the future holds—on page 14.

Whatever happens with Toys “R” Us, the industry must go on, and we’ve got you covered. Enjoy this issue of The Toy Book! As always, we’d love to hear from you! Share your feedback with us via email: jbreyer@adventurepub.com, or tweet us: @toybook and @jackiebreyer

Jackie Breyer is editor-in-chief of The Toy Book and the Toy Insider, and editorial director at Adventure Publishing. She has been reporting on new products and toy industry trends for 16 years. Contact her at jbreyer@adventurepub.com.
THE FUTURE TOY CONSUMER & TOY RETAIL ECOSYSTEM

The Toy Association Unveils New Study at PlayCon

by KRISTIN MORENCY GOLDMAN, communications specialist, The Toy Association

WONDERING WHAT THE TOY INDUSTRY will look like in a decade? The Toy Association is commissioning a series of studies by a group of futurists at ProdigyWorks to find out. The first study, “The future toy consumer and toy retail ecosystem,” will be unveiled at PlayCon, the Toy Association’s International Conference of Play Professionals, which takes place from May 8 to 9 in San Francisco.

Conference attendees will have the opportunity to participate in an interactive discussion with ProdigyWorks’ Ted Curtin, who will share detailed insights about the study results. The full study will be made available to Toy Association members immediately following PlayCon.

“ProdigyWorks is helping us uncover every imaginable opportunity, challenge, and trend that will impact the industry over the next five to 10 years,” says Ken Seiter, executive vice president of marketing communications at The Toy Association. “From evolving consumer values and sustainability, to gender and play, and a rapidly changing retail landscape, insight into these issues will help our member companies develop and launch new product, accelerate innovation, and solve complex business problems.”

Here’s a sneak peek at the first report:

CHALLENGE: HOW TO REACH THE NEW CONSUMER

Gen X and millennial consumers are rebelling against some technological advances in favor of retro ideas, products, and behavior. Only one of the top 20 toys sold on Amazon last December was an electronic toy.

Aligned with this “old-school thinking,” parents are concerned about screen time and how it reduces kids’ physical activity. Other evolving consumer values include a growing “on-demand” sensibility fueled by technology and e-commerce; a desire for more enriching experiences for kids; an interest in “authentic” toys; and a growing awareness of social justice and sustainability.

CHALLENGE: HOW TO TACKLE THE NEW RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

In addition to e-commerce, there are other factors that influence the current retail landscape, including concept stores from companies such as Amazon and Nordstrom, and pop-up and brand-immersive experiences. As retailers think outside the box, how can toy companies get on-board?

CHALLENGE: HOW CAN YOUR BUSINESS HARNESS TECHNOLOGY?

What are the plans for the toy industry as technology continues to permeate the toy aisle? Over the next few years, tech innovations, such as artificial intelligence, holography, haptics, and a more seamless fusion of media and products will influence consumer demands and product distribution dynamics.

CHALLENGE: HOW TO APPEAL TO “ANTI-BIG” SENTIMENTS

Shifts in trends and values about fair trade and labor practices have resulted in a share of the marketplace that is opposed to big business. This manifests in a movement away from chain stores and restaurants, and toward brands that give off a small, niche, or alternative vibe. Toys and play that are aligned with social-minded values—from the care of workers to an eco-friendly production and distribution process—will appeal to this consumer base and can become elements of a brand and its marketing.

CHALLENGE: HOW TO “NEUTRALIZE” GENDER

Gender-conventional toys will likely continue to exist, but parents may demand toys that de-emphasize traditional gender roles and acknowledge that girls participate in traditional male play, and boys participate in traditional female play. Toymakers will need to find inclusive strategies that neutralize gender, and instead focus on character traits—strength, confidence, intelligence, and kindness—and passions—hobbies, activities, issues—without requiring their audience to be a specific gender.

Following its debut at PlayCon, Toy Association members will have free access to the study at toyassociation.org. The Toy Association will roll out additional toy-focused studies by ProdigyWorks in the coming months.

As The Toy Association’s senior communications specialist, Kristin Morency Goldman leads the development of content for the Association’s print and online communications. Her articles on toy trends, toy safety, and industry news can be found in trade and consumer publications around the world. She holds a Master’s degree in media, culture, and communications from NYU.
BENCHMARKING FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE:

Do your metrics meet industry standards?

by KIMBERLY MOSLEY, president, American Specialty Toy Retailing Association

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, PLAYWRIGHT and co-founder of the London School of Economics, once said, “It is the mark of a truly intelligent person to be moved by statistics.”

Maybe so, maybe not. But retailers who are members of the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA) are likely to find statistics generated by the annual ASTRA Retail Benchmarking Survey to be valuable barometers of their stores’ business health. And what independent store owner wouldn’t be moved by that?

WHY BENCHMARK?

Benchmarking is a business tool that compares one measured set of metrics against best practice standards, top performers, or aggregated industry results to help spot areas of strength and weakness. Management guru Bain & Co* states that, “the objective of benchmarking is to find examples of superior performance and understand the processes and practices driving that performance. Companies then improve their performance by tailoring and incorporating these best practices into their own operations—not by imitating, but by innovating.” Bain cites several reasons for regular benchmarking, including:

• Improved performance to identify ways to improve operational efficiency and results (Think: Profit and found money).
• Greater strategic advantage that helps companies focus on capabilities that are critical to building their competitive advantage.
• Increased rate of organizational learning to bring new ideas into the company and facilitate experience sharing.

2018 ASTRA RETAIL BENCHMARKING SURVEY

If that sounds like what you want for your store, I encourage you to set aside a time on your calendar between mid-April and the end of June, and label it “Complete ASTRA Retail Benchmark Survey to Increase Profits.”

Right after Tax Day in April—and I don’t think I need to remind anyone of that date—ASTRA retailer members will receive an email with a link to the benchmarking survey. They can use that hour that was previously scheduled, and enter numbers and forms from the tax return they just completed—all of which are kept strictly confidential. The deadline to complete this survey is June 30.

The information then goes to a highly respected survey research company called Industry Insights that ASTRA selected to collect and analyze retailer data. In a few weeks, each ASTRA retailer who completes the survey will receive a report that gives their store’s metrics, plus the same metrics for ASTRA stores nationwide as a whole. Store owners will be able to see how their store compares against ASTRA averages and ASTRA high performers on a host of metrics, including but not limited to:

• Customer conversion rate
• Average ticket dollar value
• Profit (gross margin, net profit, return on assets, etc.)
• Space productivity (sales per square foot, gross margin per square foot, etc.)
• Employee productivity (sales per employee, payroll per employee, etc.)
• Inventory turnover

FREE BUSINESS STATISTICS

The personalized report and the industry report is provided free to ASTRA store owners who complete the survey, and is available for purchase for those who do not. If you are not an ASTRA member, visit astratoy.org/join-asta/become-a-member/ by mid-June to participate in the survey and get the free report. Once individuals have it in their hands, they’ll see areas where their business needs attention—whether minor tweaks or immediate intensive care—and they’ll also see what they and their team are doing well.

The upcoming ASTRA Marketplace & Academy in New Orleans from June 10 to 13 will give attendees more information on how store owners and retailers can use these financial statistics. Greg Manns of Industry Insights will lead a 75-minute session titled Performance Data: Gauging the Independent Toy Industry, which will cover why certain metrics are so important to a business and how business owners can quickly and easily monitor their performance without needing any financial expertise.

Here at ASTRA, we hope all retailers will jump on this opportunity to get top-quality free data, and contribute to the overall pool of statistics we create together. It’s yet another way that ASTRA supports the financial health of the independent toy retailing industry, and it may be the starting point a store owner needs to find some lost money in ongoing operations.


Kimberly Mosley, president of the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association, is an experienced, award-winning, results-oriented association executive with a long track record of success in managing association operations, developing innovative programs, and growing revenue.
Radio/Remote Control Toys Performance by Subclass

Both subclasses within Radio/Remote Control Toys underperformed compared to total toy industry growth of +1 percent.

### Radio/Remote Control Ground/Sea/Other
- Sales ($MM): $500
- % Change: -8%

### Radio/Remote Control Air
- Sales ($MM): ($50)
- $ Change ($MM): (-$25)
- % Change: -17%

Plush Performance by Subclass

Among the Plush subclasses, Special Feature/Interactive Plush grew the most in absolute dollars at +100MM, but Puppets grew the fastest at +33 percent.

### Total Sales
- Traditional Plush
- Special Feature/Interactive Plush
- Puppets

Collectibles

In only three years, collectibles have grown from a 4 percent share of the total toy industry to 10 percent share.

Collectibles - Top 10 Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Manufacturer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 L.O.L. Surprise! Doll Assortment</td>
<td>MGA Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 L.O.L. Surprise! Lil’ Sister Assortment</td>
<td>MGA Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 L.O.L. Surprise! Big Surprise Ball</td>
<td>MGA Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Hatchimals Mini Eggs CollEGGtibles 4-Pack</td>
<td>Spin Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 L.O.L. Surprise! Pet Assortment</td>
<td>MGA Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Shopkins 2-Pack Assortment</td>
<td>Moose Toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Hatchimals Mini Eggs CollEGGtibles 2-Pack w/ Nest</td>
<td>Spin Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Hatchimals Mini Eggs CollEGGtibles 1-Pack</td>
<td>Spin Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Beanie Boos Regular Assortment</td>
<td>Ty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Shopkins 12-Pack Assortment</td>
<td>Moose Toys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The NPD Group/Retail Tracking Service/12ME January 2018
TOYS “R” US—AND THE FUTURE OF RETAIL

by STEVE PASIERB, president and CEO, The Toy Association

THE BANKRUPTCY AND LIQUIDATION

of Toys “R” Us (TRU) has made it clear that the toy retail landscape will never be the same. Yet trends in the larger U.S. retail sector prove that interesting, well-stocked, focused, and attractive physical retail stores are indeed performing well. When those elements occur, price is less of a factor. For toys, well-curated neighborhood toy stores can exemplify this fact, while nimble mid-mass chains, a range of mass retailers, and other doors now selling toys continue to play an important role in the way consumers discover and buy toys. Going forward for all these retailers, shopping experience and a solid value proposition that matches with the consumer will be everything—basic price and promotion simply won’t be enough. That goes equally for whatever portions of TRU remain here in the U.S. (#SaveToysRUs) and around the world.

Being able to explore, touch, feel, and play with a toy is consumer magic. A family outing to the toy store or aisle to pick out a special gift or a new game for family game night is something that cannot be replicated online. Childhood memories of visiting the toy store are held close to our hearts. Even as the retail community undergoes disruptive change and a bifurcation between price-based and premier retail exposes weakness of those sitting in the middle, we know that quality storefront retail will always be essential. It’s part of a healthy ecosystem—including e-commerce—that will sustain the business of toys.

Looking ahead to the 2018 holiday season, I am among those who are optimistic about the toy industry. According to The NPD Group, Toys “R” Us represented approximately 12 percent of U.S. toy sales in 2017, meaning the majority of those sales will move elsewhere in the coming months. And we all know the competition is moving quickly to seize that share. Even if our industry sees a low single-digit annual decline, there is no doubt that toys will be at birthday parties and under the tree this Christmas. My worries are more focused long-term on range of selection, support for innovation across the industry, and opportunity for small companies that may not exist in a less diverse toy retail sector without a player with the scope of TRU. I hope I’m wrong.

THE TOY ASSOCIATION IS HELPING MEMBERS NAVIGATE THE TRU LIQUIDATION

With the unraveling of TRU impacting so many, The Toy Association has been working since news first surfaced last fall to help our members navigate this difficult period. Protecting the industry and our members is one of our primary reasons for being. Our focus remains on defending the interests of manufacturing member companies and helping them successfully navigate both the bankruptcy process as well as the next 18 to 24 months as the industry, the marketplace, and consumers all establish new patterns. We are providing support of Member Motions seeking payment of all Administrative trade claims. Our legal counsel and Credit Program have been continually working to seek information or insight from counsel to the Unsecured Creditors’ Committee, as well as encouraging any level of useful communication from TRU.

By the time this appears in print, we will have held four special calls for our members to provide updates and guidance on the bankruptcy/liquidation process, including what unsecured creditors should do next. Participants in these calls have had the opportunity to speak directly with presenters, including legal counsel, financial advisors, and counsel to the official Unsecured Creditors’ Committee about issues and concerns. Recordings of these calls are available in the TRU Bankruptcy Information section on our website at toyassociation.org, which is also continually updated as new information becomes available.

As we continue to secure additional resources to support our members, I want to remind everyone to watch for announcements and updates in Toy News Tuesday. Members should also keep their eyes open for important member alerts via email.

The marketplace will settle, everyone from specialty to mass who are nimble and focused will pick up volume, and consumers are certainly going to continue buying toys this year and in years to come. Now is the time to move forward with all deliberate speed, and not hold back or be timid. I have absolute faith in the spirit and determination of the toy community.”

As president & CEO of The Toy Association, Steve Pasierb oversees the activities of the $20 million not-for-profit trade association representing all businesses involved in creating and bringing toys and youth entertainment products to kids of all ages. He also serves on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Association Committee of 100 and is an active member of ASTM International.
MGA CEO ISAAC LARIAN AND INVESTORS CREATE GOFUNDME CAMPAIGN TO #SAVETOYSRUS

Isaac Larian, CEO of MGA Entertainment Inc. (MGAE), started a GoFundMe campaign aimed at saving Toys “R” Us.

Larian and various investor associates have contributed more than $200 million toward a $1 billion goal, which would be used in the formulation of a bid to acquire all or some Toys “R” Us assets through bankruptcy process. MGA Entertainment is not financially involved in this endeavor.

If the $1 billion goal is reached, it would be the highest-funded crowdfunding campaign to date. In addition to this initial contribution, Larian has pledged to commit 10 percent of all proceeds from Little Tikes purchases made between now and the end of this campaign.

“If there is no Toys “R” Us, I don’t think there is a toy business,” Larian said.

The public is invited to donate to the GoFundMe campaign to #SaveToysRUs. The campaign’s goal is to give future generations the opportunity to “always be a Toys “R” Us kid” and save employee jobs that are at stake, should the company cease operation.

Larian also plans to develop a special program to benefit Toys “R” Us employees who participate in this campaign. Donations are currently being accepted via GoFundMe at www.savetoysr.us. The deadline for reaching the $1 billion goal is Memorial Day, May 28, 2018. This is not a charitable donation, and certain donor disclosures apply.

KB TOYS COULD MAKE A COMEBACK FOLLOWING TOYS “R” US SHUT DOWN

California company Strategic Marks, which bought the KB Toys brand in 2016, is currently in discussion with pop-up operators to reopen stores in malls before Black Friday. The news follows the announcement that Toys “R” Us will shut down all U.S. stores.

Strategic Marks’ CEO Ellia Kassoff is in talks with retailers, including Go! Retail Group, Spencer Spirit Holdings, and Party City to provide the real estate. Kassoff is also reportedly in discussions with toy manufacturers, including Mattel.

KB Toys stores originally closed its chain of stores in 2009.

IMAGENNATION, EPIPHANY SCHWARZ APPOINT JAY@PLAY AS COZY WINGS MASTER TOY PARTNER

Epiphany Schwarz and GennComm’s Im-aGENNation division appointed Jay@Play as the master toy licensee for Cozy Wings. Created by Christine Mangnall-Schwarz, Cozy Wings is a unique, wearable cape and wings combination for kids and adults that inspires imaginative play.

Next month, Jay@Play will introduce patented Cozy Wings on As Seen on TV in several markets worldwide. There are multiple patents pending, including two worldwide patents. Cozy Wings are also expected to be available at retail later this year.

