

2025 EDITION

MOJO NATION



CELEBRATING THE 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL FIGURES
WORKING IN TOY AND GAME DESIGN TODAY

In association with





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NEW DATES



JOIN US FOR EXCITING PANELS AND KEYNOTES FROM INVENTORS, DESIGNERS AND CREATIVE LEADERS.

play creators conference

June 25th, 2025

Stamford Bridge Stadium, London

The **Play Creators Conference** is focused on creativity, innovation and design with a range of exciting panels and keynotes from the talent behind some of the industry's most iconic creations.

Part of **play** creators festival

For more information visit www.playcreatorsconference.co.uk

"Within the 100 this year are the brains behind top launches like Sky Castle Toys' Sticki Rolls, The Op's Flip 7, Moose's Bluey 3-in-1 Transforming Plane and Fat Brain Toys' PlayTab..."



Welcome to this year's edition of the Mojo Nation 100, our annual celebration of the industry's designer and inventor talent... As voted for by you.

It's been another tricky year for the independents, internals and inventors of toys and games. As always, though, our community of creatives found ways to innovate, surprise and bring fresh fun to kids and kidults alike.

You may notice this year's 100 is slightly thinner than previous editions. This is because we've now launched the Mojo Nation Magazine – a new home for opinion pieces, interviews and insightful features. You'll find this mag at

London Toy Fair and Spielwarenmesse, as well as on our website. This means some of content you'd usually find here is now there...

That said, we couldn't let the shiny new bauble have all the light! The 100 still has plenty of pieces boasting tremendous insights from some of our top creative thought-leaders. Within this edition are the brains behind top launches including Sticki Rolls from Sky Castle Toys, Flip 7 by The Op, PlayTab from Fat Brain Toys and Moose's Bluey 3-in-1 Transforming Plane... All of which were inventor items.

Other highlights include an exclusive chat with Arlene Biran – SVP, Global Brand Lead, Sports Action and Creative Play at Hasbro. There's also a catch up with Kim Vandenbroucke and Mattel's Nick Hayes about the making of Scrabble Together. Elsewhere, we have insights from tms on their recent Crocs Happy Meal campaign, and a deep dive into the Girls offering at Jazwares with Elena Wilson.

Meanwhile, Maestro's Daryl Andrews talks licensed games, Stephen Fazio and Austin Hillam discuss the origins of ZipString; there's a catch up with the creative team at SMART Toys and Games... And Christian Ulrich of Spielwarenmesse eG reveals what to expect from this year's Game Inventors Convention.

So! Before you crack on, I just want to say a big thank you to our sponsors, as well as to everyone who nominated their colleagues and peers. And thanks also to our panel of experts for helping to whittle the longlist down to the final 100.

Here's to a great 2025!



Billy Langsworthy,
Co-Founder, Mojo Nation

SUPPORTING INVENTORS AND DESIGNERS MAKE THEIR MARK ON **THE INDUSTRY**

Toy Fair 2025

- The Gold Zone dedicated to nurturing and supporting new and smaller inventors
- Stand discount of 24% for BTHA members
- Invitation only Inventors lunch hosted at the show

Advocacy

- Engagement with policy makers on the behalf of BTHA members
- Numerous guidance documents on industry related issues to help bring toys to market

BTHA Training Hub

- Free training seminars and webinars - for members on issues including; responsible marketing, counterfeit toys, intellectual property



We're pleased to once again offer the British Toy & Hobby's Association's support to Mojo Nation and the Mojo Nation 100, to help champion and celebrate those leading the way in the design community over the past year. The toy industry is full of exciting new inventions and designs which bring so much joy to people of all ages. On behalf of the British Toy & Hobby Association, I'd like to say congratulations to those who have made it onto this year's list.

The inventor community is an integral part of the toy industry, driving new designs and innovations every year to help enhance the play experience for children and adults. As organisers of Toy Fair, it's really important for us to support inventors at the show.

We were delighted last year to organise our first Inventors Lunch in partnership with Mojo Nation. This free lunch took place on the final day of Toy Fair and was exclusive to inventors, designers, studios and inventor relations execs. It was a prime opportunity to network and facilitate valuable partnerships at the show. Due to its success, we're pleased to be hosting the Inventors Lunch again this year on Thursday, January 23rd – the final day of Toy Fair 2025.

Toy Fair has long supported inventors at the show through the Greenhouse area, which is a dedicated hub to supporting smaller, start-up companies and inventors. 2025 sees the Greenhouse celebrate its 20th year at the show. To mark this occasion, we've rebranded the area to the 'Gold Zone'. This name change aims to highlight and further promote the companies in this space by encouraging attendees to visit the area which is full of new innovative products and hidden treasures. You'll find the Gold Zone toward the back of the Grand Hall – and we encourage everyone to pay a visit.

Finally, we wish inventors and the whole toy industry a very successful 2025 and look forward to seeing the thousands of new and exciting launches over the next 12 months.



Roland Earl,
Director General,
British Toy & Hobby Association



NEW DATES

CELEBRATING INVENTORS AND DESIGNERS THAT EXCEL...

play creators awards

June 24th, 2025
Stamford Bridge Stadium, London

Whether it's an R&D team responsible for a smash-hit line, a design agency that's taken a brief and soared, or a freelance designer responsible for the next industry-shaping trend, the **Play Creators Awards** are all about shining a spotlight on the sector's top architects of play.

Part of **play**
creators festival

For more information visit
www.playcreatorsawards.com

"Inventing games takes passion, perseverance and imagination. Toy and game development itself is a game..."



Cheers to the 2025 Mojo Nation 100! With your wealth of ideas, you design worlds, create strategies and experiences that captivate board game players all over the world.

Inventing games takes passion, perseverance and imagination. Toy and game development itself is a game: a combination of your idea, its realisation and many contacts... Choose the resources that will take your concept further: The right game material, numerous rounds of playtesting, expansion of your network... During this game, some positive cards will come to you,

like a Mojo Nation 100 nomination raising your profile!

Other cards you will have to bet on... Like expanding your international network in Nuremberg. Here the business world of board games comes together. At the Internationale Spieleerfindermesse – Game Inventors Convention, you will take away valuable know-how and find the key partners who can bring your prototypes to market.

Founded by the Bavarian Games Archive and integrated into the Spielwarenmesse in Nuremberg, this platform offers the perfect stage for your game. Together with our cooperation partners, we support you with all our expertise.

On behalf of Spielwarenmesse, the Game Inventors Convention in Nuremberg and SPIEL in Essen – which are all part of our company's family – we greatly appreciate your work and thank you for your creative concepts. Your ideas make this industry the epitome of innovation worldwide!



Christian Ulrich
Board Spokesperson
Spielwarenmesse eG

**NEW
DATES**

LOOKING TO UNEARTH YOUR NEXT HIT PRODUCT?

MOJO PITCH

June 26th, 2025

Stamford Bridge Stadium, London

The Mojo Pitch puts you in front of the global design community. You provide us with a brief, outlining desired categories/concepts, and then delegates pitch their toy ideas and board games to you within your own private pitching booth at London's Stamford Bridge.

Part of
play
creators festival

For more information visit
www.mojo-pitch.com

"By bravely sharing their ideas, inventors, designers and creatives not only shape the future of play – they have the power to inspire, delight and fuel friendships."



Congratulations to the 2025 Mojo Nation 100!

At the heart of our industry lies one super-powerful force: ideas. And those who harness these ideas, recognise their potential and bravely nurture them? They're superheroes. After all, every idea – no matter how small – has the possibility to evolve into something that can transform the world.

By bravely sharing their ideas, inventors, designers and creatives not only shape the future of play – they have the power to inspire, delight and fuel friendships. That's why we're honoured to celebrate the incredible

superheroes named in this year's Mojo Nation 100.

At Hasbro, our mission is to create joy and community through the magic of play. We believe every interaction a fan has with our brands is an opportunity to deliver an unforgettable experience – a magic moment. This wouldn't be possible without the creative vision and tenacity of innovators like those recognised in this year's Mojo 100, who bring our shared vision to life.

It's a privilege to collaborate with inventors, designers and creative champions to deliver magical play experiences to fans all over the world – and we are particularly grateful to the entire inventor community for their contributions.

Knowing the impact that our toys and games can have on people's lives, it's important that our community of creators reflects our global player base. That's why Hasbro collaborates with a diverse network of inventors while supporting the next generation of designers and creatives through programs...

These include our Women Innovators of Play virtual conference and challenge, our global inventor submissions platform Spark, and our Girl Innovators of Play bootcamp and challenge in partnership with Girl Up. I'm excited to continue championing these programs into the future, as we look to further expand and empower the inventor community.

As we look ahead, Hasbro remains dedicated to working with visionary creators who understand the desires of fans around the world. Together, we will continue to build toys, games and entire play experiences that foster community, create magic moments, and perhaps even change the world.



Kim Boyd

President, Global Toy Brands & Licensed Consumer Products,
Hasbro

“We’ve done a lot of work to evolve the Blaster business through cutting-edge product extensions, value-conscious design and a focus on depth of play.”



Sponsored by



Blast Off

Arlene Biran – SVP, Global Brand Lead, Sports Action and Creative Play at Hasbro – on Nerf, Play-Doh and innovating with inventors.



Arlene, to kick us off, how did you find your way into the industry? Was toys and games always on the cards?

No, I never thought I’d end up in the toy industry – but here I am, over 20 years on! I did an undergrad in Environmental Policy & Advocacy to pursue a career in Law... I very quickly realised, though, that I needed to chase something that provided me with more of an opportunity to flex my creative muscle – as well as my business acumen.

Creativity is important to you, then?

Yes! I’ve always been a maker at heart: sewing, painting, gardening, cooking... Anything with a creative output. Eventually, I realised Brand Management perfectly mixed data, insights and creative intuition. I started at Spin Master as an Associate Brand Manager on Marshmallow Furniture – an inventor-led item. That grew into a line of children’s furniture and brand collaborations, exposing me to the licensing side of things. I learned so much about marketing, product development, manufacturing and ultimately how to be a savvy entrepreneur.

Next, I moved to the Arts & Crafts team. At the time, it felt like a dream come true given my interest in creative experiences. I ultimately advanced to lead the Activity Toys & Building Sets Global Brand team, then US Marketing for the entire toy business. I loved my time at Spin Master and really valued the connections I built – particularly with the internal and external inventor communities. But when the opportunity came to join Hasbro and oversee its Nerf brand, I couldn’t resist working on such an iconic legacy brand.

Amazing. On that, you recently celebrated your one-year anniversary with Hasbro. How’s the past year been?

In 2024, we worked to set the foundation for the next phase

of Nerf... This year, we’ll start seeing these plans come to fruition. Of course, 2024 wasn’t without challenges. The toy industry continued to face the effects of the Covid era, inflation, changing play patterns, competition and other macro-level shifts. Nerf hasn’t been immune to these, but we have the benefit of an iconic brand, with unbelievable global awareness. We’re excited to refresh the strategy to evolve with our core consumers while welcoming new ones into the franchise.

What kind of thing has the team worked on?


We’ve done a lot of work to evolve the Blaster business through cutting-edge product extensions, value-conscious design and a focus on depth of play with accessibility at all price points. We’ll start to see some of this in 2025, as we launch cool new products and extensions inspired by video gameplay, an awesome new Super Soaker – thanks to the brilliance of our newest partners Hammerforce – and all bolstered by a new marketing campaign that centres around Nerf’s foundation of competitive active play.

And – in addition to Nerf – you’ve recently been tasked to take on the Play-Doh business?!

Yes! It’s a real ‘pinch me’ moment to have the honour of working on such globally recognised brands. Play-Doh was the gold standard as I developed brands like Kinetic Sand at Spin Master... The opportunity to manage these businesses with amazing, talented teams is not lost on me!

