

MOJO NATION

CELEBRATING THE CREATIVITY OF THE TOY, GAME & DESIGNER COMMUNITY | 2025

CRASH CATS™

THINKFUN'S
PURRRFECT
NEW BRAIN GAME!



PLUS...

Discover ThinkFun's best-sellers that challenge minds and spark imaginations worldwide.

CRASH CATS

Think fast, act faster! Crash Cats is the latest game from ThinkFun, designed to challenge reflexes and strategy with thrilling cat-powered chaos.



PURRRFECT FOR PLAYERS OF ALL AGES WHO LOVE CLEVER GAMEPLAY!



OPINION

“Bringing Mojo into print gives us the opportunity to do two essential things...”

Print's Charming



Hello! And thank you for picking up – or downloading – a copy of our first-ever Mojo Nation Magazine. Bringing Mojo into print gives us the

opportunity to do two essential things... First: elevate and showcase the industry's creative community at a key time. Second: write awful, pun-filled headlines that wouldn't be excused in any other format.

In essence, this aims to be a B2B magazine for anyone in the industry predominantly interested in the creative process behind products. Within these pages you'll find deep dives into exciting new launches, insightful opinion pieces and interviews with top design and inventor talent. Hopefully they're all presented in such a way that does the product – and the people – justice.

We have compelling stories of inventor/company collaborations – like Fuse and ThinkFun's Crash Cats, or Nextoy and TOMY's Human Controller. There are also meaty features looking at

what industry figures believe will be the year's biggest challenges and most exciting opportunities. We even take a look at some never-before-published correspondence between Waddingtons and the inventor of Clue/Cluedo. Finally, in a feeble bid to appear on trend, there is – perhaps inevitably – a feature on kidults.

The plan at the moment is for the Mojo Nation Magazine to be an annual publication centred around Toy Fair season. We've had some positive conversations from folk interested in this being a more regular publication, but Adam recently had a baby and I've just got into comics in quite a big way, so time is at a premium. That said, if you find it useful, or would want to see us do this sort of thing more often, please do let us know. You can reach me at billy@mojo-nation.com, or Adam via adam@mojo-nation.com.

So, thanks to you for reading – and thanks to all those who contributed, supported and took time to chat to us about what they're up to. See you at the shows.



All material in the publication is covered by copyright. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form – electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise – whole or in part, without written permission of the publisher © 2025 Mojo Nation Ltd. While considerable care has been taken in the production of this issue, no responsibility can be accepted for any errors or omissions. No responsibility can be accepted for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs, artwork or equipment. All correspondence is assumed to be for publication unless clearly stated otherwise.

Mojo Nation Ltd: 3 Skippys Meadow, Buntingford, Herts, SG9 9FP | info@mojo-nation.com

Contents

06 Design Edge's **Matt Nuccio** looks at the evolution of licensing vs self-production

08 IDEO's **Michelle Lee** points out why fun and sustainable aren't mutually exclusive

10 Kids Brands Insights' **Steve Reece** on opportunities – and dangers – around AI

12 YuMe Toys' **Felipe Noriega** discusses the rise and rise of anime

14
BTHA's **Majen Immink** looks at what London Toy Fair has in store for designers

16
Christian Ulrich of Spielwarenmesse eG gives us the low-down on this year's Game Inventors Convention

20
We talk innovation and inventors with Hasbro CEO **Chris Cocks**

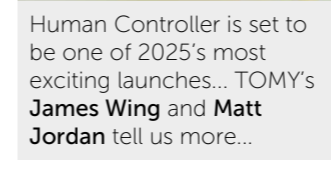
42
Spin Master's **Mike Bisogno** talks discusses his approach to inventor relations

44
Want to know more about the new Barbie Deluxe Style dolls? Mattel's **Aislinn Kaltenbrun** is on hand to help



48 **Felipe Noriega and Gurdeep Bains** discuss what YuMe has in store for 2025

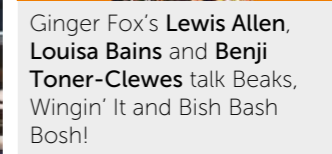
78
Human Controller is set to be one of 2025's most exciting launches... TOMY's **James Wing** and **Matt Jordan** tell us more...



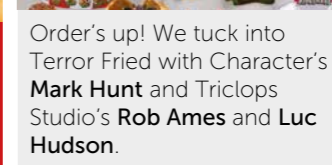
80
Gwent... MicroMacro Kids... Spy Guy... **Rob Trounce** talks us through what's set to be a busy year for Hachette.



50
Ginger Fox's **Lewis Allen, Louisa Bains** and **Benji Toner-Clewes** talk Beaks, Wingin' It and Bish Bash Bosh!



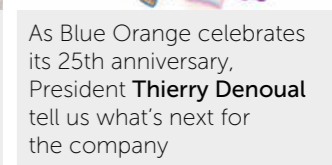
70
Order's up! We tuck into Terror Fried with Character's **Mark Hunt** and Triclops Studio's **Rob Ames** and **Luc Hudson**.



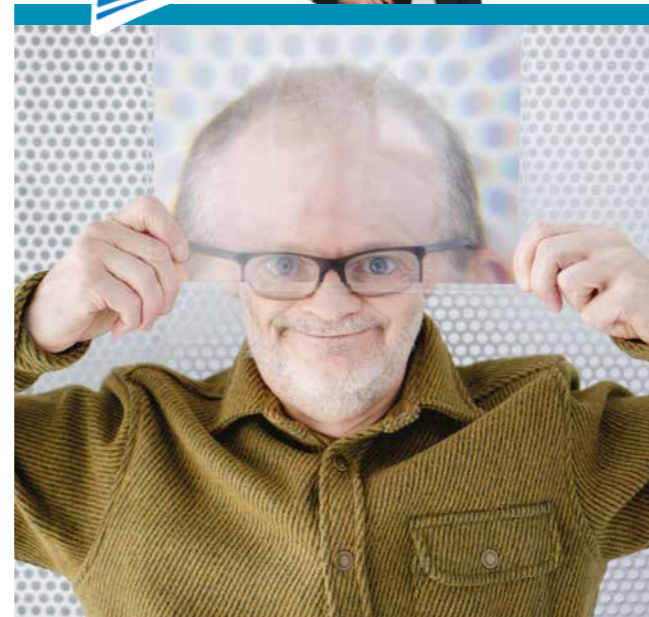
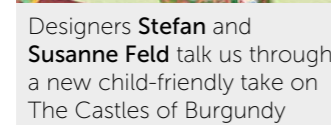
52
Casdon's **Alex Reynolds** sheds light on new launches for Heinz, Toxic Waste and Build-a-Bear Workshop



72
As Blue Orange celebrates its 25th anniversary, President **Thierry Denoual** tell us what's next for the company



36
Designers **Stefan** and **Susanne Feld** talk us through a new child-friendly take on The Castles of Burgundy



46 **Dominique Roy** of Make It Real introduces the Polish & Shine Tumbler and Swift Clicks Bracelet Maker

Portrait Credit: Pénélope Roy-Dumouchel

18
The Toy Association's **Greg Ahearn** looks at how inventors can make the most of New York Toy Fair



30
Gloomies is one of Ravensburger's top new launches... **Daniel Greiner** and **Chiara Bellavite** reveal all...

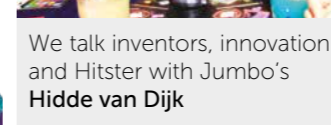


40
Rick Keuter shares the design aims and ambitions of MAGNA-TILES

94
Ben Butcher talks us through the first wave of products from Kaleidos Creative



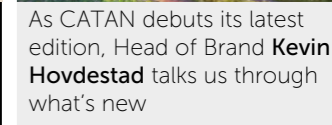
96
We talk inventors, innovation and Hitster with Jumbo's **Hidde van Dijk**



98
Oink Games' **Massimo Zeppetelli** discusses inventor outreach – and games with style



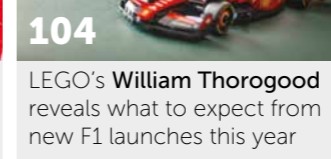
100
As CATAN debuts its latest edition, Head of Brand **Kevin Hovdestad** talks us through what's new



102
Game designer **Ellie Dix** dispels myths around fragile inventors



104
LEGO's **William Thorogood** reveals what to expect from new F1 launches this year



106
Hot new trend? Flash in the pan? We ask the industry for their honest opinions of the **Kidult** craze



SHOW HIGHLIGHTS FROM...
Asmodee, Casdon, Craft Buddy, Dyce Games, Ginger Fox, Hasbro, Hachette, MAGNA-TILES, Make It Real, Moose Toys, Ravensburger, SMART Toys and Games, ThinkFun, YuMe Toys

111

“The key to success is no longer about ‘getting lucky’ with a licensing deal.”



The Evolution of Licensing vs. Self-Production

Design Edge’s **Matt Nuccio** looks at how the shifting sands of retail are enabling inventors to control their destiny.

A few years ago, I would’ve quickly advised inventors to license concepts rather than self-produce. The risks of self-production – stories of second mortgages and unsold inventory – seemed too great. Licensing offered a way to mitigate those risks with a modest royalty stream, while companies handled production and distribution. However, the market has shifted... Today, direct-to-consumer channels have empowered inventors to become entrepreneurs, making self-production a much more viable option.

THE OLD WAY: LICENSING VIA RETAILERS

A decade ago, a few major players controlled the retail world and – for many inventors – licensing was the only realistic path to market. If you had an innovative idea, you could pitch it through an agent or licensing company, hoping a large corporation would select it for production. These products often made it to market not because they were groundbreaking, but simply to feed the retailer’s demand for new inventory. While some inventors found success, they had little control over the marketing or distribution of their products – and the royalty payments were typically modest.

THE RISE OF DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER

Today, the retail landscape has changed. E-commerce platforms like Amazon, Shopify, and Etsy, along with social-media marketing, have opened new doors for inventors. Now, it’s possible for entrepreneurs to reach consumers directly, bypassing traditional retailers

altogether. At Design Edge, we’ve seen startups that couldn’t get a foot in the door a decade ago start turning a profit within months of launching. This is due to lower barriers to entry and the accessibility of digital marketing tools. These allow entrepreneurs to build their brand and audience without relying on large corporations or retailers.

THE SHIFT: LOWER RISK, HIGHER CONTROL

What has changed is the ability for inventors to control their own destiny. Instead of waiting for a licensing deal or approval from retailers, today’s inventors have a direct path to consumers. The key to success is no longer about ‘getting lucky’ with a licensing deal but about creating a great product and effectively marketing it to the right audience.

THE FUTURE: PRODUCT IS KING

While licensing still plays a role in the market, the rise of DTC sales levels the playing field for inventors. The real key to success today is the product itself... If you have a great idea and can create a high-quality product at a competitive price, your chances of success are higher than ever. The tools and platforms are now available to allow inventors to control the path from concept to consumer.

In conclusion, the rise of direct-to-consumer sales channels is changing the game. Inventors today can self-produce and market their products independently, lowering the risks and increasing their chances of success. Long live the king – great products that speak for themselves.



Spin Master Games Loves Inventors!

We’re looking for the next **HOT Party game**, the next **AWESOME Kids game**, the next **INNOVATIVE Rubik’s Cube!**



HEY, COME PLAY WITH US!

Got a great idea! Contact Mike Bisogno at mbisogno@spinmaster.com or Helen De La Cruz at helend@spinmaster.com

“We need to collaborate across companies to develop new systems for recycling, repair, and reuse.”



Kill Waste, Not Joy

Michelle Lee – Partner & Managing Director of IDEO’s Play Lab – on why the choice between delivering joy and preserving the planet isn’t an either/or for toy designers.

As a designer, I find myself in an interesting new era, one where we have to think beyond how and when a product will be used, considering what happens before and after.

While changing an entire industry won’t happen overnight, I’ve found hope partnering with individuals across toy companies driven to explore alternative solutions.

I’m also appreciative of practices – already in line with a circular economy – that simultaneously create fun and meaningful experiences for kids. Some of these have been around for years...

Consider how American Girl gives kids the opportunity to bring their beloved dolls to the Doll Care Center... This not only enables them to refresh their dolls but also teaches that repair can and should be a natural part of product ownership.

Recently, the IDEO Play Lab team ran a four-week internal project to explore how circular design principles might shift toys and toy making. We spoke with experts across the industry – as well as kids and parents – to understand their perspectives on more environmentally sustainable toys, experiences and business models. In the process, we sketched early concepts for a platform to encourage toy repair, ways to facilitate second-hand toy purchases, models for extending the life of physical toys through digital enhancements, and alternative materials that are more durable, biodegradable and recycled – or recyclable.

We took a human-centred approach. Solutions not only had to be planet-friendly, but fun and desirable. We tested concepts like toys with

backstories that celebrate the more environmentally friendly materials they’re made from.

While we’re excited to see what’s possible, we’re aware of the significant barriers we still need to overcome. Alternative materials are more expensive than virgin plastics. Too few people hold the expertise on how to work with new materials – and we do not yet know enough about their unique properties to make the most of them.

We also have yet to design robust systems for repair and reuse – though many informal channels do exist. There are plenty of opportunities for toy companies to be part of this ecosystem, ensuring the quality and safety of toys as they’re passed from family to family, while creating new touchpoints to deepen relationships with kids and families.

As we move from a linear economy to a circular economy, we don’t need to be caught between delivering joy or preserving our planet. It’s possible to do both, but it requires us to understand the circular strategies we can employ. We need to work together to drive down the costs of new materials, optimise new manufacturing processes and collaborate across companies to develop new systems for recycling, repair and reuse.

This is an exciting opportunity to reimagine decades-old processes and evolve them into something better, both for people and planet. Let’s work together to meet this challenge.



YumeToys.com

Invites you to meet with us at these upcoming shows.

LONDON • NUREMBERG

BALCONY / UN72

HALL 12 / F13



BALCONY / UN72

LONDON



21st to 23rd January

spielwarenmesse



HALL 12 / F13

NUREMBERG



28th January to 1st February

Scan here to book your meeting with us

“Be more creative at using the power of AI and find new ways to innovate better with these new tools.”



AI • Embrace the Revolution!

Kids Brand Insight's **Steve Reece** evaluates the opportunities – and danger – that AI presents to designers and inventors.

The first quarter of a century of this millennium has been a time of revolutionary change for humanity. More specifically, there have been many areas of the toy and game business which have been hugely disrupted, enhanced or eradicated.

If you asked the average industry bod back in 2000 which would be the last toy retailer standing, I suspect Toys R Us would have been a common answer. If you asked the same people what would happen with e-commerce, they knew that buying over the internet would be huge – but were still playing Snake on their phones and sending SMS messages to each other. We didn't know that, within a few years, the smartphone would see us heavily addicted to staring at a tiny screen, scrolling through social networks...

Right now, there are some challenges facing the world of toys and games. Skipping all the geopolitical turmoil for now, let's jump to demographics. Whereas people of my age were taught Malthusian theory – that the human population would keep rising exponentially until we ran out of food and starved – most developed countries have terrible birth rates today.

This means that – among many other complications – there are fewer kids being born. Based on current trends, that in turn means fewer kids to buy toys and games for on a long-term basis. Our industry has adapted well to this by innovating in the kids' space to

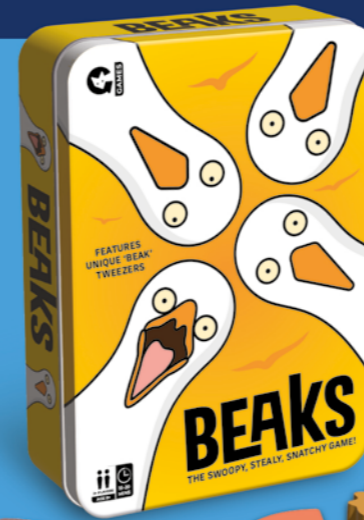
make products ever more desirable, and by embracing the so called kidult opportunity to sell toys to – or for – adults.

As we head deeper into the artificial intelligence revolution, where machines become smarter than people, we can learn from what we already experienced so far in this century: change equals both opportunity and threat. For those on the creative side, the necessary action to come through this next phase of technological advancement is simple – be evermore creative. Be more creative at using the power of AI and find new ways to innovate better with these new tools.

The rising tide of ever smarter AI will raise all boats that choose to rise on that wave versus fighting against it. What does this mean in practical terms? The task or creative function that was your livelihood yesterday, or even today, might fade away... But the toy biz still needs your creative mind to develop better products, marketing and packaging than our competitors. The best creative minds have nothing to worry about – just carry on being creative – but level up better than those around you with the power of AI tools.

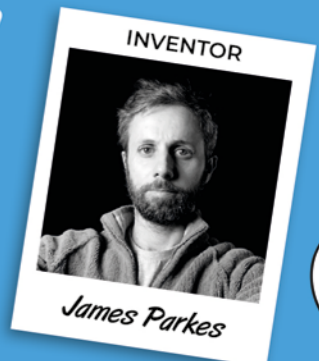
Finally, of course, remember the JFK quote: “The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘crisis’. One brush stroke stands for danger, the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger – but recognise the opportunity.”

COMING SOON!



THE SWOOPY, STEALY, SNATCHY GAME

“BEAKS is a mad tangle of limbs and outrageous squawking as you get caught up in a seagull feeding frenzy!”



James Parkes

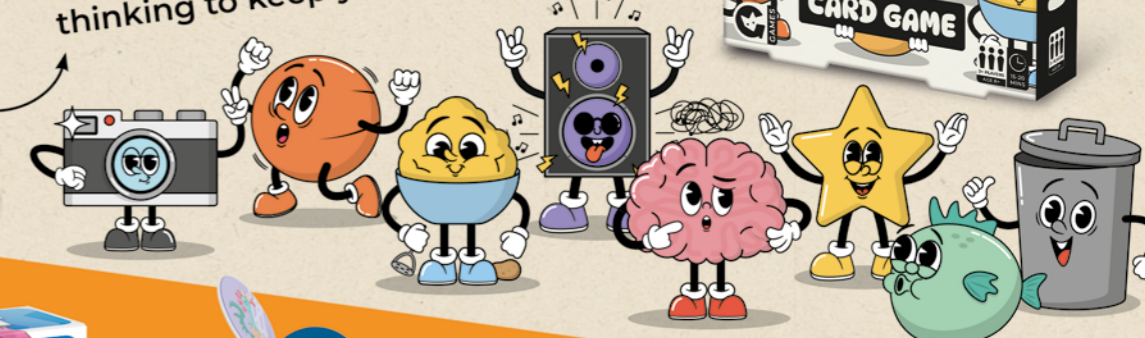


A FAST AND LOUD CARD SHEDDING GAME

“BISH BASH BOSH is a riot of noise, laughter and excitement, that mixes frantic fun with just enough quick thinking to keep you on your toes!”



Stephen Wilson



A FLIPPIN' EXPLOSIVE PUSH-YOUR-LUCK GAME

“WINGIN' IT is push-your-luck meets holy cow, I want to smash that button!”



Ken Gruhl & Jeremy Posner



OPINION



“Buyers understand that anime is not a passing trend. They know they should probably get involved if they haven’t already...”



Anime: Here to Stay!

Felipe Noriega – VP & Regional Director EMEA at YuMe Toys – talks on the rise of anime in toys... And why its appeal shows no sign of waning.

The word kidult is on everyone’s lips. And rightly so – it’s an enormous trend and one that’s been huge for us at YuMe Toys. But a notch below all things kidult – and something of a pillar for it – is anime.

Every buyer now knows about the kidult phenomenon, and most buyers are coming around to understanding that anime is not a passing trend... They know they should probably get involved if they haven’t already.

When it comes to anime, YuMe Toys has a dual strategy. We’re developing a lot of in-house ranges based on anime brands, and we’re also identifying product in Japan that’s not being sold in the West... And bringing that across to European retailers via our vast direct-to-retail network – with some packaging tweaks! We seem to have cracked what works.

One driver is pricing. Everything we’re doing is aimed at mass-market consumption. We’re trying to lower the barriers of entry through attractive pricing, better packaging and exciting product design. The anime toy scene is no longer exclusive to collectors of high-end product – or to specialist retailers.

Speaking of retail, different territories are at different stages in their ‘adoption’ of anime.

Countries like the UK, Germany and Nordic are a few years behind the likes of France and Spain, where anime is enormous at retail. Here, anime is part of the collective consciousness, and I have no doubt that’s where the UK and other places are heading too.

Why? Accessibility. You can now access quality anime content on Netflix, Crunchyroll and Amazon Prime Video. BBC iPlayer even has the entire back-catalogue of One Piece! And then there are all the live-action adaptations... Access is wider, the appeal is wider – anime isn’t niche anymore. The unique storytelling, the vibrant graphics, the emotional storylines... New audiences are embracing it.

From a design perspective, it’s had an impact too. Whether it’s larger heads and smaller bodies, or the dynamic poses we’ve captured in our lines for brands like Spy x Family, Attack on Titan and Jujutsu Kaisen, it resonates with a mass audience. And it’s influenced how we present collectibles for other non-anime brands like Stranger Things, Deadpool and Squid Game.

So... While we’re all embracing the world of kidult, don’t overlook one of its strongest pillars. Anime is thriving in toys – and it’s only going to grow.



We’re sparking bright ideas.
Welcoming new friends.
Jumping into new adventures.
And creating more magic moments through play.

CONNECT WITH US!

Nuremberg Toy Fair – Hall 4, C-30
New York Toy Fair – #3435



“The Inventors Lunch is there to help foster and encourage connections between exhibitors and inventors. It’s been a great addition to the show.”

London Calling

Majen Immink, Director of Fairs and Special Events at the British Toy & Hobby Association, on keeping Toy Fair relevant – and embracing inventors.

To kick us off, Majen, what makes Toy Fair such a great place for the industry’s creative community to connect and network?

Toy Fair really kickstarts the industry’s calendar year. Under one roof, it provides a perfect networking platform for thousands of attendees – and more than 250 exhibiting companies. It’s a prime opportunity to meet with everyone who’s anyone in the industry, to build on current relationships and to forge new connections.

From inventors to in-house R&D teams, do you feel that walking Toy Fair offers visitors the means to fuel their creativity?

Absolutely. Thanks to the efforts of exhibitors and contractors, the show is always vibrant and visually spectacular...

The fun-and-lively atmosphere never fails to energise and inspire attendees. Thousands of product launches are on display: from tech, plush and construction toys to collectibles, vehicles, dolls and so much more... Our Gold Zone area – formerly named the Greenhouse – also provides a great showcase of smaller, startup companies and entrepreneurs. It’s home to many inspired, new and innovative products.

What helps you fuel your own creativity and have ideas for the show?

We’re lucky to work in an industry where there’s so much creativity to draw from – not just at Toy Fair in January, but throughout the whole year. Whether it’s inspiration from the latest toy, trend or creative marketing campaign, the industry constantly strives to invent ways for people to enjoy the latest products. I think we have a pretty good formula and benefit hugely from the calibre of exhibitors and high returnee rate while taking inspiration from other events and industries.

What’s most key is to listen to feedback from all corners of the industry in order to keep evolving the show and improving the experience for both visitors and exhibitors. The introduction of the Inventors Lunch at the 2024 show to help foster and encourage connections between exhibitors and inventors was a great addition. We look forward to bringing it back in 2025 to help facilitate and build many more connections. The inventor community is a key driving force behind our incredible industry.