BASIC FUN! ACQUIRES GEOWORLD AND DR. STEVE HUNTERS BRAND

Basic Fun! acquired Geoworld and its brand Dr. Steve Hunters, which will become part of the company’s Uncle Milton STEM business. Geoworld is a line of excavation and discovery toys, including paleontology and archeology sets designed and developed by owner and geo-paleontologist PhD Stefano Piccini, who continued to work as a paleontologist while running Geoworld.

While Basic Fun! has taken over day-to-day management of the company, Dr. Piccini will remain an active member of the team to assist in the transition and help expand Basic Fun!’s Uncle Milton STEM business. All the company’s products can be found at traditional and online retailers in the U.S. and around the world.

Gigantosaurus is based on the book by Jonny Duddle. The series follows the adventures of four young dinosaur friends as they explore their prehistoric world and the mystery of Gigantosaurus—the biggest and fiercest dinosaur.»

JAKKS PACIFIC NAMED GLOBAL MASTER TOY PARTNER FOR GIGANTOSAURUS

Cyber Group Studios entered a multi-year, worldwide master toy agreement with Jakks Pacific Inc. for Gigantosaurus. The new animated preschool series will launch worldwide next year.

Jakks Pacific will design, produce, and bring to market a full range of toys inspired by the series, including figures, vehicles, play sets, outdoor toys, furniture, and Halloween costumes and accessories. The initial products will launch at retail next fall.

Gigantosaurus is based on the book by Jonny Duddle. The series follows the adventures of four young dinosaur friends as they explore their prehistoric world and the mystery of Gigantosaurus—the biggest and fiercest dinosaur.»

STAY CONNECTED! @ToyBook
THE STRONG NAMES WORLD VIDEO GAME HALL OF FAME FINALISTS

The Strong’s World Video Game Hall of Fame in Rochester, N.Y., named 12 finalists for induction. This year’s induction class includes Asteroids, Call of Duty, Dance Dance Revolution, Final Fantasy VII, Half-Life, John Madden Football, King’s Quest, Metroid, Minecraft, Ms. Pac-Man, Spacewar!, and Tomb Raider.

The World Video Game Hall of Fame received thousands of nominations from more than 100 countries for consideration. New this year, fans may vote for their favorite finalists as part of a “Player’s Choice” ballot. The final inductees will be chosen with guidance from an international selection advisory committee made up of journalists, scholars, and other individuals familiar with the history of video games. They will be announced during a special ceremony at The Strong museum on May 3.

ZURU RELAUNCHES X-SHOT DART BLASTERS

ZURU will relaunch its X-Shot foam dart blaster toys, including a full rebrand, improved performance of current models, and new products. The company significantly invested in automation and manufacturing optimization, including a team of more than 100 automation engineers and newly opened software divisions in Italy and India, where its custom-built machinery produces more than 3 million X-Shot darts and 100,000 X-Shot dart blasters per day to keep up with global demand.

ZURU shipped out more than 40 million blasters and 1 billion darts worldwide in the past two years. X-Shot is now the fastest growing non-licensed brand in the category, according to the company. With all major retailers carrying the line, the X-Shot brand has seen a 159 percent sales growth in the U.S. for 2016 versus 2017 with additional expected growth of 55 percent this year.

ORB LAUNCHES SOFT’N SLO SQUISHIES WEB SERIES

ORB will launch a 10-episode web series centering around its Soft’n Slo Squishies brand. The company partnered with Nelvana Enterprises to create a series of digital shorts as part of its strategy to further expand the line into new product areas.

The first three episodes of the short-form YouTube series premiered on March 30, with later distribution on other popular kids’ YouTube channels and new episodes following weekly.

Fans can expect hilarious episodes, with titles such as “Work it Squishies,” “Squishies Dares,” and “Runway Cutie.” There are currently 400 different Soft’n Slo Squishies on the market, and more than 600 new designs planned for 2018.
TOYS “R” US IS CLOSING ITS DOORS

Sean McGowan analyzes how this happened, and what it means for the toy industry.

by SEAN McGOWAN, managing director, Liolios Group

TOYS “R” US IS FOLDING. IT’S SAD.
No doubt about it. Many of us are processing the shock. Even oldsters might find ourselves singing, “I don’t wanna grow up; I’m a Toys “R” Us kid!” Quite aside from my memories as a consumer when I was young, or taking my kids there, I had a decades-long professional connection to Toys “R” Us. I covered the stock on Wall Street for 18 years. It was the first company in which I ever bought shares of stock. I interacted with seven different CEOs, dozens of executives at various levels over the years, and was on a first-name basis with managers at several stores that I visited in doing my research.

So, yeah, it’s sad. And the industry will definitely miss it. Toys “R” Us contributed to the industry’s growth in several ways that can’t be easily replicated. It pretty much bought everybody’s toy lines. It took chances on unproven toys from unproven companies, while being a reliable partner to the industry’s strongest players. It promoted toy sales year-round. It supported in-store merchandise displays on a scale that nobody else could match. And it provided a testing lab that helped manufacturers of all sizes gauge how well their products would respond to marketing, so that marketing plans, production, and pricing could be adjusted as warranted by the test.

I think Toys “R” Us’ absence will cause the industry to lose sales. While I believe that most of the sales that would have gone to Toys “R” Us will go to other retailers, I think we all know that not all of them will; a certain amount will be lost. Kudos to Juli Lennett of The NPD Group for her recent blog post pointing out the absurdity of estimates that the industry would lose more in sales than Toys “R” Us’ total share of the business. Some have rather publicly said they think the industry will lose 15 to 20 percent of sales. I believe the industry could lose 15 percent to 20 percent of Toys “R” Us’ U.S. sales, but considering Toys “R” Us’ share of the U.S. industry was at most a low-to-mid-teens percentage, that implies that the maximum that the industry could lose is approximately 2 percent.

For an industry that often shows annual growth of less than 2 percent (or even declines), it’s not an insignificant amount.

But it’s not fatal to the industry—not by a long shot. It may be fatal to some companies, either because Toys “R” Us accounted for an extremely high portion of their sales, or because the companies were in such a precarious financial condition that even a relatively small setback could be the tipping point. But the industry will get by.

Can Toys “R” Us be saved in some capacity? Could a group of manufacturers and financial backers band together and bail out what was once “The World’s Largest Toy Store?” Yes, in theory. But there are reasons to be skeptical. Putting aside the question of whether retailers such as Walmart, Target, and Amazon will remain eager to take products from vendors who “saved” a major competitor, there are reasons Toys “R” Us got to this point, and it wasn’t just debt. Even before the company’s leveraged buyout in 2005, the company was struggling to grow, and was slowly losing market share. Is this because kids stopped buying toys? No. It’s because they stopped buying them at Toys “R” Us. Why? Partly because of Amazon. Partly because Walmart and Target have grown to be so ubiquitous, and consumers shop there regularly. Partly because those retailers (and others) priced toys at loss-leading levels to build traffic.

An often-overlooked aspect of Walmart’s challenge for Toys “R” Us’ sales in the 1990s was that classic retail success factor—location, location, location. When Toys “R” Us built out its chain in the ’70s and ’80s (often buying the locations rather than leasing them), they chose locations that were not in shopping malls, but, rather near them, or on the way to them. This gave them the ability to benefit from the consumer traffic that the malls would generate without having to pay mall rents. But as Walmart grew and devoured share of wallet, the center of commerce in many locations shifted from the shopping mall to wherever it was that Walmart was located. If consumers shopped less at malls because they went to Walmart and the shops located near Walmart, they had less reason to drive to a Toys “R” Us.

Another reason for skepticism is that it’s not as though Toys “R” Us never tried to change its store experience. In fact, it tried many times, with Concept 2000, C-3, World of Toys, stores-within-a-store, etc. Management knew they had to make changes, and they tried many of them. And for awhile it looked like it was working—results from 2006 through 2009 were impressive. But after that, after they had used every arrow in the quiver, it turned out to be not enough.

Amazon gets a lot of blame for the woes of Toys “R” Us and other retailers. Maybe that’s deserved. But Toys “R” Us wasn’t just a victim of Amazon’s growth—it had a hand in it. After a disastrous start with its own e-commerce site in 1998, Toys “R” Us teamed up with Amazon to allow the fledgling e-commerce behemoth to handle its e-commerce. During that partnership, if you typed toysrus.com you were taken to… amazon.com. Are you kidding me? Toys “R” Us didn’t just...
In which case maybe the big lift doesn’t come until the family’s annual toy budget before the end of the summer.

What about a revival of KB Toys? I don’t believe that KB can make a comeback in its original form—a mall-based, small footprint toy store with a heavy offering of closeouts. But I do think there could be an opportunity to start a new chain of stores with that name that offers the unique attributes of the small specialty store. I’m not sure I’d want to be launching a new toy store chain in the middle of the liquidation sales, but let’s think long term.

What about bringing back FAO Schwarz? I’m not as optimistic about that idea. FAO Schwarz was not simply a toy store—it was a unique toy shopping experience, one that has proven to be very, very difficult to replicate on a large scale. FAO was about making that special trip to “the city” to get something that only they had. I used to quip that FAO Schwarz wasn’t in the business of selling toys, it was in the business of selling FAO Schwarz shopping bags and wrapping paper, because the fact that the toy came from FAO Schwarz mattered even more to shoppers than what the toy was. I don’t see that being any easier to execute on a large scale than it was before Toys “R” Us folded.

One final comment about some statements Dave Brandon, Toys “R” Us’ CEO said. The Wall Street Journal said that Brandon guarantees that “vendors who failed to support the retailer during the holidays, customers who shopped elsewhere, and media who chronicled the chain’s downfall will miss the retailer.” Brandon himself said, “The constituencies who have been beating us up for months will all live to regret what’s happening here.”

Well, I’m never one to kick a guy, or a company, when they’re down, and I have always counted myself a friend of Toys “R” Us. I mean no disrespect to the many hard-working people at Toys “R” Us, some of whom I’ve known for many years. But I think it’s absurd to think that this industry and its customers “failed to support” Toys “R” Us. Suppliers have bent over backwards for decades—to make sure that Toys “R” Us did as well as possible. They have supported the retailer with exclusive product and special marketing programs funded by the manufacturers. They have also tolerated decades of sub-optimal execution, private-label competition, and demands for expedited shipping that cost manufacturers money and sales opportunities.

I could tell stories going back to the 1970s that show that the industry has always been supportive of Toys “R” Us. I can recall Toys “R” Us executives warning toy makers that they would be “watching carefully and taking names” of which manufacturers were supporting Child World and Lionel during their bankruptcies. So, in my view, the industry absolutely has supported Toys “R” Us for decades. It showed continued support last year, despite having the rug pulled out from under them by a bankruptcy filling that happened after many had already shipped significant quantities of holiday goods before they were paid. Many continued shipping after the bankruptcy. Exactly how much more support could Toys “R” Us possibly have hoped for? Was expecting to be paid for the goods they shipped a failure to support? I don’t think so.

Consumers also supported Toys “R” Us. No, I don’t mean they all refused to shop elsewhere. I mean that despite the company’s old, out-of-date stores, an inferior e-commerce site, occasionally confusing pricing, and locations that were increasingly inconvenient, millions of customers did support the company. It was not just about price, guys. If success in the toy industry were only about price, then LEGO wouldn’t have grown to be the biggest toy company. It’s about innovation, creating unique experiences, and staying relevant.

Yes, Toys “R” Us’ vendors and customers will miss the company. But this mess is not their fault, so don’t blame them.

Let me conclude with a word about the passing of Charles Lazarus. Charles was the creator of Toys “R” Us, and, therefore, the father of the “category killer” retailer. He had the vision to see how changes in the retail format could actually create primary demand, and some of the elements that led to the early success of TRU were emulated in other product categories. Charles paid me a very public and very much appreciated compliment at an investor event early in my career, and I have remained grateful ever since. He will be missed, and so will his brainchild. »

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WHEN IT COMES TO SOCIAL MEDIA accounts, Twitter is the hot spot where dissatisfied customers group to howl off complaints, questions, and comments. It’s a customer service hub, a digital bulletin board, and now an entertainment epicenter.

Unlike other social media platforms, Twitter doesn’t boast high-quality images, engaging video, or the ability to view and post “stories.” Many see this online blue bird’s nest of chatter as just a stream of words and updates. It wasn’t until last year that Twitter doubled its character limit from 140 to 280, so its users could start to create longer forms of content.

While being constantly active on Twitter as a brand is a must, posts should be thoughtfully crafted. A few years ago, a tweet that included an image, had hashtag-rich copy, and was tagged with the necessary handles was considered genius. But now, the most high-profile tweets aren’t complex or professional, they are simple and funny.

Brands have been developing their own unique voice for their Twitter accounts. They are hitting send on tweets that don’t necessarily announce a new product or update, but are quippy, humorous, and entertaining. The tweets gaining the most impressions on Twitter aren’t the ones peppered with hashtags and searchable key terms, but rather the ones that just make people laugh.

Twitter is no longer just a news platform, it’s an entertainment tool. Users are logging on not just to “favorite” tweets from friends and popular celebrities, but also to see content from restaurant chains, retailers, and other consumer brands. Many brands have shifted from maintaining a pristine and professional social media presence to feeding the masses humor, sass, drama (e.g. Wendy’s Twitter, @wendys), and engaging content that doesn’t just ramble off an announcement. The en vogue approach to not only maintain your current following, but also to cultivate a bigger audience, is hooking users on humor.

To name a few exemplary comedic Twitter accounts, take a look at Wendy’s, Denny’s, Old Spice, and MoonPie. Notice anything that they’re doing that your company isn’t?

While you don’t need to hire a comedian to write your tweets (sorry guys, I have a day job), you do need to channel your brand’s personality and dare to be bold. Let these tips help you tailor your tweets.

LIMIT PRODUCT PROMOTION CONTENT

To further help you cook up some quippy tweets, your goal with Twitter shouldn’t be to sell your product directly to users, but to sell your personality (aka your brand). Make sure your feed mixes in non-business-related tweets. Users will follow your account simply because they like what you’re saying.

What does the MoonPie brand have to do with popcorn? Absolutely nothing. But its account is framed in the voice of a struggling millennial trying to navigate life one day at a time.

While some may find this tweet to be lacking punctuation or grammatical perfection, think about it. It got retweeted and favorited, causing it to pop up in the feed of other users, who may or may not follow @drakes. Twitter users probably clicked on the account, recognized the brand, and whether or not they interacted with the tweet or account any further, the name Drakes Cakes, particularly Ring Dings, has now subconsciously been implanted into their head. The next time they come in contact with the brand at the supermarket, they are likely to recognize and associate it with the funny Twitter account, which could ultimately lead to a purchase. Enough face time with the brand on social media could eventually turn users into loyal customers.

LADIES PLEASE STOP DRINKING ME SOBER FOR THE CONFUSION BUT I AM IN AN EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH RING DINGS

While this tweet is not professionally written or punctuated properly, it shows users that the folks behind @MoonPie have
a sense of humor. Not every tweet needs to directly promote MoonPies, but instead sell the brand’s personality. It’s very relatable for members of the target audience, otherwise known as the smartphone-savvy millennials trying to “adult.”

Brands have to remember that their customer base may not identify with a business-like tweet. Tweets like MoonPie’s break down the barrier between company and consumer. From reading this tweet, I already want a MoonPie because I can tell that the people behind the brand have a quirky charisma, and that’s the type of brand I want to support.

CURATE TIMELY TWEETS

After you’ve pieced together your social media personality, you’re going to need some material to tweet about. Besides evergreen, brand-centric tweets, look at what’s trending on Twitter from time to time and see if that sparks any ideas on what to tweet. Is it a holiday? Is there a big awards show on that might be relevant to your target audience? Is it a lesser-known holiday that is typically only celebrated on social media, such as #NationalCatDay? Twitter users are much more likely to interact with a tweet if it’s timely and uses a hashtag that’s trending and searchable.