You mentioned working with inventors earlier. What makes this community such a valued partner for Hasbro?

Inventors are at the heart of what we do at Hasbro – and many of our most successful brands started out as inventor concepts. That includes both Nerf and Play-Doh. Plus, there’s no way we’d be able to keep long-term brands like Nerf, Furby



“We need to remain innovative, while making sure we don’t lean too heavily toward redefining a brand with decades of built-in love.”

or Transformers fresh without inventors’ innovative, out-of-the-box insights around play patterns and technology.

I’ve always been inspired by the imagination that inventors bring to the business. They act as integral outside consultants who help drive the product pipeline into the future. It’s my aspiration to evolve this two-way partnership with inventors here at Hasbro.

What recent products would you highlight as great examples of inventor-led launches?

Our new Nerf N Series collection of blasters is based on performance and the new proprietary N1 dart. Much of the underlying mechanics are the result of our ongoing collaboration with Robert Victor of Kite and Rocket. The long-time partnership between them and our incredibly talented internal team exemplifies how we can supercharge innovation internally by working with the right external partners. With Robert’s physics expertise and performance insights – and the passion and talent of our Nerf team – we were able to take a beloved product and elevate it through increased accuracy, speed and distance.

We’re also so excited to launch our new Super Soaker Power Drench water blaster. It was inspired by an online trend that our team spotted – then brought to life through a collaboration with our partner Hammerforce, out of New Zealand. We’re always on the hunt for new sources of innovation, and Hammerforce have been fantastic partners.

Are they a toy invention firm?

Interestingly, they’re not traditional toy designers, no! They specialise in building pioneering valve and actuation products for industrial machinery and manufacturing. By bringing their expertise to the toy aisle, we were able to deliver a disruptive play experience that provides maximum soakage at an affordable price! It’s super fun and totally on brand!

Fantastic! So do you find working with inventors can energise and inspire in-house teams?

Definitely. It’s always good to have a fresh perspective. If you work inside any corporation for too long, it can be easy to get

too comfortable. Working with inventors can push us to question things that wouldn’t normally be in consideration – and provoke us to think outside the box.

Going back to Nerf for a moment – the brand is over 55 years old... How do you approach innovating a brand with such an impressive history?

It’s important to never lose sight of the brand’s original insight – because that’s what made it successful in the first place. The original Nerf ball was revolutionary because it allowed people to play with a ball indoors; it gave people permission to play. To me, that’s what Nerf is all about: permission and freedom to play, no matter where you are.

Still, as stewards of the brand, my team must always find the right balance between honouring the legacy while keeping it fresh. We need to remain innovative and evolve in line with play patterns, while making sure we don’t lean too heavily toward redefining a brand with decades of built-in love.

The same goes for Play-Doh. The team has done a phenomenal job of growing market share while staying true to the brand’s foundation, by offering a mix of classic, beloved products and expanding into new categories – like the Play-Doh Pizza Delivery Scooter – to reflect current consumer tastes and trends.

What should we expect from Nerf and Play-Doh this year?

On Nerf, you’ll start to see really cool, feature-driven innovation as we lean further into competitive active play. We’re offering more dynamic play options so that kids – and adults – of all ages and backgrounds can feel the rush and excitement of Nerf.

With Play-Doh, we’ll continue to evolve our play sets and show up in some entirely new formats to give kids even more ways to work their imagination muscle. We have some awesome brand collabs coming up that will certainly surprise and delight fans of Play-Doh – and hopefully convert new fans. Building off our recent Kids Can campaign, we’ll continue to empower kids to harness their imagination through partnerships, education, and of course groundbreaking products and experiences.

Congratulations to this year's **Mojo 100** Recipients!

We are always excited and ready
to review your great ideas!

Visit our submission portal at
spark.hasbro.com



String Theory

Guys, let's dive straight into the origins of ZipString. What brought you together?

Stephen Fazio, Co-Founder, ZipString: ZipString was a project that I built for a hackathon at Georgia Tech; it was a design competition. The challenge was to design a circuit board the size of a credit card, or smaller, that could do anything you liked – as long as the entire bill of materials was under \$50. The most creative, fun project would win.

I love watching engineering and science content online. There's a physics teacher called Bruce Yeany who has a YouTube series called Homemade Science. One of his projects was a benchtop string launcher that taught the principles of waves. Presented with the challenge, I thought: 'How ridiculous would it be if I could build something to fill an entire room with this big looping string?' The circuit board and string launcher would be credit card-sized, but the string could extend out... That was the initial inspiration behind ZipString.

Amazing. And did you win the competition?

Stephen: I did! It worked great. You get a little bit of money from that to make a batch of whatever you come up with. I made a batch of five and then I put that project on my TikTok... It got a couple of million views and people got interested. But I didn't really understand how I could structure a business around it. That piece of puzzle only fell into place when I met Austin in the summer.

How did the two of you meet?

Austin Hillam, Co-Founder, ZipString: We met through church. I love engineering and – after Stephen had me over for dinner – we spent hours talking about the launcher. Around 12 days later, we had a new 3D-printed prototype that worked a lot better. I told Stephen: "What we have is awesome! Don't share it with anyone..." What does Stephen

Stephen Fazio and Austin Hillam, Co-Founders of ZipString, talk us through the origins of their much-hyped invention – and what's next!

do? He posts it on TikTok! In four hours, we had over 20 million views – then traction on Reddit, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram... So we rolled up our sleeves and got running.

Amazing. You then successfully launched ZipString on Kickstarter in 2021. I imagine that was something of a learning curve...

Austin: We had thousands and thousands of orders through Kickstarter. We set up shop in my parents' basement and invited all of our friends and family to help. Together we built the first 4,000 ZipStrings by hand.

It's also a tough product to categorise... Has that been a blessing or a curse?

Austin: That vagueness has been both a blessing and a curse. When we started, we'd call it more of a gadget than a toy. When we talk with buyers, they'll ask: "Where should I put this in my store?" Because it could go here, it could go there... It's a challenge.

But what's fun about ZipString is that vagueness also means there's a massive audience for it. Whether you're a boy, a girl, three years old, 103 years old... Whoever uses it will have a big smile on their face. People have used them at dance competitions and created tricks that we didn't know were possible...

Stephen: Every day, people are exceeding our expectations of what they can do with the toy. We call the community Zipsters.

Last question! What does the future hold for ZipString?

Austin: We have ZipString, ZipString Luma and some cool accessories. But this year we're launching something cool that the world has never seen – we're excited about it.

Innovation is the foundation of ZipString and it's always important to be on the lookout for great new ideas. I'd love to meet clever inventors that have come up with something awesome that we could work together on.

"Every day, people are exceeding our expectations of what they can do with the toy."





CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S TOP 100!

From the Mattel Inventor Relations Team

Beth Moody • Audrey Watanabe • Tara McGrath • Sarah Franco • Judi Stonecipher • James Sheeler

Brought together
through innovation
and partnerships!



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"Sometimes a designer might have a game that fits an IP and we can marry the two together. That's what happened with Happy Camper – it's a reimagining of one of Wolfgang Kramer's early classics!"



DONALD DUCK IN

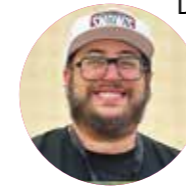
HAPPY CAMPER



License to Thrill



Daryl Andrews – game designer and Head of Talent Acquisition at Maestro Media – discusses bringing Donald Duck and other iconic characters to the tabletop.



Daryl, it's great to chat. How was 2024 for Maestro Media?

I feel like people already felt Maestro was on the rise, but 2024 saw a lot of our new product launch. We had The Smurfs: Hidden Village, Hello Kitty: Day at the Park, DrLupo Presents Streamer Standoff – and we also got Happy Camper out which was amazing.

Yes, this is Disney's Donald Duck in Happy Camper – a game that celebrated Donald's 90th anniversary. This is a co-design between yourself and another acclaimed designer, Wolfgang Kramer. Why opt for this approach of partnering exciting IP with industry 'names'?

I really want to see awesome games with cool IP. Achieving that naturally involves finding my favourite designers and matching them to IP that they might love. Or sometimes, they might have a game that fits an IP and we can marry the two together. That's what happened with Happy Camper – it's a reimagining of one of Wolfgang's early classics!

Oh! Which one?

A game called Goldland that came out almost 20 years ago. It never came to North America, but it's a gem. I'm a sucker for finding out-of-print games from designers that I love. Goldland is an exploration game and it proved a neat fit for what we wanted to do with Happy Camper.

Theme aside, did you have to change much from the original game to this new Donald Duck take?

Yes, it needed massaging and adjusting. Goldland is a game designed for 90 minutes to two hours... That's obviously not

the right timeframe for a Donald Duck game. By working with Wolfgang and Disney, we were able to massage the game to be a 30 to 40 minute game. In Happy Camper, you have interesting choices to make between maybe three or four things, instead of five or six things like the original game... It was about streamlining things.

That said, one thing that we kept was a neat backpack mechanic. Everyone has a backpack and as you collect resources, you add them to your backpack – but that slows you down! How fast you move around the game is dependent on how many items you're carrying – and I loved that.

You mention that players have lots of interesting decisions to make in Happy Camper. Was it important for this game not to 'talk down' to kids?

Absolutely. Kids are amazing. I love playtesting with kids and watching them kick butt. They catch on so fast and they get the strategy side of things just as much as an adult does in this game. I'd rather not dumb down a game, but challenge a kid to figure it out... Maybe they'll play two or three times before they figure it out, but that's great. That's exploration, that's learning, that's the challenge. As long as the teach is accessible, kids can learn and impress us and surprise us.

Absolutely. To wrap up, what makes an IP attractive to Maestro?

We are passionate about making products tied to strong fandoms. And that doesn't mean 'the most popular thing'. Look at what we did with The Binding of Isaac. It's a very successful indie game, but lots of people have never heard of it. What made it appeal to us was the fact the fandom around the IP is so passionate. So that's what we look for, and that's what fuels us: passion.



“It’s such a fun challenge to tweak a classic in a way that feels fresh and resonates with today’s players.”

Word Play

Scrabble Together inventor **Kim Vandembroucke** and Mattel’s **Nick Hayes** discuss bringing a cooperative spin to the classic game...



Before we dive into the story behind Scrabble Together, are you a fan of word games, Kim? Kim Vandembroucke, Inventor & Game Designer, Brainy Chick Inc: I’m absolutely a fan of word games! I play Wordle religiously, went through a serious Boggle/Big Boggle phase that lasted years, and I still own my mother’s childhood Scrabble set. That said, I wasn’t always a Scrabble enthusiast... My first serious game was as an adolescent, playing with my aunts around Christmas. Let’s just say I got trounced! That was deflating... But it gave me an appreciation for the game’s depth – and its competitiveness!



Now, Scrabble Together... It’s a collaborative version of the iconic game. How did this come about?

Kim: Mattel was asking for Scrabble variations, and I couldn’t stop thinking about how challenging Scrabble can be for beginners. It’s one of those games where you either need someone at your skill level – or someone with a lot of patience. I kept reflecting on my childhood experience and thinking: ‘It doesn’t have to be that way.’ Eventually, I landed on the idea of playing together instead of against each other, and from there, I set out to create an experience that – ideally – would be enjoyable for players of all ages and skill levels.

Were there any design conundrums you were proud to crack during its development?

Kim: When I started focusing on the idea of working toward a common goal, I felt confident about the general concept. The biggest challenge was knowing that there are people who take Scrabble very seriously – I didn’t want to offend them... Playing cooperatively was definitely going to be a big left turn from traditional Scrabble – but I truly believed it would be a fantastic way for families to play together.