What advice would you give newcomers to get the most from this year’s event?

My main advice for new visitors is also relevant for recurring visitors – plan your time wisely. Toy Fair is such a large show, with so many fantastic stands to get round... So planning your visit and arranging meetings in advance is key. Toy Fair hosts exhibitors of all sizes so there’s a great deal to see – from large renowned brands to smaller and start-up companies. To help plan ahead, we have a detailed online exhibitor listing at www.toyfair.co.uk. Here, exhibitors provide images, videos and details of products as well as contact information.

www.mojo-nation.com



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 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.



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



“The collaborative environment at Toy Fair encourages designers to push their boundaries and think outside the box.”



New York, **New York**

Greg Ahearn, President & CEO of The Toy Association, talks us through what New York Toy Fair has to offer designers and inventors.

What makes New York Toy Fair a must-attend for the creative community?

Toy Fair is a one-of-a-kind global event where the entire industry's creativity is on full display. Whether you're an inventor debuting a new idea, or an in-house designer exploring what's next in the market, we invite the global creative community to join us at Toy Fair to get a front-row seat of the latest trends, innovations, and game-changing networking opportunities.

Our Creative Factor pitch program, for example, happening on March 4th, is specifically dedicated to offering interactive and engaging educational sessions, pitching opportunities, and professional collaboration. This space is where inventors, designers, and artists can interact directly with industry pros, share ideas with inventor relations executives, and gain insights from leading manufacturers and creative thinkers.

Do you feel Toy Fair can provide great creative fuel for and inspiration for designers?

Absolutely! The collaborative environment at Toy Fair encourages designers to push their boundaries and think outside the box. Sometimes that little spark of inspiration can ignite a fresh idea or new perspective, making it an invaluable experience for in-house designers and design leaders looking to fuel their creative processes and drive future projects.

As Toy Fair continues to evolve, do you see the creative community continuing to be a key audience segment for the show?

The creative community undoubtedly remains a key audience segment for the show. Inventors, designers and all types of creative talent involved in bringing a product to market are the core of this industry and the foundation for every meaningful play experience. This community's innovative spirit and fresh perspectives are essential to driving the industry. Especially since partnering with People of Play, we're exploring new opportunities at Toy Fair and other Toy Association initiatives to further cultivate and grow this community.

What's your top tip for delegates to make the most of their trip?

Ask any Toy Fair veteran what their top tip is – I bet they say, "Wear comfortable shoes!" Ha! Honestly, my top tip for the creative community is to carve out time for events and networking. There's so much packed into the four days – including after-hours events – but taking time to connect with others and participate in sessions is paramount. You'll leave with new insights, new connections and a renewed sense of creativity that will carry you well beyond the show. Make time for those 'casual collisions' that happen in the aisle – you never know if your next conversation will be the next big deal.



BRINGING THE SUPERHAPPY IN 2025



A NEW YEAR OF EPIC INNOVATION

Thanks to all the inventors who continue to bring **WOW** ideas to Moose! The future of play is here.



“More than half of the revenue in our Toy and Games business comes from brands and products that started life as an inventor concept.”

Play Plan

Hasbro CEO **Chris Cocks** on inventors, innovation and the need to engage with kids as well as adult fans.

Chris, it's great to catch up. To kick us off, how was 2024 for Hasbro?

2024 was a big year for Hasbro. We've really pushed forward, reaching new fans and boosting our digital games while keeping up our reputation for creating fun, quality games and toys for everyone.

It was a milestone year too... Peppa Pig turned 20, Transformers hit 40 and Dungeons & Dragons celebrated its 50th. We've had awesome collaborations, launched the new Transformers One movie, and rolled out the latest D&D Core Rulebooks. The new Player's Handbook is now our fastest seller in D&D's history.

On the toy front, we've added some cool stuff like Beyblade X and the interactive Peppa's Muddy Puddles doll. Our games division has been busy too, bringing out new hits from fun party games for adults to unique board games like Life in Reterra. And Magic: The Gathering's new sets? They've been flying off the shelves! We've also expanded our reach with some fun new theme parks and gaming spots, like the Peppa Pig park in Germany and The Gameroom in New Jersey. It's all about bringing fans closer to our worlds...

I also have to give a shout-out to Monopoly GO! It's rocked the charts as our quickest-growing mobile game ever, showing that even



“If there’s a great new idea, we’re all in.”

our classic games can make a splash in digital form. It’s been exciting to see our teams jump on these opportunities and deliver, fast. It’s also helped to have such a visionary partner onboard with Scopely. So, yeah – it was a busy but successful year, and we’ve got even more in store.

Amazing! You began your life at Hasbro as President of Wizards of the Coast. How did that role shape your view of design and creativity?

I’ve been a huge fan of our brands since I was a kid, starting with D&D around age 10 and getting into Magic: The Gathering in college. That deep, personal connection has really shaped how I approach creativity and design here at Hasbro.

Leading Wizards taught me that our real magic makers are the designers and product creators. By giving them the right tools and freedom – while keeping true to what our fans adore – we not only spark creativity but also drive strong results. Sure, marketing and finance are crucial, but the real Hasbro magic begins with design.

My time there also showed me our customers aren’t just buyers – they’re fans. They have a personal stake in our products. We’re not just selling them toys and games;

we’re handling memories. Respecting this is key. I also believe a creative culture needs to be actively supported from the top and woven into every part of our organisation. Our leadership team is really focusing on defining and supporting the behaviours that make our culture stand out, updating our tools and processes to keep that culture vibrant.

Hasbro remains a key ally of the global inventor community. Why do inventors remain vital to Hasbro’s success?

Inventors are at the heart of what we do, and we get to work with some of the best in the world. More than half of the revenue in our Toy and Games business comes from brands and products that started life as an inventor concept. From Furby and Nerf Super Soaker to Play-Doh, Jenga and more... Our role is to share what we know fans want to see, what a product should achieve and how it will engage our community – then we let inventors work their magic.

We also make an intentional effort to broaden our inventor community. Programs like Hasbro’s Women Innovators of Play and our global inventor submissions platform – Spark – help us collaborate with a diverse network of inventors to source fresh game ideas that serve a wider audience.

On Hasbro’s Women Innovators of Play initiative, how has this evolved over the past few years? Do you see it being a key initiative moving forward?

Our Women Innovators of Play program was spearheaded by Tanya Thompson in our Inventor Relations team, with the goal of expanding the pipeline of future toy and game design talent. We’re only two years into the program, which includes a thought leadership conference and a Design Challenge. We’re already seeing momentum: this year, we doubled the number of registrations who tuned in.

Empowering the creative community, and specifically women creatives, will continue to be a priority for us. We want our creators to reflect our global player base. We’re also supporting the next generation through initiatives like our Girl Innovators of Play Bootcamp and challenge, partnering with Girl Up – a girl-centered leadership development initiative of the United Nations Foundation. This all starts from within Hasbro, where we’re proud to have women leading at all levels of Hasbro and are better for it.

What are some key opportunities for the company this year?

Digital play isn’t going anywhere. We’re evolving with our fans, making sure they can connect with their favourite brands both in-person and online. We’ve got over 30 million accounts on platforms like D&D Beyond and MTG: Arena, and we’re planning to keep boosting our digital presence. Here in the US, over half of adults game weekly – and we’ve been prepping for this shift for years. We’ve got a great line up of games from our internal studios set to launch this year and in 2026.

We’re also mixing it up with some cool collaborations, like with Marvel and Final Fantasy in our Magic: The Gathering Universes Beyond series. These partnerships make the game more approachable for newbies and keep things exciting for long-time fans. We’re committed to staying ahead by continually innovating. We’re launching new IPs and reimagining what we offer to keep both our young and adult fans happy and engaged.

And what do you see as being a key challenge to navigate?

Balancing our offerings to cater to both kids and adults. To thrive for another century, we need to engage the little ones who are just starting with us and the dedicated adult fans who have grown with us.

You have a portfolio of iconic brands. How do you navigate sustaining and growing them with finding and introducing new ones?

We don’t see choosing between new and existing IPs as an either/or situation. With over 1,900 brands, we’re flexible in our approach, focusing on what makes the biggest splash and offers the best play experiences. If there’s a great new idea, we’re all in. It’s all about listening to our community and inspiring play.

Our audience is diverse, and their needs vary. Some are collectors who chase every new expansion, while others prefer a more laid-back approach, dipping in and out of online play. We aim to satisfy both types of players. We’re also excited about developing new IPs, like our upcoming sci-fi RPG, Exodus, at Archetype Entertainment – spearheaded by James Ohlen of BioWare fame.

And though it may seem like we’re just getting started, as I often say “We’re only in the second inning of a nine-inning game” when it comes to expanding our existing IP. Keep an eye out for some fun surprises from our toy division this year – though I can’t spill the beans just yet...

Nicely teased! Now, what fuels creativity for you?

I get my creative spark from a genuine love for gaming, both tabletop and digital. I’m always up for a game!

Reflecting on why people cherish our products is crucial. Some of my most treasured memories are tied to games... Whether it’s playing Candyland with my mom, battling it out in Wing Commander 2 as a teen, or being beaten by my son in Magic for the first time – and seeing the genuine surprise and pride in his face. It’s vital to remember we’re in the business of sparking imagination, forging friendships and creating lasting memories.



“We’ve shaken up our team structures and leadership to encourage better collaboration and drive creative synergy across departments.”

Great answer. And what kills creativity for you?

Creativity can really suffer in isolation – when people don’t collaborate or share ideas. For instance, when our business units operated too independently, we missed out on blending ideas and innovations. That’s why we’ve shaken up our team structures and leadership to encourage better collaboration and drive creative synergy across departments.

One last question, Chris. What do you feel is Hasbro’s most underrated brand or product line? Is there an IP that remains filled with untapped potential?

That’s the beauty of our franchises – they’re full of untapped potential. Take a moment to appreciate the Play-Doh brand team. Even after 60 years, Play-Doh keeps bringing

new ideas to life. For instance, last year saw us launch the first-ever Play-Doh Pizza Delivery Scooter ride-on toy. It snagged a TOTY nomination in the vehicle category.

We’re also broadening Play-Doh’s appeal with cool collaborations – like teaming up with Marvel for action figures thanks to our partnership with Disney. We’re using Play-Doh to make a difference, too... Our Kids Can campaign boosts imagination and critical thinking. We’ve worked

with educators to roll out an Imagination Curriculum that provides educational materials for schools and online resources for teachers and parents.

It’s all about harnessing the power of play to educate, inspire and bring joy... A goal we aim for in everything we do at Hasbro.



Join us at  **TOYFAIR 2025 at Stand N12**

Tuesday 21st | Wednesday 22nd | Thursday 23rd January

01420 593593 • www.asmodee.co.uk • info@asmodee.co.uk

make it real!
Bringing Creativity to Life™

Have an idea for an innovative activity toy?

We'd love to connect!

To book an appointment with us at the Nuremberg or New York Toy Fairs, email droy@makeitrealplay.com. We look forward to meeting you!

www.makeitrealplay.com

LinXo™ Creator Set: Mojo Nation R&D Team of the Year 2024
Mini Pottery Studio: TOTY 2025 Nomination / Creative Toy of the Year



Feline Fun

Fuse's **Pete Cartlidge** and ThinkFun's **Josh West** on the twists and turns of Crash Cat's journey from collectible concept to sliding puzzle.

Josh, Pete – Crash Cats! This is a Fuse invention so let's start there... Pete, where did the idea come from? Did it start life as a logic game?

Pete Cartlidge, Director, Fuse: Crash Cats actually started life as a novelty and collectible around 2018, when one of our designers – Paul Martinsen – started noticing popular YouTube videos of cats freaking out when a cucumber was placed near them.

Ha! I'm the same way with vegetables.

Pete: Ha! But those videos are hysterical... Cats see a cucumber and just jump up vertically – amazing! So that was the inspiration for a fun little mechanism Paul built. He rigged up a cute cat with a hair trigger mechanism – pun intended – built into the cat's whiskers. When

you touched it, even gently, it would spring into the air about three or four times its own height. It was really daft but perfectly echoed the trend. We showed it to a bunch of toy companies – but no one knew what to do with it until we showed it to Josh at ThinkFun...

Perfect place to bring you in Josh! What were your initial thoughts about these jumping cat collectibles?

Josh West, Head of Product Design & Inventor Relations, Ravensburger North America: Well, we had a casual meeting

scheduled at Essen and Pete mentioned they were showing something cool... But that he wasn't sure what ThinkFun might do with it. He shared the video of these spring-loaded cats on

“It took several attempts with different directions, but we ultimately came up with a great product.”

little wheels... You could push the little cats like a toy car. Then, if they bumped into something, they popped up. I thought it was hilarious!

Pete: I remember you looking at me and smiling that big grin! At that point, none of us knew how it might fit with ThinkFun, but you felt it could be super fun and contemporary for ThinkFun's fans.

Josh: Absolutely. I went back and showed it to our Head of Sales at the time, and basically said the same thing Pete said to me: “This is funny, but I'm not sure we could do it?” We watched the video, and he thought it was as funny as I did. I followed up with Fuse and said: “I expect you might have other takers for the idea as a toy, but if it was still available, we'd like to make a puzzle out of it.” It took several attempts with different directions, but we ultimately came up with a great product – Crash Cats!

Fantastic. So yes, from there, Crash Cats became this brilliant sliding block puzzle. You set up the board with various objects – a chair, a pillow, a vacuum – then tilt the board to slide the cats into things so they ping into the air. You win when only the cat with the red helmet remains! So what went into transforming these collectibles into a puzzle game?

Pete: Well, from a super simple and quick ‘get’, the rest of the product took years to develop. Not helped by Covid and shifting marketing and consumer demands. There was a lot to figure out with regard to the engineering of the product and its parts. The cats had to slide well, and the mechanics had to trigger – but not all the time!

I remember at one stage, Josh had our team figure out three different ways to tilt the gameboard so the cats slid well and then the board would return to being flat again. One was so complex we even patented it! After all that, I know Josh and his talented team of designers, puzzle writers and pre-production engineers all put in a huge shift to iron out a million tiny details. Five years later, the cats were finally ready!

Josh: Yes, the cool popping action of the cats was intrinsic to the play of the puzzle. I give a lot of credit to the team at Fuse. One of the early

directions was to make a ‘Rube Goldberg-esque’ assembly puzzle where the Crash Cats would attach to a vertical grid... If you solved the challenge correctly, you'd release one cat and all the others would trigger, along with these other obstacles and mechanical details. It was fantastic – a real feat of great engineering prowess!

Amazing!

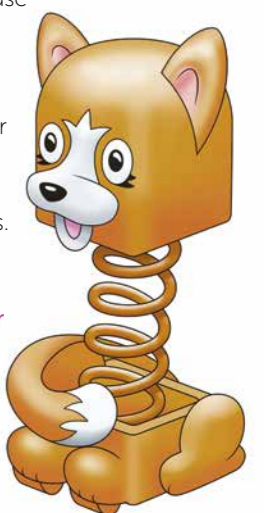
Josh: It ended up being a great use of the Crash Cat's function, but it was very costly and tough to produce a variety of challenges. When we tested it, we found that younger players would assemble the challenge – and they liked it – but they eventually just wanted to play with the cats. We didn't end up going in that direction, but it's really a portfolio piece for Fuse's development team. Once we decided to go in a simpler direction, that shift took considerable effort... Eventually, we ended up creating a variation of the version that's now available. That was a challenge in itself, but – on top of that – we also decided the new direction would retail for less than originally planned. It was a wise choice, but it took some doing to keep the functionality while lowering the price. We had to trim a lot, but it was worth it!

Wow! Sounds like a mighty undertaking. And a nice example where getting the ‘toyetic’ element right proved just as crucial as the ‘puzzle’ side of things?

Pete: You need both. The ‘sticky’ toy bit is what Josh sees a lot in submissions from Fuse and he knows how he can use his team to build the challenges around it. Hopefully, consumers will be attracted to the cats' jump-scare feature and want to do that over and over again – but then get stuck into the levels of the puzzle. Like all of ThinkFun's titles, it's very addictive and great for all ages.

Josh, you've worked with Fuse on several items now. Is there something about their design sensibilities that aligns neatly with ThinkFun?

Josh: Fuse is a fantastic partner. They have a great sense of how to make a quirky idea into a tangible thing that





“Crash Cats actually started life as a collectible!”

people can understand. This means that we can see the fun and appeal of what is happening with the concept itself – and we can start from the position of deciding how best to present the concept to our customers. It enables us to focus on brain and logic – which is what we do best – because they’ve already focused on the fun and outlandish, which is what they do best.

Pete, on that: why do you feel Fuse and ThinkFun make good collaborators?

Pete: We create games and toys, but we’re very well known for bringing things to life with mechanisms – and making products fun to look at and play with. Our collaborations on ThinkFun products like Gravity Maze, Roller Coaster Challenge and now Crash Cats showcase the best of toy and puzzle development and the best of creative resources in our two companies. The results are products that are fun to play – and fun to watch!

Before we wrap up, this a brilliant example of a product crafted with one category in mind – collectibles – that ended up as something very different. Josh, is this indicative of the ‘lens’ you like to adopt when reviewing concepts and mechanisms – that concepts can be ‘brought into’ puzzles?

Josh: It’s very indicative. ThinkFun products fit into a smaller subset of game and toy, relatively speaking. Our products are a nice blend of logic and deduction, toy-ish features and

gameplay. When we’re looking for new concepts, we’re looking for puzzle ideas that are engaging, toyetic gizmos that are fun and eye-catching, and games that have a unique, brainy mechanic. If the idea is only one of these things, that’s totally fine with us! We enjoy the chance to develop those seeds.

It also happens a lot of times that we see a game with elements of what we’re looking for, and we’re happy to alter that to fit what works best for our line. As long as the inventor is game for the collaboration, it always results in a great product!

It sounds like a smart approach – and one that resonates with inventors. Is that why Josh remains so beloved Pete?

Josh: Ha!

Pete: It is! He’s persistent and a perfectionist! Seriously, he has so much patience with the development process and any challenges that are thrown at him, his team and the inventor.

This item’s journey started long before the world changed in the pandemic, but it still made it out the other end relatively unscathed. For an inventor, that’s a rollercoaster of emotions but Josh was great at reassuring us it was going to happen. He never lost the thrill of seeing those cats pop up and was unwavering in his passion to get it over the line. I can’t begin to think about how he managed all the other parts... Josh is a legend!



Welcoming our exciting board game highlights for 2025



Spy Guy Fantasy



Gigantosaurus: The Adventure Game



Potion Express



Asterix & Co.: The Strategic and Family-friendly Card Game



Gwent: The Legendary Card Game



Wednesday: Creatures and Outcasts



One Piece: Treasure Hunt! Escape Game & Become King of the Pirates!



SquidGame: Ultimate Battle



Castle Combo



Courtisans



EDITION SPIELWIESE

Micro Macro

Jigsaw: Funfair, Kids: Crazy City Park, Crime City, Full House, All In, Showdown



Quoridor: PAC-MAN



Embark on a new adventure with the new Quoridor variant that brings the iconic PAC-MAN into the board game world!

*Each product is supported with omnichannel marketing and PR campaigns.



Gloom in Bloom

Ravensburger's Daniel Greiner and Chiara Bellavite discuss sowing the seeds of success with their light strategy game, Gloomies.

To kick us off, can you give us a broad overview of Gloomies and how it plays?

Daniel Greiner, Games Development Manager, Ravensburger: Gloomies is a light strategy game for two to four players, ages ten and up. It's set in the unique world of the Gloomies – tiny beings from a galaxy far away – that need your help to grow and harvest beautiful flowers.

The growing and harvesting are the core mechanics of the game, which plays in two phases. In the first phase, you must draft cards to grow flowers on a shared game board. You try to collect bonuses and score points for how many flowers you grow. In the second phase, you re-play your cards from before to harvest the flowers! Harvested flowers are then used to decorate Gloomies and score points. The player that was the biggest help to the Gloomies wins!

This comes from designer Filippo Landini. What appealed about the concept?

Daniel: What stood out during playtesting was the two phases of the gameplay – we liked how the two halves almost mirror each other. The central game board starts out empty and slowly fills up with colourful flower tokens. During the second phase, this plays out in reverse as players slowly pick the flower garden clean. We liked the unique and very

thematic feeling this evokes – and how players seemingly work together in a shared garden, even though the game is competitive.

Did Filippo's concept change much during development?

Daniel: As the core mechanics of the game were already very streamlined when we received the concept, our development focused on the theme, illustrations and components. There were still some minor gameplay improvements – as well as a lot of balancing to make the game feel varied and fair. We wanted to retain the suspense and tough decisions it had from the start, though!

Chiara Bellavite, Art Director, Ravensburger: The game was originally set in a vegetable garden, so one of the biggest – and most visible – changes was to bring it into the universe of flowers and Gloomies. The components started out flatter, with a traditional game board. We evolved into a 3D multi-layered game board inside the box to make the actions feel as satisfying and tangible as possible.

Lovely. Digging into that a little more, why does a layered board make such a difference?

Daniel: We wanted to make the haptic gameplay as satisfying as possible and that quickly led to the game board having holes in which to place the wooden flower tokens.



“What stood out during playtesting was the two phases of the gameplay – we liked how they almost mirror each other.”

Having these predetermined spaces helped to keep the board orderly and pleasing. It also helped enhance the tactile satisfaction of fitting a flower token into a hole.

We debated a double-layered board stuck together but ended up with two layers that you can assemble in multiple orientations to keep the board varied. To stop the two layers from misaligning, we encased them in the box. This ultimately creates a unique, compact centrepiece for our game that looks almost like a raised flower bed.

Looping back to your work on the theme, you've created a brand-new species with the Gloomies. How did you decide what form they should take?

Chiara: The spark behind the Gloomie universe came from seeing the world up close – like looking through a magnifying glass. As a kid, I loved zooming in on tiny things, discovering hidden wonders that made the ordinary extraordinary. We wanted to show that garden critters – often seen as pests – are actually caretakers, helping flowers grow and thrive. It's a reminder that we're just guests on a planet that lived in balance long before us.

The shimmering attire of the Gloomies reflects another big theme: the endless cycles of nature – day and night, seasons, planets and stars. There's something magical about it, isn't there? All the Gloomies share deep, big eyes to better see the garden at night. With Justin

Chan's art, we've worked to capture and celebrate that sense of whimsy and wonder.

What does box art need to do to stand out these days? This is so striking...

Chiara: Thank you! We wanted to capture the feel-good vibe of blooming and harvesting, while showcasing the deep love the Gloomies have for their garden. To do this, we chose a unique visual approach: a cinematic close-up of their glossy, gazing eyes. This not only highlights their connection to the garden but also sets us apart from similar games which usually focus more on the world itself, rather than its inhabitants.

Last question! Is there anything about Gloomies that you feel was designed especially to appeal to today's 'modern board gamer'?

Daniel: Modern board gaming is highly diverse – not all mechanics and graphics appeal to everyone... That said, a lot of players enjoy nice components, tactile play experiences and beautiful aesthetics. With Gloomies, we gave it our best to combine them during our development to enhance the already strong gameplay.

Now, hopefully everybody can find a part of this game that speaks to them... The clever planning over two game phases, or the cute and enchanting Gloomies in their colourful universe... Or the beautifully designed wooden flower tokens that just feel so nice to plant on the double-layered board.