#CurlRoute.” The account also tweeted Super Bowl-themed tweets in the days leading up to the big game. The brand did a good job mixing humor with high-value hashtags. Users on Twitter just searching #SuperBowl were more likely to stumble upon these tweets.

ENGAGE, ENGAGE, ENGAGE

Aside from crafting engaging tweets, interact with your followers. Be on top of your “mentions” and engage with your followers, non-followers, or anyone who uses your company’s handle or product names in a tweet.

PRO TIP: when a user tags your company’s handle, it will appear in your Twitter Mentions, but keywords won’t. Be sure to search words relevant to your brand, such as product names, in the search bar. Also, don’t be afraid to search what users are saying about competitors.

@PopTarts replied to one user’s question in a funny way and gained thousands of eyes on their account. Not too shabby.

But besides replying to users, think of other ways to spice up your Twitter feed. Creating polls is a good way to do this. While you can use a poll to ask a customer service question, even making a poll just for fun is a great way to engage users. Voting is anonymous and users can’t see which answer is in the lead unless they vote.

Lastly, consider hosting a Twitter party or chat. Just set up a time and choose a specific searchable hashtag for users to tune in and join the fun.

If you’re a toy company, consider a joint Twitter party team up with a media platform, such as the Toy Insider, to put your brand in front of a larger audience. Use this as an opportunity to place your brand’s name in front of users’ faces and answer any questions they have. This is when you actually get to engage with your fans! Use GIFs and emojis, and interact with your partygoers in fun ways. Get to know them—it all goes a long way.

KEEP YOUR FEED CONSISTENT

If your Twitter presently handles customer service, consider making a separate account just for fun. That way you can keep a consistent voice on your feed that doesn’t seesaw between appeasing customers and making them laugh. Customer service complaints can also be answered through direct messages to ensure a private conversation.

At the end of the day, remember: You are what you tweet. A 10-word sentence your company posts on Twitter reflects your company’s image.

Do you want users to laugh? Do you want users to interact with the tweet? Do you want your Twitter to have a reputation? How you tweet can affect how you sell.

For my final words of wisdom, I’ll leave you with this inspirational tweet.

Actually, oops. I’m so sorry. Please disregard everything after the first comma. I misread this tweet. This is sassy. Funny, but sassy. Let this stand as a reminder to be sarcastically inspirational on your Twitter—or whatever you want to be—as long as it has some color.

I really went over my 280 character limit.

#UntilNextTime »

Kelly Corbett is an editorial assistant at Adventure Publishing Group, where she contributes to leading trade magazines The Toy Book and The Licensing Book. In addition to handling toy and licensing news and updates, she writes toy reviews and commentaries for the Toy Insider, which features the leading consumer holiday gift guide and latest breaking news in the toy industry. Follow her on Twitter @kcorbzz.
ON JULY 11, THE TOY BOOK AND THE TOY INSIDER WILL HOST the ninth annual Sweet Suite event, known as the BIGGEST Night of Play, at Pier Sixty in New York City. The event will welcome more than 250 digital influencers, 150 members of traditional press, and 80 toy brands to meet face-to-face and get hands-on with the hottest toys and games of the season.

Guests will enjoy delicious food and cocktails, all while getting a first look at new product reveals and making new industry connections. Last year at Sweet Suite, guests enjoyed one-on-one time with representatives from more than 80 of the hottest kids’ brands and properties on the market, including VTech, LeapFrog, Just Play, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, Spin Master, Mattel, Simplay3, MGA Entertainment, K’NEX, LEGO, and more.

For the second year in a row, Sweet Suite will partner with top YouTube creators to bring Sweet Suite Live—a livestream of toy unboxings—to the event floor. Top sponsors will create custom boxes for YouTubers to open live on camera in the special Sweet Suite lounge, while thousands of followers watch the fun from home. Last year, channels such as Mommy and Gracie Show, That YouTube Family, Little Lavignes, Kitties Mama, Kid Toy Testers, and more participated in the fun.

Enormous swag boxes will also be shipped directly to attendees’ homes after the event, sparking a resurgence in social media impressions and ensuring influencers and journalists have products on-hand to review and share with their followers.

Want to make a BIG impression at Sweet Suite 2018? Platinum and Title sponsors are invited to host their own private events on July 10, the morning of July 11, or July 12. Throw a party for select groups of influencers, theme the experience toward a new brand or product launch, or just get to know top-tier influencers in a more intimate environment! What you do is up to you; we’ll provide the influencers, promos, pre-event support, and more! All special events will be coordinated by Melissa Hunter of Family Video Network and Mommy and Gracie Show.

On Thursday, September 20, The Toy Book and Toy Insider team will host the seventh annual HoliDAY of Play event in New York City, where members of the media will be the first to see the Toy Insider’s Hot 20, Top Tech 12, and STEM 10 hot holiday toy picks, as well as meet with top manufacturers just before the holiday season.

This one-of-a-kind cocktail party will welcome traditional press, top lifestyle bloggers, and YouTube personalities to engage with sponsors and experience the top holiday toys. Just in time for a first-look at the hottest holiday toys, HoliDAY of Play is a great place to show off new products and be a part of the first round of holiday shopping coverage.

If you’re interested in learning more about these events, contact Laurie Schacht at thetoyinsiderrmom@gmail.com.
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Educational Insights®
How Hot Toy Trends Are Influencing Plush This Year

by MADDIE MICHALIK, associate editor

MOVE OVER, FIDGET SPINNERS AND SLIME kits. This year, some of the hottest trends are making their way into the plush aisle.

Plush was the second-fastest-growing supercategory at 8 percent in the 12 months ending this January, according to The NPD Group (NPD). It follows All Other Toys, which grew fastest at 15 percent—thanks to fidget spinners and squishy toys.

While not the most talked about toy last holiday season compared to 2016—up against Fingerlings and L.O.L. Surprise!—Spin Master's Hatchimals property still reigned supreme. Hatchimals dollar sales in plush are nearly equal to the next top four properties combined (FurReal Friends, Ty, Mickey & Friends, and Sesame Street). Plush sales overall increased by 6 percent, with Hatchimals as the largest contributor, according to NPD.

The data also shows that special feature and interactive plush grew most in dollar sales, which is not surprising given the popularity of Hatchimals. This year, Hatchimals will share the spotlight with other interactive, innovative, and trendy plush.

Products with reversible sequins started to make their mark in mid-2017. The concept is simple: Swipe the sequins in a certain direction to reveal a new color or style. These plush are addicting to transform, look cute, and feature a functional two-in-one design. The breakout reversible sequin items were largely available as home goods and fashion items, such as notebooks, backpacks, scarves, and more.

Reversible sequins then expanded with pillows and plush, and the trend continues by capitalizing on the popularity of unicorns, mermaids, narwhals, and other stylish themes, says Richard Derr of Learning Express Toys.

“I sense the trend is slightly slowing as more low-end products have entered the market and pillows particularly have become saturated,” says Derr. “Sequins will be a good seller through summer; but look for it to slow and be replaced by some other emerging trends, such as a plush/squishy combo toy.”

These squishy plush hybrids are inspired by the mega popular slow-rise foam toys. In line with the squishy trend and inspired by Kawaii culture, Kellytoy's Squishmallows offer an irresistible squish with an ultra-soft outer fabric and polyester stuffing. These huggable plush will expand this year with more than 50 styles, including holiday themes and a baby line. The snuggle is real with Squishmallows.

“The Squishmallows are a very versatile product,” says Jonathan Kelly, CEO of Kellytoy. “Soft enough to play catch or serve as a soft bed buddy or pillow, they are comforting companions and can be soothing for those with medical and sensory issues. They are easy to take anywhere on the go because you can squish them into small places or pockets.”

As opposed to most plush, consumers don’t consider Squishmallows as a one-off purchase and are buying multiples to grow their collections. Plush is regaining that collectibility factor, harkening back to the popularity of Beanie Babies in the 1990s.

That’s where Beverly Hills Teddy Bear Co.’s new line comes in. Squeezamals plush are super squishy—but these characters are actually stuffed with slow-rise foam, serving as squishy plush hybrids. They are also scented and come in a wide assortment of animals, including adorable narwhals, puppies, hedgehogs, and more. Derr predicts the line will do well at retail this year, hitting the three hot trends right now: They are squishy, scented, and collectible.

Consumers will also collect plush in a new way this year, During New York Toy Fair, The Toy Association announced “The Big Reveal” as one of its top trends of the year. This new type of unboxing has two layers: You play with the toy to reveal what it is, and then you actually get to play with the toy.

“This pattern keeps kids engaged because it encourages the same type of nurturing play as other plush but has the added element of ‘surprise,’” says Adrienne Appell, director of strategic communications at The Toy Association. “It’s important for companies to innovate in just about every category, and sometimes people forget innovation isn’t always about technology. When a company is able to put a new twist on a tried and true play pattern in a classic category, it’s exciting for us to see—and even more fun for kids to play with!”

Scuff-A-Luvs, from Moose Toys
One of the first plush with this type of play pattern are Scruff-A-Luvs, from Moose Toys. Each pet comes as a matted ball of colored fur with only its eyes showing. Kids will then wash, towel dry, and then blow dry the animal to reveal whether it’s a dog, a cat, or a bunny.

“Not only is there the big reveal and the anticipation of what Scruff-A-Luv they will have to take care of, but kids also experience the unique water unboxing, and the process of ‘rescuing’ their pet,” says Belinda Gruebner, executive vice president of global marketing at Moose Toys. “The magic of Scruff-A-Luvs is that it has to be rescued to reveal its true beauty. Children will keep engaging with Scruff-A-Luv over and over again, re-creating nurturing moments and grooming them. These kinds of items are important to a child’s development because they help them develop a sense of love, care, and empathy.”

Or, kids can adopt something a little bit more creepy. No. 2 is No. 1 this year, and New York Toy Fair introduced us to some of the grossest toys and games ever—and the plush category was no exception.

Spin Master will introduce Fugglers to the mass market. These quirky plush have a combination of toothy grins and disturbing eyes that are quite off-putting, but that’s the whole charm of it. TOMY also takes potty humor to the next level with Stink Bomz, a collectible line of plush farts, each with its own distinctive scent, personality, and sounds. Get a more in-depth look at the gross toys trend on page 44.

As plush continues to be one of the fastest growing categories in the toy industry, some of the hottest overall toy trends of the year are fueling growth for the category.

Maddie Michalik is an associate editor at Adventure Publishing Group, where she contributes to The Toy Book and The Licensing Book. She also reports on trends and news, and writes weekly product reviews for The Toy Insider.
MOOSE TOYS introduces **Fur Babies World**, super-soft pals with eyes that can wiggle and ears that can waggle. The line includes Dreamstar Fur Babies that are super plush; Shimmies Fur Babies with sparkly detailing and a comb; Dreamstar Fur Baby and Sleepy Pod Sets, including a hangable Sleepy Pod to place the plush inside; Princess Melina and Royal Sleepy Pod set, which comes with a sparkly Royal Pod; shimmering royal crown, and comb; and the Dream Tree play set. The line will be available in June.

**Pikmi Pops PushMi Ups** are pop-up vessels filled with mini-plush inspired by icy patterns and scents. Kids can push the pop vessel up to reveal a Pikmi and confetti surprise, with 12 new characters to collect.

KELLYTOY expands its Squishmallows squad with **Squishmallows Stackables** in 10 new stackable styles, including pandas, owls, penguins, foxes, and cats. Squishmallows Stackables come in 8- and 12-inch styles.

The **Squishmallows Baby** line features nine styles with soft colors, including owls, sheep, bunnies, a chick, a unicorn, and an elephant. Eight- and 12-inch sizes are available, and the 8-inch size has a rattle inside.

**Pomsies**, from SKYROCKET, are interactive plush inspired by the pom-pom fashion trend. Each Pomsies pet has a soft, fur face and a tail that kids can wrap around their wrist, hair, backpack, clothing, and more. Featuring two modes of play—Virtual Pet Mode and Freeze Dance Mode—they will also indicate when they are happy, sleepy, or hungry with sounds and eyes that light up in different colors. Pomsies can have up to 50 different reactions, including colorful rainbow eyes, purring, and other sounds. Available in July and designed for kids ages 6 and up, there are six characters in the first series.

BEVERLY HILLS TEDDY BEAR CO. introduces **Squeezamals**, soft and squishy slow-rise foam stuffed animals. Made for kids ages 3 and up, the line includes a variety of scented characters in three sizes: a backpack clip, 3.5 inches, and deluxe.
See a world of puppets!
www.folkmanis.com or call 1-800-654-8922 for a free catalog.
AURORA WORLD introduces Luxe Boutique, a line of charming exotic animals including Sadira Ostrich, Mora Peacock, and Fiona Swan. Made with high-end materials and deluxe fabrics, Luxe Boutique features unique creatures with a focus on exquisite design.

Sparkle Tails is an all-new line featuring fantasy creatures such as unicorns and dragons. These cuddly characters come in bright colors and cute designs, and the smaller dragon characters make a “magic” noise when squeezed.

JAZWARES’ Princess ‘n Oink Peppa Pig is a 12-inch velboa plush with sounds. She wears a new outfit inspired by a new season of the Peppa Pig TV show. Kids can squeeze her belly to hear sounds from the show.

Kids can practice their favorite WWE moves with 26-inch Plush Wrestling Buddies Assortment #2, from JAKKS PACIFIC. Or, kids can collect all of their favorite WWE Superstars with the Plush Hangers Assortment #2, which can hang on a backpack, a belt loop, or more. Both items are made for kids ages 3 and up.

The World of Nintendo Plush features characters such as Goomba, Yoshi, and Mario from Super Mario Odyssey. They are made from soft velboa plush.

BONKERS TOYS expands its Slither.io plush line, based on the game and app with more than 160 million downloads and 29 billion gameplayes in 2017. Featuring blind box backpack clips and small and large plush, the line now includes a supersized XL Slither.io plush.

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TOY STATE introduces plush based on the Netflix Original preschool animated series, True and the Rainbow Kingdom. The Bartleby Talking 10.5-inch Plush is based on True’s best friend on the show, a silly ninja kitty. Kids can give it a squeeze to activate phrases and sounds from the show. Both products are designed for kids ages 3 and up.
Let the GUND times roll!

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The best is yet to come!
Dolce Baby Aardvark and Spring Calf, from MAGFORMERS, have features that will help develop sensory and hand-eye coordination skills in babies. The Baby Aardvark has parts that crinkle, beans in the feet, and squeaks. The Spring Calf is equipped with a ball belly rattle and a squeaker. Both include ribbon tabs and a Dolce teether.

In honor of GUND’s 120th anniversary, the company is bringing back the Snuffles teddy bear with ultra-plush fabric. Snuffles is 10 inches tall and features a unique crescent design, and will be available for the first time in a contemporary rose pink color, as well as gray, taupe, and white.

Nori Narwhal is a 12-inch version of the classic mystical narwhal, featuring ultra-plush fabric, sparkling ribbon around the horn, and a contemporary design in a trendy pastel blue color.

WICKED COOL TOYS will launch the Hug 'n Sing Teddy Ruxpin and Grubby Collection this fall. These huggable stuffed friends each include 30-second song clips from Teddy Ruxpin stories. Four collectible styles include Adventure Teddy Ruxpin, Friendship Teddy Ruxpin, Lullaby Teddy Ruxpin, and Grubby.

New Cabbage Patch Kids 9-inch Barnyard Cuties are soft, cuddly, and dressed in a onesie as farm animals including a cow, a chicken, a pig, a bunny, and a lamb. Each has its own name, is numbered, and is available for a limited time to enhance collectibility.

CURLY PETZ are wearable stuffed animals that curl up and hold onto wherever kids put them. The slap bracelet design can be worn or placed on a specially made Velcro wall mount. Each Curly Petz comes with a custom sewn-in name tag so kids can give it a name and write a phone number in case it gets lost. They can curl around purses, strollers, shopping carts, bikes, and more.