Once I felt like I had a solid idea, I was so excited to pitch it to Mattel. The discussion was great! They got it right away and completely understood my vision for using cooperative play to make the game more accessible. I also hoped that a cooperative version would help teach a whole new generation to love the classic game – even if they never stop playing the cooperative version! Of course, Mattel really knocked it out of the park by including it with the classic game. I think that really amplifies the message that Scrabble is for everyone.

Absolutely. Nick, let’s bring you in. What first appealed about Kim’s concept?

Nick Hayes, Manager, Product Design, Games, Mattel: The first thing that immediately struck us about Kim’s game was that it was cooperative. Scrabble has always been a players-versus-players competition, but Kim had the insight to ask the question: “What if the players worked together against the game?”

Our design team took the reins after Kim’s submission and the rest is history. Mattel has some of the most knowledgeable game designers around... They work day in, day out on some of the most successful brands in the industry. This knowledge





“Playing cooperatively was definitely going to be a big left turn from traditional Scrabble – but I truly believed it would be a fantastic way for families to play together.”

helps to tease out the best parts of an invention and make sure it matches what our fans expect. We spent a great deal of time playtesting and pushing Kim’s design in different directions over a series of months.

Diving into that process, were there any challenges that proved tricky?

Nick: The biggest hurdle during development was keeping the play time short and the complexity low. Kim’s original design centred around achieving a high score. That makes sense because scoring is a key part of traditional Scrabble play. We held onto that part of the design for a long time until we noticed that the scoring really slowed down the game because there was still pressure to perform on your turn.

Ah! Makes sense!

Nick: The breakthrough came when we decided to see what would happen if we got rid of scoring altogether. Instead of trying to maximise your points, all you had to do was complete a goal card. It took the pressure to perform off the player and made it a lot easier to collaborate with your partner.

Terrific. Now, there have been several fun Scrabble spin-offs over the years. What makes this brand an exciting sandbox for designers to play in?

Kim: Scrabble is so iconic and beloved, and I think it’s such a fun challenge to tweak a classic in a way that feels fresh and resonates with today’s players. It’s a tall order because

sometimes the simplicity of the original is what makes it so timeless... But if you can tempt fans of a classic to give your version a try – and they actually enjoy it – that’s an incredibly rewarding feeling.

Nick: Scrabble sometimes gets a bad rap for being stodgy and taking ages to play. However, people miss out on a lot of fun play because they feel they’re bad at spelling, or they need an English professor’s vocabulary... The real design challenge is: how do we get people past that barrier and into the fun part of playing Scrabble?



Are you seeing a greater appetite for collaborative gaming experiences?

Nick: Cooperative games really saw a boom in the hobby channel about a decade ago. We had great success with Ghost Fightin’ Treasure Hunters, which won the Kinderspiel in 2014 and saw a 10th anniversary edition in 2024. We also recently launched UNO Teams, the first

edition of UNO designed to be played with a partner, and of course the together mode of Scrabble. So maybe there’s a new appetite for cooperative games!

And Kim, is this an area for which you’d like to invent more?

Kim: I’ve actually designed quite a few cooperative games for kids. Last year I launched a new game with Hand2Mind called Bunny Brunch. I also have several Peaceable Kingdom titles in my portfolio – including the always-adorable Share and Sparkle Unicorns. I think, in the right context, cooperative play can really shine.



Girl Power

Elena Wilson – VP of Girls Design at Jazwares – talks Hello Kitty, Royal High and winning in the Girls’ aisle.



Elena, you’re VP of Girls Design at Jazwares. This is a new and growing division – what does the role entail?

Just two years ago, I was brought in to establish and build this division at Jazwares... I couldn’t have been more excited to take on this opportunity – especially given their tremendous success with brands like Squishmallows, Pokémon, and with much more in the works.

Since joining, I’ve focused on bringing in fresh talent and building out the division with a focus on original IP. Working side-by-side with the amazing Joni Pratte – Sr. Director of Product Design – we’ve been building a dream team that’s not only packed with talent, but laser-focused on creating toys that truly connect with our fans. I’m thrilled to say that, in just two years, we’ve tripled our team and scored the master toy license for Hello Kitty & Friends!

Amazing! Alongside Hello Kitty, what other brands and launches are keeping you busy?

Most recently, we celebrated the successful launch of our first fashion doll line, Royal High, inspired by the hit Roblox game. Plus, we just rolled out

Squish-a-longs, a collectible plastic line featuring everyone’s favourite Squishmallow characters in an adorable new mini size. And I couldn’t be more excited about collaborating with David Winter, head of our BlueJ Innovation team, to bring Figabands to life! It’s a totally fresh take on collectibles that’s transforming the way we think about wearables.

The Girls’ aisle is one of the industry’s most competitive. What do products in this space need to do to resonate with girls today?

The Girls’ toy aisle is definitely one of the toughest spaces to break through, but I’ve found that to truly connect with today’s savvy consumers, there are three key elements that can’t be overlooked...

The first is storytelling. For me, it’s all about creating products that have compelling stories or relatable characters. Whether through animated series, digital content or deep character backstories, storytelling is what transforms a toy into something truly memorable that inspires imaginative play.

Then there’s collectability and surprise. I’ve seen firsthand how much kids – and collectors like myself! – love the thrill of discovery.

Whether it’s mystery packs, limited editions, or rare drops, adding that



element of surprise keeps them coming back for more and creates a sense of excitement with each new release.

Terrific. And the third element?

Digital integration. In today’s world, tying toys into digital platforms is a game-changer. I love the challenge of exploring how to seamlessly integrate toys with apps, games like Roblox or expanding stories on YouTube. It keeps kids engaged longer and helps build a strong fan community around the brand. Ultimately, products in this space need to be innovative, inclusive and authentic. Today’s consumers are savvy and know when something is made with them in mind, so connecting with their interests and passions is key.

Can you talk us through a recent range you’ve worked on that shows how Jazwares is approaching the Girls’ sector?

I’ll share two examples of how we’re making a splash in this space. First: Royal High. For years, the industry tried to find a way to seamlessly blend digital and physical play... Jazwares has done just that! We’ve taken the beloved digital game Royal High and brought it to life in 3D. It lets fans collect their favourite characters directly from the game and use those same characters to play in-game with our unique gaming codes. It’s a compelling fusion of fashion dolls and online play, truly bridging the gap between virtual and physical worlds.

My second example is the launch of our new Hello Kitty & Friends line. At Jazwares, we have a deep understanding of collectibles and plush, so partnering with a brand as iconic as Hello Kitty was truly a match made in heaven. With its adorable characters and loyal fanbase, we’ve reimagined these beloved figures in fresh new ways across both plastic collectibles and plush formats. It’s all about honouring nostalgia while bringing something new and delightful to fans of all ages!

Looking ahead, what do you see as key opportunities for the Girls division at Jazwares?

The sky’s the limit for our team, and we’re just getting started! I see huge opportunities as we continue to innovate. For Hello Kitty & Friends, we’re already exploring new scales and figures that will take this beloved brand to the next level. And just wait until you see what’s coming for Squish-a-longs... We’re teaming up with some exciting new licenses that are going to blow fans away!

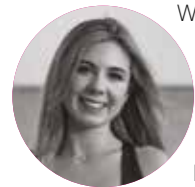
Our team is also buzzing with excitement as we collaborate with tokidoki and Atomic Cartoons to bring Mermicorno: Starfall to life! This magical new IP – packed with amazing content and tokidoki’s signature style – is going to deliver products fans will adore. We thrive on pushing boundaries in the girls’ collectibles space and we’ve got plenty of surprises in store.



“We thrive on pushing boundaries in the girls’ collectibles space and we’ve got plenty of surprises in store.”

Behind Every Smile...

Sophie Lazenby, Junior Product Designer at tms, unboxes the complex craft behind Happy Meal toys... And their collaboration with Crocs.



Wow, yeah, stepping in to the world of Happy Meal has been nothing short of exhilarating! I have always known about Happy Meal toys, they were part of my childhood growing up, visiting McDonald's and wondering which Happy Meal toy I would get. But, I never truly understood what it takes to make them!

Six months into my role here, has felt anything but short; I've been involved in projects that I am really proud of. Every meeting, design discussion, every change has given me a newfound appreciation for the art of crafting a range of toys that will appeal to kids. As I've quickly learned, making something that feels effortless and entertaining for the end consumer, is anything but effortless from a design perspective.

But nothing could have fully prepared me for what takes place behind the scenes. It's not just one team, but multiple teams at tms, that collaborate to create experiences that put consumers at the heart of their thinking. Happy Meal toys are always on, every month a new campaign is launched no matter where you are in the world, each one focusing on impactful play experiences, playing a significant role in shaping cherished childhood memories. As I have transitioned from being an inventor, the processes and expertise that tms applies to creating these toys has really opened my eyes, broadened my knowledge, and deepened my understanding of the entire development process.

It's fascinating to see how the Happy Meal brand continues to evolve after 40 years. A testament to this evolution is the Crocs campaign which literally blew everyone's socks off in

2024 and has already become one of the most successful Happy Meal campaigns of ALL TIME!

I joined the team when this programme was already in full throttle, live in markets across the globe, but I've seen the complex and highly skilled work that goes in to make something like this happen.

From an outsider's perspective, it's easy to preconceive that Happy Meal toys are recurring solutions based on a popular toy, game or entertainment brand.

But with the Crocs collaboration, there was a whole new approach.

So why did this formula work so well? We took a hugely successful and iconic lifestyle brand like Crocs and blended it with the McDonald's brand, in what we term as 'icon to icon'. Bringing together these two brands creating a miniature Crocs shoe line, all fashioned on the Happy Meal brand, with a play experience that not only drives engagement but also an opportunity to customise.

Through in-depth research with kids and families we gained valuable insights from early concepts. The learnings allowed us to iterate and adapt our solutions at pace. From addressing the Crocs scale to ensure "wearability" and engagement were critical to the experience, we knew it was vital that the unboxing experience was equally reminiscent to the brand.

What has now become one of the biggest Happy Meal campaigns ever, is largely driven by the universal appeal to such a wide audience of brand fans. Both Crocs and McDonald's Happy Meal have captured the core Gen Alpha kids, with Gen Z audiences swept up in the wave too!





“Crocs has already become one of the most successful Happy Meal campaigns of all time!”

Combining strong partnerships such as Crocs, with exceptional play experiences, we continuously evolve to deliver engaging and relatable play that resonates with today's kids. By aligning with current trends and truly understanding what excites and inspires children, we embrace the opportunity to see the world through their eyes. Combined with our creativity and passion for toys, this all allows us to generate meaningful impact.

I've quickly come to appreciate the incredible balancing act that goes into crafting each campaign. There's incredible scale of our annual production, with over 60 licensed collaborations spread across a worldwide audience. And we're doing this with the inclusion of sustainable practices at the forefront of our decisions. Pairing creative and commercial perspectives often means the process is not always linear, requiring flexibility and adaptability. There's the challenge of delivering retail-quality toys at a fraction of the cost, ensuring they offer unbeatable value while sparking excitement in children's eyes.

It's been incredible to witness how concept design iterations and variations with materials and finishes have evolved to create the final solution. From sustainable materials, through to innovative tooling techniques, assembly and decoration solutions at our vendors; the sheer scale of the operations to deliver for a campaign of this magnitude is mind-boggling!

At the same time, the company's commitment to sustainability is inspiring, with innovative practices

aimed at minimizing our environmental footprint - from design, material optimisation, to sourcing, manufacturing, delivery and beyond.

What amazes me most is how these efforts come together to create something bigger than the product itself: moments of joy for countless children and families around the world. As a fan of Happy Meal growing up, it's a lovely full-circle moment for me personally to get to be a professional "kid" working on the brand! It's a humbling and heartwarming mission, and I'm proud to play even a small part in shaping those moments.

So, back to the starting question, what have I been up to in just 6 months so far on Happy Meal? ...