Play matching cards...
to grow flowers on the game board...
and collect useful bonuses!



The Gloomies are tiny beings from a distant galaxy, with a boundless love for vibrant flowers. You step into their role, tasked with planting and harvesting.

With the flowers you gather, you'll adorn other Gloomies— or even yourself—in a celebration of color and life.



Available Spring/Summer

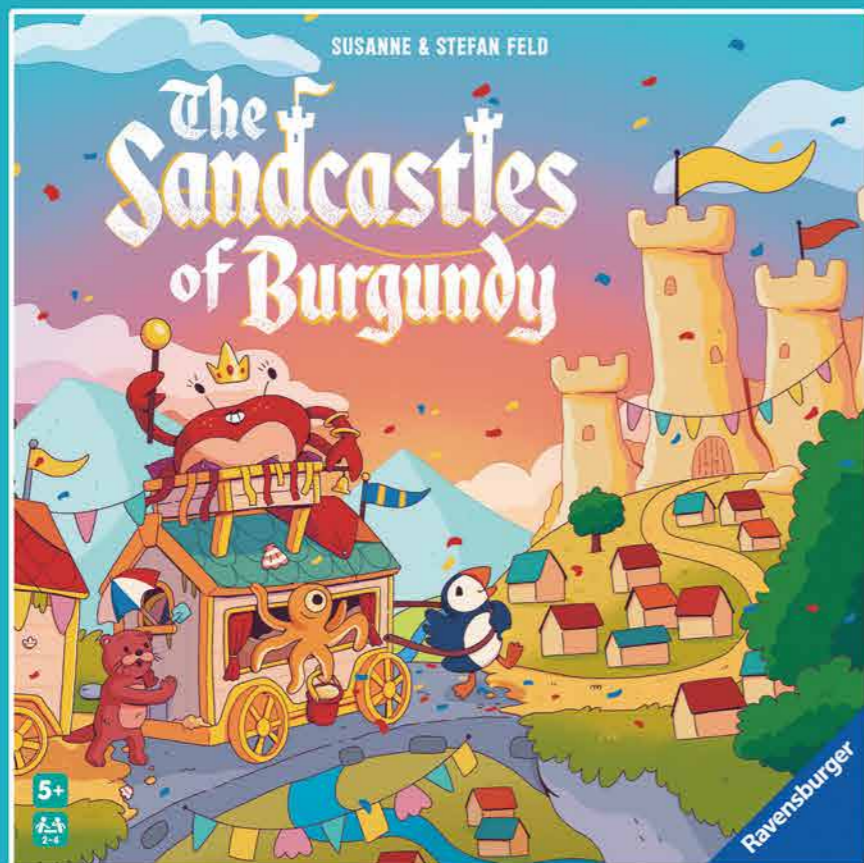


Replay your cards...
to harvest the flowers from the board...
and decorate the Gloomies!



Ravensburger

The children's game of
the multi-award-winning game
"The Castles of Burgundy"!



Available Spring/Summer

Queen Krabbe is coming
to Burgundy for a visit.



Decorate your village for
her royal beach party!



Find the right decorations
and collect points to win!



Ravensburger

“Back in 2011, we couldn’t have predicted how successful The Castles of Burgundy would be.”



Life’s a Beach

Ravensburger’s modern classic The Castles of Burgundy is getting a child-friendly spin-off. Designers **Stefan** and **Susanne Feld** tell us more.

The Castles of Burgundy... Great game! When that launched in 2011, did you feel it had the potential to spawn a series?

Stefan Feld: Back in 2011, we couldn’t predict how successful The Castles of Burgundy would be. However, even back then it was exceptionally well received by test groups. We realised – relatively quickly – that we could make a whole family of games out of the basic idea... Since then, we created Burgundy the dice game, Burgundy the card game, The Castles of Tuscany and, of course, many expansions.

And joining them is The Sandcastles of Burgundy. How would you pitch it?

Susanne Feld: The Sandcastles of Burgundy offers children as young as six-years-old the opportunity to experience the world of Castles of Burgundy. In its simplest version, children are first introduced to the basic elements of the game. With additional game elements, the difficulty can be increased – and the game becomes more tactical. There’s a lot of interaction between the players.

I imagine it’s easier to add complexity to a game than strip things back... How did you approach designing this for younger players while retaining the original’s essence?

Stefan: We’ve retained the core elements of The Castles of Burgundy. First, of course, the use of dice. Instead of numbered dice, we used dice with different colour faces. As with its big sister, you take tiles from a common display which you then place in your own village. We combined the whole thing with memory elements. Children are particularly good at that.

They are indeed. You designed this game together. How did the collaboration work?

Susanne: The Castles of Burgundy is one of my absolute favourite games. When I heard that Stefan was going to develop a children’s version, I was thrilled! Just the title – The Sandcastles of Burgundy – put a smile on my face. Then, as a primary school teacher, I had a good idea of what children that age could do and what they like. In my opinion, Stefan’s first draft was too complex for five-year-olds... So we sat down together and started to simplify. By the end, we’d created a basic version that captured the original’s core elements.

Stefan: Susanne has always been my most critical tester – and many of my games are only so good because we spent many hours at home playing the prototypes together.

Susanne, you mention the first version being too complex... This version remains full of interesting player decisions. How did you approach crafting a game that doesn’t ‘talk down’ to kids?

Susanne: We think the most important thing is that children enjoy the game. If a game is too easy, it quickly becomes boring. Of course, it’s great to see children develop their social skills and learn how to deal with emotions. In any case, a game doesn’t have to be too easy... The children should be challenged.

One last question! What fuels your creativity?

Stefan: We’re often asked how we come up with game ideas – the answer to this is not easy! Sometimes an idea comes to you and you can turn it directly into a game. Sometimes we sit at our desks, think about new mechanics and it takes time to come up with a good result.



“We’re always looking for new ideas and want to collaborate with people who share our passion for play.”

The Pull of **Play**

Rick Keuter – Head of Product Development at MAGNA-TILES – discusses new launches, innovation and connecting with inventors.



How would you describe the design aims and ambitions of MAGNA-TILES?

My role here is to ensure we’re known as leaders in innovation in this space and to provide a roadmap for the next few years on how MAGNA-TILES continues to be successful – with a focus on innovation and newness. There were a lot of changes that led to me being here and the team has done an amazing job getting MAGNA-TILES to where we are today. There was always a focus on the product, but there was not a dedicated team.

Innovation around meaningful play is one of the main drivers for MAGNA-TILES. We’re making major investments in product development and are excited to share the new 2025 items with you soon.

What recent launches would you point to as good examples of what MAGNA-TILES wants to do?

It all started with Downhill Duo. This was the first set designed by our in-house team – preceding me... It won Preschool Toy of the Year in 2023. It was developed to provide a new play experience, by adding racetracks, roads and cars. Also, for the very first time, we added a figure for kids to use and see themselves in the driving seat as they play. That set was the starting point of bringing newness and innovation to magnetic building sets.

We’ve since launched our new Space set which – for the very first time – has a vehicle that can be carried and ‘flown’ by the little hands of kids. We also launched two new Castle sets that come with figures and a dragon, as well as brand new pieces like the drawbridge and balcony.

Great! And the microMAGs Travel Set?

The microMAGs Travel Set was the most successful set to come out of 2024. This is something we’re very proud of... It showcases the power of listening to the consumer and giving them something they didn’t realise they needed or wanted. We designed and engineered our classic tiles a ¼ of the size of our standard tiles. They still fit into the building system, but these smaller tiles fit in a metal travel case for on-the-go value at a lower price.

On paper, MAGNA-TILES plays in a space with more restrictions than those that don’t focus on magnetic sets. Do you find these restrictions to be a good source of creativity?

In general, any toy with magnets has to adhere to higher standards and more regulations than those without. That’s a good thing as we pride ourselves on safety and durability at MAGNA-TILES. This is one of the reasons our product is considered more premium than others in the market.

We compete with a lot of knock off and ‘me too’ products that try to enter this space, and our dedication to safety sets MAGNA-TILES apart. We take this very seriously. We not only adhere to US and EU regulations but also impose our own internal regulations and guidelines that are even more strict. We see this as putting the families who play with our product first – and we challenge ourselves in how we design and engineer new products to ensure safety is number one, and everything else comes second.

What other design challenges do you face?

Being a building-set brand, we must ensure that all new pieces fit within our system of play. This can be challenging at times – it’s like trying to solve a puzzle... We might have an idea for a new part that seems very specific to a set or theme. If we change one thing, though, it



becomes a general piece that can fit into other sets and themes! That’s what we strive for: every new piece must be useful as something else in a build and be used in more than one set. Our designers and engineers do an amazing job of this; their creativity is inspiring.

How key is the inventor community to MAGNA-TILES?

We love working with new people, especially the inventor community. New ideas keep us engaged and excited about the future of MAGNA-TILES – inventors are some of the best people to bring those ideas to life. We have a new product coming out in July that was designed by an inventor we started working with in April 2024. I can’t talk too much about it now, but we’ll unveil that at New York Toy Fair. What I will say is that it takes the ease of building that MAGNA-TILES is known for and brings in a new way to play and build. We can’t wait for everyone to be able to play with this new set.

Sounds exciting. Can you tell us a bit about the inventor?

He’s not known as a professional inventor... He’s a regular guy with three kids, who just loves to play with MAGNA-TILES. He came up

with the idea while playing with his sons. He created a prototype, made some videos to show the features and sent us an email. From there, we connected over the phone and partnered together to make the item even better... Now he’ll have his first product coming out this year!

Amazing. Are there any ‘north stars’ you’d give other inventors looking to impress MAGNA-TILES?

It’s all about the idea: being able to show it in action and being played with by kids. Kids typically do not hide their excitement... When we see how excited they are when they’re playing, we know something’s there. In short, you need to really know the product, play with the product and see how kids play – that would be my advice. The key is knowing the system of play and then finding a way to improve, enhance or extend the play value. We’re always looking for new ideas and want to collaborate with people who share our passion for play.





The Detective
Gear Experts



ESSENTIAL STEM TOOLS



ESSENTIAL TOOLS, EXQUISITELY DESIGNED

**GECKO
RUN**
MARBLE RUN

sales@thamesandkosmos.co.uk
01580 713000

THAMES & KOSMOS

EXIT
THE GAME

WORK TOGETHER
SOLVE RIDDLES
THE CLOCK IS TICKING



KOSMOS

NUNATAK
TEMPLE OF ICE



FAMILY & STRATEGY BOARD GAMES

DEVIR



**ROCK
HARD**
-1977-



“I feel it’s super important to view internal and external developments with a very similar lens.”



Spinnovation

Mike Bisogno – Spin Master’s Senior Director, Design and Inventor Relations, Games – on how his in-house design experience shapes his work.

Mike, it’s great to catch up. Let’s start at the beginning! What set you on a path into the toy and game industry?

Well, this wasn’t something I recognised that I wanted to do – or that it was even a job choice, right? I always loved games and was a big gamer growing up. Friday nights we played Risk at my buddy’s house and it was a good time. Much later, my wife and I took a family trip to Atlantic City. While there, my sister-in-law said: “Did you ever consider going to school for toy design?” She had graduated FIT in Packaging Design.

And for context, what were you doing?

I was at Stony Brook for Business Management. She knew I liked toys and drawing, though... When we returned from that trip, I contacted Judy Ellis – the chairperson for FIT’s Toy Design program – and expressed interest in the course. She gave me a project to take home for the rest of that summer. I’d come back and share that in an effort to see if I’d be worthy to join the Toy Design program.

No pressure! And how did it go?

I made the cut; I was accepted! A couple of years later, I was graduating the class cum laude and received the department award for Toy Design that year, which was pretty cool. So I had no formal training going in – it was just something I was very passionate about. Then my career started right out of that

program because I was hired at Cardinal Games a month before I graduated college.

How does having experience as an in-house designer shape how you work with inventors?

Overseeing design for some categories as well as Inventor Relations for Games lets me look at things as a much wider portfolio. I know what we’re developing internally and that lets me give a clear picture of what we’re looking for externally. I also like to involve our design team in the inventor relations process now. We play concepts together as a whole team – design, marketing, inventor relations. Getting them excited early lets them show some ownership for it and stand behind the concept as we put it through the pipeline.

Also, I feel it’s super important to view internal and external developments with a very similar lens. Ultimately, it’s still the Spin Master Games portfolio – regardless of where the idea comes from. We should support these concepts in the same way throughout. We also love to have local inventors come in and spend time with us and the whole design team. It’s a cool way to build that connection.

The other thing is that – hopefully – I can give inventors useful feedback that’s informed by a design lens. Even if it’s not something that winds up with Spin, I always want to provide feedback that benefits the inventor.

Spin Master has a great reputation for stellar inventor engagement. How does the company maintain that?

It’s part of the backbone and DNA of the organisation. Spin has always been extremely inventor friendly and has always invited inventors to



come here first. We pride ourselves on being a really innovative toy company – we call it ‘Spinnovation’! Part of that reputation for innovation comes from how we engage with this wonderful inventor community. From the very beginning, Spin has made this a priority. It doesn’t matter what category or brand you’re on; inventors are important to us.

What are some key elements to establishing positive relationships with inventors?

It’s about focusing on the people and ensuring every inventor gets their moment to present and share their concepts with us in a meaningful way. We have to pay attention, give meaningful feedback and be good communicators. I know if I was in their shoes, I would want the same thing.

Can you talk me through a recent launch to come from an inventor or invention studio?

Yes! There’s Snack-O-Saurus Rex, which is a game we did in partnership with Dan Klitsner, Brian Clemens and the team at KID Group. It’s been featured on The Today Show and nominated for awards... It’s a fantastic concept. KID are great partners and that’s a fantastic recent success story. We also have a game on the way from Pace Development’s Robert Schwartzman and Peter Williams – one of the

first party games those guys have done. It’s awesome and they have so much enthusiasm for exploring a new space for them. I think we’ve brought a few different toy-design inventors over to the ‘dark side’ actually!

Ha! And as well as working with the established community, how important is it to bring new inventor talent into the business?

It’s critical that we find and foster the next wave of talent. I put a very concerted effort into the different conventions across the year, making sure that I’m seeing predominantly new faces at each of the events. The more inventors we’re meeting with, the more concepts we’re ultimately going to see. And in the waves of product we have coming up, you’ll see some new names that we’re partnering with.

Before we wrap up, are there any new Toy Fair launches that you’re especially excited about?

I’m very excited about some innovations within the Rubik’s portfolio. It’s a critical brand for us and it’s probably the highlight of my career to work on and lead design for the Rubik’s portfolio. We have another great new kid’s game on the way, as well as some cool launches in family games and party games.



“Barbie Deluxe Style dolls feature luxe fashions and playful aesthetics, reflecting today’s trends – with both kid and collector appeal.”



Like Your **Style**

What sets the new Barbie Deluxe Style apart from other dolls? **Aislinn Kaltenbrun**, Director of Global Brand Marketing for Barbie at Mattel, tells all...

For anyone new to Barbie Deluxe Style line, Aislinn, can you talk us through what defines these products within the brand’s wider offering?
Barbie Deluxe Style is a new offering from Barbie. It addresses a white space within the Barbie product line by offering more premium fashions and details than most other Barbie dolls available at brick-and-mortar retail. They also have a lower price point than our ultra-premium ‘Barbie Signature’ dolls made for collectors. The dolls feature luxe fashions and playful aesthetics, reflecting today’s trends – with both kid and collector appeal to engage Barbie’s core audience... And of course, it embraces our most iconic colour, pink!

Goes without saying! What spark was the inspiration for the range?

We were inspired by our brand’s 65th anniversary in 2024, reflecting on our rich heritage of being a leader in the fashion-doll category and delivering trends throughout each decade in the fashion world. Collectors consistently ask for more detailed fashions... We wanted to introduce a widely available line at brick-and-mortar retail that offered this – for both collectors and kids who love fashion play.

Research is key to the creation of any Barbie line. What steered the development of these dolls?

We have many talented designers on Barbie who’ve worked on the brand for a decade plus. Our team takes inspiration from magazines, social media, pop culture, what’s happening on runways during Fashion Week and more. Our first wave of dolls is inspired by our own pink heritage – and the tidal wave of ‘Barbiecore’ pink that took the world by storm in 2023. Pink will always be in style – and we love that adults all over the world are embracing #barbiecore.

This range features plenty of eye-catching fabrics. What design challenges did you face bringing certain concepts to the range?

Our biggest challenge was delivering premium design details at an accessible price point while continuing our commitment to offer a range of body types, skin tones, hair textures and abilities – as shown with our first-ever glittery pink prosthetic leg.

We’re thrilled that each doll in this line is putting the glam in glamorous. These dolls are ready for any fabulous occasion – whether they’re accessorised with velvet gloves, shiny mesh tights, faux fur collars, or a statement purse! Each doll offers premium fabrics, elevated hair styling, and articulation in a unique and fashion-forward way.

casdon[®]
live playfully

The UK’s #1 infant pre-school roleplay toy manufacturer* is now also expanding into new global toy categories



all new for
2025

TOXIC WASTE.



Want to be part of what’s next?
We’re looking for new invention and license opportunities for 2027 and beyond.

contact: Alex Reynolds - Global Head of R&D & Licensing
alex@casdon.com +44 (0)7591 598476

casdon.com



The Art of Crafts

Make It Real's **Dominique Roy** on developing the Polish & Shine Tumbler and Swift Clicks Bracelet Maker.

Dominique, we're discussing two exciting launches for Make It Real. Let's start with your Polish & Shine Tumbler. How did this come about?

We're always interested in inventor proposals and creating products that are inspired by well-proven play patterns, but ones that have not been innovated for years. That's what led us to tumblers... There are many rock tumblers out there – and they haven't changed for years. It's a simple process to explain, but one that's often long and fruitless.

Do your best for us, Dominique!

Normally, you put rocks into a barrel, along with a polishing agent and a bit of water. You let it spin for days, weeks or – in some rare cases – months. If you are apparently lucky, you get smooth, polished rocks. Now, people may presume that this mostly attracts dads and uncles, but we felt

there was an opportunity to make this play pattern aspirational again, for boys and girls as well. If the outcome is cool, any budding jewellers could be interested in it.

So with this, you're more quickly transforming unpolished pieces of natural stone into beautiful beads that you can then use as jewellery?

Right! Rock tumbling can take a long time, so we've made it a faster, more predictable process. That said, we have an option that requires three weeks of tumbling to get the desired result!

The play experience divides in four levels: Beginner, Maker, Master and Explorer. Explorer, the most advanced level, invites kids to 'find rocks in their backyard' and tumble them – using the tumbler in the classic way. It was important that even if a child has used all the supplied beads, there's still a use for the Tumbler.

Portrait Credit: Pénélope Roy-Durmouchel



“Kids aged eight and older appreciate a more mature design these days, as opposed to a ‘toyish aesthetic’.”

There are strong links between the traditional experience and the types of jeweller-crafting products Make It Real specialises in: anticipation, transformation and a sense of pride in a finished item...

Exactly. And there's some striking parallels with the toy space. Every kid on the planet has, at some stage, collected rocks. It's universal wherever you are in the world because rocks are available. And to your point – yes, the processes are the same. You take the ultimate commodity and, with some patience and anticipation, transform it into something precious.

Dolly Parton once said: “It takes a lot of money to look this cheap”. Did it take a lot of hard work to craft the simple-looking ‘rough’ beads? The ones that transform in the Tumbler?

Ha! She's a bright woman and the analogy makes sense – but with a slight difference... We worked hard to keep it cheap but look great! Natural stones like agate, marble and amazonite are expensive when compared to plastics. We worked hard to keep our proposal sound from a cost standpoint. That's important to me because I'm a product designer that happened to create toys...

This means I have a lot of respect for the people who play with our products. I feel like surrendering when someone says “This is just a toy!” to justify sub-quality functionality. We had to get this right – and wanted to control how much time you need to tumble in order to get a predictable end result. We did a load of experimentation before getting rewarding results. Among these tests, we played around with the level of polish on the supplied beads and came up with a custom formulation for the polish agent.

Great. Let's move into your Swift Clicks Heishi Bracelet Maker. Where did the idea for this come from?

We're doing great with Heishi beads; they're still trending. We wanted to provide kids with a different way to make a bracelet – a faster way that's more fun! So what used to take 15 minutes now takes five. The designer's original idea was inspired by those multi-coloured clicker pens, which you can see in the architecture of the product.

I can absolutely see that now!

It was a huge technical challenge for the team. To get the precision right, so that every time you press the button, one bead will thread onto the threading stem. It had to be perfectly aligned; the designer needed seven prototypes in order to get to that final version... And all using normal toy manufacturing technology and, inevitably, financials – we're not NASA!

Ha! So it has to perform well and looks beautiful. Did those two aspects align organically?

It's a very good question. I can't take credit for the design of this, but I fully endorse what the team came up with... As mentioned earlier, I'm first and foremost a product designer. Kids are now surrounded by iPhones, electronic goods and products that look very good. In this case, it's more about form following function than smoke and mirrors. Kids aged eight and older appreciate a more mature design these days, as opposed to a 'toyish aesthetic'.

Also, we can capture an older audience because our product is not, say, shaped like a unicorn! I believe that approach to aesthetics can be the difference between a triple and a homerun. It's ultimately a bet and I'm hoping a larger audience will adopt this product because of that.

“We’ll have different products at different price points for the IPs. These include figures, mini-figures, mystery capsules and DZNR plush.”



Fan Favourites

From Stranger Things walkie-talkie surprise capsules to anime inspired figures and plush... YuMe’s **Felipe Noriega** and **Gurdeep Bains** talk us through their exciting 2025 slate.

Guys, let’s kick off with a look back. How was 2024 for YuMe?

Felipe Noriega, VP & Regional Director EMEA, YuMe Toys: 2024 was really good. The market got past the issues we had after Covid. Our product range was about four times the size of our 2023 portfolio – and that’s reflected in the volume of sales we experienced last year.

What are your big focuses for 2025?

Gurdeep Bains, Global Creative Director, YuMe Toys: There’s plenty! We’ve got some exciting new additions to our anime ranges. These include brands like Haikyuu, Attack on Titan, Oshi No Ko, My Hero Academia, Chainsaw Man and Jujitsu Kaisen. We’ll have different products at different price points for the IPs. These include figures, mini-figures, mystery capsules and DZNR plush.

Felipe: We’re also doing Dragon Ball, One Piece, Solo Leveling, Kaiju No.8... It’s a very expansive anime line!

Sounds busy! And is there something of an educational process when selling these to buyers? How do you help them navigate opportunities?

Felipe: We understand that some buyers are less acquainted with anime than others and therefore a familiarisation process may be necessary. We’re happy to help! Some retailers will jump on the bandwagon only after they’ve seen other specialist retailers embrace a line and succeed with it. That’s just part of the process. In terms of how we convince them? Statistics! And of course, by having the strongest brands and products in the market. And some IP, like One Piece, is now seen as a brand first and an anime second.

This year brings with it new Hero Box items – these are your larger 4” figures?

Gurdeep: Yes, Hero Box was huge in 2024 and will continue to be huge this year. We’ll have Stitch, Harry Potter, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Jujitsu Kaisen... And Lotso – the bear from Toy Story 3.

Why do you think these have resonated?