Kids can take care of their pet friend with the Barbie Kiss and Care Pet Doctor Set, from MATTEL. The set features a stylish backpack and an interactive soft plush pet. The pet’s nose will light up when it needs help to feel better, and the bottle can be used to nurse it back to health.
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For more information, contact Hy Laniado at Hy@dglusa.com
Soft Cuddly Friends Giselle Giraffe and Fuzzy Lamb, from STEIFF, are soft and squishable. Giselle Giraffe sports contemporary patterns and textures, while Fuzzy Lamb is sewn from super cuddly plush. Both plush feature safety eyes and reinforced seams for kids ages 1 and up.

Designed for kids ages 3 and up, Wish Me plush, from JAY@PLAY, glow when kids kiss their noses. Kids can watch as the puppy’s bow or the unicorn’s horn glows, then make a wish and blow out the light to hear magical sound effects. Pop A Lotz Surprise Pops let kids push and pop to see which of the 12 different plush characters they get. Designed for kids ages 4 and up, each Surprise Pop features confetti, pom poms, scented plush, foodie plush characters, collectors' chips, and more.

New styles have been added to SQUISHABLE’s Comfort Food line of plush, including Comfort Food Iced Coffee and Comfort Food Ham. The Iced Coffee is designed with a green straw sticking out of the whipped cream, while the Food Ham has three pieces of pineapple on top of it. Both are 15 inches tall and made for kids ages 3 and up.

Kids can flip the sequins back and forth to change the image of TOP TRENZ’ Reversible Sequin Sports Pillow. The 14-inch plush changes from a basketball to a soccer ball when the sequins are flipped.

For the first time, PILLOW PETS launches products specifically designed for babies, including My First Pillow Pet and Naturals Pillow Pets. My First Pillow Pet is a new soft and soothing line that comes in three sizes: 5-inch, 11-inch, and the classic 18-inch, and pastel colors. The Naturals Pillow Pets are soft and cuddly animals in two different sizes, 11-and 18-inch, and made from soft Sherpa materials.
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Perfect for playtime or cuddles, the **German Shepherd Puppy**, from FOLKMANIS, has a movable mouth and forelegs that kids can animate and use their imaginations for play.

The **Frog Life Cycle** is a three-stage puppet that teaches kids about science. The first stage is a lenticular printed egg that kids can animate. Next, kids use the zippers to tuck and transform the tadpole stage into the frog stage and animate the frog’s mouth to tell the story of metamorphosis.

**DREAM PETS** are huggable characters with embroidered elements and machine-washable fabrics. The line is made for kids ages 3 and up and features collectible plush that come with their own unique story, such as Honolulu Harry, a turtle who dreams about being the fastest runner in the world, and Murphy Mouse who dreams about hosting a cheese party.

The Hatchimals line expands with **Hatchimals Hatchibuddies**, from SPIN MASTER. These 6-inch characters feature large glitter eyes and sparkle wings. Each plush is nestled inside a mystery egg, and kids ages 3 and up can crack open the reusable egg to reveal one of 24 characters.

Each **Fuggler** character has a distinctive look with unique eyes and material patterns, a signature button hole, and a toothy, creepy smile or grimace. The Medium Fuggler Assortment offers 50 9-inch characters for kids to collect. The Fugglers Large Plush Assortment offers 12-inch styles, and some have claws. Rare chase characters will have a golden button hole on the back. Fugglers are made for kids ages 4 and up and will be available in the fall.

**Huggers**, from WILD RE-PUBLIC, are soft, 8-inch plush that hug kids back. When kids spread the arms of the stuffed toy and give it a squeeze, the huggers instantly wrap their arms around their new human friend. Their specially designed snap bands provide a safe and friendly grip that can be worn on wrists, backpacks, strollers, bikes, and more.

Kids can explore previous generations from the Sonic Legacy with the **Sonic 8-inch Collector Plush**, from TOMY. Designed for kids ages 3 and up, the highly detailed and embroidered 8-inch plush features classic and modern styling.
**Plush**

KD GROUP’s KD Kids brand will launch the Rescue Runts line, which features a 7-inch plush puppy, kitten, unicorn, and dragon that have matted fur, dirty paws, injuries, and fleas. Kids can care for and nurture their Rescue Runts with the included comb, flea tweezers, and towel. Little pet owners can remove the bandages and perk up their pets’ ears to complete the transformation from stray pet to one that has a loving home. Kids can write their name on the collar to make the adoption official. Designed for kids ages 3 and up, the plush pets’ messy fur, downturned ears, dirty paws, and bandages can be restored for repeated animal rescue play.

Kids can show off their personalities with Fur Fuzzle Crossbodies and Fur Fuzzle Clip-ons, from DOUGLAS CO. Each furry bag is 7 inches in size and has a rounded edge and square shape that has been fully corded. These over-the-shoulder bags have a linked chain and faux leather strap for carrying, or kids can clip them wherever they’d like.

Wishing Pals, from DEMDACO, are plush friends that offer inspiring message patches to invite kids to explore aspirational character traits. The collection includes messages such as, “Let’s Be Brave,” “Let’s Have Fun,” and “Let’s Be Kind.” Each 16-inch plush has a mismatched, textured, and eclectic plush construction, including a unique puckered belly, a slightly tilted head, and finished patches.

This fall, JUST PLAY will launch the Disney Junior Hot Diggity Dance and Play Mickey. Based on the popular Disney Junior series, Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, this interactive feature plush is dressed in a light-up T-shirt, dances to “The Hot Dog Song,” and play What’s That Sound?! and Freeze Dance.
**PLUSH**

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**ANIMOODLES** are building plush that are designed for kids ages 3 and up. Each character has six safely-hidden magnetic connection joints at the legs, arms, head, and upper back, with a total of 11 magnets inside. The magnets are not too strong for kids to pull apart, but are strong enough to hold together without falling apart. All parts are rotatable 360 degrees, so kids can post their Animoodles any way they want. All parts are fully interchangeable so kids can make their own creations.

**CUDDLE BARN** introduces a new collection of animated plush inspired by the picture book *Llama Llama Red Pajama*. The 14-inch Animated Mama Llama recites the entire *Llama Llama Red Pajama* book. This plush version of Mama Llama holds Llama Llama and a plush book, and is made for kids ages 2 and up. The 11-inch *Llama Llama in Red Pajamas* plays phrases from the book when kids press its hand. The 6-inch *Llama Llama Squeezers* play phrases from *Llama Llama Red Pajama* when kids hug them to help tell the story. The Squeezers are available in Mama Llama and Llama Llama. The new *Llama Llama* collection will be available in April.

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The **Color & Cuddle Unicorn**, from ALEX BRANDS, is a follow up to the popular Color A Pony. Kids can color this cuddly, trendy friend. The **Discover Learn to Dress Monkey** is a 21-inch tall monkey that features 11 dressing activities. Kids can learn to snap on straps, button, hook and loop, zipper, and more. It comes with sneakers, socks, overalls, and a T-shirt.

**FU2PLAY TOYS** introduces Poo-nisaurs 12-inch Plushiez, which will be available in the fall. The plush was designed by mixing the poo emoji with dinosaurs, with characters such as T-Rock and Poo-Rannosaurus Rex. Made for kids ages 3 and up, the plush will be available in a variety of bright colors.

**BLEACHER CREATURES** adds **Sasha Banks** and **Bayley** to its line of plush figures based on WWE fighters. The characters are 10 inches tall, feature true-to-life details, and are available now.
There’s No Play Experience Like Racing a Car Across the Playroom Floor via Remote Control. While the video game industry surprises us year after year with even more realistic and stunning visuals, it can’t deliver the marvel in a child’s eyes after flicking the on/off switch on their new gizmo, toggling with the remote, and watching a still vehicle come alive in real time.

R/C vehicles put kids in the driver’s seat for the first time. While there will most likely be a rocky beginning (read: bump vehicle into a wall repeatedly), it’s only a matter of time before kids are nagging Mom and Dad for a different set of wheels or wings to add to the collection.

R/C vehicles are a staple of the toy industry. But of course, not every year sees an uptick in sales. Last year, both subclasses within the category—Radio/Remote Control/ Ground/Sea/Other and Radio/Remote Control/Air—underperformed compared to total toy industry growth of more than 1 percent, according to The NPD Group.

In particular, the Radio/RC Ground/ Sea/Other category decreased in sales by 8 percent, while the Radio/RC Air category decreased by 17 percent, showing that R/C sales are down all around, but that when it comes to picking out an R/C, fewer customers opted for ones that fly.

So, what exactly caused this dip in sales? Last year featured more efficient drones flying higher than ever before, and faster four-wheelers trekking in our backyards and across living room floors. Yet customers weren’t driving these R/Cs off shelves.

“Too many me toos” says Robert Sheets, the national sales manager at MukikiM. “If it’s not new, it’s just another R/C.” He says too many manufacturers are pumping out products that don’t bring a new element to the category. “To make a difference in this category you have to have something unique.”

The concept of the R/C category has remained the same over the years—to wirelessly control a vehicle. Manufacturers exploited the idea in numerous ways, yet as they work to build new models, they’re reaching a standstill. Every great new idea has been said and done already.

As R/Cs start to lose stamina, R/C manufacturers look not to design a never-before-seen prototype, but instead to engage kids in new ways. Not every year will see a groundbreaking model reveal—in fact, most years won’t. But manufacturers are thinking up some different ideas, heavily technology driven, and steering down a road less traveled: user experience. This year at Toy Fair, manufacturers unveiled innovative new features hoping to pique consumers’ interest.

To start, Jada Toys said goodbye to alkaline batteries with the introduction of its HyperChargers line. This R/C line comes equipped with a rechargeable battery that can be charged via USB plug, the same way smartphones are charged. Other manufacturers, such as NKOK, nixed alkaline batteries for more energy-efficient rechargeable lithium-power batteries. This move from disposable to rechargeable will save customers money over time, as they do not have to keep replacing batteries.

A lot of thought also went into the controllers. Playmobil revved up its game with its new RC Racers, which can be controlled either by the remote included in the box or the digital remote on the free Playmobil RC-Racer app.

This year also welcomed SmartGurlz, a Shark Tank baby, and a coding robot designed to attract girls and teach STEM concepts. This doll and her R/C segway can only be controlled through the app.

While the traditional remote control still made many appearances at Toy Fair, so did the pistol grip controller, showing a crossover between toy grade and hobby grade. “The pistol grip controller adds to the overall play pattern and gives the R/C a more authentic, hobby grade feel,” says Darryl Li, director of marketing at Jada Toys.

Another way to get customers interested in a new R/C is to take away the remote altogether. Air Hogs, the third most grossing R/C property (New Bright is first, Sky Viper is second), introduced Super Nova, a drone that kids control with just their hands.

The R/C category has also been incorporating virtual and augmented reality, such as first-person view (FPV) video, to give kids a more realistic state-of-the-art driving experience. Last year Spin Master’s Air Hogs debuted its DR1 Competition Race Drones, allowing consumers to feel like a professional drone racer. This year, Toy State’s Nikko Air, its second year in the drone market, released its Mini FPV racer, allowing junior pilots to not only engage in high-thrill drone racing, but enabling them to monitor flying through FPV indoor video piloting. These new features give kids as well as adults a reason to buy a new drone, especially as R/C competition, in comparison to solo play, is gaining more popularity. According to Toy State, FPV and robotics are only going to pick up more momentum by Toy Fair next year.

This year, robot battles have arrived from Odyssey Toys. Auto Moto: Battle Bots transform from robot to sports car with the click of a button, but also transform when it loses the battle against another bot to signal defeat.
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ODYSSEY TOYS introduces the Land and Sea Truck, designed to navigate on land and in water. This truck can speed around on land and perform pop-up tricks, but can also paddle through a body of water with its four wheels. The Land and Sea Truck is equipped with dual high-RPM motors, has a range of 70 feet, and is powered by a rechargeable lithium polymer battery.

Auto Moto: Battle Bots can transform from robot to sports car with the click of a button. Bring in another Battle Bot and kids can go up against an opponent. To win, kids must have their Battle Bot punch the heart of the competition three times, which will then transform the robot back into a car.

ALPHA GROUP US introduces Super Wings Robot Ready Jett. Jett is an interactive personable robot that can change its facial expressions and communicate with kids. Jett can move left or right and can also fly away.

The Drone Force Hovering Horror is small but mighty. Powered by a palm-sized spooky spectre, this lightweight drone can survive crashes and bashes and can be used indoors.

The Drone Force Terra Select can roll, flip, and crawl in any direction. With a rolling attack, it will flip and keep going. It can be used indoors or outside.

TOY STATE’s Turbo Panther 60th Anniversary Edition is a high-speed racer that can zoom up to 15km per hour and allows up to 10 racers to compete simultaneously. It has a 50 meter range and a 2.4GHz frequency.

Kelly Corbett is an editorial assistant at Adventure Publishing Group, where she contributes to leading trade magazines The Toy Book and The Licensing Book. In addition to handling toy and licensing news and updates, she writes toy reviews and commentaries for the Toy Insider, which features the leading consumer holiday gift guide and latest breaking news in the toy industry. Follow her on Twitter @kcorbzz.
Brian’s Nissan Skyline GT-R (BNR34) Drift RC

Challenge your driving skills with the new Fast and Furious Drift RC from Jada Toys.
SKYROCKET introduces the new **Sky Viper v24 70 HD Streaming Video Drone**. This 10.5-inch full-sized performance drone features auto launch and land, one-touch stunts, extended flight time, and the ability to stream and record HD video. The technology works at up to 100 feet and improves flight experience with superior control.

The **Journey Pro Video Drone** includes a built-in GPS that kids can use to program their drone to reach certain destinations. Pro Video Drone uses a network of satellites to triangulate its position in relation to waypoints—that way it can maintain its coordinates in hover mode without drifting away. There is also a Return to Home feature, in which the drone flies back to its launch point with the touch of a button.

NKOK introduces the **Bull Rider Zor**, a 2.4GHz R/C Ninja Steel vehicle. The eyes on the bull light up red, and a Gold Ranger is included in the driver's seat.

NKOK will also release **Sonic & Shadow 2.4 GHz R/C vehicles**. Inspired by the video game, these vessels have a turbo boost feature as well as working lights.

In honor of **SpongeBob SquarePants** 20th anniversary, NKOK debuts **SpongeBob and Patrick Jellyfish Racers** that light up and play sound effects and music.

**The Galactic Spacebot** can transform from robot to space vehicle instantly with the press of a button or touch sensor. Spacebot can perform 17 functions, such as walking, sliding, rotating, and dancing. To really get Spacebot to break a sweat, kids can switch to a programmable mode to make Spacebot follow a long string of commands in a row.

The **Robo Rover** dog R/C has 20 unique functions, as well as four dance modes with programmed music. Rover is equipped with light-up blasters and sounds, as well a programmable mode, where kids can program multiple consecutive actions with easy playback. Both Rover and Galactic Spacebot include rechargeable lithium battery packs.

**The Ready to Run 2.4GHz 1/10 scale Rampage Rock Crawler with Action Camera Mount** features a suspension system that allows for unparalleled rock crawling abilities and headlights. The Rock Crawler also features an action camera mount (action camera sold separately) to record kids’ off-road adventures.
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MATTEL introduces the **Pterano-Drone**, inspired by Jurassic World. This drone takes flight through a handheld R/C and is equipped with kid-friendly features, including auto-circle and auto-land.

DGL introduces its **NFL Remote Control Monster Truck**. Kids can race off in fan-favorite cars, such as the New York Giants Range Rover or a Dallas Cowboys Car. Each offers full radio control, enabling the vehicle to move forward, backward, left, and right. These trucks can range up to 80 inches in size and have a frequency of 49 MHz.