For starters, I've been immersing myself into the expertise, collaboration and ingenuity it takes to make the complexities of Happy Meal look simple. Diving into the story that lies behind every toy - a story of passion, innovation, and an unwavering dedication to creating joy and smiles on a truly massive scale.

I can't reveal the juicy projects planned throughout 2025 and beyond, but I'm thrilled to be involved with building on the successes of the Happy Meal brand, helping to ignite the imaginations and experiences for a new generation of fans. We're continuing the legacy of connecting lifestyle culture with hot partner properties, and the thought of sparking countless more smiles is a very happy prospect!

(All claims in this article are tms' and were not independently verified by McDonald's)



Show Business

Christian Ulrich – Spokesperson of the Executive Board at Spielwarenmesse eG – on inventors, inspiration and what to check out at this year's show.

Spielwarenmesse welcomes visitors across the toy and game landscape – including professional inventors and design studios. Why do you feel it remains a must-attend event for this community?

As the world's leading B2B event, the Spielwarenmesse is the central meeting place for the international toy industry. Two halls – namely 10.0 and 10.1, as well as Foyer 10.0 in the Nuremberg Exhibition Centre – will be dedicated to board games in the coming year. Numerous national and international games publishers will be exhibiting here. This offers game inventors a perfect environment for networking and exchanging ideas – even after the fair closes on Thursday. This is when RedNight takes place again, where exhibitors invite attendees to parties at their booths to round off the day in a relaxed atmosphere.

This year sees the return of your Game Inventors Convention. For anyone new to this, can you talk us through whom it's for, and what it looks to do?

The Game Inventors Convention takes place for the third time during the Spielwarenmesse, on Friday January 31st. This is where we bring game designers together with the agencies' editorial teams. They can present their ideas and prototypes at their own tables in NCC Mitte, in the Brussels and Munich exhibition halls and on Level 1 of the foyer. There is a great deal of interest at the international level – in addition to Germany, there are already entries from Italy, Spain, the UK, Israel, Hungary and the USA.

To round off the event, the GamingHour will take place from 6pm. In a relaxed atmosphere, all participants in the Game Inventors Convention, games publishers and media

“With Spielwarenmesse and SPIEL, we create two central meeting points for the entire board game community every year.”



representatives can make contacts, swap ideas and come together over snacks, drinks and music to try out exciting new ideas.

A terrific opportunity; we'll be there. In addition to this, do you feel there's more to do with this community at shows like Spielwarenmesse and SPIEL moving forward?

With Spielwarenmesse and SPIEL, we create two central meeting points for the entire board game community every year. Although there is an active scene of game inventors and illustrators in many countries, they often lack a local platform for dialogue and marketing opportunities for their creative game ideas. This offers our two world-leading fairs enormous potential to become even more international. Game inventors and illustrators remain important target groups for us.

As well as inventors, plenty of in-house designers and R&D leaders will be at the show. Do you feel Spielwarenmesse provides great source of inspiration to designers?

Certainly! The international network of the Spielwarenmesse enables both newcomers and established industry giants to quickly and easily make new contacts and maintain existing relationships. For game designers in particular, this is possible not only at the Spieleerfindermesse but also during the entire duration of the fair in the SpieleCafé (Hall 11.0), which is located near the games product group. Our interactive expert presentations on current industry topics in the Toy Business Forum in Hall 3A will also provide fresh impetus.

Last question! Away from the show itself, what's your top tip for making the most out of the trip?

An absolute must for every trade fair guest is a visit to the historic Old Town with its mighty castle, winding alleyways and numerous half-timbered houses. This walk can easily be combined with a detour to the Toy Museum, which brings Nuremberg's more than 600-year tradition as a city of toys to life.

“I don't like the word **'invention'**”

Ernö Rubik tells Peter Jenkinson how he discovered the eponymous Cube 50 years ago...

Ernö, let's start at the beginning. How did you come up with the idea for the Cube?

My experience is that if you are looking around all the time, you will find something that is inspiring. Maybe you see some irregular elements in the environment you're in, for example. But one of the areas of life I'm interested in is geometry. Geometry is part of math and it's part of science, but it's a very pure one; it's very clear and innocent. And the richest part of geometry is the three dimensional one – trying to understand space relations.

I started lecturing form studies, discussing art without function; looking at construction space; using space without a special type of function... I got the idea to try to demonstrate for the kids and for myself the potential of this kind of thing. And what I found interesting was what could I do with one of the simplest forms, what is known in the field as a three-dimensional form, which is part of the platonic solids. As a result of that, the Cube was born in 1974.



And when you say “born”?

Well, not at once! A human being is not born at once – it's a process. And the Cube was a process... The idea, what to do, thinking on it, working with material, making models and looking for the potentials of the order of space. In one sense, the idea that it was engineering and sculpturing or art crossed my mind. But I wasn't working on a toy and I wasn't working on sculpturing... I was working on something that I found interesting and very rich in content and potential, using all of the things which are close to me: colours, forms, conception, dynamic movements and the technical parts of it.

What design decisions helped it become the success it is today?

Even after it was a three-by-three, I still had to decide on the

exact size. The last step I took, for example, was to reduce it by three times one millimetre – one millimetre in every direction – because it then became very natural to the size of my hand.

Then, once that was the size of it, for three years the production started, and the sales started in Hungary. That was a closed economy, but many cubes were sold and I felt the potential of the product and tried to distribute it much wider.

Even when we finally found an American company that was ready to handle it, it was not an easy task because traditionally a puzzle was not very important in the toy field. It had no volume really; a puzzle was something small and cheap. You buy it, you try to do it, it's tricky... But after that, what does it do?!

But they took the risk!

Yes – and, at first, we continued to manufacture it in Hungary. But the contract said that if they weren't capable of fulfilling the volume, we got the right to manufacture it elsewhere. Well, as you know,

during the first three years it was a real wonder because it practically at once generated a craze. And in those first three years they sold out 100 million pieces.

100 million pieces! Astonishing! And I know we're running out of time, Ernő, but one other thing I wanted to ask about is why you prefer to say you discovered the Cube rather than invented it?

For me, I don't like the word 'invention' because it is much more about discovering and using potential. So my view is that the Cube was discovered rather than created from nothing. Because we can't create something from nothing, can we? So it is always there, just hidden until somebody is able to see and discover it.



Dream Team

We pick their brains of some of the long-serving creative team at Smart Toys and Games... And discover their favourite games.

Tom, thanks for making time. What do you get up to on a 'typical' day?

At all times, I need to make sure that all tasks and projects are running smoothly in the Studio. When it comes to product development, I handle this personally as my background is in product design. For the graphical side of things, our recently joined Art Director takes the lead and collaborates with me to keep everything on track.

I like to 'zoom out' to have a clear overview of the Studio's operations, especially to prioritise urgent tasks. When I'm in the office, I want to be there for the team – whether it's answering their questions or sitting down with them to discuss progress and next steps. Combine this with the daily communication with other departments like sales, production and marketing and you get a sense of the variety of responsibilities I juggle every day.



TOM BUELENS,
Head of Creative Studio

Excellent, thank you. What was the first Smart product you worked on?

I started working for Smart 13 years ago. In the beginning, I helped out wherever possible. I helped create artwork for upcoming new games, explored new products made from wood, helped with graphical work for a digital games platform, and so on... Over time, my approach evolved as I gained a deeper understanding of the key brands like SmartGames and SmartMax. This experience helps me think more efficiently and makes you often wonder if it's a 'Smart' product or not – in every meaning of the word!

Yes, I imagine it takes time to fully get a handle the core aspects of the brand's DNA.

Absolutely. Understanding what makes a product a true 'SMART' product isn't something you grasp right away. It's a

learning process tied to the company's core values, strategy, mission, product execution and product language. These are things you internalise over years, not after just one day on the job.

What's your favourite Smart item that you've worked on?

I spent seven years as a designer working on the SmartMax brand, collaborating closely with my colleague Emma Ribbens. Together, we developed and introduced the My First sub-range to the collection... It's incredibly rewarding to see how the seeds we planted years ago have helped SmartMax grow into a more mature brand.

In what way?

Before that, the brand was primarily perceived as a magnetic construction toy for children aged three and older. Today, it's evolved to represent magnetic build-and-play experiences starting as early as age one. This repositioning not only helped SmartMax

differentiate itself from competitors but also established the My First range as a standout success. It's something I'm genuinely proud of.

The last product I designed in this range – My First Build & Drive – is also my personal favourite because it involved a certain 'Aha!' moment when I was working on it. The concept of clicking unique blocks against each other, both horizontally and vertically, was there from the start... But the moment I got the idea of using a vehicle for the base – where its top and bottom allow different building combinations – is when all things fell into place.



HANS BLOEMMEN,
Graphic Designer & Illustrator

Hans, talk us through what you do...

My main focus is on developing visuals that are not only aesthetically appealing, but also functional – ensuring the designs support the game's playability. This involves creating

everything printed on game pieces, packaging, rule booklets and marketing materials... Creating an eye-catching and appealing box is crucial to grab the attention of potential buyers.



What's your favourite Smart item that you've worked on?

Oh, that would be Three Little Piggies! The theme and the game mechanics are so well tuned to each other... And, of course, it features a little, wordless comic book. When I graduated as a comic book illustrator, wordless comics were

my specialty – it's incredibly rewarding that I get to do exactly this in my job! I feel a warm sense of joy when I think about all those little kids around the world, in so many different countries, reading – or rather 'viewing' – the story with their parents and creating their own version of the tale.

What fuels your creativity?

Coming from a client-oriented graphic past, I guess I'm a bit of a people pleaser... So I'm fuelled by the enthusiastic reactions of my colleagues and the product designer whose game I'm supporting. Their excitement and feedback really motivate me.

And what kills creativity for you, Hans?

Creativity can be stifled when there's too much pressure – or when I'm not given enough time or creative space to explore ideas freely. Too many different opinions, a lack of clear direction or constant micromanagement can also kill the flow of creativity.

Rein, What was the first Smart product you worked on?

Cube Duel, almost six years ago. At that time, I played games often and had made some during my studies – but never designed one professionally. Since then, my approach has definitely evolved. I've learned designing a game for a school project is very different from creating one that needs to sell thousands globally!

Is there a Smart item that you're especially proud to have worked on?

IQ Mini. This project was especially exciting because we challenged ourselves to create something entirely different from anything we'd done before. Our games traditionally come with a booklet of puzzles, but we wanted to make something truly compact by eliminating the booklet entirely. Instead, we had the



REIN LAMBRICHTS,
Product Designer



idea of letting players create their own challenges by moving blockers around the game board – then fitting all the puzzle pieces around them.

What was the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge was ensuring that every blocker set-up resulted in a solvable puzzle. That's when Alain Brobecker – one of our brilliant programmers – stepped in to save the day! He developed a program to calculate the optimal paths for the blockers. After weeks of testing and calculations, we finally found a working set up. It was a real eureka moment!

Great example. And what helps you have ideas, Rein?

What really fuels my creativity is when everything starts coming together and seeing all the elements aligning perfectly. That synergy is incredibly motivating, and I can't stop until I've created a playable prototype.

MOJO NATION 100:
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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JAUME FABREGAT,
Senior Creative
Manager, LEL
Publishing, The LEGO
Group & **BIRGITTE
BÜLOW**, CEO,
Dotted Games &
Bezzewizzer Studio

Last year saw the exciting launch of LEGO Monkey Palace... The first title from Asmodee's Dotted Games, a studio that focuses on creating LEGO board games. On the LEGO Publishing side is Jaume Fabregat while Birgitte Bülow heads up Dotted Games. "It's a true team effort – one brimming with creativity, enthusiasm, expertise and passion for everything board games," said one nominator. The success of the collaboration is set to continue with Dotted Games heralding the arrival of party game Brick Like This! in August.