Gurdeep: These collectible figurines have a distinctive style. Each one has a pose and facial expression that captures the essence of the character. There’s a lot of attention to detail. They’ve been designed for display and have a premium build quality. You can feel this the moment you hold one – it’s solid and satisfyingly weighty.

Felipe: We also expect our Squid Game range to continue to thrive this quarter. The third season is set to be huge and we’re hoping to ride that wave. And yet Squid Game was a risky bet in some ways. It’s an extremely violent show... Many buyers said they weren’t up for that. We took a risk and made enough to satisfy the initial demand. Then at Deauville Toy Show in France, many buyers that had said no started placing orders. This speaks to the power of compelling content and Netflix’s formidable, innovative marketing.

Before we wrap up, what other big products you expect to be a highlight of Toy Fair season?

Gurdeep: We’re beyond excited to unveil our Series 3 Stranger Things Upside Down Mystery Capsules, launching alongside the final season of the Netflix phenomenon later this year. We’re confident this collection will be a smash hit!

For this release, we’ve reimagined our iconic capsule design. Moving on from the 80s-style TV of earlier series, the new capsule takes the form of a walkie-talkie – a perfect homage to one of the show’s most iconic props. Not only is it instantly recognisable, but it also serves as a fun role-play item while concealing a collectible surprise.

The unboxing experience is more interactive than ever, inspired by key moments from the series. Before revealing the collectible figurine, fans get to crack a Morse code puzzle – just like the characters in the show. Decipher the clue to guess which character is inside! This turns the unboxing into an exciting, hands-on game that adds a layer of fun. The collection features all the fan-favourite characters, making it a must-have for any Stranger Things enthusiast. We’re truly excited about this one!

Fox News

Lewis Allen, Louisa Osmond and Benji Toner-Clewes on their new games – and why they remain committed to working with inventors.

Guys, it's great to tie-in. Last year saw Professor Puzzle acquire Ginger Fox. What impact has that had on your capabilities and areas of interest? Lewis Allen, Product Development Director, Ginger Fox: Since the acquisition, it's become clear that we're very complementary businesses! Professor Puzzle predominantly focuses on retailer-bespoke business... Ginger Fox is focused on the catalogue business. The product development process is very different on both.

How so?

Lewis: It's more intense and fast-moving on the bespoke side because they're working with buyers and trends. On the Ginger Fox side, we spend a little more time in development – but on fewer lines. Both teams benefit from seeing how the other works and we've been successful in sharing ideas and resources to generate even better product across the board for 2025.

You'll see some of the most exciting things to come from the acquisition over the next 18 months. It's a very exciting time for us all!

Let's look at some of your new titles, starting with Beaks...

Benji Toner-Clewes, Product Developer, Ginger Fox: We found this at a speed-pitching event at UK Games Expo last year. It comes from an inventor called James Parkes. I instantly fell in love with it and wanted to bring it back to the team. From there, the support the Ginger Fox gang gave it went from strength to strength.

Louisa Osmond, Senior Product Developer, Ginger Fox: It's one of those games that people want to play again and again – which is always a great sign! Beaks sees everyone frantically trying to grab food – playing as seagulls using these little beak tweezers – to complete food orders. The orders are all worth different amounts of points, and some items are harder to grab than others! You can even steal food from the other players... It's a feeding frenzy!

Lewis: It's a dexterity game, and we didn't have a dexterity game in the line. We've had it on our wishlist for a while and this one fit the bill... Quite literally. It creates a lot of noise and excitement – and lends itself well to social-media sharing. The response from our retailers is great.



“You’ll see some of the most exciting things to come from the acquisition over the next 18 months.”

Now, sticking with birds, talk me through this next new launch – Wingin’ It.

Benji: Yes! This comes from inventors Ken Gruhl and Jeremy Posner. They described it as “Push-your-luck meets ‘holy cow, I want to smash that button!’” It’s partly inspired by that nineties craze, Pogs – or Tazos. The game sees you trying to help your chicks fly the nest – in a very extreme way!

On your turn, you take a chick token from one of the three nesting stacks and place it onto the launcher. Then you have a choice... You can whack the button on the launcher to send the tokens flying, or you can add another chick to the launcher... But if you take a token and reveal a chick that’s already on display atop one of the other stacks, you go bust! That means all the tokens you put on the launcher go to the next player... Who then chooses whether or not to push their luck.

If you do smash the button and send the tokens flying, you get to keep any chicks that land ‘adult side up’. So: the more tokens on the launcher, the better your odds of keeping birds. First to collect four of the same type of bird wins. Oh, and if you flip a magpie token, you can steal a bird from another player.

Nice! What appealed about this one?

Benji: One of the things that appealed was this striking centrepiece. Then the push-your-luck element makes this a perfect family game. And it has this retro nostalgia to the Nineties for those millennials that now have families.

Let’s move onto the beautifully named Bish Bash Bosh.

Louisa: This comes from designer Stephen Wilson – and we loved the name immediately too! We also loved his sizzle video, which showed how much fun people were having with it. It had lovely retro graphics too, and we’ve continued in that vein with our artwork.

It’s a fast-paced card-shedding game. You want be first to get rid of all your cards – but there are some rules around how and when you can shed cards. Each card has a word on... Cards with words ending in ‘ish’ must be followed by cards with words ending



in ‘ash’. And a card ending in ‘ash’ must always be followed by an ‘osh’.

Hence, Bish Bash Bosh – it tells you how to play!

Louisa: Exactly! And if you can’t go, you have to draw a card into your hand. And if you make a mistake, you have to pick up cards.

Louisa: There are also coloured cards that let you jump in when it’s not your turn... If you play a ‘Mash’, anyone can follow it with a ‘Mosh’. Then there’s ‘Squish’ and ‘Squash’, which confuses people because ‘Squash’ is actually played as a ‘osh’ because it’s an ‘osh’ sound. When you’re playing at speed, it’s easy to get confused and make mistakes!

Stephen is a relatively new inventor. How important is it for you to be engaging with new talent as well as established pros?

Lewis: Hugely! We’re very reliant on the inventor community to help us with our pipeline of ideas and concepts. The more people we see, the more access we have to good ideas. And Stephen is great – he really spends time thinking about what sorts of concepts are right for Ginger Fox.

Benji: We really value our relationships with inventors and we’re very open. We go to events like the Mojo Pitch, we welcome ideas and we like to get to know our inventors – we’re always keen to build and nurture these relationships.

Louisa: That open communication also helps ensure that inventors have a good understanding of what sort of games we want – as well as what might not be right for us. The better our relationship, the more likely inventors are to think of us when they have great new ideas.

Lewis: A few years ago, we were very seasonal in our approach to working with inventors. What we’ve realised is that we actually need to be open to new ideas all year round. We want to be as clear as possible about our objectives and we want to be as open as possible. We remain very invested in the inventor community.



Stuff of Legends

Alex Reynolds – Casdon’s Global Head of Research, Development and Licensing – on their exciting new ranges from Build-a-Bear Workshop, Heinz and Toxic Waste

Before we dive into your 2025 ranges, Alex, can you talk me through some of Casdon’s key ‘evolutions’ of late?

Sure! Securing household brands for our toys has long been Casdon’s go-to strategy and will continue to be a significant part of our future. However, we also needed to expand our vision and look at other opportunities to widen our toy category offerings with a larger pool of licenses. Scouting for new global licenses has been challenging for a company of Casdon’s size. However, we’ve applied our creativity a little differently with an aim to excite licensors... We’ve been making great strides – and this is just the start!



You’re kicking the year off with ranges based on three exciting brands... Let’s start with Toxic Waste: what appealed about this IP?

We’re well-known for our role-play Sweet Shop toy. It’s seen many variations throughout the years in its generic form, but – surprisingly – it’s never had a licensed offering. The Toxic Waste Hazardously Sour Candy brand opportunity gave us a way to rethink the item... Not only by including on-trend candy, but also by featuring the amazing characters and iconic Toxic Waste barrel.

Brilliant. Next up, Heinz! Can you talk me through a few key design details and play features here?

Heinz is a very exciting license for us to secure.

“We’ve revolutionised the stuffing process. We’re really excited for everyone to see it.”

Food role-play toys have always been a part of our non-licensed heritage, but we needed a way for us to stand out in this area... We concluded ‘It has to be Heinz!’ The final range consists of six lines centred on iconic Heinz products. Our hero element – which is used in a few of the SKUs – is the Heinz 50% Less Salt & Sugar Ketchup bottle toy, with a squeeze action to shoot out play ketchup.

Terrific. Now, Build-a-Bear! First of all, what made this brand appeal?

Build-a-Bear Workshop is a license that’s been on my mind for a while. It’s the pinnacle of excitement for a child to visit these incredible stores and bring a bear to life. While this license has been a success in the toy space previously, we felt there was still a big gap here to not just bring our own spin on the expected product, but to play on the in-store experience at home.

The obvious product for us was the Stuffing Station! But we also wanted the traditional cash register play, multiple clothing options and SKUs you could purchase to play with your bears after you’ve made them.

The Stuffing Station is very impressive. Talk me through how it works – and some of the design decisions that shaped it.

This certainly has been a labour of love. We had similar items to reference for the Stuffing Station function, but this gave us an opportunity to test with children and work out what didn’t work for the age group we were targeting. It was very apparent from the start that a similar design just wouldn’t work – we needed a full redesign.

My awesome design team created a kid-powered pump action concept that made it easy for a child to use. We also designed a twist on/off method to keep the bear attached to the stuffing nozzle without being forced off when filling. These two elements have revolutionised the stuffing process. We’re really excited for

everyone to see it. Please come by the Casdon stand at London and Nuremberg, Billy – you can build your own bear.

Sold! And the bears look great – is this Casdon’s first foray into plush?

They’re super-cute, aren’t they?! But no, it’s not quite Casdon’s first plush venture... It’s certainly the first plush-focused brand we’ve developed in Casdon’s 75 plus year history. It shows how we’re expanding our vision to different categories.

You mentioned Casdon’s expanded vision there. Does this feed into how you’ll be engaging with inventors this year – and beyond?

Absolutely. We’ve been busy ourselves to set up the changes and expansion internally. We’re now clear on our future focus and will be engaging fully with inventors again from this year on.

We’ve already made great inroads on securing new licences for 2026 and beyond. We’d love to chat with inventors on what can be leveraged with those new brands and beyond. Overall, we’d love to be at the forefront of inventor’s minds, where we can work together and target specific licences with a ‘wow’ feature that helps drive the product to a whole new level. Someone may have a great concept but need the addition of a specific license to unlock the potential... Let’s work together and make it happen.

To close, looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, what should we know about Casdon’s ambitions?

Casdon’s vision statement should really say it all: ‘To be a leading brand for quality and innovative play, that brings enjoyable, lasting memories for every child, in every corner of the world.’ For us to do this, we need the trust and conviction from licensors – and for the inventor community to join us for the ride. We’re staying curious, constantly innovating and striving for success for Casdon and our partners. It’s a very exciting time!



“It’s a stark reminder that creating a bona fide classic doesn’t make you immune to the wave of rejections that come with being an inventor.”



Without a Clue...

We take a look at a rejection letter sent to Cluedo inventor **Anthony Pratt** regarding his next idea: Treasure Hunt...

Last year, to mark 75 years of Cluedo, Mojo’s Deej Johnson interviewed Marcia Lewis – daughter of the game’s inventor, Anthony Pratt. Not wanting to derail this piece one line in, I do suggest checking it out: it’s a terrific read.

While chatting, Marcia shared various pieces of correspondence relating to her father’s journey. Without Deej applying any undue pressure with a spanner, Marcia has now given us permission to share one of these letters...

But why are we so interested in this? A few reasons... First, it’s a formal letter from Waddingtons Games, tentatively turning down Anthony’s latest idea: Treasure Hunt. It’s a stark reminder that creating a bona fide classic doesn’t make you immune to the wave of rejections that come with being an inventor.

Next, it also serves as a lovely snapshot of Inventor Relations in 1953. There’s something beautifully, painfully polite about the line: “Naturally, it is not necessary for me to tell you the game is similar in almost every respect to Cluedo.” But there’s some genuinely useful feedback too...

Evidently, the good people at Waddingtons Games were concerned about cannibalising Cluedo’s sales. If they were, as they put it, “able to interest ourselves in this”, it wouldn’t be for a few years. So: it’s a definite maybe-not, accompanied by some useful insights and

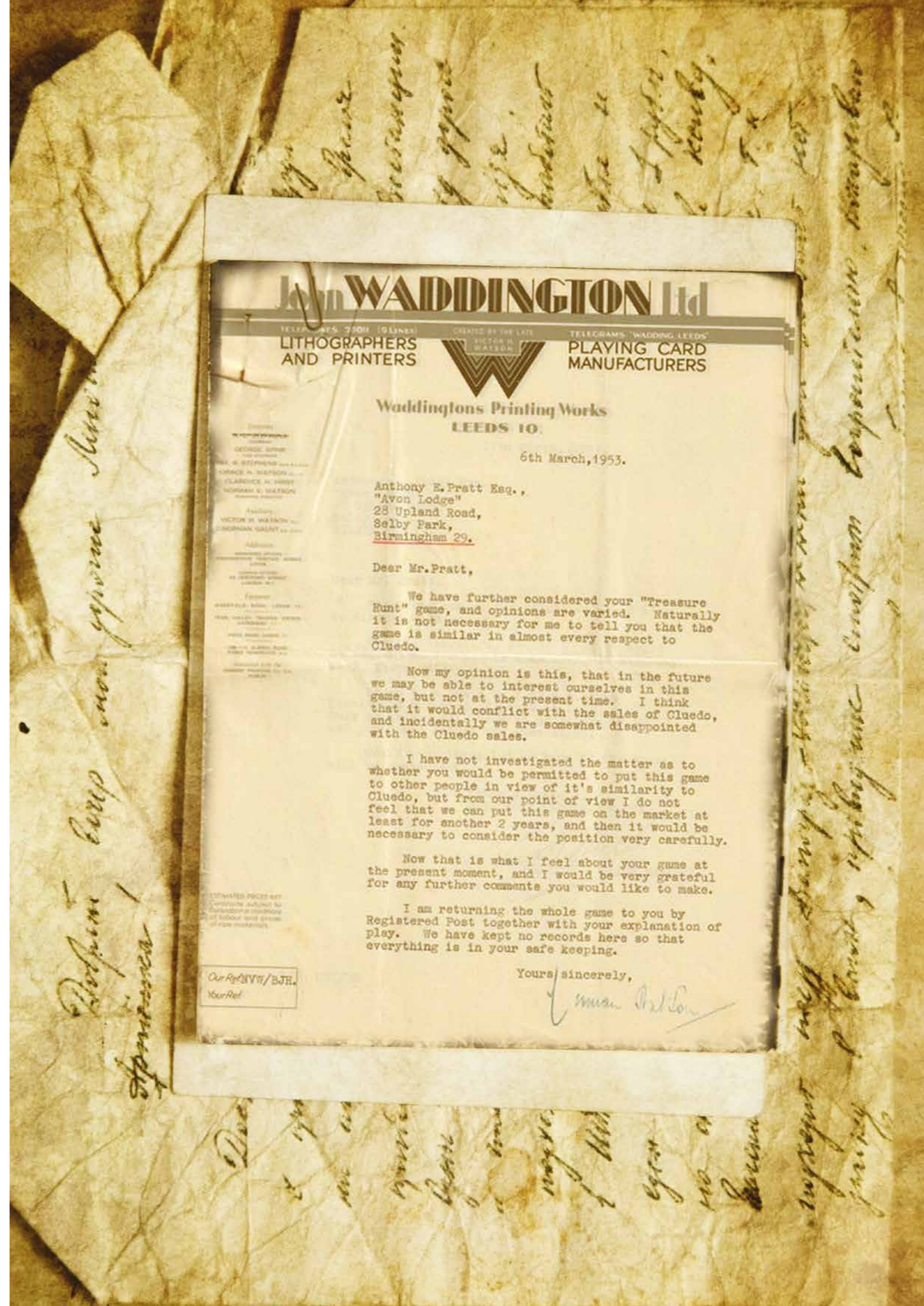
wider words of encouragement... An approach that isn’t uncommon today.

One final thing jumps out here: Waddingtons Games launched Cluedo in 1949. So, with the game being out for just four years, Anthony received this rejection letter which “incidentally” mentioned that: “...we are somewhat disappointed with the Cluedo sales.”

Elsewhere in this magazine, Adam Hocherman of Wayfarer Games described a key challenge for today’s industry. He told us: “A propensity for ‘newness’ has encroached on what used to be a more patient – read, ‘evergreen’ – toy industry. This has made the life of the inventor much more difficult.”

While today’s industry and retail landscape differ radically from the toy world of 1954, it’s interesting to look at that timescale. After four years on the market, Waddingtons Games expressed disappointment in the sales of Cluedo – and yet it didn’t disappear. On the contrary: it went on to become one of the most iconic boardgame IPs in the world!

In the wake of this letter, the patience Adam Hocherman mentions seemingly bought the game enough time to find its feet as an all-time classic. One wonders if there’re any games wobbling a little today that could follow a similar path...



“When I introduced Krumples and My 1st HangaTangs, there were a lot of raised eyebrows in the room...”



Smart Guy

Erik Quam – VP New Product and Business Development at Smart Toys and Games – on Krumples, My 1st HangaTangs and inventor collaborations

Erik, for the uninitiated, who are Smart Toys and Games?

We’re a Belgian-based company with offices in Germany, France, the Netherlands, the UK, and the United States. Have you ever heard the old saying that goes something like, “There’s nine people in the toy industry, and you are I are two of those people?”.

Ha! I haven’t heard that, but I love it.

It’s my way of saying I’ve known Smart’s founder, Rolf Vandoren, for over 15 years. We always used to bump into one another at trade fairs around the world. We’re both incredibly passionate about product and product stories. In fact, one Christmas, my wife and I gave the SmartMax Mega Ball Run as a gift to our daughter, Matilda. That’s one of the few toys that’ve truly stood the test of time here at The Quampound in Nebraska.

The Quampound! Terrific. And what is Smart Toys and Games all about?

Passion! Passion for product. Passion for people. Passion for positive play. An ‘all-hands-on-deck’ approach to Smart’s product design has resulted in some really magical mechanisms and surprising play patterns over the course of the company’s 30-plus year history. We’re always asking what we can do to make an item special and different from our last release, while still maintaining our brand identity. Those self-issued challenges have resulted in some very well-known and respected toys and games.

Well, let’s talk about that... What are some of your favourite products there?

That’s like asking me to pick my favourite child! I can’t do that. Each of our puzzles, games and building toys are truly wonderful. I’ve always admired a great puzzle – whether it’s concentration, logic, visual-spatial or deductive reasoning. I’ll let you in on a little secret, though. I am horrible at solving puzzles...

Oh, really?! That’s funny!

Fortunately, my mentor, a very intelligent and astute person, told me something I’ll never forget. She said “Erik, you don’t have to solve a puzzle to sell a puzzle.” That’s stuck with me over the years, and has honestly allowed me to be more open to product pitches. The graduated-level approach for all our puzzles is another hallmark of a Smart product... All our puzzle products begin with Starter challenges, then go up to Wizard level. That way, players can apply the knowledge gained from each level as they advance in play.

What makes an idea right for Smart Toys and Games, Erik?

As you know, I will never be the inventor relations and product development ‘executive’ who shows up to a pitch meeting with a laptop to take copious notes and then follow up by asking inventors to fill out countless, laborious spreadsheets and information documents. That’s just never been my style. We are an industry driven by people and relationships. Oftentimes, it’s the person behind the idea that makes all the difference. If an inventor has an idea or vision that fits us, and has the desire to work alongside our internal team, that’s a winning combination for all of us at Smart.



Fantastic answer! You do have some guidelines for the products themselves, though?

Yes, on that front, I’ve always been a firm believer in the ‘easy get’ principle. It can be the most complex puzzle, brainteaser, game or toy, but as long as it can be easily explained and the lightbulb in my head can instantly be illuminated, the inventor has my attention.

And what gives you a feeling of uneasiness dealing with inventors, Erik? What would be a red flag for you in a pitch?

Ohhhhh! Well, I do always stress the importance of due diligence prior to a pitch. Do your homework and understand the niche the company fills in the industry. It’s obvious Smart Toys and Games isn’t in the business of plush or pool toys. As an inventor, know your audience.

I also want to revisit the human side of our industry for a moment. A pitch should be personal... Inventors, by their very nature, are passionate individuals. I want to know your story, your background, and your reason for bringing me a concept to review. Essentially, I want to get to know you as a fellow human. There’s the potential to enter a long-term relationship with each and every pitch meeting. Let’s take a few moments and get to know one another. After all, we’re in the business of play and bringing joy to people.



And don’t tell me why your product is similar to another product we already produce, or if it’s a twist on another well-known game made by another company. I don’t find that helpful!

Terrific insights. Now, you recently launched two lovely new lines in the US called Krumples, and My 1st HangaTangs. Tell us about them!

When I joined the Smart Toys and Games family nearly two years ago, I remember having the most wonderful conversation with Rolf about the need to keep the Smart

brand fresh, innovative and unexpected. When I introduced Krumples and My 1st HangaTangs, there were a lot of raised eyebrows in the room... However, both of these brands have been a major hit here in the US. We are excited to see how they will expand into the UK and Europe.

Both products are a perfect example of intrinsically simple play patterns providing a complete surprise for little ones. The multiple cognitive skills each toy provides are astounding. Combine that with grasping, cause and effect and fine and gross motor skills – you have a near-perfect toy for little ones. But why let them have all the fun? We had to develop Fidgety Krumples for older children and adults. These have been a huge sensation in the specialty toy arena.



“We’re blending the timeless magic of play with the modern magic of AI.”



Toy Stories

ToyPal Founder **Sami Samiee** introduces his AI-infused product that transforms a child’s favourite plush toy into an engaging storyteller.

For those new to ToyPal, how would you pitch it?

At its heart, ToyPal is about spreading love and joy through storytelling. Imagine a heart-shaped device that magically turns your child’s favourite soft toy into a storytelling buddy... That’s ToyPal!

Great! And for the child, this is screen free?

Right. Our AI-powered app allows parents to craft deeply personal, screen-free stories that come alive through the toy. The device can be easily attached to your child’s favourite plush companion, transforming it into a storyteller that knows your child’s name, loves their quirks and even tailors stories to their interests.

How did this idea come about?

ToyPal started with a playful moment between me and my son, Nick. We were goofing around with his soft toy – I was imitating voices and puppeteering like it was alive. And then it hit me... What if his favourite plush could actually talk? That’s how the idea was born: a way to make their favourite cuddle buddy into the ultimate storyteller.

What are some of the capabilities of the product in terms of the stories and routines?

ToyPal isn’t just a storytelling device – it’s a parenting tool in disguise! The app comes packed with lullabies, nursery rhymes and over 500 timeless stories. These can all be personalised with your child’s name, preferences and favourite characters. But the real magic lies in its

customisability. Parents can craft bespoke adventures where their child becomes the star alongside family members, friends – or even pets.

AI is quite a divisive topic! Why did it work for this kind of project?

AI can be polarising but, for ToyPal, it’s a perfect match because of its ability to create deeply personalised and dynamic experiences. Unlike traditional toys or apps, AI allows us to craft stories that grow with the child. It’s like having a magical storyteller on call, one that knows your child’s interests, favourite characters and routines, keeping them engaged and inspired. But there’s a twist...