JADA TOYS introduces the **Justice League Batmobile 1:14 Off Road RC**. This sleek 2.4 GHz vehicle is equipped with a built-in lithium-ion rechargeable battery and attached USB plug for easy on-the-go recharging. Kids can hit the turbo button on the pistol grip controller to experience superhero fast speeds.

MUKIKIM returns with the **Voice ‘n Go XT**. Both larger and faster than its predecessor introduced last year, the XT includes a smartwatch controller that allows for customizable voice commands for forward, backwards, left, right, turbo, stop, and two demo modes. The car roof is equipped with 12 LED colored lights that kids can customize. The XT also allows kids to customize their own unique commands, in any words or language. The new Joy Stick commands allow kids to direct the XT without having to raise their voice.
MAISTO TECH introduces the **R/C Hobby Elite Off-Road Attak**. This full-color printed, 14.5-inch by 14-inch vacuformed truck is equipped with 2.4GHz, steering alignment adjustment, and has a 115-foot control range. Maisto goes futuristic with the **Cyklone Splash**, which can drive on land, perform 360-degree spins, and can be driven on water with the help of some hidden paddles. The Cyklone Splash has three wheels and can travel within a 115-foot range.

The **R/C Tread Shredder** can drive, spin, and climb up to a 45-degree angle. Equipped with rubber treads, this tank has the extra grip it needs to shred the street or climb up and over obstacles. The working roof light will help kids navigate their drive.

For the R/C driver who might need a little more practice, the **R/C Volkswagen Beetle** has crash avoidance technology. When this easy-to-navigate R/C detects an obstacle, it changes direction automatically.

Maisto Tech introduces **Volvo My First R/C Dump Truck**. This R/C truck is equipped with lights and sounds and includes a traffic wand in place of a remote to signal the truck’s direction. Kids can just wave the wand in a certain direction and the dump truck will follow.

SMART GURLZ CODING introduces **Siggy Robot New York**, which gained stamina after its launch on Shark Tank. These dolls allow kids to control their doll on screen via an app and watch her perform the actions in real life. Kids can draw a path on their touchscreen and watch their Siggy doll mimic that motion on her segway. Kids can also control the speed and angles at which she turns.

The **Sonic Rocket** joins SPIN MASTER’s Air Hogs line and allows kids to experience the adrenaline of blasting a rocket. The Sonic Rocket, made of crash-resistant expanded polypropylene (EPP) foam, features a rotating countdown, rocket-style acceleration, and easy-glide descent. Kids can choose between three power modes—50, 100, or 200 feet—and watch as their rocket soars into the sky.

The **Air Hogs Sonic Plane** puts kids in the pilot seat. Designed for outdoor use, this model high-speed plane makes realistic motor sounds. The Sonic Plane features a durable lightweight foam exterior, and requires no assembly or experience to fly. Kids can immediately toss their Sonic Plane in the air and get soaring.

The **Air Hogs Supernova Drone** is controlled by kids’ hands. With more than 30 moves and nine tricks to learn, this futuristic ball-shaped vehicle is equipped with five motion sensors and an interactive LED light core that responds and reacts to the motions of kids’ hands.
CONGRATULATIONS! YOU DID THE HARD work—you developed a product. You took an idea and turned it into something tangible—ideally something that’s different, better, or more affordable than anything else out there.

And now, it’s time to give this soon-to-be-best-seller a name. Likely you’ve been calling it something all along—a code name or file name that’s followed the product through ideation and development. Please don’t be tempted to take that name to market, no matter how attached you are to it. Seriously, just don’t.

Your spectacular new product (or brand!) deserves a name worthy of its uniqueness. Whether it has super special features or an adorable design, or does something no other toy in the history of toys has even thought to do, your new product needs a name that clearly and concisely communicates exactly what’s so special about it. In a single word. OK, maybe two.

Easier said than done, I know (boy, do I know!). But let’s do it anyway. Below are a few approaches you might take when thinking of a name for your latest baby.

EMOTIONAL NAMES

Some of the most powerful product names are those that communicate an emotion. For example, the brand name Adora clearly communicates an emotion—these dolls are adorable, meant to be loved and adored, and your child will be adorable playing with them.

Spend some time thinking about your product’s emotional benefits. Does it provide comfort or friendship? Does it inspire creativity and imagination? Give a sense of empowerment? What are some words that describe those benefits? How about some words that describe the feeling a child gets when playing with this product? Make a list of your emotional words—put everything down, even if it seems unusable. Now, open your thesaurus app and type in the words you’ve written to see what else comes up and continue to broaden your list.

DESCRIPTIVE NAMES

What does your product do, and what will your consumer do with it? Will they race it? Fly it? Snuggle it? Squeeze it? Make a list of those action words, too. Now, think about any common phrases or idioms using those words that might work as a product name. (The Free Dictionary online has a great idiom search.) Head Waiter—The Teeter-Tottering Balancing Act Game is a great example of a product name that uses a common phrase that describes what a player will do when playing this game.

NONSENSE NAMES

Sometimes when we get really stumped on a name, we start to think about make-believe words. These names can be great, if you’ve got the marketing budget to support it. After all, the words Fritos and Pepsi don’t mean anything at all, but with enough of a TV budget, you can add meaning to any word. If you’ve got a big budget, go for it!

Think about the noise your product makes or blend two words together into a new, made-up word, then infuse it with meaning in your commercial spots. If you don’t have a big TV budget, but you still want to go the nonsense route, don’t despair. You can support your nonsense name with a descriptive tag line that tells your audience exactly what your product is or does.

There once was a magical product that made music when kids moved around it. Its name? Musini. Great name, but what does it do? Well, according to the tag line, it can “Magically transform your child’s energy into music!” If you choose a nonsense name, make sure that the two pieces are always united in both design and text.

NOW WHAT?

Let’s take a look at your list. Can you:

• Find a word you like and shorten or abbreviate it to make a brand-new word?
• Find two words you like and put them together, such as Higher Flyer, Rockin’ Racer, or Squeeze ‘n Sculpt? Remember, rhyming and alliteration are powerful tools.
• Blend two words into one? Think PipPals or SongStars.
• Add a cutesie ending to one of your words, such as “sies,” “ables,” “lings,” or “sters,” turning Snuggle into a “Snugsie” or “Snugster”?
• Come up with a make-believe word?
• Find a common phrase or idiom that uses a word on your list?
• Use a word from another language? For example, Jenga means “build” in Swahili.

With a bit of creativity and thoughtfulness, you can come up with a name worthy of your awesome new product. Once you do, make sure to search the name on Amazon and Google to make sure that no one else is using it and it doesn’t have a surprise meaning you didn’t know. Now let’s get to naming! »
The toy industry’s newest trend is a bit icky.

by KRISTEN NELSON, assistant editor

CRISP POPPING NOISES, SLIMY FEELS
running between fingers, funky smells wafting through the air, and unpleasant shapes of things usually kept in the bathroom: The gross trend is here and it’s all about the sensory experience.

Fake bugs and vomit have always been classic gags, but this trend is more about embracing the yuck and getting everyone to interact together with a bit of humor. In a sea of unicorns and sequins, the popularity of ickiness seems to balance out the toy world, particularly in the games and collectibles aisles.

The slime craze took over much of last year, as the easy-to-make compound kids started to create themselves at home sparked the launch of kits available for purchase that include non-toxic ingredients. The “all other toys” category grew by 14 percent last year, driven primarily by fidget toys and slime kits, according to The NPD Group.

But that ooey gooey trend will reach a new level this year.

There is a bit of a bowel movement happening within this trend because kids can’t get enough of poop. It’s the obvious go-to in a trend that focuses on the disgusting, but there’s a reason for that. Poop is, and probably always will be, funny. This trend finds humor in what’s usually taboo or uncomfortable, and accepts the fact that no matter how complex of a species humans may be, we all poop—and that’s quite humbling.

 ”Bodily functions have always been funny to kids and people of all ages,” says Michael Bernstein, senior vice president of marketing at Jakks Pacific. “The marketplace is catching up to the trend and is now accepting of these types of products.”

Jakk’s Pacific’s new game, Toilet Paper Blaster Skid Shot 30, is one of several that find innovative ways to play with poop.

There’s no shortage of toys that use toilet paper, plungers, toilets, and, of course, farting sounds hitting the shelves throughout this year.

Poop and slime are tried and true for gross connoisseurs, but new to the trend is a pimple obsession. Social media is filled with pimple-popping and blackhead-clearing videos that are oddly satisfying, yet equally disgusting, to watch.

NSI International’s ZITS is a simple representation of what’s so satisfying about this part of the trend. The peel-and-stick pimples come in different sizes, and kids can squeeze and pop it until the zits can ooze no more.

But the suspense of popping a pimple lends itself to several games as well. In addition to poop, Jakks Pacific also embraces the pimple game with Pop-A-Zit, a roulette-style game that will explode with anything players decide to put inside—from water to mayonnaise. “Pimple popping is gaining tremendous popularity online,” says Bernstein. “Pop-A-Zit is a fun, lighthearted game that features an oversized zit on a cartoon-faced boy. It is the perfect mix of fun, suspense, and silliness that kids love.”

Spin Master’s Pimple Pete has a similar suspense-filled, pimple-popping gameplay, but diverts players’ attention to additional pimples across Pete’s face to distract from when the “mega zit” will pop. Countless beauty experts preach resisting the urge to pop, but all of that is forgotten in the toy industry. Rather than try to clear the skin, the pimple passion focuses on the gratification of the “puss” oozing through from the pores.

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Jakk’s Pacific’s new game, Toilet Paper Blaster Skid Shot 30, is one of several that find innovative ways to play with poop.

There’s no shortage of toys that use toilet paper, plungers, toilets, and, of course, farting sounds hitting the shelves throughout this year.

Poop and slime are tried and true for gross connoisseurs, but new to the trend is a pimple obsession. Social media is filled with pimple-popping and blackhead-clearing videos that are oddly satisfying, yet equally disgusting, to watch.

NSI International’s ZITS is a simple representation of what’s so satisfying about this part of the trend. The peel-and-stick pimples come in different sizes, and kids can squeeze and pop it until the zits can ooze no more.

But the suspense of popping a pimple lends itself to several games as well. In addition to poop, Jakks Pacific also embraces the pimple game with Pop-A-Zit, a roulette-style game that will explode with anything players decide to put inside—from water to mayonnaise. “Pimple popping is gaining tremendous popularity online,” says Bernstein. “Pop-A-Zit is a fun, lighthearted game that features an oversized zit on a cartoon-faced boy. It is the perfect mix of fun, suspense, and silliness that kids love.”

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There is a bit of a bowel movement happening within this trend because kids can’t get enough of poop. It’s the obvious go-to in a trend that focuses on the disgusting, but there’s a reason for that. Poop is, and probably always will be, funny. This trend finds humor in what’s usually taboo or uncomfortable, and accepts the fact that no matter how complex of a species humans may be, we all poop—and that’s quite humbling.

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farting noises and have their own distinct smells—and Spin Master’s Fugglers—dolls made with fake teeth—somehow make the weird feel endearing. (For more on what’s popular in plush, flip to page 20).

The entire success of a gross toy hinges on the sensory experience it provides, though luckily we haven’t quite gotten into the realm of taste, apart from the Harry Potter Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans from Jelly Belly. This embracing of the senses is why this trend is strongest in games.

“The biggest challenge lies in finding that meaningful play through the gross humor—kids are not going to come back to a toy or game over and over again if it’s not fun to play with at its core,” says Eric Levin, strategic director for KD Group. “Another challenge is finding that happy medium between creating something gross, but not so repulsive that Mom or Dad will say ‘We’re not buying that.’ You can’t lose the playfulness in the grossness.”

KD’s new Snot It game features boogers and snots attached to silly glasses that look ridiculous on everyone.

At the core of any game is having fun, which is what makes gross and games combine so well. Other games—such as Who Cut the Cheese?, from Epoch Everlasting Play, and What’s That Smell, from WowWee—embrace the sense of smell as a way to bring people together. Catching wind of... broken wind is miserable on your own, but being forced to smell it with friends and family around makes it more humorous.

“I think that parents today are much more relaxed about the way they interact with their kids than they were 20 years ago—they are willing to indulge the fascination with potty humor and even to join in the fun themselves, which kids get a kick out of,” says Levin. “In a way, these games and toys give kids an outlet to laugh about gross humor at home and get it out of their systems.”

Kristen Nelson is an assistant editor at Adventure Publishing Group, contributing to lead trade magazines The Toy Book and The Licensing Book. She is also a toy expert and writes weekly reviews for The Toy Insider.

Who Cut The Cheese?, from EPOCH EVERLASTING PLAY, is a new laugh-out-loud game for the whole family. Designed for two to four players ages 4 and up, the object of the game is to slice the electronic cheese without cutting it. It’s a race to get to the finish without a “frrrt” sound. Players put the pretend knife into the cheese and if they hear a happy sound, they get to move forward.

Tic Tac Tongue, from YULU, is a game of skill and speed between chameleons for kids ages 4 and up. Players put on chameleon masks, flip a number card, and face off to knock down the correct insect card. The chameleon that knocks down the most insects the quickest is the winner.
What's Gross In Games

Pop-A-Zit is an explosive surprise game, from JAKKS PACIFIC, that capitalizes on the satisfaction of popping a zit. Players roll the die and squeeze the zit depending on the number rolled. Designed for kids ages 4 and up, the game comes with a water bottle that can be filled with whatever players want and will be available in the fall.

Flushin' Frenzy, from MATTEL, is the game of a plunger, poop, and fast reflexes. Players roll the die and plunge the toilet that number of times. If the poop comes flying up and the player catches it in midair, they earn two chips. The player who ends up with the most chips wins. Designed for kids ages 5 and up, Flushin' Frenzy will be available in the fall.

WOWWEE's What's That Smell is a fragrant guessing game. Players try to guess the scents or suffer the stinky consequences of the Whiff-of-Shame. Kids can also download the companion app and capture all the stinky fun on video. Designed for two to six players, the game will be available this fall.

The Toilet Paper Blaster Skid Shot 30, from JAKKS PACIFIC, is an easy-to-use blaster for kids ages 8 and up. Users load the blaster with toilet paper, add water, lock, load, and fire. Available in the fall, the blaster uses real toilet paper and can blast up to 30 feet.
Players must avoid stepping in poop in HASBRO's **Don't Step In It**. The game, designed for kids ages 4 and up, features a mat on which players place mounds of a brown compound. Players take turns spinning the spinner to find out how many steps to take across the mat while blindfolded; the player to take the fewest steps in poop wins.

**Plunge It** is a laugh-out-loud, action-packed game from ALEX BRANDS that will be available in the fall. Players flush the toilet and quickly pass the plungers around the flushing toilet until they hear that farting sound. Designed for kids ages 4 and up, players should act fast to be the first to plunge the poo.

**Snot It**, a game that challenges players to collect the most snot, is introduced by KD GAMES, a division of KD Group. KD GAMES challenges players to collect the most snot. Players fill the spinning cup with the foam snot pieces and use their nose glasses with dangling slime attached to pick up pieces. The first to collect 10 snot pieces wins. Designed for kids ages 6 and up, the game will be available in the fall.

The **Nickelodeon Slime Burst Hat**, from JAKKS PACIFIC, has players mix slime and then load up the hat with a slime-filled balloon. The first player spins the dial to see how many times to squeeze the bulb. Kids then pump up the balloon while watching it grow, passing the hat between turns. The winner is the first one to get slimed. Designed for kids ages 6 and up, the game will be available in May.

In **Pimple Pete**, from SPIN MASTER, players help with pesky pimples while avoiding erupting the mega-zit. Once all the pimples are loaded and the mega-zit plunger is filled with water (or any other form of liquid), players take turns spinning the spinner. The spinner determines where to pop the zit—chin, left cheek, right cheek, or forehead. Be careful: too much pressure and the mega-zit will explode. Designed for kids ages 5 and up, Pimple Pete will be available in October.
What's Gross in Collectibles

Designed for kids ages 5 and up, MOOSE TOYS’ Grossery Gang Season 4: Bug Strike prepares kids for battle against the Bug Army. Kids can build up their armies with more than 150 new Grossery Gang characters, as well as articulated action figures.