ALEX REYNOLDS,
Head of R&D and
Licensing, Casdon

It's been an impressive year for Alex Reynolds as Casdon secured exciting new brands and crafted impressive lines around them. Fruits of the past 12 months include new lines centred around Heinz and Toxic Waste, while a Build-a-Bear Workshop range debuts with an impressive Stuffing Station. "Alex is always thinking ahead," said one of his champions, adding: "He has a great eye for design and works well with the team to achieve something terrific."



DINA AL RIFAI,
Creative Director,
The Loyal Subjects

"Dina is a creative powerhouse; an undeniable talent whose instincts for innovation and storytelling set her apart." That's just one of several glowing testimonials for Dina Al Rifai of The Loyal Subjects. Dina joined the firm last year following impactful tenures at Jazwares and Just Play. Recent highlights include her work on the TOTY-nominated Rainbow Brite line. As another fan tells us: "She's not just a great creative but also a great leader – and one of the kindest souls anyone could have an opportunity to come into contact with."



ALENA NIU,
Director Product
Design – Monster
High, Polly Pocket,
Disney IP, Mattel

Alena Niu leads the designs on some of Mattel's most popular doll brands, including Monster High and Polly Pocket. In the past year, Alena has overseen the development of some standout products, including the Monster High Haunted Castle Playset and the Monster High Fangtastic Food Truck Playset. She also deeply values the role of inventors in the industry, recognising their vital contribution to creativity and innovation. Nominators further describe Alena as: "Energetic and highly motivated."



DAFNA MOR,
Director of Design, Fisher-
Price Little People, Mattel

Being a part of the Little People team at Mattel is no small feat. For the past 27 years, Dafna Mor has been a creative leader at Mattel, working on brands that include Little People, Sesame Street, Barbie, and Fisher-Price Core Role Play. During her time, Dafna has helped build the Little People brand to reach millions of children. One nominator told us she is, "Someone who brings a wealth of knowledge to the toy world and pushes boundaries in the brands on which she works." Another fan told us: "She's a joy to work with."



JM DUPARC,
Creative Director, Identity Games

2024 was something of a banner year for JM Duparc and his team at Identity Games. Four new titles hit the market: Medical Mysteries, The Traitors, Battle Royale and Birdy Call... And as one fan says: "These games showcased the team's unparalleled ability to merge creativity with innovation." Medical Mysteries scooped a Play Creators Award for Play Innovator of the Year and was also a Dutch Play Award Jury winner.



NANCY CARIFFE,
Principal Product Designer,
Little People, Fisher-Price

A popular industry veteran and a staple of Fisher-Price, Nancy Cariffe has worked there for close to 30 years. To this day, Nancy continues to demonstrate why she's a much-valued figure at the company. In the past 12 months, highlights include her work on the successful Little People Barbie line. "I look up to Nancy as someone still doing what she enjoys. What's more, she's personable, friendly and can lay out a cool playset," said one fan.



HEATH SABER,
Inventor Relations
Director,
Moose Toys

Fans of Moose's Heath Saber nominated him in their droves! They describe him as "Modest", "Driven", and "A standout figure in inventor relations". His support for inventors – combined with his willingness to adjust his schedule to connect across all time zones from Australia – highlights his commitment. "Heath's not only a fantastic inventor relations leader, but also a very talented toy designer," said one nominator, adding: "He has great problem-solving skills which usually makes the concept submission significantly better!"

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MARK GARCIA,
Associate Manager, Inventor
Relations, Hasbro

Mark is a key member of the team. His trademark positivity and enthusiasm make him a pleasure to work with – and his collaborative and creative approach to working with inventors is appreciated by everyone. As more than one inventor has said, "Simply put: working with Mark makes our ideas better!"



MOOSE UK DESIGN TEAM

This small but mighty group - led by James Austin-Smith - forms the European Hub of the global Moose business. Designs from Dave Emblin, Lauren Geach, Lucy Gilbert, Nina Harris, Eddie Percy-Hughes, Ross Monks and Abbi Udell include Cookeez Makery, Yum Yumz and Scruff-a-Luvs. They've been instrumental working with the broader Moose design teams on Magic Mixies, Mama Surprise, My Puppy's Home and Mr. Beast Lab among others. "They live to create great toys and are at the forefront of ingenuity and innovation in toys," said one fan.



BRETT ALMSTEAD,
Senior Industrial Designer, Melissa & Doug

A key figure at Melissa & Doug for over 20 years, Brett Almstead played a vital role in some of the company's 2024 success stories. These include the TOTY-nominated Sort, Stock, Select Wooden

Vending Machine, as well as the Disney Snacks & Popcorn Wooden Food Counter and Deluxe Grill & Pizza Oven. As one nominator told us: "Brett boasts fantastic attention to detail and a great understanding of where to put the money in a product."



HAZEL REYNOLDS, Founder, Gamely Games
– and the **GAMELY GAMES TEAM**

Over the past nine years, Hazel Reynolds has grown Gamely Games into a thriving company. In 2024, the team celebrated some huge milestones, including selling their millionth game! They also launched four new games, with Clues in Twos instantly becoming a big hit. With a mission to spread joy, Gamely Games has donated a total of 20,000 games to charities alongside donations of £145,000 to good causes since launching.



NAOMI BRUGNATELLI,
Manager, Inventor Relations, Hasbro

An inventor champion for over a decade, nominators call Hasbro's Naomi Brugnatelli "The gold standard for inventor relations" and "An inspiration." In the past year, Naomi's role has expanded to include preschool, dolls and Play -Doh. As one fan of her work puts it: "In the challenging business of toy invention, it's great to have Naomi representing Hasbro. She has a huge energy and great enthusiasm." Another added: "Naomi personifies delight in the industry."



BRENT GEPPERT,
Senior Product Manager,
Educational Insights

Brent Geppert has driven significant innovation in the toy and game industry over the past year. He continues to expand the brainteaser line at Educational Insights... New products include two new Kanoodle SKUs: Kanoodle SudoQube and

Kanoodle Shape Escape. Brent was also pivotal in the launch of Slidewise, a word-building game aimed at Kanoodle fans – and revitalised Playfoam Pluffle, which saw a sales surge after going viral on TikTok. "Brent is able to turn challenges into opportunities and deliver results," said one nominator.



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BRYAN DAVIS,
Sr. Director of Product Design, Preschool, Jazwares

Bryan Davis is a well-known and respected name in the industry, especially among inventors and those working in the pre-school category. An innovation champion for all the brands he's worked on throughout his career, Bryan has a passion for inspiring his teams and bringing partnerships into his

product lines at Jazwares. Recent success stories include ranges like the popular Spidey & His Amazing Friends – a very inventor-friendly brand under Bryan's leadership. "Bryan is a legend," said one fan of his work, adding: "His feedback is gold and always improves the product."



LOUISA OSMOND,
Senior Product Developer, Ginger Fox Games

Louisa Osmond has played an essential role in building the Ginger Fox catalogue of party games. Recent highlights include working with game inventor Ellie Dix on Bangarang. This title quickly became popular and was named Best Party

Game at last year's UK Games Expo. "Louisa is forever diligent – and committed to delivering impeccable product development," said one fan. Another added: "It's a pleasure to work with her."



MATTEL'S INVENTOR RELATIONS TEAM: BETH MOODY, AUDREY WATANABE, TARA MCGRATH, SARAH FRANCO, JUDI STONECIPHER & JAMES SHEELER

Cited by nominators as being "Best in class", Mattel's Inventor Relations team works closely with inventors to create products that deliver insight-driven experiences that captivate global audiences. Described as "Fair and proactive", the team ensures every idea is given careful consideration and has the opportunity to reach the right teams. "Their reputation for fostering strong, collaborative relationships with inventors continues to be a driving force behind Mattel's ongoing success in the market," said one nominator.



DARYL ANDREWS,
Head of Talent Acquisition, Maestro Media

It's been a big year for Daryl Andrews and Maestro Media. 2024 saw a raft of games come from the team, including Hello Kitty: Day at the Park, Disney's Donald Duck in Happy Camper and The Smurfs: Hidden Village. "Daryl works both with lesser known and more established designers to get these IP-led games made," said one fan of his work. They add: "He's constantly travelling to conventions to meet new people and find the right fits for these brands."

GURDEEP BAINS,
Global Creative Director, YuMe Toys



Gurdeep Bains of YuMe Toys has spearheaded several successful lines in a banner year for the company. Chief among them was the Netflix Gift Box. This gift compilation spans 24 collectibles from brands including Stranger Things, Bridgerton and One Piece. Elsewhere, Gurdeep helped shape a line of Squid Game collectibles and a popular Hero Box range. "Simply put: Gurdeep is just great!" said one nominator. "He's a creative powerhouse," added another.



MARY GEORGESCU,
Senior Game Designer, Relatable

2024 saw Mary Georgescu celebrate her one-year anniversary at Relatable... And it's been a busy 12 months! In that time, Mary led development on more than ten titles, including Date Night Scratch Offs, Block Up, D is for Drink and Sip or Spill. Last year also saw the successful release of a game that Mary co-designed with Eric Lang for Exploding Kittens: Let's Hit Each Other with Fake Swords.

MOJO NATION 100:
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LEE GLICKMAN,
Lead Creative Designer, Casdon

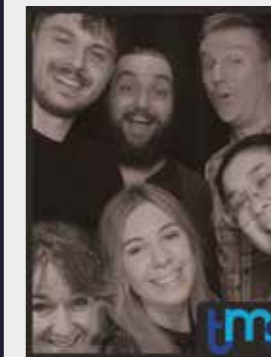
Described by nominators as "A creative superhero", Casdon's Lee Glickman enjoyed another stellar year in 2024. One showcase of his skills saw him solving the problem of a clunky handle on Casdon's Build-a-Bear Workshop Stuffing Station! The design also includes a child-friendly, kid-powered pump action to push out the stuffing material. "Lee is ever-ready to add creativity into everything he does – and he always does it with a great sense of humour and a smile on his face," said one nominator.



MARY LUZ RIU,
Head of Design, Eolo Toys

2024 showcased another exciting portfolio of the design talents of Mary Luz Riu and the team at Eolo Toys. One recent success story was Lit'L

Biggie Bouncerz – a new brand that got off to a phenomenal start. Mary was also involved in the design of Kites Ready 2 Fly, a flagship brand for Eolo Toys. These easy-to-use kites have proven to be a huge success over the last few years. "Mary's designs turn the ordinary into the extraordinary," said one of her champions.



GLOBAL PRODUCT DESIGN TEAM, TMS

As one nominator told us: "The Industrial Designers and Product Engineers at tms are a global powerhouse!" Based in several locations around the world, the group works tirelessly

to invent and develop exciting new toys and play experiences for McDonald's Happy Meal consumers to enjoy. "Their work is always deeply rooted in consumer insights, strategically thought through and executed to the last detail," said one fan of their work, adding: "They're experts in their field."



WITH CREATIVE

It's been a year of notable success stories for Ste Smith and the team. The group has licensed many products in the gift and games categories, including Pikkii's popular The Egg

Game. WITH were also a TAGIE finalist for designing the National Geographic Motorized Model Kits – and they have another big toy launch just around the corner.



SEVEN TOWNS

"Best in-class", "a top team" and "consistently one of the best groups we meet" were just a few thoughts from nominators of Seven Towns. Another told us: "They bring innovation to all brands across our portfolio and are always willing to be collaborative." Recent success stories for the team include Hydro Pods with Hasbro, Balloon Stuffer Pro from BOTI and John Adams, Fart Yoga from Golden Bear and Upzzle by Educational Insights.



KID GROUP

2024 saw a year of exciting product launches and award wins for the renowned invention studio KID Group.