We’ve embedded the human touch into the journey. Parents can step in at any point, weaving their own ideas or lessons into the storyline... So it’s a collaboration between technology and the family. By combining AI’s creativity with a parent’s personal touch, ToyPal creates stories that resonate deeply, turning playtime into cherished memories.

What’s next for ToyPal?

Our next big step involves developing the next generation of AI toys – innovative devices that are even more interactive, engaging and accessible for children. We’re also focused on expanding our library of content to ensure there’s something magical and meaningful for every family. For us, it’s about using technology to spread love, make an impact and bring joy to every child’s world.

Creativity and innovation are at the heart of everything we do.

SMART
TOYS AND GAMES

As we gear up for an exciting year filled with the launch of many new items, we wanted to take you behind the scenes to meet the minds behind the magic.

In this special series, we’re sitting down with four of our talented people to share their stories and inspirations that drives them to create products that spark joy, curiosity, and learning. From brainstorming concepts to crafting engaging gameplay, these short interviews showcase the passion and dedication that go into creating every Smart Toys and Games product.

We can’t wait to unveil all the new items we’ve been working on and hope these “behind the scenes” will give you an even greater appreciation for the thought and care that make our games truly special.



Byron Lemoine
PRODUCT DESIGNER

Apple Puzzler from SmartGames

I created the Apple Puzzler in search of a compact 3D puzzle with a twist. Inspired by puzzles like the Soma Cube, it uses only five playing pieces combined with an adaptable gameboard made up of three apple slices. The slices can rotate, and the middle one can flip, creating countless configurations and 80 challenges ranging from easy to very hard.

The goal? Fit all the worms into the apple, stack the slices, and snap it shut. Magnets inside the slices make the apple click together perfectly. The soft silicone leaf feels nice to the touch and provides a subtle hint for the top layer’s orientation.

The layered design, playful mechanics, and smiling worm faces naturally inspired the fun theme of a three-sliced apple hiding five colourful worms. Once this deceptively tricky puzzle is solved, it doubles as a delightful desk toy.



Hide & Seek, the story of The Wolf and the 7 Goats from SmartGames

At SmartGames, we have had a strong collection of fairy tales for young children, such as *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Three Little Pigs*. Recently, we wanted to expand this series with a new preschool fairy tale for SmartGames.

The story and initial concept was quickly found, as my sister Jeanne Ribbens (who works as an illustrator for SmartGames) and I quickly reminisced about our favourite childhood fairy tales. One story that had a significant impact on us was *The Wolf and the Seven Goats* by the Brothers Grimm. This was a tale our father would tell us before bedtime. We were in our bunk beds, and our father would tap on the bed frame as if he were the wolf knocking at the door, trying to get inside. It was such an incredibly thrilling story that my sister and I would huddle closer together under the blanket. I can still feel the tension to this day.

There are many elements in the story that resonate with the world of young children. Playing hide-and-seek and trying not to be found is a favourite game among preschoolers. We wanted to add an extra layer to the SmartGames experience by challenging children to use logic and deduction to solve the game. Not all the little goats have the same shape, so they won't all fit into the same hiding spot. For example, the triangular-shaped goat has more hiding options than the square-shaped goats, encouraging children to use deductive reasoning to solve the puzzle.

In designing the game, we aimed to capture the visual atmosphere of the Brothers Grimm story. We wanted the game board to evoke the feeling of sturdy wooden furniture, but also to translate important objects out of the story into the design, like the clock, while still preserving the charm and cuteness of a preschool SmartGames product.

We hope that by adapting this fairy tale into a SmartGames product, and illustrating it with a delightful story, more children will get to know this fairy tale and create their own beautiful memories. We want them to experience the thrill of hiding and the humorous moments of the 7 goats trying to outsmart the wolf.



Emma Ribbens
PRODUCT DESIGNER



IQ Deluxe series from SmartGames

This year, while designing new IQ games, I stepped out of my comfort zone, but not in the way you might expect. Typically, I keep a concept in my mind for a long time. Only after thoroughly thinking it through (sometimes for months or even years, occasionally overthinking it) and feeling confident in its potential, I start working out the details. However, in this case, the concept was so straightforward, that there was not much to think about. IQ Circle, but also IQ Square, IQ Pentagon and IQ Hexagon are the result.

The idea stemmed from a request by my colleagues to create IQ games that looked less like toys and would appeal more to teens and adults (kidults). While I believe many adults already enjoy our standard IQ games, not everyone is aware they exist. Adults who don't frequent toy shops—because they don't have children, or their children have outgrown toys—are unlikely to encounter SmartGames.

One objective of this new range was to broaden its appeal and make it suitable for sale in other outlets, such as bookstores, gift shops, and museum stores where adults could see them. To distinguish this new subcategory from the existing IQ games, I approached the design process differently. Our standard IQ games always use the same rectangular or square game board format, with variation coming from the puzzles themselves.



Raf Peeters
PRODUCT DESIGNER

For the IQ Deluxe series, however, I flipped this approach: each game has its own uniquely shaped board. But the different games are tied together by a common theme. In this case, the theme was "geometric shapes." From there, the development process unfolded naturally. We developed puzzles based on circles, triangles, squares, etc. Once we had enough choice, we picked the ones we liked best and developed them further. That's why there's no IQ Triangle yet: while we created two versions, the puzzles for the other shapes were simply more compelling. Unlike the standard IQ games, the IQ Deluxe series comes in a more premium box with a larger, more durable challenge booklet.

One of the key goals of the IQ-Deluxe series was to ensure each game had its own unique character. IQ-Circle has solid pieces, while IQ-Square uses hollow ones. And while the pieces in IQ-Pentagon are translucent and sharp like gems, those in IQ-Hexagon are rounded and made of soft thermoplastic rubber. As usual, all games feature 120 challenges. Though IQ-Circle is the easiest to solve, its simple yet iconic design makes it my favourite.





Krumples Pully & Plungy

People often ask me, “How do you know when you’ve stumbled upon a GREAT toy?”. My instant answer has always been, “You just know.”. Coincidentally, I was challenged on that notion last year by my colleague, Raf Peeters. He didn’t accept my standard answer. We got to talking, and for me, it truly comes down to four principles: An exquisite design, it displays simple yet fundamentally foundational play patterns, materials, and finally, (and most importantly), an, “Aha! I get it!” moment.

As an inventor relations executive, I know those four crucial ingredients aren’t typically included in the recipe of one product. However, when Krumples was pitched to me at the end of a long day, my eyes lit up, and I immediately knew this was it. Not only is Krumples a needle-in-a-haystack opportunity to conceive of an evergreen brand from the beginning, but it is also a chance to be on the ground floor of a yet-to-be-developed and intrinsically curious play pattern for all ages.

Historically, Smart Toys and Games has been known as the premier destination for high-quality single-player puzzle games, brainteasers, and building toys. Sensory-based toys for preschoolers was charted territory for Smart Toys and Games. We were fortunate enough to partner with Scott Baumann, CEO and Founder of Procreate Brands on Krumples. Baumann’s never-ending quest of bringing toys to market that offer wonderful surprises was alive and well with the creation of Krumples.



Erik Quam
VP OF NEW PRODUCT AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Together, along with Product Engineer Edwin Cheong, we set out on a sprint to bring these “Ridiculously Clever Playthings” to life in time for the all-important ASTRA Marketplace and Academy trade fair in June 2024. It was important to establish a brand immediately. At ASTRA we released Krumples Pully and Krumples Plungy, along with a smaller, travel-friendly version called Fidgety Krumples.

Retailers worldwide have had a positive reaction to Krumples, and we have since begun work on exciting new concepts within the Krumples brand, which will be released in the second half of 2025. This new category of play from Smart Toys and Games has been given a warm reception, and we are excited to continue to build our new line.

“We have a surprisingly resilient community of creators – and a nation who love games.”



Gaming Down Under

Game designer **Jason ToToTam** puts a spotlight on Australia’s tabletop scene – highlighting three creatives to watch...



As an Aussie game creator, living on the other side of the world of the tabletop and toy industry can be isolating. At times, it can feel like we’re playing the business of fun on hard mode! Even so, we

have a surprisingly resilient community of creators – and a nation who love games.

It’s home to industry titans like Moose Toys, and veteran board game designers like Sushi Go’s Phil Walker Harding, Next Station: London’s Matt Dunsten and Brass: Birmingham’s Martin Wallace. The country is also having a spotlight at the moment with That Sound Game by Nat and Cam making noise around the world.

We have a dedicated group of creators and local events – like Aus Toy Fair, Devcon and PAX Aus, as well as newer events like TableTop Con and Play Con – bringing together the Aussie community with the general public. That said, we don’t necessarily have that worldwide presence without travelling to GAMA, Spiel or an international toy fair. With that in mind, I wanted to shine a light on three independent Aussies creators...

QUOKKA GAMES

The Quokka brothers – Andy and Jono – are Queensland-based creators, who have been

Kickstarting small box card games over the years! They’ve developed a following in Australia with their easy-to-learn card games and twee themes that put smiles to faces. Over the years, they’ve been growing their presence not only at conventions but also on Aussie retail shelves, landing a major distribution deal!

STORY BREWERS

Haley and Vee are Sydney-based, award-winning tabletop role-playing game creators. Over the years, they’ve raised over half a million dollars on their collective Kickstarter projects. They lovingly brew games that are inclusive, safe, diverse – and foster a like-minded community. Story Brewers create some of the industry’s best tabletop role-playing games that don’t necessarily involve dragons or dungeons.

JETT ARCHER

Jett Archer recently launched the second edition of their party trivia game Pathological – formerly known as Wrong Answers Only. It’s a trivia game where you must make convincing arguments for incorrect answers to a wide variety of trivia questions. Since making noise at PAX Aus in 2023, the game has gained a cult following in Australia and is now available internationally.



Discover all our games at www.smarttoysandgames.com or www.smarttoysandgames.co.uk

© Smart nv. All rights reserved.

Challenges & Opportunities



ADAM CARSON,
Director of Product
Innovation, Fat Brain Toys

This year, Fat Brain has a great opportunity to reach new customers through a range of exciting product launches in fresh categories. We hope these new items will help us connect with a broader audience and tap into customers' ever-evolving interests. It's been a fun process to explore different perspectives and showcase the range of our creative abilities. This also opens up opportunities for inventors. By looking further into other categories of play, we can work with inventors to explore many more toy and game concepts.

One of the industry's biggest challenges will likely be balancing kids' growing interest in digital entertainment with hands-on play. As screen time rises, the effort to get kids to engage in physical product only increases. To keep up, toy companies will need to get creative to make physical toys just as engaging as digital experiences.



RICHARD NORTH,
President, Wow! Stuff

The biggest challenge will be tariffs imposed on companies selling Chinese or far east products to the US. The biggest opportunity? Offshoring elsewhere to avoid the possible tariffs and doing it ahead of your competition.



With 2025 in full swing, design and invention figures discuss the exciting opportunities and tricky troubles ahead...

“A propensity for ‘newness’ has encroached on what used to be a more patient – read ‘evergreen’ – toy industry. This makes an inventor’s life much more difficult.”



ADAM HOCHERMAN,
Co-Founder, Wayfarer Games

2025 must become the year of the ‘big swing’. It’s perhaps unsurprising that I write this tired analogy in the midst of the 2024 World Series in the United States. Major League Baseball, like the toy industry, has faced headwinds in recent years – and for many of the same reasons...

Baseball is a deliberate game that rewards the patient. That does not describe the demeanour of today’s young fans, who are looking for quick adrenaline hits and instant gratification. Interest in faster sports has encroached on baseball’s popularity... So too has a propensity for ‘newness’ encroached on what used to be a more patient – read, ‘evergreen’ – toy industry. This makes an inventor’s life much more difficult. So difficult that inventors, brand managers and others are reluctantly taking roles in other industries altogether.

Meanwhile, mass retailers increasingly look to move games in and out, year-by-year, as a matter of corporate strategy. On top of this, some major players are quite publicly ‘doubling down’ on a digital strategy: effectively an admission of defeat at the sword of the screen. As a result, great toy inventors are struggling to find footing... For many, the economics simply aren’t adding up – and therein lies the greatest challenge. Which brings me back to the greatest opportunity...

Many major publishers have eschewed the risks associated with ‘big swings’ due to reasons that are not unjustified from where they stand. But time is running out and perhaps that big swing – while still risky – is suddenly looking like a better strategy given the alternatives. This opens up opportunities for toy inventions – some of which I’ve even had to pass on myself – that may not have been feasible two years ago but are, or simply must be, today. Let’s Freddie Freeman-it!



FI MURRAY,
Innovation Director, Making Things Studio

The toy industry has faced a series of complex challenges over the past five years, creating ripple effects across every layer of the chain. But challenges fuel opportunities... For 2025, our studio is focusing on diversifying how we bring concepts to market, forging new partnerships, flexin’ within the traditional inventor model and doubling down on strong performing categories, like developmental play for little ones. We’re also working on 360-degree IP that spans toy, print and digital realms.

One major industry trend is the growth of the second-hand toy market, especially for items aimed at children over three – and all the way up to adult collectors. Families increasingly see second-hand purchases as a sustainable and a budget-friendly choice...

The reason that platforms like Vinted are thriving is because pre-owned toys still deliver the thrill of novelty for kids, while satisfying parents’ sustainability goals and saving pennies against reduced incomes. These platforms are a testament to changing consumer habits – and a compelling case for manufacturers to adapt. Nearly 60% of toys for my kid this past Christmas were pre-loved from Vinted and Facebook Marketplace.

Imagine, then, if manufacturers could capture revenue from every resale within a product’s lifecycle – not just the original sale. Some companies are already experimenting with this through take-back schemes and various partnerships. By offering trade-in or resale options on their own sites – or collaborating with established second-hand platforms – manufacturers could foster new revenue streams, attract new customer demographics, and reinforce eco-friendly values.

Fashion has similar high volume, low value products. Zara, for example, has pioneered a model where customers can resell purchased clothing back to them. Zara then resells these to new customers at a discounted rate. This approach could create similar opportunities in toys, where manufacturers benefit at every stage – and consumers enjoy an ever-expanding choice of sustainable options. Toys are more complex in regard to QA, so it wouldn’t be as simple... But hey! What’s one more challenge to troubleshoot?!



“Imagine if manufacturers could capture revenue from every resale within a product’s lifecycle – not just the original sale...”

“Viral content can be, and is being, shared by creators with all levels of followings. This means consumers have more power than ever to drive what becomes a top-selling toy or game.”



LISA GUILI,
Vice President & General Manager,
Educational Insights

Social commerce has started to gain serious traction in the US, and we’re expecting its growth to continue to fuel our own businesses in 2025. The exciting part is that while much of today’s social commerce is influenced by entertainment platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, the POS impact is evident across all forms of shopping – including physical retail.

Even more encouraging is that viral content can be, and is being, shared by creators with all levels of followings. This means consumers have more power than ever to drive what becomes a top-selling toy or game. This accessibility is opening opportunities for small and medium-sized brands to broaden their reach quickly and efficiently.

The surge in entertaining content has also contributed to expanding the ever-present kidult trend. For instance, adult couples creating content of themselves playing all types of games has grown significantly in the past year. It has made it permissible – dare I say ‘cool’ – for adults of all ages to engage in quirky, hilarious play as a pastime. At Educational Insights, we refer to this phenomenon as ‘coupletainment’.

The outcome, besides driving consumer awareness through engaging content, is an emergence of ‘age neutrality’ in the toy and game space. Age neutrality allows all ages to embrace toys and games. It’s so prevalent that I even saw a recent post from a specialty toy store owner about a preschool-aged toy that’s been in high demand for kids of all ages – including teenagers.

Virality is fleeting. To fully leverage all the opportunities that social commerce is creating, businesses need to strategically plan how to nimbly navigate viral moments and build them into long-term growth occasions for their products and brands.



DAVID SNOW,
Owner, The
Fantastic
Factory

All I can say with 100% certainty is that there will be some challenges and there will be some opportunities... Good luck everyone! If you made it through 2024 you are winning, big congrats. 2025 is going to be one hell of a ride... War, tariffs, inflation, interest rates, declining birth-rates, empty retail stores, Web3, internet, social media, space travel, container prices. That said, I know we will still make games that could be the opportunity you're looking for in 2025.



DAVID YAKOS,
Co-Founder, Streamline Design & Salient Technologies

One of the biggest opportunities has to do with one of the bigger challenges we face as toy and game developers – and parents... Digital displacement and screen fatigue. Digital innovation offers major opportunities, but it also poses a large challenge to traditional human interaction and the toy and game industry.

Screen-based entertainment keeps vying for kids' attention with dopamine boosts every 10 seconds, making it tougher for physical toys to stay engaging. Screens have become a pacifier, stifling active and imaginative play. Parents, if not oblivious, feel guilty over the excess amount of screen time. This imbalance has put pressure on toy companies to strike a balance between digital integration and encouraging physical imaginative play.

To stay competitive for kids' attention, companies must either incorporate digital and tech features in a way that enhances physical toys to make play more interactive and magical – or embrace a low-tech approach that delivers highly engaging, hands-on experiences through human interaction.

“A recent challenge is aligning the inventor community to work earlier in the year. In truth, we look at more product concepts in the summer and early fall than any other time...”

BEN DERMER,
SVP of Toy Innovation, Spin Master

A recent challenge is aligning the inventor community to work earlier in the year. Current US shipping dates mean we start looking at concepts – and making decisions – earlier than ever, while the inventing world is to some extent still stuck in an older timeline. In truth, we look at more product concepts in the summer and early fall than any other time...

That means we're pretty well into development by the time the winter toy shows come along. We're obviously excited to see great new ideas at any time – and will jump on a great opportunity. When it comes to putting the line together, though, it's a challenge to synchronise development timelines. Summer's now the high time.

It's also worth noting that, because most 'big' companies rarely do totally new brand launches, it's understandably challenging to get inventors to invest heavily in 'new' versus – say – brand-focused development. While many big toy companies tend to focus almost exclusively on existing brands, the world loves new stuff more than ever – and the industry needs it. We need the next Super Soaker, Furby, L.O.L. and Hatchimals... We need the next big thing. It's a hard target, but if you hit it big with 'new', it's the biggest opportunity there is.

Compounding this challenge is the fact that the bar keeps getting higher when it comes to delivering 'wow'. Kids and parents have seen mechanisms, motors, lights and sound, colour change, glow-in-the-dark and a hundred 'reveals'. The industry needs new materials, chemistries, technologies, stories. And ways to deliver magic... But new materials are often hard to work with, unproven or difficult to manufacture. These days, the truth is that there are fewer disruptive advancements in physics and material sciences than in past decades.



FELIPE NORIEGA,
VP & Regional Director EMEA,
YuMe Toys

The biggest opportunity remains the kidult space. The market has embraced it and conversations with buyers are much easier. There's a lot less education to be done. The biggest challenge is the fact it's such a saturated market. It's very hard to cut through. There's so much product, so many licenses, loads of content.. It's tough to stand out.

“Expect to see more official collaborations with YouTubers you've never heard of!”



MATT FANTASTIC,
Creative Director,
Forever Stoked Creative

The biggest opportunity I'm seeing is in non-traditional media tie-ins and collaborations. Traditional IP use has been a core part of the industry basically forever, and that's not going away... But with the continued rise of platforms like TikTok – and the massive reach of non-traditional content creators – we're going to see more projects that look to connect with audiences through partnerships with these creators. The old ways will still be there – but expect to see more official collaborations with YouTubers you've never heard of!

With games specifically, I also see a real hunger for new ideas and different takes on what a game can be. The massive influx of new adult gamers that occurred during and post quarantine are reaching a point in their fandom where they've worked their way through the classics and are looking for something different. We'll see a lot more niche and higher concept hobby games hitting mass-market success.

The flip side of that hunger for novelty is that consumers are also hitting a point in their fandom where they're starting to have full shelves, with unplayed games stacking up. This makes it harder than ever to get them to buy whatever new thing you're putting out. At this point, the canon of modern classics is massive and offers a lifetime of amazing game experiences already... Getting attention and traction is harder than ever and will only get worse.

“We're going to see an increased desire from consumers for familiarity – a shift towards comfort buying.”



JOSH WEST,
Head of Product Design & Inventor
Relations, Ravensburger North America

The biggest opportunities will be in products that deliver a fun, simple, accessible experience. Products that consumers see and instantly understand that they can bring home – without breaking the budget – open and get straight to having fun with family and friends.

It's a wonderful thing to innovate, but innovation brings challenges... If you've created something new, it comes with a proportional amount of teaching... How does someone use this new concept, and why would someone want to? There's always opportunity there, but I think that we're going to see an increased desire from consumers for familiarity – a shift towards 'comfort buying'. Companies and inventors that can bring products that a purchaser will recognise – meaning both to understand and to have some measure of previous experience with – and that are budget-friendly will be very successful in 2025.

I think the year ahead will bring some uncertainty. The biggest challenge will be to create these same familiar, fun products, keep them at a low price point – and make them stand out. Those three elements are

each difficult by themselves, but success in the coming market will rely on all three. Producing abroad will have some new difficulties, and that will really test our ability to control price points. Our industry's ability to be creative and come up with fun ideas and how to promote them will be tried as well.

The good news is that I really believe people are going to want to be together more – to periodically disconnect from distraction and connect with each other. Anything that we can do as playmakers to meet people where they are and facilitate those connections will be good for everyone.





DOUGAL GRIMES,
Founder, EightyTwo

In the evolving games market, there has been a notable shift toward card-based games and lower price-point offerings, alongside a significant increase in direct-to-consumer and e-commerce purchases. This shift has lowered the barriers to entry, fostering an exciting landscape for creativity and diversity among new creators and game concepts. However, this environment has also intensified competition for companies and inventors alike.

With easier access to information on current trends, licenses and themes, many innovators are exploring similar territories, leading to a crowded market space. In this landscape, social media and influencer marketing have become the dominant channels for driving consumer engagement. For companies and inventors to stand out, they must focus on creating unique, 'ownable' elements within their games – or innovating creatively with brand licenses.

A distinctive visual or interactive hook remains a powerful tool across all consumer products, particularly in the attention-driven world of social media. To capture interest and generate buzz, inventors and companies must integrate inventive, cost-effective features into their games – even for simple card games – that make an impact and have the potential to transform a game into an iconic, must-have experience.

I would be remiss not to mention the transformative impact of AI on both the development and marketing processes, which may require a more extensive article! A wide array of applications now specialise in generating copy, images and video content. This provides creators – who may not have previously had access to these skills – the tools to bring their ideas to life.

This shift has effectively 'raised the floor', creating a more inclusive landscape where accessibility and diversity of thought are amplified in the innovation process. The democratisation of these creative tools is paving the way for fresh voices and ideas, further enriching the development of new products and marketing strategies.

“A distinctive visual hook remains a powerful tool across all consumer products, particularly in the attention-driven world of social media.”

“There’s an opportunity for surprising mash-ups in the game aisle. With this comes the potential for reaching new or niche audiences that may currently be overlooked.”