SPIN MASTER introduces Flush Force, inspired by all things flushed down the toilet coming back up the toilet to attack. The line has more than 150 characters, and features flush-to-reveal technology; kids fill the toilet with water and shake to find two characters.

BASIC FUN! launched Poopeeze, a web series and collectible line of more than 36 squishy characters. Designed for kids ages 4 and up, the blind capsules come in packaging that resembles rolls of toilet paper. The Toilet Launcher Set lets kids plop their Poopeeze in the toilet, flush them, and wait for them to launch.

Zits, from NSI INTERNATIONAL-AL, are the grossest, yet most satisfying toys designed for kids ages 4 and up. Kids peel off a zit, stick it on their skin, squeeze them, and feel the pop. Kids can gross out their friends with the oozing goo that comes out when the Zits are popped. Packs are available in small breakout, medium breakout, and large breakout sizes.

Stink Bomz, from TOMY, are plush that let kids see what a fart looks like. Each character makes a unique farting noise and other sounds, and has its own distinct smell. Kids can collect eight characters, available in the fall, as well as two special rare versions.
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**WHAT'S NEW**

**Beaker Creatures** is a new line of science-themed collectibles from LEARNING RESOURCES. This new line features multiple elements rooted in real science, from the fizzing Reactor Pods that reveal the creatures, to the classification cards that help kids identify them. There are 35 collectible characters from five different families for kids to discover, classify, and explore.

**Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 43-Inch Epic Lair Playset**, from PLAYMATES TOYS, has four levels of play, including seven rooms and more than 20 features. Kids can explore Splinter’s Dojo, Raphael’s Weight Training Room, Leonardo’s Rotating Weapon storage wall, and Michelangelo’s arcade. It also features a catapult basketball hoop, hidden projectile launchers for villain invasions, a rotating skateboard ramp, a collapsing balcony, and more.

**Fisher-Price Think & Learn Rocktopus**, from MATTEL, features 15 unique instruments across five different genres of music so preschoolers can mix and remix their own musical creations. Kids can add or subtract instruments to change the tempo and layer in sound effects for a hands-on physical approach to learning. There are three interactive play modes—math, music, and game—and a free Rocktopus app to create, save, and share music videos.

**SKYROCKET** adds to its Real Cooking line of D.I.Y. baking kits with **Real Cooking Mini Tarts**. Kids can create their own delicious mini tart pastries, which they can actually eat. The set includes a pastry maker and food ingredients to make a variety of treats. Kids can add milk and eggs from home to whip up custom creations, such as jam, chocolate marshmallows, and more.

The **Calico Critters Ride Along Tram**, from EPOCH EVERLASTING PLAY, is a play set featuring a tram, seats, a tram stop, and a hat for the driver. The tram can be outfitted for one level or converted into a double decker. Calico Critters, sold separately, enter through the foldable tram doors to enjoy the ride.
Kids can go on tour with Disney Junior’s Vampirina with the **Vampirina Rock ‘n Jam Touring Van**, from **JUST PLAY**. The play set transforms from a tour van into a spook-tacular stage that plays rock ‘n roll music and Vampirina’s signature phrases. The van has a driver’s seat that swings out to become a sofa, bunk beds that flip up to reveal speakers, and piano key-styled spiral stairs. When Vampirina is ready to perform, she magically rises on a light-up platform in true rock star fashion.

**HASBRO’s Chow Crown** is the ultimate food competition game, made up of a plastic crown with six hanging forks that players load with various food items of their choosing (food not included). The player places the spinning crown on his or her head and eats as many snacks as possible from the dangling forks before the music stops. Chow Crown can be played solo or in a head-to-head tournament.

**TASTEMAKERS LLC’s Arcade1Up** is an authentic cabinet retro game that brings back iconic arcade games in a classic and redesigned form. Standing 4 feet tall, Arcade1Up has full-color, high-resolution screens, joysticks, control buttons, and classic gaming sounds. It includes games such as Asteroids, Centipede, Rampage, Mortal Kombat, and Street Fighter.

**LEAPFROG’s Safari Learning Station** allows little ones to interact with three modes on the activity panel to explore first words, numbers, shapes, colors, animals, Spanish, music, and more. The giraffe, lion, and zebra introduce letters and numbers while playing safari-themed songs. Toddlers can press the light-up piano keys to make music and discover shapes and colors, or drop the balls through the monkey’s tail to watch as they roll down the ramp and through the trees. Raise the arch up and kids can crawl under it to pull on the hanging leaves or stand and play with the colorful animals.

**HEXBUG’s VEX Balancing Boxing Robots** allow kids to build smart-tech, self-stabilizing robots that are ready to box. The bots have adjustable arms for punches to knock their opponent off balance. Using a smartphone app, kids can control their robot’s moves, deciding when to use a swift uppercut or a jab, or monitor their robot’s health status.

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THINK BEYOND PINK:
FINDING PROGRESS IN GENDER-NEUTRAL TOYS

by WENDY SMOLEN, founder, wendysmolen.com

THE POWER OF WOMEN IS MAKING
headlines every day. The ways females are
nurtured and treated is playing out in media,
sports, education, business, and even in the
revised words of the Canadian national an-
them. We’d be naïve to think that toys—the
way kids naturally learn about their world—
have no impact on this global issue. Thankful-
ly, the toy industry is taking notice.

It’s been several years since the industry
embraced STEM and STEAM for girls: LEGO
Friends, Roominate, and Nancy B’s Science
Club have all ridden to success. Companies
such as IAmElemental and toys like Hasbro’s
Nerf Rebelle have supported strong female
characters. Mattel helped rethink the fem-
ine ideal with new Barbie body shapes.
Major retailers have eliminated boy and girl
toy aisles. The Toy Association no longer
separates TOTY awards by gender. Toca Boca
even created a gender-neutral clothing line
for Target.

But pink blocks and chemistry sets with
perfumes aren’t solutions. Too often tweaks
are just perpetrating gender stereotypes
by (subconsciously?) defining the type of
play girls and boys “enjoy.” A recent study
on brand mascots out of the Geena Da-
vis Institute on Gender in Media, Mascots
Matter: Gender and Race
Representations in
Branding, found that
male characters still
outnumber female
characters two to
one.

Julie Kerwin, chief elemental
officer of female action-figure brand
IAmElemental, aptly put it this way:
“It is equally important to put the
figure of a healthy female in a boy’s
hand as well as a girl’s. If we hope
to achieve gender equality in our
lifetime, we can’t teach only half of
the population what it means to be a
strong and powerful female.”

Companies need to stop tip-
toeing around this issue. The toy
industry, often kids’ first sense of the
larger world, has the power to initiate
real change.

START WITH A CONNECTION
“We believe that building is
inherently relevant to any child,”
says Michael McNally, senior director, brand
relations at LEGO Systems Inc. “For years,
LEGO was thought of as a boy toy. Extensive
research with both parents and kids revealed
that moms play a key role in whether LEGO
play is even considered for their daughters,”
says McNally. “When we introduced LEGO
Friends, we innovated the LEGO system to
deliver against those insights.”

Many of us remember that the response
wasn’t all positive at first. However, six years
later, LEGO Friends is among the top five
LEGO themes globally. What’s even more
interesting is that girls are exploring more
broadly across the
entire LEGO portfolio because they found a
connection with building as a play pattern.

“Today, we see a balance of both boys and
girls playing LEGO Minecraft, LEGO Star
Wars, and LEGO Creator,” says McNally. The
key was finding a way to initially engage kids
in the building process.

BE AUTHENTIC
Know your strengths and play off of them.
“The gender of our customers doesn’t play a
large role in the development of our prod-
ucts,” says Ted McGuire, president of Thames
& Kosmos, a company that was founded by
a female STEM pioneer. “Today, over half of
our product development staff is female. Our
goal has always been to get science kits into
the hands of as many children as possible.”

For Thames & Kosmos, one of the ways to
achieve this was through a partnership with
Mattel to create Barbie STEM. “We want to
spark a lifelong interest in scientific explo-
ration, to get real science experiments and
empirical experiences in front of kids who
might otherwise think they had no interest in
science,” says McGuire. “Until we get to the
point where science is just science, and not
specifically for boys or girls, and pink is just a
color, we have to use the current perceptions
and assumptions as tools to move toward the ideal. A science kit centered around Barbie doesn’t limit a child’s access to a myriad of other science kits, but its existence may just spark an interest that wasn’t there before.”

IT’S NOT ALL ABOUT STEM
Role play, pretend play, outdoor play, and art are all types of powerful play, and the toys that kids play with impact their impressions. “It’s often hard to find toys where girls are the ones saving the day,” says Kerwin. “The storyline that’s implied when a girl plays with two dolls dressed as princesses is very different from the story that unfolds when you have two figures that are dressed like knights. Action figures take on challenges, fight bad guys, and have superpowers. That difference is at the heart of our tagline: ‘If you give a girl a different toy, she will tell a different story.’”

SHAKE UP THE NORM
Say “hair salon,” and most of us think “girls.” But not with Toca Boca. Toca Hair Salon, an endlessly playable digital game, captures the full market with its weird and quirky characters. “Hair play isn’t just for girls. Boys also go to the barber,” says Caroline Ingeborn, president and COO of Toca Boca.

From shaving to shearing, painting to poofing, Hair Salon stresses diversity and inclusion with humor and smarts. “Toca Boca is rooted in gender neutrality,” explains Ingeborn. “We don’t define kids by body shape, age, color, or gender. We want them to just be kids. We don’t teach them who plays with what. We give them the freedom to choose the experiences they like.” Focusing on inclusion, as well as quality, is also good for business, she says. “Once parents recognize our quality, the gender issue is rarely a hurdle.”

CONTEXT AND CONTENT
Packaging, advertising, and media messages connote context and cultural clues. Pink packaging and princesses scream “girl.” Picturing only boys with trucks discourages crossover play. Further findings in the Davis Institute’s gender study revealed that female mascots were more likely to be presented as gender stereotypes than male ones (25.45 percent versus 15.9 percent), while male mascots were more likely to be shown as being more active than their female counterparts (48.4 percent versus 43.4 percent). That’s not to imply you must always show both genders on every product and ad. You could also show none. Packaging from ThinkFun and LEGO never features kids. “Yes, Toca Boca uses a lot of pink, purple, and blue on our packaging,” admits Ingeborn. “But the mix is about inclusion, never stereotypes.”

RESPECT KIDS AND THEIR PARENTS
“We believe kids come out of the womb being smart,” says Andrea Barthello, co-founder of ThinkFun, a company that brings 33 years of STEM learning to its strategy games and puzzles. “We know that kids all play differently, and may have special interests or talents, but when we create a product, we never think about whether it’s for a boy or a girl.”

To that point, they also gather no analytics on what gender is playing with their products. “Today’s parents are incredibly savvy,” says Barthello. “They know what’s best for their own child. They look for information before purchasing a product. Websites like vroom.org give lots of tips and information to help them to make informed decisions. They don’t have to rely on a store aisle or packaging promotion to tell them what’s right for their kid.”

CHANCE PERCEPTIONS
“Recently, I had the mom of two boys tell me what a revelation it was to hear them playing with female action figures,” says Kerwin. “It hadn’t occurred to her until they started incorporating the IAmElemental figures into their typical play patterns, that she had never before heard them say, ‘She’s coming to save you.’ ‘Here she comes to save the day.’ It’s a subtle, but important distinction. It doesn’t change their play, but it does have the power to change their thinking.”

Wendy Smolen has spent 25 years playing in the toy industry. She co-founded Sandbox Summit, an idea forum focused on the intersection of play, learning, and technology. Currently, she works with companies and organizations to create playful solutions that engage kids and families in innovative and impactful ways.
BEHIND THE MAGIC:
ASSURING THAT AD CLAIMS MADE FOR TOYS ARE
TRUTHFUL AND ACCURATE

by DONA FRASER, director, Children’s Advertising Review Unit

A TOY IS A LITTLE PIECE OF MAGIC. A TOY can be the key to a new realm of imagination, a sweet comfort when the lights go out, or the foundation for the long-abiding memory of a gift that was absolutely perfect and completely unexpected. Toys live in the minds and hearts of children.

That relationship is, in part, why it’s necessary to ensure that advertising directed to children is truthful, accurate, and not misleading, and that advertising claims and presentations take into account the unique vulnerabilities of a child audience.

Since its founding in 1974, the Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU), an investigative unit of the advertising industry’s system of self-regulation, has been providing guidance on advertising directed toward children to companies large and small.

CARU looks at advertising to determine whether advertiser claims comply with federal law and with the Self-Regulatory Program for Children’s Advertising, which includes guidelines on matters as diverse as product presentation, material disclosures, the blurring of advertising and editorial or program content, sales pressure, and unsafe or inappropriate advertising to children.

CARU’s guidelines also address privacy issues and compliance with the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). The Self-Regulatory Program for Children’s Advertising is available for download, free of charge, at the website of the Advertising Self-Regulatory Council.

What should toy makers keep in mind as they move the magic from conception to point of sale?

Here are some quick tips to keep advertising directed to children on the right side of CARU’s guidelines:

• Anticipate what parents will want to know prior to purchase. What is essential to operation? Does the toy require batteries or an internet connection? Make requirements clear on the packaging and supplement that with information on your app or website.
• Let children—and parents—know exactly what they receive with a purchase. Does the dollhouse come with furniture? Do you need a smartphone to download the app that controls that awesome car? This information should be made explicitly clear in TV ads with a clear voiceover—not a video super—and in print ads.
• Be very clear about how the toy works and how children can get full play value. If there’s a learning curve, ads shouldn’t depict the child opening a box and immediately doing tricks with toys that likely require additional practice or learning. That principle applies to traditional and non-traditional toys, from yo-yos to internet coding kits.
• If safety demands adult supervision, make sure advertising depicts adults and provide an audio disclosure that such supervision is required.
• Avoid social pressure. Don’t create the impression that having or using a toy will make a child stronger, smarter, or more popular.
• The makers of connected toys need to make clear how information is collected from children, what information is collected, whether an account is necessary for operation, and whether additional purchases are available, perhaps through an in-app purchase requiring the collection of credit card information.
• Keep the privacy policy short, sweet, and complete, and make it easily accessible. Consumers need to know the basics: what information is collected, why it is collected, and with whom it is shared. Also provide consumer contact information—a phone number and email address—and make sure those points of contact are monitored by staff who can immediately respond.
• When you partner with a third party, ensure that your partner’s services and products are aligned with your data collection practices. If your product is targeted to children under 13, your partners must also be COPPA compliant, preferably through a Safe Harbor approved by the Federal Trade Commission.
• You need a data-security plan if you are collecting personal or sensitive data. Ensure information is safely collected, properly secured, and accessible only to those who require it.
• For children under 13, do not build in features that require access to or use of social media, since doing so encourages children to falsify their ages to participate. »

Dona Fraser is the director of CARU, which serves the children’s advertising industry. To learn more about CARU, or about advertising industry self-regulation, please visit the website of the Advertising Self-Regulatory Council, asrcreviews.org, or contact CARU directly at djfraser@caru.bbb.org.
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HOW PACKAGING BECOMES THE BRAND

by TED MININNI, president and creative director, Design Force

PACKAGE DESIGN, WHEN WELL-conceived and executed, plays a pivotal role in the realm of brand experience—especially in the case of toy packaging and licensed consumer product packaging. Good package design brings consumers into storylines. Great packaging delivers something so compelling that consumers actually experience the full essence of the brand.

WHO DOESN’T LIKE A SURPRISE?