Success stories included Hyper Dash with Golden Bear, Snack-o-Saurus Rex by Spin Master and Figbands with Jazwares.

Meanwhile, the team's Sling It scooped them a Game Designer of the Year award at the Play Creators Awards, where KID Group's own Dan Klitsner won the prestigious Design Icon award. As one of their champions told us: "KID Group is exceptional – brilliant at what they do and a pleasure to work with."



NEXTOY

"True professionals with an eye for incredible innovation – I'm never disappointed with what they present." That's one nominator's thoughts on the stellar team at Nextoy, who have enjoyed a year full of remarkable launches and award wins. One of the most notable is Goliath's Power Saber... This collaboration between Nextoy and inventor Yair Shilo scooped them a TAGIE award for Toy Innovator of the Year. Elsewhere, Nextoy Digital – managed by Alex and Sam Fuhrer – continued to thrive while Horizon Group USA's Color Motion tablet did well with licenses like Bluey and Hello Kitty.



INDY TOY LAB

Jordan Goddard and his team boast a proven track record of collaborating with nearly every major and mid-sized company in the

industry. Said one fan of their work, "What sets them apart is their incredible ability to take raw ideas and transform them into fully fleshed-out concepts... And even full-blown brands". They add: "Jordan doesn't just invent: he reinvents the way ideas are brought to market."



OPEN 2 DESIGN

2024 proved a successful year for the team at Open 2 Design. The invention side of the business licensed seven items to companies including Helvetiq, Buffalo Games, TOMY and University Games. On the work-for-hire side, projects included the Little People Barbie Dream Camper and Little People Light-Up Learning Garage. One fan told us: "Their work always surpasses our expectations." Another said: "They're our go-to agency – always a pleasure to deal with, super-creative and their attention to detail is fantastic."



THE FANTASTIC FACTORY

It was another stellar year for The Fantastic Factory... From collaborating with

Hot House Games on new party titles like Too Far to inventing the acclaimed 5 Up for TOMY. Other highlights included Mind Meld and The Game of Two Halves from Golden Bear. One fan of their work told us: "What makes The Fantastic Factory special? Their relentless focus on staying ahead of trends; ensuring every game they create feels fresh, engaging and tuned to the moment."



TANTRUM INNOVATION

2024 was a highly successful year for Steve Moore and Tantrum

Innovation. Highlights include the release of Mattel's Monster High Haunted High School playset and the Hot Wheels RacerVerse Batman's Escape Chase transforming vehicle. Each of these scooped Toy of the Year awards from Mattel.

Elsewhere, Pictionary vs. Ai – a collaboration with Nik Roadley from Brik – was nominated for a TOTY. "Flexible, brilliant, creative and a true pleasure to work with," said one nominator, adding: "Steve listens to brands – and executes; he kills it!"



7PIPS

In just its second year, 7Pips continues to thrive. The team is made up of Amanda Birkenshaw, Richard Heayes, and Scott Dean... And the trio enjoyed a busy 12 months of launches, options

and licensing deals. They were behind titles including Hitster Bingo, and Stratego: Lost Island from Jumbo. They also worked on projects with TOMY, Buffalo and Hasbro. In all, the group showcases their prowess across a raft of sectors, including fidget toys, card games, light strategy games and electronic games.



FOREVER STOKED CREATIVE

Matt Fantastic, Andrea Pincumbe, Trish Loter, Blaise Sewell and Lorelei Bunjes make up the talented team at Forever Stoked Creative. 2024 was filled with exciting launches from the group, including 100% Soft's Dumpster Fire Party, Joking Hazard's Texas Hold It and Sordane Publishing's Aldarra. The winning run continued into 2025 with January's release of The Fellowship of the Ring: Trick-Taking Game from Asmodee's Office Dog studio.



DESIGN EDGE

As one nominator puts it: "Under Matt Nuccio's visionary leadership, Design Edge continues to shape the future of the toy and game industry with unparalleled skill and dedication."

Working on everything from concept to completion, Design Edge continues to be a trusted partner for companies around the world, as well as the inventor community. Case in point: Matt's collaboration with inventor Martin Lombardini helped Cornhole Shootout come to market – and become TOTY-nominated!



TRICLOPS STUDIO

"Creative powerhouse", "Class" and "Just brilliant!" are a few of the ways nominators describe Rob Ames and Luc Hudson of Triclops Studio. Alongside notable design work undertaken for a raft of different clients, 2024 also saw Triclops enjoy success as inventors. Their Terror Fried line of creepy, slimy collectibles launched to great success with Character – and more are on the way this year.



SO SOUND

The popular team at So Sound have enjoyed a successful year, with one highlight being the launch of Snake Attack, licensed to Wilder Toys. It's been cited as a perfect showcase for So Sound's broad skillsets across game design, audio, electronics, graphics, CAD and even video production. Another launch from the team was It Flies It Spies from Ridley's Games – and they have an exciting new item on the way with Hasbro.



PEGGY BROWN CREATIVE

A relentless studio that consistently impresses, Peggy Brown Creative had a terrific 2024. Launches include Wildflowers from Moose Games, Who's the G.O.A.T.? from Go! Games, Meowdy Partner from Peaceable Kingdom and Snap Trap from Lansay. In addition, the group wrote content and rules for lots of other people.



JIM MCCAFFERTY & THE JMP CREATIVE TEAM

Synonymous with innovation, joy and top-toy invention for over 30 years, the past 12 months brought more exciting new launches from JMP Creative. Among them is Sticki Rolls from Sky Castle Toys. These wearable sticker bracelets were nominated for a TAGIE award and are also a Collectible of the Year finalist at the 2025 TOTYs. Elsewhere, the group introduced an exciting new handheld evolution of its original Oonies invention with the Oonies Ponpuru Set from Tomy Takara.

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CATAPULT CONCEPTS

It was a milestone year for Catapult Concepts as the studio – made up of Westley Ciaramella and Keith Millman – marked its 20th anniversary. And there was plenty to celebrate!

They strengthened existing partnerships and created new ones too. These included exciting new products with Vtech and PlayMonster, as well as new Barbie and WWE items with Mattel.



DAVID YAKOS & STREAMLINE DESIGN

2024 saw Streamline Design's David Yakos named Game Designer of the Year (Party Games) at the Play Creators Awards for inventing Hasbro's Battleship Royale. He was also nominated in other categories for titles including Fainting Goats and AdventureX: Jurassic World. Other launches include MindWare's Geonyx and the Pinball Machine Maker from Thames & Kosmos. "David is a creative powerhouse," said one fan, adding: "He combines the creativity of an artist with the precision of an engineer – all while maintaining a playful spirit."



GALACTIC SNEEZE

It's been another impressive 12 months for the team at Galactic Sneeze. Highlights included Hasbro's adult party game Fork Milk Kidnap as well as a collaboration with Metre Ideas & Design on Kraken's Revenge, an innovative water game from Luki Lab. The group was also nominated for Game Designer of the Year across Kids and Party Game categories at the 2024 Play Creators Awards. "Galactic Sneeze consistently put out some of the freshest games out there," said one fan of their work.



MAKING THINGS STUDIO

As one nominator told us: "Founder Fi Murray is a beacon of creativity and innovation in the design world – her ability to turn imaginative ideas

into reality is nothing short of extraordinary." One notable success story for the studio was an inventor collaboration with Phase Two on PlayTab – a modular sensory toy licensed to Fat Brain Toys.



INCREDIBLE US

Invention studio Incredible Us – made up of Uri Streigold, Naama Weiss and Liat Waks – enjoyed a standout 2024. For one thing, Blue Orange launched their game Night Knight – a fun twist on pillow fights. For another, their innovative range of costumes-on-the-go, Magic Flip, enjoyed a successful debut with Goodmark at Spielwarenmesse.



FUSE

"Fuse are absolutely incredible to work with," said one fan of the prolific London-based invention house. They add: "The studio brings passion, focus and imaginative thinking to all projects." Notable launches to come from Fuse over this year include the Pokémon Carry Case Beach Battle Playset with Jazwares, Crash Cats from ThinkFun, Monster Jam Launch N Go Hauler from Spin Master, Jurassic World Mission Mayhem Truck Set by Mattel... And the Bluey 3-in-1 Transforming Plane playset from Moose Toys.



CARTERBENCH

In a year marked by the sad passing of Carterbench founder Rob Kay, there were still many positives for the team. In February, Suzanne Robinson received the coveted I.D.I.O.T. Award for her contributions to the industry. Elsewhere, Carterbench strengthened their team with another full-time designer and a rolling intern program. The team also saw the bolstering of their UNO Flip lineup with Mattel's introduction of UNO Flip Attack. In addition, they received Mattel's Inventor Choice for Toy of the Year.



TOYZONE

One-stop solution ToyZone continues to impress, offering services across toy development, design and entertainment. Recent success stories include working with Moose Toys to develop collectible baby figures Bibi-Chibis, and a collaboration with BOTI Global on their brand Cre-A-Tures. The ToyZone team designed the Cre-A-Tures universe and the range became a top seller in many markets.



FUN-DAMENTAL INVENTION

It's been another mightily impressive 12 months for the team at Fun-Damental Invention. Named Invention Studio of the Year at 2024's Play Creators Awards, the group have a raft of

items out in the market. These included Big Potato's Tilt 'n' Shout, Eolo's Cutie Pops, Spin Master's Splash Shield, Fat Brain's Hard Pass – and Red Lolly Yellow Lolly by Blue Orange. "They are brilliant," one fan told us. Another said: "Fun-Damental bring not only unmatched creativity but also a deep understanding of market dynamics and consumer desires."



ELLIE DIX,
Board Game Designer, The Dark Imp

One nominator tells us Ellie Dix is “A joy to work with” and “Fast becoming a leading light in game design”. Her recent titles include Digsaw from Indie Boards and Cards, The Jane Austen Game from Laurence King Publishing and A Midsummer Night’s Fayre from Gamewright. Ellie also invented Outset Media’s Skullduggery, as well as Bangarang and Top Secret: Briefs by Ginger Fox. Both these titles scooped awards at the UK Games Expo last year. For 2025, Ellie has items coming from Osprey Games, Hootenanny Games and Buffalo Games.



CIARAN LARKIN,
Founder, Made Real Design

Cited as a “Tireless innovator” by nominators, Made Real Design’s Ciaran Larkin enjoyed a banner year in 2024. He’s been responsible for multiple innovations in the Hasbro action portfolio – from compound alchemy to mechanical wizardry. This includes notable work on the Spider-Man Ultimate Real Webs Blaster. Other highlights include items in Spin Master’s Unicorn Academy range. “Ciaran continually pushes the boundaries of what’s possible,” said one fan, adding: “His relentless passion and creativity set a new standard.”



ERIC OLSEN,
Board Game Designer

What a year it’s been for Eric Olsen. The Op launched his Flip 7 card game to great acclaim and success: it even bagged a TOTY nomination. Elsewhere, The Op also picked up an earlier invention of Eric’s – Glyphics. This should launch at ASTRA in June. In addition, Eric self-published two games in 2024 – A Lotta Axolotls and French Goats in Trench Coats. “I continue to be impressed with Eric’s ability to create games that feel fresh yet timeless,” said one nominator.



ERIC LANG

Nominators describe designer Eric Lang as “An amazing collaborator, mentor, and teacher” as well as “One of the great minds in game design.” One stand-out success story for Eric included Hasbro’s Life in Reterra. This co-design with Ken Gruhl bagged a TOTY nomination. Meanwhile, Exploding Kittens launched Eric’s Let’s Hit Each Other with Fake Swords – co-designed with Ian Clayman and Mary Georgescu. Other launches include I Heart Manatees from Buffalo Games and Gamewright’s Wrath of Fire-Mountain with Phil Walker-Harding.