SARA FARBER,
Co-Founder, Galactic Sneeze

A few weeks ago, I found myself staring at the seemingly never-ending wall of games at Target. Many appeared to have similar mechanics, themes or names, which made me wonder how

someone popping in quickly to grab a game would know which to choose. From my perspective, the market seems to be more saturated than ever before. The good news is that games – and party games in particular – are clearly a well-performing category to warrant so much real estate in a big-box store. But the huge selection seemed overwhelming to me from a consumer standpoint – and daunting from an inventor standpoint. Given this sea of products, I think the biggest challenge in 2025 will be to create games that truly stand out on shelf or in amazon searches.

This challenge is potentially also a great opportunity for inventors. As a shopper, if your eyes land on a product that taps into a current trend, theme or IP you're passionate about, you're one step closer to stopping and taking a closer look. And as game designers, we'll need to figure out what those new trends, themes or IPs are – and harness them in a fresh way.

One interesting approach may be to lean into unexpected collaborations. Who would have predicted that in 2024, Michael Cera x CeraVe, or Snoop Dogg x The Olympics would be such huge sensations?! Like PUMA x Cheetos, I think there's an opportunity for surprising mash-ups in the game aisle. And along with this, comes the potential for reaching new or niche audiences that may currently be overlooked. See you on the shelves!



DANNY KISHON,
MD, All in 1 Products

The biggest challenge for companies this year will be the economy. 2024 has been a very tough year at retail all around the world. If you extract LEGO's growth from any of the published numbers in virtually any country, you'll see significant double-digit declines. Add the fact that 'close out' is included in the numbers and it's really not a very pretty picture.

Also, Temu, amazon marketplace and other unregulated Chinese online shops selling direct to the consumer at very low prices is a growing issue and likely to get worse in a difficult economy. Freight – both in terms of massively increased cost and delivery times – created problems in 2024 and will likely do so again this year. These affect both prices and managing inventory as forecasting needs to move so much further forward... And Trump's tariffs are likely to affect US companies and those selling into the USA.

This also impacts inventors... When a market is not doing well, there is often less of an appetite for investment in innovation. Companies become more risk averse, making it harder to place products. Overcoming this might involve investing in taking the project further down the road in terms of development – which is an additional risk as well as a challenge, and a challenge to cashflow. In essence, the challenge for inventors is to figure out where and what to invest time and effort into, in a marketplace where placing product is harder and tougher.

When it comes to opportunities for companies, the good news is that in a difficult retail marketplace, there is a real chance to change your market share. Having a hit when things are generally slow can get you leapt on by retail and see your numbers soar. Other opportunities lie in growing sales via direct-to-consumer sales and marketing-led online retailers like the US version of TikTok Shop, where influencers earn a commission on sales they promote.

For inventors, think kidult. It's where the market is expanding and so far, has been led by nostalgia rather than innovation. And look at the categories that had bad results in 2024... Those companies – rather than the ones already doing well – may be the ones looking for inspiration and innovation. Team up with an influencer and add a marketing angle to your innovation. Team up with a 'Product Doctor' and get focus and help with what to spend time and effort on – and how.

“For inventors, think kidult. It’s where the market is expanding and so far, has been led by nostalgia rather than innovation.”



JOOST POULUS,
Chief Product Officer, Moose Toys

Every year, the biggest opportunity for us is to continue to raise the bar of what's possible in toys! At Moose, we have an insatiable appetite for innovation and uncovering untapped areas of play. This means that we're looking to our internal R&D teams and external inventors to create something new and unexpected that will wow our customers, retailers and partners around the world.

The biggest challenge facing the industry in 2025 is most likely something that none of us are aware of yet. Over the past five years, apart from the standard challenges a toy company faces, there has been many unexpected obstacles we've had to face. Obviously Covid was something that challenged us all as the world seemingly changed overnight – however it finessed our ability to pivot quickly so we're well prepared for what may be around the corner next. From a play point of view, our greatest opportunity – continuing to innovate – is also our biggest challenge, as we find new and exciting ways to captivate and delight the attention of our customers.



Come Fry with Me

Triclops Studio's **Rob Ames** and **Luc Hudson** discuss the origins of gross-out collectibles line **Terror Fried** with **Mark Hunt** of Character Options... And reveal what's next!

Guys, let's go back to the beginning... Where did the idea for Terror Fried come from?

Rob Ames, Co-Founder, Triclops Studio: We still get the local newspaper around here, and there was an article in there a while back about a chicken shop that closed down because someone found a rat's head in their chicken nuggets. It stuck with me... Later, we were talking about product names – always important when you're trying to come up with a new brand... We're always coming up with puns. I came out with 'Terror Fried' and instantly remembered the article. It just made sense to explore a toy that provided gross discoveries through fake fast food...

The range spans rotten dissolving burgers, gooey dipping sauces, mouldy milkshakes – all housing these freaky collectible characters. Once you had the fast-food idea, did this kind of application come quite intuitively?

Luc Hudson, Co-Founder, Triclops Studio: Once we started on that train of thought, we

knew there was a lot of potential in this theme. Our starting point was a process that involved 'deep frying' the item. That's how we initially revealed the character inside. Character did an incredible job of expanding out from there. They have a lot of heritage in compound play with things like Stretch Armstrong and Goo Jit Zu. It became bigger and better.

Rob: We initially thought about how to 're-batter' the character after frying them so you could replay the experience. We couldn't quite get that to work, but Character came in and said: "Well, we can't use the dip to re-coat the collectible – but what else could we use the dip for?" That's how the whole compound play experience of Terror Fried took shape – very quickly, and organically.

One door closed but plenty more opened! And Mark, from Character's perspective, what got the team excited about this idea?

Mark Hunt, Marketing Director, Character Options: At Character, if a concept really

“We're big fans of gross-out horror from the Eighties and Nineties. It's been a very strong influence on how we design characters.”

resonates with us, we get passionate about it. When I first saw this way back in its infancy, I thought it was very cool. And if you look in the boys' aisle, compound play and those layers of discovery are key – but what's cooler than fast food?! It's very relatable and the whole concept was a perfect match-up of some very strong elements.

Can you guys also speak to the character design here? They're beautifully repulsive!

Luc: Ha! Well, we're big fans of that kind of gross-out horror from the Eighties and Nineties. That's the fodder we grew up on and it's been a very strong influence on how we design characters. The starting point for these characters came from that idea that something had been deep fried that shouldn't have been, like flies and mice... Building the wider cast of characters was another great collaboration with Character team. They were fantastic fleshing out the line.

And Mark... This first wave of Terror Fried has really resonated with buyers – and consumers! Why do you think that is?

Mark: It's this powerful trifecta of elements. First, collectable figurines. We know boys like to collect figures: it's a no brainer. Second: compound play. We know slime is huge; it's a sector mainstay – and we've got a great combination of compounds here. Third is how it's wrapped up in this fast-food theme. Those three things together lead to something familiar but innovative. This take on compound-led gross out food play hasn't been done together. And it hasn't been wrapped up, packaged and advertised with the fast-foot twist.

Rob: I remember when the Character team showed us the crackle slime. We'd never seen anything like that before! That kind of crushable material filled with slime. So seeing the corn on the cob and fries utilising that, where you crack it open and all this slime oozes out... That really elevated it.

Mark: Crackle clay was trending on TikTok at the time; we were looking at how we could embrace that in a way that made it cool, collectable and relevant for the boys' aisle. A side dish of fries or corn on the cob worked perfectly!

Absolutely. Looking ahead, what does the future hold for Terror Fried?

Mark: In Autumn/Winter, we're going to launch an exciting new theme called Wok Warriors – inspired by Asian fast food. Where wave one has fries, burgers and nuggets, Wok Warriors introduces spring rolls, sushi, and noodle pots. You pour water in to fizz and unearth your gross surprises... There's fortune cookies, sticky rice and other things to crack and squish.

We're also bolstering the play value. With Wok Warriors, the figurines have gone to another level, with both good and evil warriors. You can remove the lids from each of the four offerings and combine them to build this ancient Chinese Pagoda playset. So we're adding this collect-and-build element to the brand! It makes for an incredible central display piece. It adds on wave one, while retaining the core elements that have made Terror Fried successful.

Rob: It's very exciting. We like to invent brands rather than one-off solo items, and when we originally pitched the idea, we tried to show where the brand could go. Could it be noodle pots and sushi? What gross reveals could you do with pizzas and pastas? Character has done a great job running with that.

Yeah, you can't help but see the gross potential when looking at food through this lens! Think about the opportunities around crème brûlée!

Luc: Absolutely. Broadly speaking, food is a popular theme in toys, especially in the girls' aisle. Cupcake collectibles and scented items. But it's been fun to turn that on its head and look at things from a gross-out perspective.

Mark: It's got so much potential. We just have to keep the momentum going and great things can happen.





Tangerine Dream

As Blue Orange celebrates its 25th anniversary, President **Thierry Denoul** discusses the company's humble beginnings – and bright future.

This year sees Blue Orange celebrate its 25th anniversary, Thierry. What led you to launch the company?

It came a little out of the blue! I was living in San Francisco and had another company that was nothing to do with games... We were importing French door hardware to the US – I was designing doorknobs.

A natural path to game design!

Ha! Well, in 1999 I went to a US toy store to buy something for my young son. All I saw was the same stuff that I played with when I was a boy... Candyland, Risk, Monopoly. It seemed there hadn't been a lot of progress in game design. So I didn't pick anything up for my kid! I started thinking what the simplest game is, and how I could improve it. The game that came to mind was tic-tac-toe – but it has a major flaw... There's a big chance nobody wins. I asked myself how I could make it more fun and ensure there's always a winner.

A sound starting point...

Right! And while I was thinking about this, one of the first Starbucks opened near where I was living in California. Back then, they wanted to look European; they had little tables with checkerboard print on them. I was thinking about the game and drinking a coffee as I looked at their different-sized cups...

Big, medium and small? Like now?

Big, medium and small, yes... Then I looked at the pattern on the table and it hit me! I could do tic-tac-toe but with different-sized cups that could go on top of each other! I went to the barista, he gave me some empty cups. I drew some crosses and noughts on top of them and started to play the game that became Gobblet.

Amazing. And for the first few years, you were designing all of Blue Orange's games?

Yes, after Gobblet I designed a few more that we released – and they were pretty bad. But I learned more about game design from these failures than I did from Gobblet. I soon got on a roll, and designed all our games from 2000 to 2009... I must've designed and published around 50. But these days I spend most of my time scouting for new ideas.

We see close to 2,000 games ideas a year from inventors.



“One of our new launches is Magicaboo – a really cool game for kids based around the magical gimmick of making something disappear...”



Wow. What was the first game you took from an external inventor or company?

I remember, I went to a fair in France and I saw this new game that was just released by a small French company... I really liked the game and took the rights for the US, before Asmodee took the rights for the rest of the world. The game was Dobble. It was the first external game that Blue Orange took on. We transformed it into Spot It, as it's now known in the US. We had a great run with Spot It in the US before we sold it to Asmodee.

And what defines a Blue Orange game?

Broadly speaking, it's something you can explain very quickly – people should be able to understand it quickly. Fun and simple. Look at Taco Cat Goat Cheese Pizza – since we took that on, we've sold more than 1.5 million units a year. But we have a very good spectrum of games, from titles for very young gamers like Pengoloo, right up to games to like Kingdomino, Photosynthesis and New York 1901.

What is the key to cultivating successful relationships with the inventor community?

We try to be as transparent as possible during a game's development. Also, we try to include them in the process – or at least keep them informed as to what's going on. And it's funny, most established game designers don't really care about being involved to a great degree.

They leave you to it?

Yes, they trust us; they don't ask so many questions and are happy with the final product. The newer generation of inventors want to be more involved and have more information, and

we're happy to oblige. Actually, for the past 10 years, when a game is signed, we assign it to a project manager. One of the project manager's job is to keep the inventor informed throughout the different stages of development.

But we love seeing new inventors, too... Over the past 20 years, some of the world's best game ideas were an inventor's first game. Classics can come out of nowhere, so we're very open to all inventors.

Great answer, thank you. To wrap up, which 2025 launches excite you most?

All of the new launches are fantastic! There's Magicaboo – a really cool game for kids. It's very simple gameplay around the magical gimmick of making something disappear... And you have to remember what's disappeared! And then we have Linkx, which is a little like Tetris meets Connect 4. You want to link up your shapes from one side of the grid to the other, without getting blocked off by your opponent.

Another is a party game called Blindjack. It's like blackjack in that you want to get to 21 without going over. You do that by answering questions. Each card has a question on one side and an answer on the other. Each answer is a number from zero to 10. So you might think one answer is nine and ask for another card. If you think the next answer is 10, you might choose to stop because you think you're at 19 – but you don't know the answers, so there's a risk you'll go over or play it too safe. The player who stops closest to 21 wins!



INSPIRING PLAY: How MAGNA-TILES® Team Dream Up New Worlds

Creating toys that captivate young minds, spark creativity, and encourage hands-on learning is no small feat—but the team at MAGNA-TILES® make it look effortless. Today, we're excited to spotlight two of our talented innovators, Mechanical Engineer Henry Hillstrom and Industrial Designer Maryam Syed, whose work brings the magic of magnetic play to life. In this interview, they share what inspired their journeys into toy development and the creative sparks that fuel their daily work. From cherished childhood memories to groundbreaking ideas, discover the minds behind your favorite MAGNA-TILES® sets.



Henry Hillstrom



• What got you started in engineering?

I've always been passionate about developing high-quality products that make a positive impact. After an internship in toy design, I realized how powerful play can be in educating and inspiring kids. After gaining experience in other industries, I was drawn back to the toy world and found my home at MAGNA-TILES®. Now, I'm excited to promote meaningful, creative play through safe, innovative products.

• How do you start your engineering process?

Safety always comes first. I ensure every design is reliable and secure for all the children who use our products. From there, I focus on understanding how kids will play and solve problems, which often requires creative thinking. When I hit a roadblock, I remind myself of the advice to pause, take a walk, and return with a fresh perspective—it works every time!

• What are the concepts that you are most drawn to?

I'm drawn to designs that appear magical but rely on simple, reliable mechanisms under the surface. Magnetic construction toys capture this perfectly: a series of magnets housed in durable plastic, creating that satisfying "click" when tiles align just right. It's the combination of precision and simplicity that inspires endless creativity and problem-solving, making these designs as fascinating to create as they are to play with.

• What's next?

As the magnetic construction category grows more competitive, innovation is key. We're exploring new technologies and creative concepts to push boundaries while ensuring every new piece integrates seamlessly with our existing system. The future of MAGNA-TILES® is bright, and I'm thrilled to be part of it!

Maryam Syed



• What got you started in toy design?

I've been fascinated by toy design for as long as I can remember! As a kid, I loved inventing games, tinkering with toys, and sometimes stirring up a little trouble with my siblings. My passion for creating fun experiences grew into a love for STEAM learning, and I've always wanted to inspire others with toys that spark the same curiosity and creativity that shaped my journey.

• How do you start your design process?

It all begins with research and collaboration. I dive into cross-functional discussions to ensure every new concept is innovative and fits seamlessly within the MAGNA-TILES® system. Compatibility is my top priority—every piece needs to work together effortlessly to deliver the limitless play experience our fans know and love.

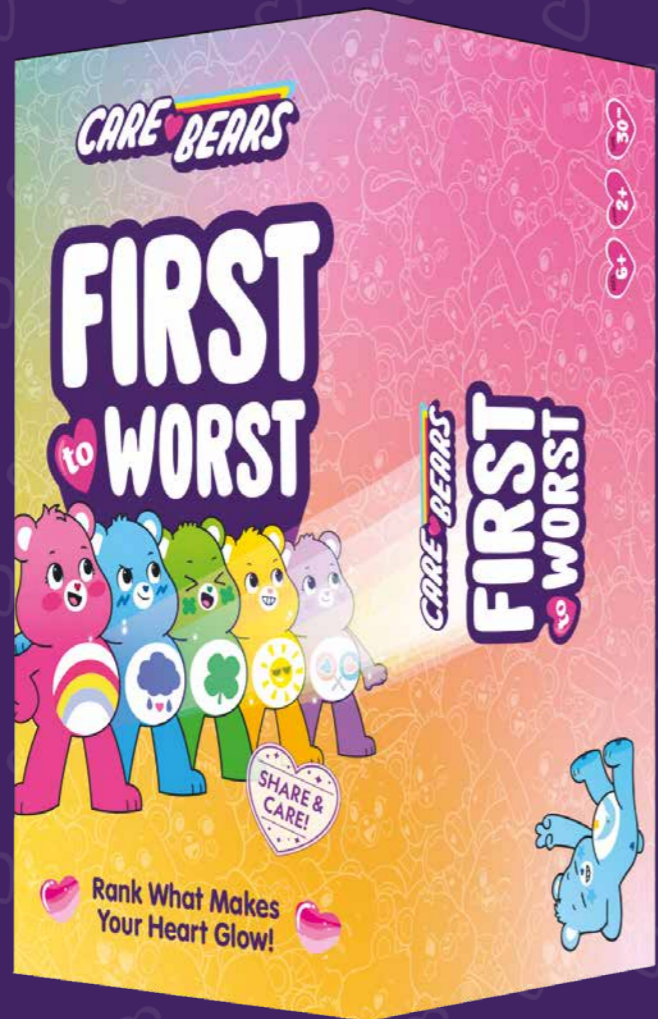
• What are the concepts that you are most drawn to?

I love tackling ideas that challenge compatibility and consistency within the MAGNA-TILES® system. These hurdles often spark the most creative solutions, resulting in unique add-ons that elevate the fun. I can't wait to share some of the exciting interactive features we're launching soon!

• What's next?

We've got some amazing new pieces coming in 2025 that will add even more creativity and interactivity to the MAGNA-TILES® world. Stay tuned—it's going to be a blast!





Brand Designs

Jason Exum, VP of Brands and Partnerships at Dyce Games, on exciting new collaborations with Care Bears, Miraculous and Wiz Khalifa.



This year sees Dyce bolster its line-up with new licensed games... And it's an eclectic mix of brands. What makes an IP attractive to Dyce?

Ha! I think you nailed it when you call our portfolio of brands "eclectic". It runs the gamut from the HISTORY Channel to Care Bears and Miraculous, plus an upcoming collaboration with Wiz Khalifa...

Ultimately, an IP is attractive to us for two main reasons. It has evergreen appeal and 'cool factor'. It also inspires us to design a game that's a great match for the brand. In some cases, that's a crossover with one of our existing titles; in others it's a bespoke new game designed to showcase specific thematic elements of a brand.

Let's dig into the new slate, starting with the Care Bears edition of First to Worst...

What made this brand such a neat fit for First to Worst?

Care Bears exudes so much positivity and presents so many different attitudes and feelings... The very fact that there's a Grumpy Bear – my favourite, by the way – really lines up with what First to Worst is all about. Besides these thematic links, the rainbow-coloured wonderland of Care Bears is also a natural aesthetic match with our First to Worst base game. A Care Bears edition just seemed so obvious – and luckily the fine folks at CloudCo agreed!

How does the gameplay differ from the original?

The basic gameplay is the same, but every card features vibrant Care Bears artwork. Their asset library is vast, allowing us to include a unique image on every card. This also allowed us to move the game's age from eight plus down to six plus, since reading comprehension is no longer really required.

“A Care Bears edition of First to Worst just seemed so obvious – and luckily the fine folks at CloudCo agreed!”



You also have a game on the way based on Miraculous. What makes this show ripe for the tabletop treatment?

Miraculous is a franchise with a ridiculously deep lore and a dedicated fan base that extends far beyond the core demographic. The Miraculous mythology is rich with colourful characters, action-packed situations, intrigue, romance and adventure. We wanted to capture the excitement, heroics and character interactions that fans of Miraculous have come to expect.

The game we're developing is a fast-playing family racing game featuring the most popular characters from the show. Players race to get to the top of the iconic Eiffel Tower – it's as much a character in the show as any of the humans! There's a bit of hand management, a bit of 'take that' and a whole lot of fun!

Your HISTORY range has enjoyed success with regional editions. Is this a good example of how Dyce engages with big name brands that aren't necessarily obvious for the gaming space?

Absolutely! Everyone seems to love and engage with the HISTORY brand in their own way – but it universally generates good feelings. We launched an Australian Edition in Fall 2024 and there's a new UK Edition coming this year. The game's been such a success that we added two new games to our HISTORY range – HISTORY Through the Years and HISTORY Facts & Stats. Both games share a core gameplay mechanic but feature completely different content – and they can be played either cooperatively or competitively.

What's the key to successful creative collaborations with brands?

The key to immerse yourself in the brand's

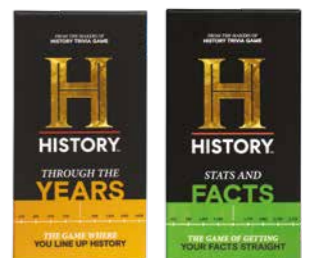
mythology so that your product can truly encapsulate the essence of the property. What is it about the brand that the fans love? If you can capture that, you are on the right path. Games that respect the brand's core fans and feel authentic... That's what we're after. It's what we believe leads to successful, long-lasting creative collaborations.

Sometimes it's highlighting the colours and positivity of a brand like Care Bears, sometimes it's giving players an opportunity to feel like they're part of the brand's world like Miraculous... Other times, it's just capturing the right 'vibe' as we have with the HISTORY brand.

Away from licensed titles, can you talk us through some other launches?

There's lots of things to be excited about in terms of Dyce originals! The fifth entry in our flagship 'Bad' series of adult party games, Bad Judgement, is in the pipeline. It's my favourite in the series... It features a really neat 'pyramid' card layout and some of the funniest content we've ever written.

We also have two new drinking games in the works. One is dead-simple, the other has a clever bidding and bluffing mechanic that we've never seen in a drinking game before. There's also a dedicated couples version of First to Worst coming out in Spring 2025. That features a twist on our family base game and a ton of engaging couples-centric content. It also boasts a more grown-up visual style that sets it apart from the original, while also making it clear that it's part of the same series. We've got a lot of exciting stuff in the works for 2025 and beyond!



Control Freak

TOMY's **James Wing** and **Matt Jordan** on why Human Controller brings something new to the game aisle.

Guys, it's great to catch up! Let's talk about Human Controller – how would you pitch the game?

Matt Jordan, Senior Product Designer, TOMY: It's a game in which you literally get to control another human being to do silly stuff! One player wears this vibrating headset and visor... Another player controls them through an app. It comes with 30 games, as well as a 'free play' mode where you can play Human Controller however you want to.

James Wing, Director of Development & Project Management, TOMY: It's about doing incredibly simple and silly tasks – but in a difficult way! Of course you think you can do these simple challenges... Until you're blindfolded and being controlled by someone else via an app and a vibrating headset!

Can you describe one of these simple tasks?

James: You might just have to walk across the room and sit down on a chair. You can't see, but the vibrations on your head are telling you how and when to move. Everybody's looking and laughing because you're being controlled by your friend or whoever! So there's always a bit of apprehension around how effectively they're controlling you. It makes for an interesting dynamic between controller and the controlled.

Let's dig into how this works. The headset has pads at the front, to left and to the right. And there's an option to make them all vibrate at once. So depending on the game, feeling a vibration on the left of your head might mean turn left, at the front might mean walk forward...

James: Yes – and those controls differ game-to-game. If you're sitting still, the left and right vibrations might mean lift your left arm or right arm. In a game that doesn't use your arms, it might mean use your left leg or your right leg. It's a clear, clean interface and has lets us create a variety of different games.