What if companies leveraged packaging to deliver something so fresh and so magical that the brand became one of the hottest in the toy business? And what if it was solely driven via social media?

One of the biggest toy industry surprises in recent memory managed to pull this off. The L.O.L. Surprise! dolls came into being because the brand owner, Isaac Larian of MGA Entertainment, watched YouTube unboxing videos one night in 2016. These videos, some of which had millions of hits, depicted children opening up toy packaging. In an “a-ha” moment, he realized something crucial: no manufacturer had created toy packaging where kids couldn’t see what was inside. He immediately grasped how compelling it would be for kids to unbox toys that were unseen.

Without a single ad, the YouTube unboxing videos of the L.O.L. Surprise! dolls drove sales of 25 million units through last year. And as of the beginning of 2018, this is the best-selling toy in the U.S. Unboxing videos depicting young girls peeling back layers of the L.O.L. Surprise packaging enjoyed millions of hits. The ingenious package design in the shape of a ball features seven layers that kids remove one at a time to reveal a secret message sticker, followed by a collectible sticker sheet, a water bottle charm, shoes, an outfit, an accessory, and, last but not least, a collectible doll. Filling the water bottle to feed the doll leads to an additional surprise. She might cry, spit, tinkle, or change colors. The process of unboxing to discover the treasures that lie within this unique packaging keeps young girls engaged.

The package design features a thin outer wrapper with a large eye-popping brand identity. Chunky L.O.L. letters appear in white, outlined in black, and filled with black polka dots; the word “Surprise” in white appears beneath them over different colored backgrounds—yellow, aqua, green, and magenta among them. Artwork depicting one of the small, wide-eyed dolls appears to the left of the brand identity. In a speech bubble the doll tells us that there are “45+ to collect!” Beneath the brand identity on the bottom of the package are two emotive messages to young girls: “Let’s Be Friends!” and “#CollectLOL.”

This proves that even in a collectibles category populated with powerful brands such as Hatchimals and Shopkins, there’s always room for new properties with package design know-how to make their own mark by creating a unique brand-centric experience.

GETTING DOWN IN THE DIRT

As moms and dads know, kids don’t mind making a mess of their rooms when they play, but cleaning up is another matter. Jakks Pacific strikes a familiar chord with kids and their parents with its brilliantly conceived Real Workin’ Buddies brand. Mr. Dusty the Dump Truck is a terrific toy for tots, but the packaging really delivers the brand. Visual and verbal brand communication come together in this packaging in a seamless manner. While a traditional die-cut window shows most of the toy, the artwork depicting the truck in motion vacuuming up toys littered on the rug, super-imposed over the actual product, rivets any child’s attention. The phrase “Really cleans up!” tells kids that this toy really works, and a “Try Me” button encourages them to see for themselves.

Mr. Dusty’s eyes, nose, and mouth give him a very human persona that attracts
children and makes them perceive him as a friend. Verbal brand communication that Mr. Dusty makes 50 phrases and sounds further bolsters this perception. Vertical artwork on the right-hand side of the front panel skillfully depicts Mr. Dusty’s three main attributes, underscored by one word in each frame: eat, sweep, dump!

The Real Workin’ Buddies brand identity is spot-on with its blocky typography and a couple of well-placed rivets that highlight the word “Buddies,” again promoting Mr. Dusty as a pal. In the middle of the letter “O” in the word Workin’, a nut appears. While the brand identity is meant to depict the tough, gritty nature of toys such as a dump truck, it is also somewhat softened because, after all, these are toys for toddlers and preschoolers. Obviously, there are plans for brand extensions here. Mr. Hosey the Fire Truck is next, debuting early this year, and I expect that will feature equally compelling packaging.

FASHIONISTA STATEMENTS

Remember when Barbie doll choices were limited to a handful of different hair colors and styles? When an impossibly slender and statuesque version was the only option? Those days are gone. Starting last fall, Mattel launched Barbie Fashionista dolls in multiple skin tones, as well as curvy, tall, petite, and original sizes—a true representation of the various body types for kids who want to play with Barbie dolls. These iterations of Barbie have their own striking, unique look, from hair colors (including trendy pink or blue) and hairstyles to fashion-forward apparel and accessories that reflect current trends.

Mattel touts Barbie Fashionistas as “the new crew.” New Friends—New Fashions—New Stories. Barbie fans always created and shared storylines. The new Fashionista-branded Barbies are bound to inspire stories that are in alignment with girls worldwide; stories that reflect their own cultures and aspirations. Mattel’s package design delivers the brand in such a compelling manner that girls’ imaginations will ignite as soon as they see it.

The blister card design allows the dolls to be fully visible. Bold, graphic backdrops in black and white make the colorfully dressed dolls stand out. The Fashionistas sub-brand name appears in vertical lettering on the left-hand side of the card, and then in super-imposed, thermoformed letters on the blister itself. On the bottom of the package a trio of cool Fashionistas strike model-like poses, cleverly showing additional doll choices. The Barbie logo in its signature pink juxtaposed with the black and white Fashionistas name form the brand identity and it is seamlessly woven into the artwork. Both are “outlined” just as the thermoformed letters are. The only verbal brand communication appears on the upper right of the packaging, telling girls whether the doll inside is curvy, tall, petite, or original in size. Nothing else is required.

Mattel continuously proves that blister cards are just as important as any other kind of packaging. It can be more challenging because of the limited real estate in which visual and verbal brand communication must be maximized. But done well, blister packaging for toys can be just as compelling as those that are boxed.

TAKING IT UP A NOTCH

The ultimate objective of package design is to deliver one brand above every competitor’s within a product category. When it is compelling, packaging becomes the brand in the minds of consumers. It leverages powerful visual and verbal design elements that create a unique language—one that can’t be co-opted by wannabees and imitators. It’s already owned. »

Ted Mininni is president and creative director at Design Force Inc., a package and licensing program design consultancy to the consumer product and entertainment industries. The goal of Design Force is to establish strong emotional connections with consumers and create powerful visual brand experiences that engage, excite, entertain, inspire, and influence consumers’ decision to buy. Mininni can be reached at (856) 810-2277. Visit designforceinc.com for more information.
WHETHER YOU’RE ENJOYING YOUR dream career or starting your own business, one thing is for sure: Getting actionable, sage advice from those who came before you can be invaluable.

Women in Toys, Licensing & Entertainment (WIT) is committed to facilitating career growth for its members, and one way it does that is by providing a network of support, inspiration, and advocacy. There is real value in sharing lessons learned. WIT calls these words of inspiration “WOW moments.”

Here to share their WOW moments are the 2018 WIT Wonder Women winners and honorees. Throughout their careers, they’ve successfully navigated the ups and downs, and have learned that success often comes by learning from the experiences and expertise of others.

SYDNEY WISEMAN
Wonder Woman Creator/Inventor
Brand Manager, WowWee
“Listen and learn as much as you possibly can. Being a sponge is the best thing you can be!”

JULIE CHRISTOPHER
Wonder Woman in Marketing
Vice President Marketing, North America, Entertainment One
“Judy Garland said, ‘Always be a first-rate version of yourself instead of a second-rate version of someone else,’ and that applies to brand marketing as well. Stay off the bandwagon, stay true to your brand’s values, and you won’t be disappointed.”

SUSAN MURPHY
Wonder Woman in Public Relations
Vice President, Coyne PR
“Whatever you do in life, do it to the best of your ability. No one can fault you for giving it your all.”

ALI MIERZEJEWSKI
Wonder Woman Rising Star
Senior Editor, The Toy Insider
“Downplaying yourself is different from humility. Work hard and stay humble—but know your worth.”

STEPHANIE MENDOZA
Wonder Woman Rising Star
Licensing Manager, Sesame Workshop
“Everyone you work with has something valuable to teach you. Learn from their best qualities.”

DONNA MOORE
Wonder Woman in Sales
National Advertising Director, ttpm
“It takes more energy to be mean—just be nice. Everyone has a story about their product—just listen.”

MENAL MCGRATH
Wonder Woman in Licensing
Director of Licensing Acquisitions, Moose Toys
“Authenticity shines brighter than the sun, and makes people want to bask in your brightness.”

DIANA YOUNG
Wonder Woman in Manufacturing
Vice President of Product Development, Spin Master
“Surround yourself with talented people so you are always challenged to grow.”

CINDY LEVITT
Wonder Woman in Retailing
Senior Vice President Merchandise & Marketing, Hot Topic
“Be kind, respectful, professional, and gracious in any business situation. We are in a very small industry and you never know who might be your boss or your customer down the road.”

NORMA ROSENHAIN
Wonder Woman Honoree – Lifetime Achievement Award
Founder & CEO, Creata
“Success in any business requires that the products and services we offer be consistently excellent. However, all customers have many options. It is the strength of our relationships that makes the difference. I believe that the customer is always right!”

NANCY ZWIEERS
Wonder Women Honoree – Mentorship Award
Executive Vice President & Global CMO, Spin Master
“Your reputation is your most valuable asset—be trustworthy. The truth shall set you free.”
COMMAND THE ANALYTIC ENGINES OF THE NPD GROUP

Introducing the new U.S. Kids’ License Tracker

The NPD Group’s U.S. Kids’ License Tracker takes the guesswork out of product development and marketing decisions related to licensed products for children up to age 14. Now you can explore U.S. consumers’ purchases of licensed products — going beyond toys — and find out how purchasing varies by category. Get the only 360° view into the highest-performing licenses, characters and licensed brands — from sales, trends, and opportunities to pricing and categories. This is the licensing information and insight you need to succeed, available only from NPD.

WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU?
Learn more. Call 866-444-1411 or email contactnpd@npd.com.
HUNT FOR BIGFOOT AND OTHER HIDDEN TREASURES WITH BIGFOOT GOES BACK IN TIME

BigFoot Goes Back in Time, by D.L. Miller, is an exciting seek-and-find challenge hardcover puzzle book. Each page has an illustrated scene with details and activities that kids can search through to see if they can locate the legendary BigFoot and other hidden objects.

Readers can go “back in time” to real places such as the Golden Gate Bridge, Grand Canyon, Great Wall of China, Notre Dame Cathedral, Pyramids of Giza, Roman Coliseum, Statue of Liberty, Stonehenge, and Uluru in Australia. Fun facts and informational pages after each scene make these visual puzzles an enjoyable way to learn about the treasures of the world.

CELEBRATE CHILDLIKE IMAGINATION WITH WILD IS EVERYWHERE

Wild is Everywhere is Sara Lovell’s second album, with 14 original songs with imagery of flying children, misplaced animals, and insects and flowers that turn up in the most unexpected places.

The songs, such as “Rhinoceros Under the Bed” and “Raspberry Pickleberry Wormnut Pie” are full of lyrics with fantastical wordplay that inspire imagination.

There’s something for everyone with a wide range of musical genres from blues to disco, and every kid will be able to relate to songs such as “All the Grownups Get to Stay Up Late” and “I Want It Now.”

GROOVE THROUGH SPACE WITH ZOOM A LITTLE ZOOM: A RIDE THROUGH SCIENCE

Zoom a Little Zoom: A Ride Through Science, from children’s music duo Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer, is a modern interpretation of Ballads for the Age of Science, a 1961 collection of educational science songs.

The new album introduces elementary-level science concepts with catchy, upbeat tunes across a number of different genres, including western-swing, Klezmer, and boogie-woogie. While kids are grooving, they can learn a bit about space, rockets, constellations, gravity, weather, and more.

The album includes an activity guide that features experiments that kids can replicate at home or school using household materials.

EMBARK ON AN UNDERWATER ADVENTURE WITH HOW TO CATCH A MERMAID

Kids can follow along on an underwater quest to find the elusive mermaid with How to Catch a Mermaid, written by Adam Wallace and illustrated by Andy Elkerton.

This is the latest installment in The New York Times bestselling How to Catch series, with humorous illustrations and lively rhyming text.

Kids will find that the characters must be very clever, using mirrors, crowns, and pearls to try to outwit the mermaids. Find out if it really is possible to capture the shimmering, magical mermaid once and for all.
THE COST OF INCONSISTENT PRICING AND HOW TOY MANUFACTURERS CAN HELP

by PAMELA SPRINGER, CEO, ORIS Intelligence

MANY TOY MANUFACTURERS AND retailers aren’t thinking about pricing violations until the looming holiday season approaches, and most don’t ever think of it, particularly those that are meeting revenue goals. However, inconsistent prices can actually pose a threat to your brand, your relationship with trusted retailers, the reputation of your product, and—ultimately—your bottom line.

When brick-and-mortar retailers and online sellers are competing with each other over prices, it confuses the consumer and lets retailers know that you’re not supporting their efforts in marketing your products by enforcing your prices across retail. You risk the threat of your brand becoming a commodity due to the inconsistencies. Building your business around trusted partners who you support by maintaining price parity aligns all sellers and enables them to compete on a level playing field.

ORIS understands that the most important thing is to get started, so we’ve compiled a few simple tips to help toy manufacturers get started:

START THE TREKKING

Keep a detailed record of pricing changes, so you have a well-recorded history of price parity and sellers who are violating your policies. Remember to also track your correspondence with sellers so that everything related to pricing changes and communications is in one place. As a result, it makes it less cumbersome to track down violators and understand the total picture.

VOYAGE BEYOND THE AMAZON

Amazon is often blamed for igniting pricing wars, but the truth is, large marketplaces are often watching smaller sites and following wars, but the truth is, large marketplaces

1. **Keep a detailed record of pricing changes.**
2. **Track your correspondence with sellers.**
3. **Monitor all the time—especially during holidays.**
4. **Enforce a comprehensive minimum advertised pricing policy.**
5. **Catch pricing violations early.**
6. **Stay diligent about monitoring all the time.**
7. **Catch it early.**

search everywhere

The entire web needs to be searched, including marketplaces like eBay and Amazon, individual retailer websites, and shopping engines. Be aware though that comparison shopping engines (CSEs) don’t catch everything—and they generally get their data from data feeds, so it can take hours or days for them to pull a new pricing feed and update their reports. As a result, you could be days behind on catching violators.

BEWARE OF BIG ANIMALS

Walmart is adding more than 1 million SKUs per month and has grown from 300 sellers last year to more than 3,000 today. Typically, Walmart has demanded that before they carry your product, your online channel needs to be under control, i.e., there must be price parity amongst your sellers.

STAY THE COURSE

Violators don’t take the weekends off—so neither should you. Nearly seven in 10 of all violations start on nights or weekends (with the majority starting on Sunday followed by Saturday). Keep this in mind and understand that “off hours” like nights and weekends are when the most pricing violations are likely to occur. For that reason, brands need to be diligent about monitoring all the time—especially because many sellers will play pricing games when they think no one is looking.

CATCH IT EARLY

Visibility into who moved first enables the brand manufacturer to catch the violations early, before more resellers follow suit and there is an overwhelming number of violators to chase down. For that reason, it’s critical that you catch the sites that move first, in near real-time. With ongoing monitoring, you’ll increase the likelihood of obtaining proof and timing of the violation, so you can immediately notify the reseller and they can remedy it before the domino effect happens and others follow suit.

Once more resellers recognize that they are being regularly monitored, it significantly decreases the likelihood of violators—and, if nothing else, it cuts down on the price-cutting game. Enforcing a comprehensive minimum advertised pricing (MAP) policy is both a commitment to your reseller partners and to the overall protection of your brand.

With an enforced MAP policy, toy manufacturers can manage and mitigate pricing issues and preserve margin for their sellers. With a policy in place, manufacturers are also better equipped to catch those retailers that don’t comply with their policies. By getting a hold of your price parity, you will be better able to forecast revenue, while also signaling your commitment to supporting your partners and protecting your brand.