WARNER MCGHEE,
Freelance 3D Artist & Illustrator

“Warner is great at drawing and sculpting across a raft of categories – from fashion to pets!” So says one fan of design and sculpting expert Warner McGhee. They add: “He’s such a great all-round designer.” 2024 saw Warner continue working with major players across the industry on a number of leading brands.



TAMMY SOUTHGATE,
Independent Concept Designer

A rare talent who went freelance in 2024, Tammy Southgate is said to be “An extraordinarily creative toy designer”. With a deep understand of play and toy design, a gorgeous illustrative style and brilliant ideas, people describe Tammy as “A true all-rounder.” As one nominator told us: “Tammy is humble and self-deprecating. I don’t think even she knows how good she is!”



SCOTT BRADY

Over the past 12 months, game designer Scott Brady continued to gather momentum. Following earlier hits like boop and Hues and Cues, Scott's 2024 launches include Better Letter from Play to Z and the third game in the boop series, boop the Halls. Another highlight was Caution Signs, a party game Scott co-designed with Danielle Reynolds. Dice Tower later named this one of their '12 Games of Christmas'. As one fan of Scott's work tells us: "Scott has established himself as a go-to designer in the gaming community."



ROY KFIR,
Toy & Game Inventor

It's been an exciting year for inventor Roy Kfir. He collaborated with Gilad Podgor to invent TattooMeez. Launched by Golden Bear, this is a novelty plush that you can personalise with tattoos! Elsewhere, Roy continues to lead the Toy Invention Program for Spin Master at both Shenkar College in Israel and Polly U University in Hong Kong. Here he helps usher the next wave of talented inventors into the toy industry as a mentor.



APRIL MITCHELL,
Founder, 4A's Creations

"A creative powerhouse" is one way nominators describe April Mitchell. April has seen six games hit the market that she designed or co-designed this year. These include Slanguage from Foxmind, Am I A Dirtbag? by John Adams, Disco Island Escape by Hootenanny Games and Danger Hugs from MoCo Games. Alongside Ed Gartin, April also runs the TableTop Game Design MasterClass. Says one fan: "April personifies tenacity, creativity and a commitment to make a difference."

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CHRISSY FAGERHOLT,
Founder, EAP Toys & Games

Chrissy Fagerholt continues to impress! She thrived in 2024, bolstering her self-published slate with *Feelin' It Not Feelin' It*. Elsewhere, Chrissy licensed a party game – *Girls in Bar Bathrooms* – to Mattel... And it fast-became a bestseller. In addition, Chrissy now serves on the sub-committee of the fellowship group at Horizons, which brings attention, education and support to underrepresented designers and retailers in the game industry. "Chrissy is high-energy and creative," said one nominator.



KEN GRUHL AND JEREMY POSNER

Popular designers Ken Gruhl and Jeremy Posner continue their enviable winning streak! 2024 saw plenty of their games hitting the market. These include Hasbro's *Piggy Piggy*, Gamewright's *Up Dog* and two titles with *Exploding Kittens: When Sip Hits the Fan* and *Snack Monster*. Elsewhere, Ken created *Dumpling House* for ThinkFun and worked with Eric Lang on Hasbro's *Life in Reterra*. Meanwhile, Jeremy continued his success with his *Jixelz* line at TOMY. This now boasts sets using licenses like *Sonic the Hedgehog*.



RINAT ALIMA & TOM DOR
Toy and Game Inventors

Tom Dor – a veteran 3D character animator – and Rinat Alima – an industrial designer – have been collaborating for eight years.... And 2024 proved another fruitful time for them. Together, they co-created *Roll 'N' Hatch*, a transforming egg toy launched by HAPE. Designed to stimulate young minds, *Roll 'N' Hatch* fosters cognitive growth, motor skills and visual tracking skills – and has proven popular at launch. Elsewhere, Tom continues to enjoy success with ThinkFun's *Stuffie Sleepover* – a puzzle game he invented with Shimrit Manor Pfeffer.



BARRY MCLAUGHLIN AND JASON LAUTENSCHLEGER,
Co-Founders, Barry & Jason Games and Entertainment

Design duo Barry McLaughlin and Jason Lautenschleger added more strings to their impressive bow in 2024. Expanding their reach beyond game invention, they acted as consultants and licensing brokers for *Chuck E. Cheese* and *Wilder Games* on *Chuck E. Cheese BBALL*. They also helped Mattel Entertainment and *Spin Master* develop game shows, and crafted marketing videos for the likes of *PlayMonster* and *Dyce*. All this, plus they have a new game on the way with the team at *Hootenanny Games*.



JOSH FINKLE,
Toy & Game Inventor, Anything at All



Last year saw industry veteran Josh Finkle launch his own invention studio, *Anything at All*. The former IDEO Play Lab design director quickly made an impact with the venture. As one fan of his work tells us: "Josh is an incredible partner – he's such a cool guy to work with and we can always count on him to bring results." 2024 also saw Josh launch a collectible line of 3D-printable modular toys called *Fly Frogs*.



RANDY KLIMPERT,
Vice President Design, Games, Puzzles, Plush & Outdoor, Spin Master

“Legend”, “Design leader” and “A fearless champion of designers.” These are some of the ways people praise Randy Klimpert. One told us: “Randy has redefined process, product and play.” Another adds: “He has trend awareness, mechanical know-how and understands play – plus he’s hilarious!” Says one fan: “Randy navigates concepts internally to provide inventors with the best chance of success.” Yet another adds: “Because he was an inventor, Randy understands our challenges – and is very respectful of the process.”



ANGUS WALKER,
Head of Inventor Relations & External Innovation, Hasbro

“A passionate advocate for all external and internal innovators.” So says one nominator of Hasbro’s Angus Walker. Further proof – if it were needed – of Angus’s standing with the community came last year, as he was named Inventor Relations Exec of the Year at the Play Creators Awards. “Angus is a gem,” said another fan of his work, adding: “He’s an asset for Hasbro – and the wider inventor community is lucky to have him batting for us.”



TARA MCGRATH,
Creative Director of Inventor Relations & Innovation, Mattel

Tara McGrath heads up Mattel’s Inventor Relations and Innovation team. There, she leads the search for innovative products and technologies within the global inventing community. “Tara is a hugely positive driving force for inventors at Mattel,” said one fan of her work. They add: “Her design prowess and strong relationships at Mattel help elevate inventors within the company.”



ELENA WILSON,
VP, Product Design, Girls, Jazwares

An industry veteran, Elena Wilson is known to be a huge champion of internal and external innovation. “Inventors will remember her well from her days at Mattel, and she brings that same collaborative mindset to Jazwares,” said one fan of her work. In just two years, Elena has been integral in building and establishing the Girls Division at Jazwares. Recent highlights from Elena and her team include Royal High, Squish-a-longs and FigBands.



JUSTIN BERGER,
Director, Value Channel Programs, Asmodee North America

Asmodee’s Justin Berger redefined accessibility in tabletop gaming this year through the development of value line products. Partnering with Asmodee’s first and third-party studios, he streamlined product development to deliver high-quality games at approachable price points. His efforts make titles like Piles, CATAN and Words Are Hard more attainable. They also expand the reach of Asmodee’s library to diverse audiences on a global scale, with a focus on emerging markets. As one fan puts it: “By championing affordability and inclusivity, Justin opens the door for more to engage with tabletop gaming.”



DANIELLE REYNOLDS,
Project Director, Wise Wizard Games

It was a great year for Danielle Reynolds. She launched the party game *Caution Signs*, co-designed by Scott Brady, and was named Rising Star at the Play Creators Awards. Danielle also launched a second podcast: *Proud to Gayme*. Here she interviews queer individuals about their gaming journeys. As well as being a Director with *Tabletop Gaymers*, she helps run the Board Game Besties Facebook group to promote industry women, trans and non-binary individuals. “Danielle does unparalleled work promoting minorities,” says one fan.



ED GARTIN,
Head of Innovation & Licensing, Bestway USA

Ed Gartin capped off his first year at Bestway USA with a promotion to Head of Innovation and Licensing – but his in-house role hasn’t diminished his dedication to the wider creative community. The past year has seen Ed commit countless hours to mentoring creatives. He offers guidance on everything from concept development to licensing agreements. “His efforts to foster a culture of collaboration and knowledge-sharing have left an undeniable mark on the industry,” said one nominator.



ROBERT YUSIM,
Founder & President, Product Counsel

Inventors and companies of all shapes and sizes find a champion and collaborator in Robert Yusim. In 2024, his work with ZipString helped cement them as an industry force. Meanwhile, his latest launch with NSI – SIREN – got off to a great start. In addition, he brought David Silverglate’s *Nockles* invention to Fun in Motion, which had a successful launch last year. Said one fan of his work: “It’s exciting to see what Robert will do in 2025.”



CARRIE LINDEN,
Communications Manager, Snowbright Studio

A tireless supporter of diverse voices in tabletop games, 2024 was a special year for Snowbright Studio’s Carrie Linden. The year saw Carrie spearhead the first ever Nonbinary Tabletop Awards, recognising non-binary gendered creators, artists and designers in the industry. Carrie also became Chair of the DEI Committee for GAMA. “Carrie’s work centres on celebrating the uniqueness of others in a variety of ways – and she deserves to be recognised,” said one fan of Carrie’s work.





TANYA THOMPSON,
Sr. Director Inventor Relations, Hasbro

One of the most popular figures in the industry, Hasbro's Tanya Thompson is a true games guru and a champion for inventors near and far. As well as shepherding titles like Drop Trivia, Fork Milk Kidnap and Life in Reterra for Hasbro,

2024 saw her continue to advocate, celebrate and elevate the position of women inventors in the industry. This is evident in Tanya's vital role in the continued growth of Hasbro's Women Innovators of Play initiative. As one fan of her work tells us: "Tanya deserves all the plaudits."



XAVIER MARRERO,
VP Product Design, Preschool, Jazwares

A design leader who has been a long-term champion for inventors, Xavier Marrero is hailed by nominators for "Empowering his team with the same partnership mindset of working with external creators... Celebrating great ideas wherever they come from."

Xavier's efforts and dedicated approach to embracing the inventor community have led to some big wins within the licensed portfolio at Jazwares.



SPIELWARENMESSE'S GAME INVENTORS CONVENTION TEAM

Kyra Berger, Claudia Herzog and Francesca Ercoli are the team within Spielwarenmesse eG tasked with running the Game Inventors Convention. A staple of the show since it moved there in 2023, the group has been instrumental in the growth and continued success of the event. Last year's Convention welcomed 145 participants from 18 countries and this year's looks set to be even bigger. "It's been a brilliant addition to the show – and is a terrific opportunity for inventors and publishers alike," said one nominator.



DOUGAL GRIMES,
Founder, EightyTwo

It was a milestone year for the ever-popular Dougal Grimes. 2024 saw him launch EightyTwo: a company that helps content creators, brands and inventors develop innovative, standout games. "Dougal's unique ability to bridge creativity and strategy make him a trusted inventor partner – and a sought-after consultant for companies," said one fan. Another says: "Dougal's vision, dedication and unwavering commitment to the community have earned him the respect and admiration of inventors, designers and leaders alike."



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SHANE HARTLEY,
Creative Director, Global Games & Disney Lorcana TCG, Ravensburger

It's been a remarkable 12 months for Ravensburger's Shane Hartley. He built the Lorcana team from scratch, growing it to

over 50 members across key roles like art directors, narrative designers, graphic designers and UI designers. He also commissioned a roster of over 300 artists. "Shane firmly believes that artists and their work are the lifeblood of products and success," said one fan, adding: "Under Shane, Lorcana adopted a no-tolerance policy on AI-generated art, reinforcing his dedication to supporting the creative community."