Human Controller is a higher-priced game, but we believe in the positioning of that as it delivers an amazing new experience no other game can offer. It comes with a lot of games and it's got a lot of tech in it. It can't just be a one-hit wonder – it's not a £9.99 card game. We want people to love the experience and come back to it again and again.

It's a skill game, a party game and an entire games system all at once. What are some of the

opportunities – and challenges – around launching something totally unique?

James: There are two sides to it. The innovation is one thing and TOMY is incredible at identifying innovation and stimulating it internally. This really is a unique product and exactly the sort of thing TOMY wants to be part of.

Then there's how we talk about Human Controller and try to lead people through that by discussing previous experiences. "Hey, if you like this, you'll like this." That's where the comparisons with VR headsets and the familiarity of the games that Matt's created are useful. But we also have to stress that Human Controller is unlike anything you've played before. What could be a marketing challenge is actually something that can fuel intrigue.

And I imagine there are plenty of other games you can create for this?

Matt: Absolutely. We had a bank of around 50 or 60 games that we whittled down for launch. There's a breadth of things we could do with this after launch. It's app-driven now, but could do a controller-driven version for a younger



“This really is a unique product – and exactly the sort of thing TOMY wants to be part of.”

audience? Could we connect several devices to a single controller, so one player controllers several people? Could we make it a team game? This version has three motors and four controls... What happens if we add to that in the future? The only limitations we have right now relate to the price point, but I feel it can be anything we want it to be.

James: The beauty of the app means we can enhance it live when it's in the market. If people come up with an incredible game for Human Controller – great, we can share those instructions with the community. Equally, as we launch this across several markets, we can react if one type of game takes off in a specific region.

Matt: We hope to cultivate a community around the Human Controller game system. It's a very social game in the sense that I can see people recording videos of players in action! If we have an environment where people can share videos of – or instructions for – games they've made up, we can post them and feed it back into the app. It's a nice ebb and flow of community engagement – that's the dream scenario.

Is Human Controller indicative of what you'd like to see from inventors moving forward?

James: It represents what we mean when we say: "We're looking for something really different". It could be different in the card space, or an innovative dice game... But yes, this kind of uniqueness is something we look for.

Does this kind of project also energise and fuel creativity in-house?

Matt: Hugely. This has got everybody fired up, and that excitement and passion ripples through the office – from our design team to marketing and sales.

James: Human Controller is incredibly innovative, and it's the kind of inventor item that spurs us on to want to innovate more. And that's across all our categories, be it toys, games, arts and crafts, outdoor, bath toys... It's exciting.



Human Controller came to TOMY via Nextoy – Alex Fuhrer tells us how...

Nextoy works closely with Rubik's, and I often find myself searching for innovative concepts for the high-end cube collector market. During one of these explorations, I stumbled across an interesting mechanism... While the initial Rubik's-related idea proved too complex, it sparked a conversation with the inventor. This connection eventually led to him disclosing the Human Controller to us.

We review a lot of inventions, and this one clearly offered a fresh perspective on play. There was something inherently funny and engaging about it, but it needed refinement and a clearer sense of direction. Through a lot of brainstorming and collaboration, we identified what was missing and worked to evolve the concept.

TOMY proved to be an ideal partner because of the early enthusiasm we received from their team. What sets them apart is their ability to handle ambitious, tech-forward projects. Their expertise – from product design to development of the app – took Human Controller to an entirely new level.





Game Plan

Rob Trounce, Marketing Manager at Hachette Boardgames UK, reveals what he feels will be one of the biggest tabletop hits of 2025.

How, Rob, have the past 12 months been for Hachette Board Games?

Honestly, it's hard to describe how huge a year it's been without sounding grandiose, but here goes... Pivotal! We've seen success after success. We've signed several new publishers: from Japan's small-box darlings Oink Games, to one of the biggest new publishers in the Netherlands – MNKY Entertainment. They've produced stunning licensed titles such as Gigantosaurus, and Wednesday: Creatures and Outcasts. Meanwhile, we've lined up new publishers for distribution – we'll have huge new titles at London Toy Fair.

for Hachette. First, family games... Titles for families with children as young as three, where everyone can play. Stomp The Plank is quintessential here. Easy to learn, yet raucous fun to play...

Next, we have 'anytime games': 30-to-60-minute experiences that almost anyone can enjoy. Castle Combo captures much of this – a deft game with simple rules and rich, brain-burning tactical gameplay. Then social games. Quick, easy to play in large groups and packed with laughs and banter. Traditionally, they'd be described as party games – but you can play them anywhere: a party, the pub, a café, game night! CDSK captures this. It's a team-based trivia game with the twist of betting on how much you think you know.

Sounds great! So family games, anytime games, social games... What's left? Strategy games – rich, complex and textured titles, full of ever-evolving strategies and challenges. Shackleton

Were there any titles that proved to be a good 'anchor' for Hachette? One that helped establish the company and what you stand for?

Our games naturally fit into five pillars, each serving as an anchor for our identity while driving future growth. We have a hero game for each category – they serve as fantastic anchors



“We view ourselves less as distributors and more as curators for the UK market.”

Base has become just such a hit, rewarding players who invest in learning its intricacies. And finally, puzzle games. These are easy to learn, but with an ever-escalating skill curve.

And is Katamino Tower a good example of that?

Yes! In that, Katamino Tower stands majestic on the table, tempting you with 'one more challenge' gameplay like a glorious, tactile sudoku! With these five categories and audience profiles, we evaluate every game on how it might fit into these spaces and help us achieve our broader mission of getting more of the UK gaming.

With that in mind, what makes a title attractive to Hachette?

We view ourselves less as distributors and more as curators for the UK market. How we come to choose our games is simple: it's about our values. We can be looking at a complex heavyweight euro game or a laugh-out-loud dexterity game and the decision point is always the same... Will this entice gamers and show them just what board games can do? We take a gamer-first approach and assess each game based on quality and how it fits into the UK market. We're all gamers, so we love that part of the job too!

You've bolstered your offering with No Loading Games and Spielwiese. Let's talk about the latter first. It's the studio behind the MicroMacro series...

Yes – and MicroMacro perfectly tapped into the rapidly growing 'kidult' space. We'll be repackaging the MicroMacro line in a new series of boxes that'll become the definitive way to play and collect the games.

We also have a number of new Edition Spielwiese games on the way. The Same Game is the first of these, coming from Wolfgang Warsch – it's a spiritual sequel to his party game phenomenon, Wavelength. We also have the new MicroMacro Jigsaw, bringing MicroMacro to a new format. And swing by our stand at Toy Fair to be the first to see the brand new MicroMacro Kids – a new chapter for the series.

Perfect. And No Loading Games... That might be a new name to many of our readers. On what does this studio focus?

No Loading Games is one of our newest partners. London Toy Fair attendees can get the first taste of games we have on the way from them. Their focus is licensed products – predominantly licenses from video games. While their first title with us will be a card game in the Asterix universe, their subsequent titles include Gwent... This is a 1v1 card game that exists within The Witcher 3 video game. With full backing from CD Projekt Red, the studio behind the video game, Gwent is going to be one of the biggest tabletop hits of 2025.

Thanks Rob. I always love a prediction! Last question... What's the most unique title in Hachette's portfolio?

That's a tough one! If I were to pick one, I'd suggest Kronologic: Paris 1920. This is a compact and compelling murder mystery set in an Art Deco era Paris Opera House. Jon Purkis of the hit YouTube channel Actualol called it "the perfect modern alternative to Cluedo" and we agree... It's snappy and fast, contains plenty of deductive challenges – and is gorgeously illustrated.

HACHETTE HIGHLIGHTS



Quoridor PAC-MAN: Arcade gaming's biggest franchise hits tabletops by way of the abstract megahit, Quoridor.



Oink Games: Small boxes that pack a big punch. Oink hails from Japan, with hits like SCOUT, Deep Sea Adventure and the incredible DroPolter.



Gwent: Considered the greatest 'game within a game' of all time, Gwent was a phenomenon as a card game within The Witcher 3... Now it's a physical game!



Spy Guy: Trefl provides a masterclass in kids' gaming with this cooperative observation game.



Backstories: The latest innovation in escape room/puzzle games. A narrative adventure using a unique 'cut out' card system for choosing actions and cracking puzzles.

“We have four expansions for Gecko Run coming later this year. The possibilities to add to this fantastic brand seem to be limitless!”



STEM-sational

Steve O'Connor, MD of Thames & Kosmos UK – talks new launches, brand collabs – and the future of Gecko Run



Talk us through your approach to designing STEM products.

We envision a world in which everyone loves to learn, and we want to provide the toys and tools that enable and encourage that love of learning.

Quality is an important consideration when we're designing – but most of all, we want our products to be fun to engage with, providing that stealth learning for which STEM has become known.

Your new Telescope looks like an impressive piece of kit. How do you balance crafting an item that does what it needs to do, while also being 'entry level' in terms of usage and price?

We need to ensure our products really teach something in a deliberate way. With a telescope, that means creating the sandbox for a child's open-ended learning experience. We felt it must reach certain technological requirements to engage and hold interest. For example, the 100x magnification, lets you view the surface of the moon! However, we always keep the audience in mind. We don't dive too far into the technology available, as this may overwhelm or alienate.

Children don't need the James Hubble telescope to start stargazing!

How important is it that these products have an aesthetic appeal too?

Our essential STEM range does have a deliberately sleek look. We're aiming for a space-inspired style and believe that this approach really

helps draw the attention of the ever-growing kidult audience.

Elsewhere, the Gecko Run Deluxe Set looks like a thing of beauty!

The Deluxe starter set has everything you need to zip, zag, bounce and skip into an awesome engineering experience. It has the tracks, bridges, levers and marbles that you'd find in our starter kit to make countless amazing marble runs. The Deluxe Set gets even better by including extra components and two of our favourite expansions.

I'm all ears!

The Loop expansion is an amazing stunt to add to any run. It really encourages experimentation with velocity to ensure the marble perfectly loops the loop. Then there's the Trampoline expansion pack. This has the marble hopping from one section of track to the other and explores the physics of projectile motion and trajectory.

Love it. What's next for the brand?

We have four expansions coming in 2025. The possibilities to add to Gecko Run appear limitless!

You also have a Harry Potter range on the way this year. What does that include?

Harry Potter is loved by children and adults worldwide! We're introducing two products in 2025; both have a crafting aspect... Either making three of the magic wands from the series or creating letters and Hogwarts seals – there's even instructions on how to make your very own howler!



HAVE FUN!

New games for the whole family, coming 2025!



We love working with talented game inventors

Get in touch to pitch us your ideas!
ideas@gibsonsgames.co.uk



Island Escape

Two iconic game brands unite in EXIT: CATAN... Here, designer **Markus Brand** reveals what he and co-designer Inka Brand put into every EXIT.



Before we dive into the latest EXIT launches, what sparked the idea for the initial range back in 2016?

In 2014, Sandra Dochtermann and Ralph Querfurth reached out to us from KOSMOS with the first concept of EXIT. A group of KOSMOS development managers had played an escape room together – and Sandra and Ralph came up with the idea of EXIT at lunch right after! They also gave us the themes for the first three games.

Inka and I had played countless real-life escape rooms already and were really excited about the project. When it came to developing these games, the first challenge – and probably the biggest – was coming up with a fitting decipher system. We wanted to make sure that players didn't have to look at the actual answers to the riddles in order to check if they solved them correctly... The decoder disk allows players to make incorrect guesses without ruining the fun by giving the answer.

Nice solve for a tricky dilemma! You've designed many EXIT games since then. What does the

development process look like?

Whenever we start the design process of a new EXIT game, we already have a given topic. Someone then comes up with the new 'adventure-worthy' topics for the games... That tends to be Sandra, Ralph or another game development managers at KOSMOS, or us – or our daughter! In terms of how we then develop these games, there're a couple different ways...

For the most part, we start by coming up with new riddles. Later, we make up a story to bring them all together. In rare cases, we start with the story and make riddles that play into it. We did this for EXIT: The Lord of the Rings – Shadows Over Middle-Earth. That said, we always put a few things in every EXIT game... A riddle that uses the game's box. Different ways to solve riddles – folding, cutting, drawing and so on... And a special riddle that, hopefully, creates a 'wow' moment.

The brand now includes advent calendars, EXIT Kids and – with two recent additions – puzzles. How does the design process for The Key to Atlantis and The Alchemist's Garden puzzles differ to the games?

The puzzles are always a challenge for us as we

“CATAN is one of the oldest games in our collection – it inspired us to start designing board games in the first place!”

have to focus on riddles that only take place on a picture... We don't have the luxury to be able to play with folding or cutting pieces as we want the puzzles to be replayable. It's hard to include text into the picture, which is why we added the storybook. It was important for us to lead players through the riddles and not just expect them to look at the picture and know what's going on.

Another exciting new release on the horizon is EXIT CATAN. Can you talk us through the design process behind this one?

To start, we want to mention that it's a great honour to be involved in the project. Klaus Teuber and CATAN mean a lot to us, not only because CATAN opened up many doors for the board game industry, but also because CATAN had such a huge impact on our personal life.

How so?

CATAN inspired us to start designing board games in the first place! The game is one of the oldest in

our personal board game collection. We played CATAN countless times throughout our marriage and its junior version also accompanied our children growing up.

Lovely. So how did you mesh EXIT and CATAN together?

It was important to us to make CATAN recognisable throughout the entire EXIT game. We wanted to make sure it looked like the game and not simply have our riddles dropped within 'the same story' – it had to feel authentic. It was also important that the story fitted with the novels Klaus wrote about CATAN. We made sure to incorporate characters people know from the CATAN books and games, and also wanted the players to recognise game mechanics, like trade from both of the games.

We're especially grateful to Benni Teuber and the CATAN GmbH team for working closely with us. They gave us feedback at every turn and, together, we hope we created a game that also Klaus Teuber would've loved to see and play.

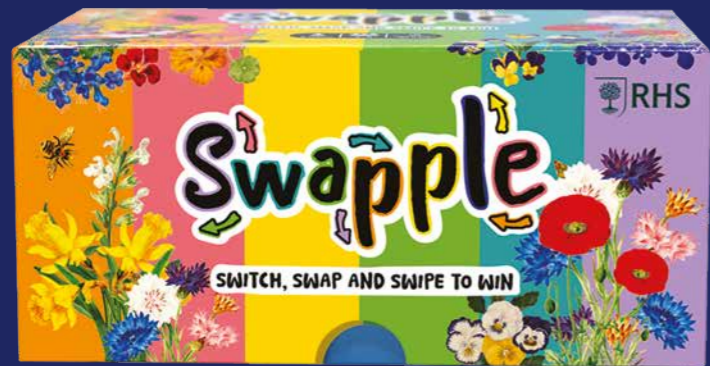
Cheers to 80 years of partnerships!

Shaping the future of play together!

The Mattel Inventor Relations Team

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





Game On

Emily Charles, Head of Brand at Gibsons, on the company's latest slate of games – and what she wants from inventors.



How was 2024 for Gibsons?

2024 was interesting. I feel like it was a difficult year for a lot of people for a lot of reasons... We've certainly felt some of that – but we've used it as an opportunity to reflect and plan for a better 2025. We've taken stock of our brand, our niche and what our focus should be on. We also had some major wins after introducing paper bags instead of plastic for our puzzle pieces – and gaining our B Corp certification at the end of 2023.

shapes; you have to rescue the animals in the right order! It also has beautiful artwork from our internal game developer, Lauren Heywood-Law. She's done an incredible job. Then we've got a game that's called Tegula, from designer Mark Langley. We actually met him at the Inventors Lunch that Mojo Nation and the BTHA hosted at last year's London Toy Fair. We sat down with Mark, played this game – and loved it! We've made it with wooden tiles, and our Graphic Designer – Lauren Stallard – has created some stunning patterns and packaging. It's beautiful and great fun to play. An ideal coffee table game!

Great stuff. Which new launches speak to that renewed vision and focus?

We're really excited about the new games we're debuting this month. The first is called Grab Bag: Jungle, designed by Rob Harper and Mike Harrison-Wood. They're new inventors to Gibsons – but when they pitched this concept, we just loved it. It's about rummaging through a bag of animal

Fantastic – and what a great advert for the lunch! Thank you! What other new launches should we keep an eye out for?

We have a game called Bean Counters Inc, designed by Nick and Alice Payne. It's a party game that can be played by younger people. It centres on this company – Bean Counters Inc – that has a ridiculous CEO who expects his employees to count beans all day. It's a very funny game – just reading the rules made me laugh a lot. If you can enjoy reading the rules



“We really want to hear from more inventors – and in particular we'd love to hear from more female inventors.”



before you've even start playing a game, then I figure we're onto a good thing!

And that leads us to your last one – Swapple?

Yes – from inventors April Mitchel and Serena Fadlun. This one is a fun swapping card game that involves planting flowers in the right order. It's RHS branded as part of our new licensed range... We've got three puzzles and this game launching in 2025, with lots more in the development pipeline. It's a fantastic brand partnership for Gibsons with perfectly aligned values.

We're looking at adding to our roster of brand collaborations too. If inventors have games they think could be adapted into licensed versions, we'd love to see them because they can really work. Look at our TFL game Mind the Gap – it's been so successful for us since 2017, selling at the same levels every year. That's the magic we'd like to recreate.

All of these come from the inventor community... Are you looking to ramp up your engagement with inventors?

Definitely. We really want to hear from more inventors – and in particular we'd love to hear from more female inventors. We really want to champion women in this space. It still has to be all about the right game, but we want to make sure we're hearing from female designers more than we are right now. We're looking for what you might call 'warm up' games. Lower-weight family games that look great on the shelf and you want to play again and again. We'd welcome wholesome themes, and we obviously do really well with British-themed titles.

You mentioned earlier that one of your recent launches comes from a 'new' inventor. How

important is it for Gibsons to embrace fresh talent and not shy away from the more 'amateur' pool of designers?

We don't shy away from that because our in-house ability to develop games is better than it's ever been. We've seen people come in with an idea on a piece of paper, right up to people presenting fully fledged working prototypes – but both are valid. Just because you haven't got the resources or knowledge to make a prototype doesn't mean you haven't got a great idea.

And how closely do you track trends as sources of inspiration for games?

A company of our size is not necessarily set up to compete in the fast-paced world of trend-led games. Our strategy is very much about creating games with longevity. Interestingly, the only title in our catalogue that I'd say capitalised on a trend would be 221B Baker Street – a game we first launched in 1975! It was around for a really long time. We re-released it in 2014 when the BBC launched Sherlock. The show shot that game back into people's consciousness, and it hasn't gone away since. It's a classic now – a must have for any game shelf.

What's the key to cultivating positive relationships with inventors?

I always try to give useful or constructive feedback and treat people how I would want to be treated. It's about having genuine, honest conversations and relationships. And I'm a born and raised people pleaser! I really struggle with needing to say yes to people, so I've had to teach myself to evaluate things sensibly and say "no" as part of that honest review. Having Lauren on board as Games Developer has been invaluable to inventor relations at Gibsons. Her focus on games allows her to meet with inventors and grow the relationships.



King of Kweenies

Rowen Wagner – Head of Design for Girls, Youth Electronics and Activities at Moose Toys – on why XOX Kweenie looks to be something special.

Rowen, tell me: what set you on the path to toy design?

My toy story stems from an Industrial Design background. As a child, I loved creating and dismantling things – apologies to my parents for the destroyed VHS player! After university, I gained experience in various fields – automotive, street furniture, homewares, and more – but I always loved toys. For my university major project, I developed an educational toy system and sent it to Moose Toys for feedback.

Wow. Bold move!

Well – to my surprise, they gave it a thorough review and responded with constructive insights. Five years later, when I applied for a design role at Moose Toys, one of their senior designers remembered my project... Following a few interviews and a design brief, I was fortunate to secure the role of Product Designer. It felt like everything had come full circle and my journey into the toy industry began.

What does your 'typical day' look like as Head of Design?

In a word, 'dynamic'. There's rarely a typical day – and that's a big part of the fun. I oversee an outstanding creative team of over 25 designers across multiple categories. On any given day here in the Melbourne head office, I might be brainstorming toy ideas, reviewing project progress or debating brand strategy. Other times I could be in LA pitching new brands to retailers, or even in Tokyo hunting for inspiration. The toy world is never boring, and I truly believe it to be one of the best jobs.

Let's talk about one of your exciting recent launches, XOX Kweenie. For anyone new to the range, how would you pitch it?

XOX Kweenie is a premium, blind-box figurine that's full of attitude. They include a display case and collector card, with rare chase characters to find. Every 'Kween' is unique, making the range



highly collectible. They're a diverse and creative expression of quirky themes that each character exemplifies. We've got everything including Kween of Pickles, Kween of Spicy, and Kween of Drama – the one closest to my heart!

Ha! Where did the idea come from?

The original concept – 'Princess Everything' – challenged the notion of the traditional princess persona. We loved the anti-princess trend and saw the positive empowerment of creating your own definition of what is sovereign. This led us to look at how we might evolve an edgy new perspective on the classic theme, making it more relevant to children today. Think a Princess of Being Late or a Princess of Cold Pizza.

The one closest to my heart!

Ha! Then, to bring this fresh princess perspective to life, we paired it with the growing popularity of blind-box art toys. A vinyl toy format became the perfect medium to elevate the concept, making the toy feel precious and highly collectible. Our talented illustrators explored over 60 aesthetic directions during an intensive styling process – ultimately crafting a distinct and ownable look and proportion for our Kween. Combining this with brand development, technical refinement, rich storytelling and a premium approach to every detail, we created XOX Kweenie – the ultimate canvas for owning and celebrating anything imaginable.

Each one features premium finishes and styling. Which of these gave you unique design challenges?

The entire focus of our physical Kweenie development centres around delivering a premium product.

“The original concept – ‘Princess Everything’ – challenged the notion of the traditional princess persona.”



From the weight of the figures to the seamless assembly, elevated details and, of course, the finishes.

And every toy we work on presents unique challenges. We've tackled technical feats like a deflating balloon dog, a singing pooping flamingo, a magical fogging cauldron, and the most really real toy puppy on the market. But the challenge with Kweenie was different...

How so?

It was simply to ensure each figure is visually stunning. We're particularly proud of the craftsmanship and beauty of the finishes – a designer-toy standard while maintaining a very accessible price point. It's our hope that everyone can get a strong sense for the passion we've poured into every character simply by holding one.

Absolutely! Now – without saying anything that may get you in trouble...

Don't worry, I get myself in trouble all the time.

Ha! Well, that's perfect! What does the future of the brand look like? Feel free to spill as many secrets as you like!

There's an insight into the future of XOX Kweenie within the DNA of the toy itself – it's bold, diverse, full of attitude and unexpected. I can't reveal our big new development plans, but – true to the art-toy world – we're playing with different scales,

wild new themes and some unique collaborations. Moose is all about creating long term, meaningful brands and we've set awesome creative groundwork for Kweenie to make a big splash.

Terrific. You've been at Moose for over 10 years. What's kept you there for such an impressive stint?

Yes, I'm coming up to 14 years at Moose... I have many colleagues with a good ten-plus years as well. Moose simply does things differently: with authenticity, heart and soul. We're a family – and regardless of your department or role, there's always an exciting career pathway for all Moosies. We're outrageously ambitious, but we always find time for a laugh. We don't take ourselves too seriously, but we're serious about creating innovative toys in the awesome business of making children happy.