As president and CEO of ORIS Intelligence, Pam Springer is focused on the strategic growth of the company in support of its mission to help manufacturers protect their brands online. Springer has more than 20 years of experience growing tech-based companies, including re-starts and IPOs. She has been recognized as one of the “13 Powerful Women Running Today’s Biggest Startups” by Business Insider and built Manta Media into one of the largest, most trafficked websites in the U.S.
THE ETHICAL TOY PROGRAM IS HERE

The Future of the ICTI CARE Foundation

by MARK ROBERTSON, director of communications and stakeholder relations, Ethical Toy Program

AS OF FEBRUARY, THE ICTI CARE

Foundation is officially known as the Ethical Toy Program (ETP). In addition to a new name, we also feature a new strategy, membership for brands and retailers, and dynamic brand identity. This change aligns with the evolving needs of the global toy industry to set new ambitions for responsible toy sourcing.

TWO DECADES OF PROGRESS

The toy industry first came together to focus on supply chain standards in the ‘90s. Accidents were commonplace, working hours were long, and standards at factories were severely lacking. This created major risks for toy brands that were sourcing from these factories, as well as poor conditions for the millions of factory workers.

For the last two decades, we worked with thousands of toy factories, brands, licensors, and retailers to establish a global standard for ethical toy manufacture, and to deliver a social compliance and certification program for the industry.

We raised standards at factories across the toy supply chain, made improvements for millions of toy factory workers, and built a trust in global toy manufacture.

CHANGE IS NOW

The global dynamics of toy manufacture are constantly shifting. Political, social, economic, and technological changes in other key toy sourcing countries create a new set of ethical risks and supply chain vulnerabilities.

There is an increase in the regulation and legislation regarding key issues, such as modern-day slavery, bribery, and corruption; new initiatives are beginning to emerge, such as Employer Pays Principle and responsible recruitment; and large multi-governmental initiatives—including Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights—create new responsible sourcing obligations for the global toy industry.

The increasing investor interest in how companies manage social and environmental risks, and growing scrutiny from the media, campaign organizations, and consumer groups adds to this dynamic. Social media allows supply chain events to become global news stories, allowing workers to share their grievances faster than ever before.

Responsible toy sourcing is not only about responding to new and emerging risks, it also should ensure that standards are maintained at toy factories. The 2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza Apparel Factory in Bangladesh, which killed more than 1,100 factory workers and injured hundreds more, serves as a reminder as to what can happen when factories do not maintain standards. In addition to the tragic death toll, Rana Plaza cost brands and retailers billions of dollars in compensation and reparations. The disaster highlights the high-profile risks that can occur if an industry takes its eye off the ball.

Of course, raising standards at factories in the supply chain isn’t just about avoiding risks. It also creates exciting opportunities for more efficient factories and a stronger toy supply chain. Investing in the well-being of the workforce increases workers’ trust, reduces staff turnover, and increases efficiencies and levels of commitment to the factory. These are important benefits in China, where recruitment of skilled front-line factory workers is an increasing challenge.

It’s a straight-forward concept: Happier workers are more productive and committed. Well-run factories are less likely to suffer worker strikes, fires, recruitment issues, or other disruptive events. This is why we launched the next generation of our program to clarify our core purpose: Better lives for workers and a stronger industry through the ethical production of toys.

NEW STRATEGY, MISSION, AND FOCUS

We are already working with some of the biggest names in the business—Disney, Mattel, and Walmart—but we want to further engage with the industry. Our new membership model gives toy companies of all sizes access to ETP tools and resources to manage supply chain risk, and access to our searchable database of more than 1,000 ethically certified toy factories. Our new program offers:

• Membership principals to drive engagement with the industry, promote collaboration, drive transparency, and increase commitment to responsible toy sourcing.

• Significant updates and investments to our program, including the enhanced audit checklist and the new approach to factory certification.

• Added support building and training to raise standards at toy factories.

• Investment in worker well-being, such as programs to support domestic migrant workers with left-behind children in China and Vietnam.

• The use of technology, including a large-scale industry pilot that uses mobile phone technology to poll workers on working conditions in China.

All this adds up to an exciting time ahead for the future of ethical toy manufacturing. We encourage toy brands and retailers to become members of ETP and to see firsthand the benefits that come with responsible sourcing. Together, we can ensure that toy supply chains are respectful of their factory workers. After all, “the people” is what our whole industry is about.

To learn more about these exciting changes and find out how your company can be a part of the future of ethical toy production, visit ethicaltoyprogram.org. 

Mark Robertson has more than 15 years of experience with sustainability. A member of the leadership team, Robertson leads on global communications and stakeholder outreach at the Ethical Toy Program, and is a passionate believer of the positive potential of business-driven sustainability.
NOT SO FAST
Trademark Protection That Keeps Pace with Fast-Tracked Toys

by HOWARD N. ARONSON, managing director, Lackenbach Siegel LLC

BUYERS CAN NOW ORDER CERTAIN fashion items right after a runway show—and the toy industry may be headed in that direction, too. Coats, dresses, and shoes, which used to appear on the ramp long in advance of their display in retail stores—and even longer in advance of the actual fashion season—have become “see now, buy now” products. Some companies’ toys are also being fast-tracked to consumers to take advantage of media-driven consumer demand.

If your company is investing in fast-tracking toys and related services—shrinking development and production times to rush products to retailers—make sure you take time to put your products’ and services’ intellectual property (IP) protection in place. When companies speed up design, production, marketing, and distribution, trademark rights in particular could suffer, allowing competitors to use others’ brands and doom potential sales success.

WHAT’S THE RUSH?
Social media are the new bellwethers—or dictators—of trends, not least among kids. A viral video can create instant demand for a product that in the past would have taken months of marketplace presence or film promotion to captivate consumers. Now, toys answering this demand include not only things such as plush toys, balls, and dolls, but also water experiment games and slime kits. Toy companies face an increasing need to discover what’s in demand, and to create faster and leaner teams of executives to meet that demand, including toy designers as well as manufacturing and marketing experts.

Not every idea will lead to a product, and not every product will make it into the marketplace. Choosing and protecting the right trademark will ensure that the speed of the new process won’t undermine the potential success of your product or service, especially if your brainstorm becomes a big and long-lasting success.

CONDUCTING A SEARCH
When you emerge from the meeting that came up with a short list of possible trademarks for your new product or service, remember that another company may have had the same inspiration. Conducting a comprehensive trademark search should be your next priority. Your IP attorney has the resources to quickly provide search results. The search could show that there is little risk in adopting your chosen mark.

Eliminating a proposed mark that is already in use or that doesn’t meet Trademark Office requirements could avoid costly rebranding or even litigation down the road. Therefore, searching can save considerable time and money in your fast-track rollout, and protect your rights for years to come.

IS REGISTRATION NECESSARY?
Toy companies sometimes question the need for trademark registration, and when product deadlines loom, it helps to keep a few things in mind.

First, you acquire trademark rights as soon as you begin using the mark at point of purchase, if no one else is using the same mark (or a confusingly similar mark) before you began to use your mark. Before you actually offer your product or service to consumers, you risk having a competitor or another third party acquire those rights by actually using the mark. And you may find that your rights extend only to the specific geographic area where you begin sales. If you plan on nationwide or international use of your mark, it’s safer to acquire federal registration of your mark.

In addition to the right to use the registration symbol ®—putting would-be infringers on notice that the mark is protected—your federal registration will indicate to the public your trademark rights by showing the priority established by your application date. Owning a U.S. trademark registration on the Principal Register provides many advantages:

• Access to U.S. district courts: A federal registrant does not have to meet federal jurisdictional requirements such as diversity, or amount in controversy, to be able to protect its mark through the federal courts.

• Monetary recovery: The owner of a federal registration may recover profits, damages, and costs—and possibly treble damages and attorney fees—in a federal action.

• Protection from counterfeiters: Seizure of counterfeit goods and similar measures are available to federal registrants.

• Recordation with U.S. Customs.

• Proof requirements: In an enforcement action, the owner of a federal registration doesn’t have to prove ownership of the trademark; factors, such as use in commerce, which are established during the registration process; that the registration is valid; and other facts.

• And last, but far from least, recognition by most internet service providers and by retailers when trademark disputes occur. Amazon, for instance, primarily recognizes only registered trademarks for its Brand Registry. A federal registration can also provide a basis for obtaining registration in foreign countries. That’s protection your trademark might need—because your fast-tracked toy may become an enduring classic. »

Howard N. Aronson has provided legal counsel to toy industry companies for the past 30 years. He is the managing partner of Lackenbach Siegel LLP, an intellectual property law firm recognized for its nine decades of handling toy company issues. Grateful acknowledgement is extended to Eileen DeVries, counsel at Lackenbach Siegel. Contact Aronson at HAronso@LSLLP.com or (914) 723-4300.
MOBILE GAMES ACCOUNTED FOR 20 percent of toys and games sales globally in 2016, a considerable increase from 2011 when they represented only 4 percent, according to Euromonitor International. The growth of mobile games is a direct impact of the growth of smart devices worldwide, which brought video games to previously uninterested segments of the population. In addition, the introduction of free-to-play (F2P) gaming considerably lowered the barrier to entry of mobile gaming to nearly zero cost. All of this led to seismic shifts within the rest of toys and games, as traditional toys and video games try to find ways to adapt to increasing competition for kids’ attention from mobile games.

AGE COMPRESSION ON THE RISE
Global smartphone and tablet possession has been on the rise for years, and despite smartphone sales of nearly 1.3 billion units in 2016, 2021 is expected to see even greater sales, according to Euromonitor. Thus, penetration rates are expected to reach record heights, which inevitably means that more of these products will likely end up in kids’ hands more often, increasing the pace of age compression, meaning kids will move away from the traditional toy space to other means of entertainment.

While the overall impact has been a drag for most areas of traditional toys, some were able to benefit from the increased emphasis mobile games bring to licenses. In addition, some have attempted to capitalize on the growth of mobile gaming by adding such elements to their traditional toy products.

EMERGING MARKETS LEAD GROWTH
Emerging markets are largely responsible for mobile gaming’s rapid growth. Emerging markets saw enormous growth in smartphone sales, as cheaper models have made them more accessible. Increased availability of mobile data also made smartphones vital in many emerging markets, boosting consumer access to the internet.

With greater penetration of smartphones in emerging markets, more consumers are playing mobile games, in particular F2P games. Much of this is led by local games that consumers can more easily relate to and understand. Some titles, such as Honor of Kings in China, are so successful that they are now trying to move into developed markets such as the U.S.

The emerging traditional toy market offers a major opportunity for traditional toy makers, with expected growth well above that of developed markets. However, the growth of mobile gaming is likely to increasingly stifle the growth of traditional toys. Despite some core emerging markets reaching peak levels of income and child population levels, the pace of growth for traditional toys is expected to slow closer to 2021. With mobile games expected to more than double from 2016 to 2021, they are likely to be the leading factor contributing to traditional toys being unable to attain higher levels of growth.

MOBILE GAMING TO IMPACT ALL AREAS OF TOYS AND GAMES
The growth of mobile gaming will continue to have a sizeable impact on the rest of toys and games. First, traditional toys and games will be in constant competition with mobile gaming, and, to combat this, toy makers will need to address the shortcomings of mobile games, with products such as outdoor and sports toys. In addition, traditional toy makers will have an advantage in growth categories that directly address entertainment needs that mobile games cannot, such as educational toys. Finally, toy makers may increasingly use mobile games as a basis for licensed products, especially in emerging markets with popular local properties.»

Matthew Hudak is a toys and games analyst for Euromonitor International. In his role, he researches and writes on the global market for toys and video games, and drives analysis on the ever-evolving ways children and adults play.
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The Playtime Sales & Marketing Company, LLC. is a Toy and Electronics Manufacturers sales representative organization. Our prime focus is to represent Toy and Electronics Manufacturers to the Mass Market Retailers. The principals of our Company are Len Soyka and Murray Bass. Our only vocation has been in the Toy Industry. We are dedicated toy professionals.

Our geographical areas of sales coverage and accounts include:
- NEW ENGLAND...Connecticut North to Maine and Upstate N.Y. Accounts...CVS Drug, BJ’s Whole Club, and TJ Maxx,
- NY METRO...NY City and New Jersey. Accounts...Toys R Us and their DOTCOM and aGlobal divisions, TRU Express, dd’s Stores, Macy’s Backstage, Cititrends, Burlington Stores, Xmas Tree Shops, Shepher Distributors, Buy Buy Baby, Party City, National Whle., Bed Bath and Beyond, Stevens Intl., and NY area Supermarket chains.
- MID-LANTIC...Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., Northern Virginia and Western Ohio. Accounts...Rite Aid Drug, Group Sales, Boscov’s, Omni Global, 5 Below, Dollar Tree, Variety Wholesale and Big Lots.
- K mart USA // JC Penney Catalog // Universal Studios Orlando // Gordman’s // Target and Walmart
- CANADA...Walmart, Toys R Us, Canadian Tire and Costco
- CHINA...We maintain a full time Hong Kong sourcing Office

We employ a staff of 5 toy sales specialists. Our contact information is listed on our above shown letterhead. We welcome your inquiries.
1

Lyrick Studios presents its line of 12-inch Barney, Baby Bop, and BJ “Farm Friends” plush toys based on the movie, *Barney’s Great Adventure*, released in April 1998. Each dinosaur plush wears farm-themed attire and has its very own miniature farm animal to carry in its pocket.

2

With the licensing rights to the film *A Bug’s Life*, Mattel offers Bug’s Life Figures with iridescent metallic paint jobs and translucent accessories, a deluxe interactive version of the bug Flik that comes to life through sound and motion, and several play sets, including Hopper’s Lair and P.T. Flea’s Circus.

3

Fisher-Price’s Rescue Heroes are an exciting action-figure alternative that feature nonviolent, real-life heroes that serve as positive role models, such as firefighter Bill Blazes and construction expert Jack Hammer. The figures are fully articulated and have oversized feet, allowing kids to stand the figures up easily, and they come with interchangeable equipment packs that carry specialized tools.

ELECTRONIC DOLLS TAKE ON THEIR TRADITIONAL COUNTERPARTS

Electronic dolls are on the rise, with their manufacturers standing by the idea that these products promote the most realistic form of “nurturing play” for little kids.

Play By Play introduces two new sets: Penny and Patches, a doll and dog set in which Penny asks the dog, Patches, to do a number of tricks, and Knickie and Knockie, two dolls that tell 12 different knock-knock jokes back and forth to each other.

ACCLAIM GETS SOUTH PARK IN GAME DEAL

Acclaim Entertainment announced that the company will develop PC and video game titles based on Comedy Central’s *South Park*, created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. The South Park gang of Kenny, Kyle, Stan, Cartman, and the melodious Chef are due to take over PCs and next-generation gaming consoles worldwide in 1999.

Knickie and Knockie
THE VOICE REACHING...

TRADE

The Toy Book and The Licensing Book reach thousands of manufacturers, retailers, and other members of the toy and licensing industries, providing information on the latest deals, the hottest new products, and the trends affecting the industry. From print magazines to online blogs to weekly e-newsletters, we keep you on top of all the latest toy and licensing news.

toybook.com • licensingbook.com

CONSUMERS

The Toy Insider provides parents, grandparents, and other gift-givers with the latest information on the hottest toys. Thetoyinsider.com features daily product reviews, lifestyle blog posts, videos, new product announcements, weekly newsletters, and two seasonal gift guides. Our annual holiday gift guide is published in the November issue of Family Circle magazine, and we reach millions of consumers through hundreds of broadcast media opportunities, making us the most trusted toy experts.

thetoyinsider.com • @TheToyInsider

MEDIA & INFLUENCERS

The annual Sweet Suite and HoliDAY of Play events reach hundreds of digital influencers and members of traditional media. Hosted by the Toy Insider, these events allow toy manufacturers to show off their latest products to the most influential voices in the media in advance of the holiday season. Attendees get to play, party, and make millions of social media impressions, all while gathering information for holiday gift guides and product reviews.

#weknowplay

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