LEE ALLENTUCK,
Founder, The Plan A Group

This year, nominators called Lee Allentuck "A tireless supporter of inventors" and "A passionate advocate for innovation." An

industry veteran boasting time at Hasbro and LEGO, Lee's been at the heart of some of the sector's biggest brands. As an independent consultant, he's supercharged that experience, championing ideas and providing opportunities for creators. "His dedication to fostering creativity in the industry is unparalleled," says one fan. Another adds: "He's a key ally for anyone striving to make a difference in the industry."



ALTON TAKEYASU,
Key Principal Designer, Innovations, Mattel

Alton Takeyasu started at Kenner Toys before joining Mattel. Since then, he's led Mattel's Inventor Relations department and worked on a variety of action figures and brands. These include Harry Potter, Toy Story, Star Wars and Hot Wheels. Today, Alton is a part of Mattel's Creation Station – a team that provides design innovation, creative solutions and technical expertise. He also inspires the next generation by mentoring toy-design students at Otis College of Art. One nominator tells us Alton is: "Creative, calm and solution oriented."



JAMES AUSTIN-SMITH,
Creative Director, Innovation, Moose Toys

Responsible for leading the development on – and championing of – several global Moose brands this past year, James Austin-Smith continues to thrive as "One of the industry's most impressive design leaders." As another nominator tells us: "James's relentless imagination and unmatched passion for toys and games is obvious in the way he approaches design work. James is always pushing for the next best thing in everything he works on – and encouraging creativity in those who work with him."



RICH MAZEL,
VP of Innovation & Inventor Relations, All 4 Fun Toys

2024 was a milestone year for Rich Mazel, as he teamed up with Jeff Wilcox to launch their own venture: All 4 Fun

Toys. With a 'Direct-to-Inventor' model that looks to shake up the traditional way of engaging with inventors, All 4 Fun Toys is off to great start with the firm's debut item, Ring Slingr. "Rich's commitment to fostering creativity, driving innovation and supporting the inventor community makes him a true design champion."



ERIC SCHAUER,
VP of Brand, Jazwares

Eric Schauer of Jazwares has been cited as 'A true champion of collaboration and innovation in all its forms' by nominators. He is one of the company's biggest cheerleaders for innovation and an 'Exceptional partner' when it comes to pushing boundaries and ensuring

his portfolio is filled with fresh innovation – from both internal colleagues and external partners. 'Eric is a key reason why Jazwares has an inventor item in its pre-school business every year – be it Triple Threat Spidey, the Web Hauler or new items coming in 2025 and 2026,' said one fan of his work.



TONY SEREBRIANY, VP, Inventor Relations, The Op
PAT MARINO, Director, Hobby Games, The Op
DAVID BLANCHARD, Director, Party/Family Games, The Op

It's been a year of successful launches and TOTY nominations for the team at The Op... And they continue to be major supporters of the inventor community. The Op champions designers by including their names on the boxes of mass market titles as well as hobby games. The team also "Continues to set the standard for inventor engagement." This was evident at shows in 2024, with spotlights on Gnome Hollow designer Ammon Anderson at Gen Con, and Flip 7 inventor Eric Olsen at PAX Unplugged.



DANNY KISHON,
MD, All in 1 Products

Industry stalwart Danny Kishon is known as an inventor champion, product doctor and innovator. 2024 highlights include the launch of Russ Hornsby's Zhu Zhu Aquarium and the Tasty Tinies Bake Shop licensed to Goliath on behalf of Barry Rosenbaum and the team at Stylus. There was also the Minions Blast Training licensed to Epoch on behalf of Gil Druckman, Danny Hershkovitz and Kishon himself. Elsewhere, Prime 3D Lenticular Jigsaws from Robert Schwartz launched at GP Italy and John Adams... And there's more to land this year!



ANJAR & BECKER ASSOCIATES

It's been a year of sustained success and enhanced offerings for Jonathan and Patti Becker of Anjar and Becker Associates. Highlights from 2024 include the launch of their business

brokering services focused on small and medium toy companies; the publishing of their first four children's books, and an increased commitment to sustainability and philanthropy. Elsewhere, Tangle joined their portfolio, American Battle Dome enjoyed a relaunch and the Wham-O Pet toys line from Jazwares continued to expand.



AVA GARFINKEL,
Associate Game Designer, Hasbro

Since joining Hasbro in 2023, Ava Garfinkel continues to impress. 2024 proved to be a particularly special year as she scooped the Rising Star award at the TAGIEs for her work as the designer on the board game Monopoly Go. "Ava has made a real impact in her short time on the games team," said one fan of her work.



ROBIN SOWDEN-GARCIA,
Designer, Illustrator & Animator, Big Potato Games

Big Potato's Robin Sowden-Garcia is a jack-of-all-trades – and a master of them too! He is the designer and illustrator behind a number of fantastic-looking games. These include Ghosts Can't Draw, Sounds Fishy and many others. But there's more... As fans of Jack's work point out, he also creates all the animations and puppets for the firm's promo videos and marketing.



SOPHIE LAZENBY,
Junior Product Designer, tms

Having impressed at the likes of Fuse and Lucky Egg, 2024 saw Sophie Lazenby join the Product Design team at tms. Sophie hit the ground running, helping to conceptualise ideas and solve challenges through the development of several global McDonald's Happy Meal promotions. "As a Gen Z, Sophie brings a unique perspective to her work for tms's Gen A consumer – and an infectious energy!" said one nominator.



ASHLEY SILVER,
Senior Inventor Relations Associate, Jazwares

"Ashley Silver is a name you're going to hear more of in the future..." So says one fan of this rising star. As the latest addition to the inventor relations community at Jazwares, her Gen Z vocab keeps the BlueJ team tuned into all the TikTok trends. "She has a keen eye for trends," adds one nominator.



MILLY WOOD,
Designer and Illustrator, Gamely Games

Since joining Gamely Games in January 2024, Milly Wood has made a huge impact. With an incredible eye for design, she's created stunning artwork for a raft of games. These include Bang Out of Order, Clues in Twos, The Fast and the Curious and Six Second Scribbles Christmas. Milly is also a driving force behind the redesign of some of Gamely's legacy titles. As one nominator told us: "Creative, curious and always up for experimenting, it feels like everything Milly touches turns to gold!"

LORENA MONTALVO, Senior Designer, TOMY & **OLIVIA DELUCA,** Designer, TOMY

Described by one fan as "A design duo who have the ability to absolutely nail anything they work on", TOMY's Lorena Montalvo and Olivia DeLuca continue to dazzle. Bringing energy, quality and creativity to everything they work on, one nominator tells us: "I have no doubt they'll be leading the industry at some time in the future!"



ABBI UDELL,
Product Designer & Illustrator, Moose Toys

Moose UK's resident illustrator, Abbi Udell is the driving force behind the character design and intricate print style of the Cookeez Makery and Yum Yumz brands. She produces concept visuals and creates final artwork for playsets and character skins. On top of this, she doubles as a product designer on the brands, pushing the finishes, details and quality of the plush. Says one fan of her work: "Abbi is only a few years into her toy design career – but is most definitely one to watch. She's a true star!"



MARYAM SYED,
Industrial Designer, MAGNA-TILES

Right after graduating from the University of Illinois, Maryam Syed joined MAGNA-TILES... And became the company's first ever Industrial Designer. Since then, she has endlessly impressed as the lead designer on all MAGNA-

TILES sets launched in 2024 – including several that won awards. As one nominator puts it: "Maryam's passion for design and toys is unparalleled."



LAUREN HEYWOOD-LAW,
Games Developer, Gibsons

One nominator tells us what Lauren Heywood-Law is doing most succinctly: "Lauren is putting the games back into Gibsons!" In her first year, she has taken three games through from production to launch... And has another four set to debut this month, with nine in development for summer. "Lauren is building relationships with game inventors around the world – as well as a pipeline of games that are a perfect fit for the Gibsons brand," said one fan of her work.



MARTIN LOMBARDINI,
Founder, LIT

Independent inventor and entrepreneur Martin Lombardini had a year to remember. He began his inventing journey in 2019 and his first patented product – Cornhole Shootout – came to market in early 2024. It was soon nominated for a TOTY award in the Outdoor Product category. "It's an outstanding achievement," said one fan of his work.



TAM & DAVID GORDON

2024 was a standout year for game designers TAM and David Gordon. Their LEGO Monkey Palace was the debut title from Dotted Games... This proved to be one of the most popular games at SPIEL. Between them, David and TAM have more than eight games releasing in 2025. Along with partners Ammon Anderson and Greg May, they also launched UP Games and formed a strategic partnership with Asmodee for worldwide distribution. The first release from UP Games – Floristry – lands this year. "They are shooting stars!" said one fan.



BENJI TONER-CLEWES,
Product Developer,
Ginger Fox Games

After a change in career to follow his passion for games, Benji Toner-Clewes joined Ginger Fox in 2023... And is already making waves with his boundless energy and enthusiasm. Benji has unquestionably enhanced the talented team at Ginger Fox and is heading for great things. Working with Ellie Dix to deliver the 'fast-paced, pants-based' deduction game Top Secret: Briefs in 2024, Benji is helping to develop several other inventor ideas. In the words of one nominator: "Benji has already impressed and is certainly one to watch in 2025."



JAMES SHEELER,
Inventor Relations Associate,
Mattel

Celebrating his first year with Mattel is James Sheeler. Said by some to be a great new talent, James quickly showcased his talent and dedication in Inventor Relations. Recently, he made the move from the Fisher-Price East Aurora office to

sunny El Segundo... And he continues to manage Fisher-Price brands while also expanding his portfolio to include action figures. "You can tell he genuinely cares about helping inventors succeed," says one nominator.



RAPHAËLLE DOYON,
Digital Sculptor, MEGA, Mattel

Mattel's Raphaëlle Doyon recently embarked on an exciting new chapter in her career. Having already moved from project management to digital sculpting, last year saw Raphaëlle dive into the world of design. "Her reputation for boundless joy, an insatiable thirst for knowledge and an

unwavering passion for her work make her an absolute delight," said one nominator, adding: "To work with Raphaëlle is to experience the best of creativity, collaboration and genuine enthusiasm."



ROB TROUNCE,
Marketing Manager, Hachette Boardgames UK

New to the industry when he joined Hachette Boardgames UK in January 2024, Rob Trounce has fast established himself as a key factor in the rise of the company... And a passionate champion of the design community. Recent highlights

include being instrumental in the UK launch of PAC-MAN Quoridor. As one nominator puts it: "He knows the designers, he gets what they're doing – and puts them front and centre without thought. All within his first year!"



SERENA FADLUN,
Game Designer

2024 proved to be a special year for designer Serena Fadlun. She licensed two games and optioned a third. Two of her titles – co-designed with April Mitchell – are now on shelves. "Serena is not only a rising star for her creativity, licensing deals and innovation – but also because of her support for the industry community and amazing heart," said one nominator. They add: "You'll always find her cheering for fellow inventors and designers on LinkedIn."



KALEIDOS CREATIVE

2024 saw the arrival of Kaleidos Creative – a new toy company founded by Pixar and Funko alumni Ben Butcher. Made up of passionate industry veterans, Kaleidos focuses on invigorating the collectibles industry... And they're off to a fantastic start! Popular debut lines include Odds N Sods, Tiny Shiny Hineys and Ghost Cat. "I've never encountered such an inviting group of people to collaborate and create product with," say one fan. They add: "I'm so excited for what Kaleidos has in store – they're going to blow up!"



OSNAR RENGIFO,
Concept Artist, Eolo Toys

In his two years with Eolo Toys, Osnar Rengifo has established himself as a terrific concept artist. One recent highlight involving Osnar's considerable talent was the Disney Fidget Fun range – a successful line of Disney Princess fidget toys. One fan of Osnar's work told us: "His boundless creativity and imagination bring to life the craziest creations and ideas."



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