Rowen, this has been fun. One last question! What fuels your creativity?

Coffee aside, it's great to get out of your common surroundings, though. Hunt for inspiration in places others don't. Smash unexpected components together! Be open to wild results. Embrace a healthy dose of delusion. Be comfortable conceiving ideas that aren't what your customer asks for; risk giving them something they didn't know they'd need. Surround yourself with people who can build and challenge your ideas. And critique through the lens of your end user – in our case, millions of children all over the world.

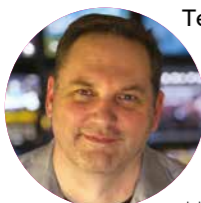


“We’re playing with different scales, wild new themes and some unique collaborations.”



Night to Remember

Fresh from celebrating One Night Ultimate Werewolf's 10th anniversary, Bezier Games CEO **Ted Alspach** discusses its longevity – and legacy...



Ted, we're here to discuss 10 years of One Night Ultimate Werewolf – but this wasn't Bezier's first Werewolf title?

No, I'd been a Werewolf player before we even started the company. I loved the game and this idea of social deduction. I was just a little frustrated by the commercial versions of the game that had been out there, like Werewolves of Miller's Hollow and Are You a Werewolf? I wanted to play the game differently, so we made up a custom version of Werewolf. Eventually we turned it into our own game, which ended up being Ultimate Werewolf.

Originally, it was something for me and my friends to play. Then a couple of my friends wanted a copy, so I gave them one. Then more people wanted it, so I ended up hand cutting 800 copies of Ultimate Werewolf! At a certain point I thought: 'This is ridiculous. I should probably actually get this printed. Our first run was 2,500 units – and that sold out instantly! So then I printed another run and it took off from there.

So you launched Ultimate Werewolf and that did well... What sparked the idea for One Night Ultimate Werewolf?

The Resistance had been out for a while and that

“I'm delighted that it's still referred to as a great gateway game for non-gamers.”

didn't have any player elimination. I liked the idea of doing a social-deduction game without elimination... But that's tricky in a game that centres around werewolves eating people!

Yes, I can see that!

Game designer Akihisa Okui did a game called One Night Werewolf, which was a very minimalistic version of what became One Night Ultimate Werewolf. I thought we could make some changes to improve that game. Essentially, what we did when turning Werewolf into Ultimate Werewolf, we did again to transform One Night Werewolf into One Night Ultimate Werewolf. We added some key roles and it went on from there.

Which design decisions helped make One Night Ultimate Werewolf special?

One of the big ones was to introduce the Troublemaker role. Whoever's in that role can choose to switch two of the other players' cards around. It was so vital because – whether it's used or not – it sows doubt in everyone's mind, except for the Troublemaker themselves... Suddenly, you don't know your own role! You're not 100% sure which team anyone is on – including yourself! When we introduced that, we knew we were on to something.

How successful has One Night Ultimate Werewolf been for Bezier?

It's been really successful. Ultimate Werewolf was our bedrock game and that gets more popular each year, but One Night Ultimate Werewolf kind of came from nowhere and went 'Boom!' Of course, One Night is shorter than Ultimate, and people get the idea of game right away – that's one of the reasons that One Night really took off and did well. It also gave us confidence in launching lots of games in this Werewolf world, like Werewords, Silver and Werebeasts.

How soon after launch did you realise it could be something special?

We actually did a Kickstarter for it; it did \$15,000 – which, at the time, was okay. But

we've been very fortunate with games like One Night Ultimate Werewolf, Suburbia and Castles of Mad King Ludwig that have done fantastically well. That said, there was no reason to expect One Night would go on to do that well. But it works the other way too.

In what way?

We did a game a couple of years ago called Sync or Swim – a co-op card game. We all felt that could be a monster hit, but it just sputtered out and flopped. We recently published a trick-taking game called Cat in the Box and it's taken off like a rocket! We sold 100,000 copies in a year. We liked it, but we didn't know it would connect with people to such a degree. So you can never be quite sure what's going to really hit home. One Night did well, continues to do well and even lived in the mass market for years at Walmart and Target.

Did the game have an influence in the industry? Has it left a legacy?

Absolutely – both from the app standpoint as well as social deduction. Once One Night came out in 2014; there was a bit of a glut of social-deduction games until around 2017. Some are really good and some aren't so great, but that's what happens. In terms of its legacy, I'm delighted that it's still referred to as a great gateway game for non-gamers. They can usually have a good time with it. It's even great for kids – parents are always amazed how well their children lie in the game!

I bet! Last question... What does the rest of 2025 have in store for Bezier?

We launched Rebel Princess in 2024 – that's doing really well for us, so we're working on a thematic and a mechanical sequel. It's basically: what happens after the princesses have rebuffed the princes? We'll also be doing a sequel to our card-shedding game Scram! The first game was about getting rid of all these critters in the woods that bother your camping trip. The sequel focuses on what happens at night in the dark woods. It's a little spookier!

We'll also be launching a Kickstarter for a game that's all about the board game industry! It's really cool and we've got a lot of licences in there from lots of game publishers. That'll be exciting.



Collectibles with Character

From Ghost Cat to Shiny Tiny Hineys... **Ben Butcher** talks us through Kaleidos Creative's debut slate of collectibles.

Ben, it's great to catch up. You've launched a new company, Kaleidos Creative. Talk us through your debut slate of collectibles!

We've started off with blind box sets, and we have a few larger vinyl figures and some plush – but even our plush is in blind boxes. We've launched with five series... One is Odds N Sods – a Halloween line created by Seth Watkins. It's a series of amazing characters – there's a headless priest...

Sold!

Ha! It's dark, but funny and charming too. There are eight figures in that range, including a rare chase figure. All of our stuff will have rare chase figures. The second – also created by Seth – is called Ghost Cat. Cats like to climb into silly things, like fishbowls, and this is a ghost cat that has climbed into a series of household items. There's a washing machine, a blender, a cookie jar... It's a fun take on that idea.

Lovely. And what else?

The next two lines were developed by our incredible designer – Meg Dunn. One – called Capkins – centres on little mushroom characters inspired by actual mushrooms and their qualities! Then we have Wild Magic Tarot – a cool line of animals inspired by Tarot cards. All our lines come with collector cards, but these have Tarot-sized cards with bases so you can display them behind the figure. They're ornate and beautiful; Meg's done a great job. Then, to complete the range, we have Tiny Shiny Hineys – also developed by Seth.

We can sell Tiny Shiny Hineys on the name alone. Who needs to hear more?!

Yeah, with this one, you hear the name and you're like: "I'm in!" But this one is a range of very cute, coy-looking animals looking over their shoulder – and each of them has a bright gold butt.

Naturally. Dare I ask where the idea for this one came from?

It's this idea that around the world there are statues that people go and rub for good luck. And all that

rubbing makes them shiny, right? That led us to the idea that you could rub these cute little shiny animal hineys. With this line, we've also made a larger, mixed-media figure. It's a plush, but it has a vinyl head and hands. We even did a vacuum metal gold butt – you can see your face in this thing. It's so good!

Ha! And these will be blind boxes too?

Actually, the boxes have a window so you can reach in and touch the butt. We've had a lot of fun with this one! So that's our debut range... These are sold in Hot Topic, BoxLunch and our site, but we're also opening it up to specialty retailers. And we're not limited territory-wise either.

All five of these are compelling, fun ideas that sit in the designer toy space. Was the aim to craft a line that would appeal to consumers, regardless of whether they were into designer toys?

These are not limited to a certain audience. They'll end up in different speciality places and I can imagine a whole host of different people will be interested in them. I think they could appeal in a broader sense than just strictly the designer toy space. In an ideal world, some of these lines become evergreen and grow outside of this initial form factor.

It goes back to my experience at Pixar and what I learned there. It was about creating stories and worlds that everyone there loved... We're taking the same approach... Building worlds that we love and are passionate about, and hoping they resonate.

On that, do you think these rich worlds have the potential to extend into areas like TV, film and other types of consumer product?


Absolutely. We believe these worlds are bigger than these initial form factors... There's so much behind them – and that's by design. So we'd love to see these become things like animated shorts, and the way the industry is right now, new IP is where the big opportunities are.

What does the rest of 2025 have in store for Kaleidos?

Our roadmap has 20 to 24 new IPs that we'll launch in mostly blind-box form factors. We've also left room in there to build on anything that resonates in a special way. We'd love to get behind something and grow that world. We're also leaving room for some licensed opportunities.



“The way the industry is right now, new IP is where the big opportunities are.”



“We have to embrace the unexpected. That’s how Hitster came about.”

Greatest Hits

Hidde van Dijk – Group Innovation Manager at Jumbo – talks inventors, innovation and the success of Hitster.



How did you find yourself in the industry?

I never imagined I’d end up in the toy industry. To summarise, my journey began at a computer game studio in the Netherlands, followed by running my own design company. One day, I received a call that I thought was for a freelance gig. My English wasn’t great at the time, so I misunderstood the opportunity... Turns out, it was a job interview for the company where I still work today. Almost 20 years later, here I am, and it has truly transformed my life.

Part of your role is in inventor relations. How do you approach cultivating positive relationships with the inventor community?

For a long time, Jumbo was a relatively small company, so when we took on someone’s product, we put a lot of care into it. That approach hasn’t changed. It’s about maintaining and respecting the personal relationships we have with inventors. We like to work together with the inventor and our internal teams to make the product a success. We pay a lot of attention to the ‘relations’ part of inventor relations.

My role also covers product innovation, so it’s about championing ideas that, on paper, we weren’t initially seeking. We want to broaden our product lines, and to do that, we sometimes have to embrace the unexpected. That’s partly how Hitster came about.

And Hitster’s been a huge success! It’s sparked expansion packs and the recent Hitster Bingo game. Was it an easy sell?

No! Actually, it was kind of a hard sell. I saw the Kickstarter campaign for it, and it looked fun. It combined games and music using a third-party QR-code reader and did not have a dedicated app. The inventor, Marcus Carleson, had created something different, and that was the appeal.

What I completely underestimated was that Hitster is a party game. I initially thought it sat more in trivia... I received a sample and passed it over the fence to my neighbours to give it a try, as we were still in Covid lockdown. That’s when it transformed from a trivia game into a party game. They were having so much fun and sparking different conversations. My neighbour on the other side even popped up over his fence, asking what was going on!

Ha! And at what point did you realise it would benefit from having an app?

Almost immediately after that. We knew, too, that it would require some investment – and those kinds of games had underperformed in the past. That was the hard part to get it sold in, but once we’d developed the app, people saw how easy it was to use – and that people weren’t glued to their phones during the game. It’s just used to play the music.

Digging deeper into your role, what does innovation mean to you?

For me personally, innovation is about doing something different that brings value to a company. Innovation sits between what a company can do and what it’s capable of doing better. What innovation doesn’t mean for us is unlimited budgets spent on tinkering with new technologies. We’re not a research lab. Innovation needs to have an element of success that pays off at the end of the day. It’s also why I look for products that are a little bit outside of Jumbo’s comfort zone...

In what way?

Innovation can bring us into a category we’re not operating in. That’s why our engagement with inventors fits nicely into this area – they can help us with this. The other part to innovation is that we don’t take a product at face value. We always look for the rough diamonds.

What helps you have ideas, Hidde?

I need to connect with others. If you put me alone in a room, I struggle to be creative. The other key thing is that I never take anything for granted. If someone says something can’t be done, I get triggered and want to push through it. If people think something’s hard, it usually means there’s something valuable there. And the last thing that’s important to creativity is to innovate fast. Iterating faster helps us get to great ideas faster.

Brilliant. Last question: What’s the most underrated product you’ve worked on at Jumbo?

It was a product line called iPawn. It was a set of pawns that interacted with the touch screen of the iPad. I feel it was ahead of its time – like a lot of Jumbo products.



The Beautiful Game

Massimo Alessio Zeppetelli talks style, inventor outreach and new launches at Oink Games.



Last year saw you join Oink Games as Director of Inventor Relations, Growth and Marketing. What was the appeal?!

Oink Games is my all-time favourite games company!

They make consistently solid games, and I love how they're essentially like art pieces. I feel like I've joined our industry's equivalent of a 'high-end' clothing brand. The team is passionate and many of our titles are made by one person – our founder Jun Sasaki. As a Japanese company, there's a way of thinking that runs through how we design and market our games. It's very different to working in the West and has been an amazing experience so far.

And I believe you've joined as part of a push to get Oink's games played more in the West? Absolutely. We're well-known in Asia; one of the most-well known games companies in

Japan. Outside of Asia, we're relatively unknown when it comes to the mass audience. And because I've had years of experience working in America, part of my role is help push our brand in the West.

Alongside that, you're also now leading Inventor Relations. What defines an Oink Games game?

One key factor that our founder really looks at is meaningful turns. That's a baseline. Games also need to be fun, unique and interesting. I also think a lot of designers are misled by our box size and think they have to invent a game that fits into a small box. We want to stress that it's our job to make a concept feel and look like an Oink Games game. We're just interested in great games for all ages that use minimal text – so they can be accessible globally – and with meaningful turns!

Yes, because Oink Games' style is so defined, I imagine there's a perception that a certain type of game suits you better than others...

“A lot of designers are misled by our box size and think they have to invent a game that fits into a small box.”

Exactly, but our line is very diverse. Look at Hey Yo. It's a rapping game and features an electronic device. Then there's Moneybags which comes with tonnes of heavy coins. One of our recent games, DroPolter, has lots of interesting components including rings, bells and. I love games that have interesting centrepieces, so the size of the box isn't something that inventors should be concerned about.

And for any inventors that want to show you their ideas, how do you like to be pitched to?

I'm always happy to review games at conventions, or if we've already connected then reach out via email. We're a small company, and I'm doing multiple roles, so we'd prefer not to see loads of concepts in a meeting. Really think about what would make a good idea for Oink Games and then pitch us two or three finished games. We want to consider games properly.

Makes sense. Now, can you talk us through some of Oink Games' latest launches?

There's a new version of Deep Sea Adventure called Deep Sea Adventure Boost... That's designed by Jun Sasaki and his son Goro. Deep Sea Adventure was the game that got me into Oink Games – and I don't know anyone that doesn't love it! It's simple, has unique mechanics and gives you the choice of being nice or awful. Last year was the game's 10th anniversary, we've launched this powered-up version with special dice and new rules, It's a really exciting launch for us.

What a great way to mark the 10th anniversary.

Right! Then – from the same designers – there's Souvenirs from Venice. It's a great family game where you ride around in a gondola in search of souvenirs. I mentioned DroPolter earlier and that's one of my favourite new launches. It's so accessible... Everyone holds five items in their hand. A card shows the item, or items, you have to drop, and if you can drop them faster than any of the other players, you win! That's an inventor item; it came from Paul Schulz. Such a unique idea and so easy to explain... Beautiful too!

Love Island

As CATAN turns 30, **Kevin Hovdestad** – Director of Brand Development at CATAN Studio – talks us through the new edition... And why the future looks bright.



Kevin, it's great to catch up. This year sees CATAN celebrate its 30th anniversary! What do you put the enduring success of the game down to?

At its core, CATAN has that 'just-right' mixture of simplicity and depth. It's easy to learn, but infinitely replayable and challenging to master. Having a game develop this kind of legacy means the gameplay and themes are relatable across generations, which is an incredible achievement.

You've just debuted the sixth edition of CATAN. What's new?!

Our goal was to keep the game the same – all the mechanics you know and love are unchanged – but refresh it with all-new art. We also improved the components and drastically simplified the rulebook.

How do you approach the balance between retaining what makes CATAN what it is, and introducing something fresh in a new edition?

In a lot of ways, this is honestly a fun challenge for the team.

We want to respect and cherish the original game's legacy while continuing

to find creative ways to build upon it. I look at something like New Energies, where we still have a very CATAN experience, but some clever additions put a spin on it that's meaningfully distinct and fun in its own right. The base game has stood the test of time and benefits from a periodic facelift, but we're excited to grow what CATAN means beyond that.

I imagine each edition of CATAN reflects the games industry of its time. Are there any aspects of this refresh that you feel will resonate especially with the 'modern CATAN fan'?

Absolutely. The world is always changing and part of the reason for evolving the game's look and feel is to meet those moments. There are all kinds of little considerations that go into this: precise adjustments to the box sizes, minimising plastic use, updating the art to reflect more people and places, and so much more. It's a fascinating dance where we're trying to make sweeping updates to the overall ownership experience without impacting what's going on under the hood in the game itself.

What are some of your main aims for CATAN this year?

We're treating this as a chance not only to release our amazing new edition, but also take stock of how



“It's a chance not only to release our amazing new edition of the game, but to really take stock of how people experience the brand as a whole.”

people experience the whole brand. We're hoping to engage more actively with our community on social platforms, have more incredible experiences at all kinds of live events, partner with great brands and people who love the game, and give people more ways to celebrate how this game touches their lives. Longer term, I think aspirationally we're excited about more powerful CATAN experiences outside the board game world too.

On that, in what other product categories do you feel CATAN could thrive?

My dream state would be that we partner with a bunch of world-class companies making the best, most interesting, built-to-last versions of products – and then finding good fits where those lifestyles or hobbies overlap with CATAN. For example, I think a lot of outdoor enthusiasts love board games, if for no other reason than it's nice to have something to do when you're around a campfire or your excursion is rained out... I could see us working to make some cool collaborations in the outdoorsy space.

Sticking with licensing, there have previously been Game of Thrones and Star Trek versions

of CATAN. Is there potential to do more licensed versions?

Finding great partners to work with is something I think we'd all be genuinely excited for, and I think it cuts both ways... I imagine there are other places and ways in which seeing a CATAN-ified version of other games, or CATAN represented in other media, could be thrilling for everyone involved.

There've also been several expansions and standalone titles – like Rivals for CATAN, CATAN Junior and CATAN: New Energies. Is there an appetite to produce more variations in the coming years? Or spin-offs that don't necessarily follow the original's template?

We're always talking about what kind of fun ideas are out there to make interesting new crossovers, partnerships or licensed products. I think there's a balance to be struck... People have the expectation that CATAN is going to be something of a premium product or experience, so we have to put a lot of thought into what the right fit looks like. We're also looking at ways to diversify the core experience across new and different formats. The new edition and the next few years look to be CATAN's best and brightest yet – so stay tuned.

Grand Designs



“Sometimes, publishers are worried about offending inventors. I’ve heard “Oh, but this is your baby!” No, it’s not. It’s so far away from that!”

Award-winning games designer **Ellie Dix** discusses her latest launches – and perceptions that inventors are fragile about feedback.

Ellie, it’s always lovely to chat. You work in both mass market and the hobby space. Does your work in hobby shape your work in mass market, and vice versa?

They do. It’s about your frame of reference. If you’re a hobby games player, you’re exposed to all sorts of mechanisms and game innovations. It gives you a bank of references to draw from when it comes to design, development and problem-solving.

Equally, I can make something simple sing in a game – I’m pretty good at focusing on one thing and doing that well! Whereas in hobby, you tend to get lots of different mechanisms working together. I sometimes make games like that, but I’m increasingly drawn to simplicity, so tend to focus on mass market.

Are there many big differences between the hobby design community and the mass market inventor space?

There are – and I imagine that’s why many designers just stick to one or the other. Even the fact that in mass market game designers are generally called inventors... And that you’ll be speaking to inventor relations execs... People don’t know what that is in the hobby space. It can be unfamiliar and overwhelming.

Also, because some of the biggest mass-market games have such a poor name in the hobby world, some people mistakenly think mass-market publishers only want games that aren’t very good! So one of the biggest misconceptions is the idea that ‘games are better in the hobby space’. In truth, mass-market publishers are every bit as vigorous about quality and what they’re looking for as hobby companies. Maybe more so! The mass-market bar is so high – and that’s largely not understood or appreciated in the hobby space.

Equally, I know several game designers working exclusively in mass market, that don’t go to Spiel in Essen, or other hobby game conventions... Simply because they feel it’s a totally different world.

You’ve done a lot of pitching over the past year. What makes someone good at the role of inventor relations? It’s easier to answer the opposite question actually! What makes someone less good at inventor

relations? The answer to that is someone who’s vaguely enthusiastic about everything! I appreciate that it’s really hard to know what you want, but if an inventor relations person can vocalise exactly what they’re looking for, that’s perfect. And a fast “no” is super helpful! If I’m met with vague interest, I know they’re probably never going to get back to me.

Honesty and clear communication...

Right. I would rather people were honest than pleasant! I can have a relationship with a person or a company even if they don’t like my games then and there in a meeting. Sometimes, publishers are worried about offending inventors. I’ve heard – way too many times – “Oh, but this is your baby!” No, it’s not. It’s so far away from that. It’s a game I designed!

Ha! Does that matter, though? In real terms?

Yes – because if they think that’s how I feel, they’ll treat me different and they’ll give me feedback differently. I’ve heard that loads of times, and I think it’s detrimental. The perception that inventors are fragile around feedback only reinforces that idea.

To wrap up, let’s dive into some of your recent games... We’ll start with A Midsummer Night’s Fayre. How did that come about?

For that, I wanted to capture the feeling and experience of familiar fairground games: Hoopla, Hook a Duck... Different mini-games but using the same components. Like the real games, many of them are luck-based. Ben Rathbone took it in after I pitched it at the 2022 Mojo Pitch. He felt the mini-games would work well for Gamewright.

Moving onto the brilliantly named Top Secret: Briefs...

Ha! Initially, I was trying to create a Cluedo card game. That’s how I originally themed the game. But then I became obsessed with the idea that it should be about guessing other people’s underpants and Top Secret: Briefs was born! Ginger Fox has done a great job with the production. They saw it, they loved it – and the combination of deduction, spies, underpants... So many people are sold on the combination of those three things alone!



“We know F1 has seen a huge surge with younger fans – and our new range will continue to broaden that appeal.”



Piece de Résistance

William Thorogood – Head of Design, New Business at The LEGO Group – discusses recent successes, future launches and what to expect from the Innovation Campus...

William, what were some of the stand-out sets and ranges from last year?

We had amazing sets for different passions and interests! Whether it was our first products from LEGO Fortnite – including the iconic LEGO Fortnite Battle Bus – or our collaboration with the genius Pharrell Williams in the ‘Over the Moon’ set... Then there were products and episodes from the second season of our latest home-grown IP, LEGO DREAMZzz. I’m proud to say all our teams are continuing to innovate and release new products and content to surprise and delight builders of all ages – whatever their interests.

This year marks your 20th year at LEGO. What is it about the company that’s kept you there for such an impressive stretch of time?

What’s kept me at the LEGO Group for all that time is a culture that’s never rested on its laurels. As a brand, we’re always innovating, trying new things and pushing ourselves... But still with the same focus on our people that I believe comes from being a private, family-owned company.

Our brand values revolve around imagination, creativity and fun... Most likely that won’t surprise anyone – but also quality, caring and learning. It’s that balance of creative standards, with a keen focus on our people, that I feel makes the brand unique. That’s kept me excited to work with this fantastic team day in and day out for the length of time I’ve been there. Roll on my 30th anniversary in 2035!

Ha! I’ve put it in the diary! Now, one exciting partnership for this year is your collaboration with F1. What made this brand a good fit for LEGO?

I’m hugely excited by our Formula 1 partnership – something my team and I have been a core part of making a reality. The LEGO Group has a long history connecting to motorsport, but to have a full partnership across the Concorde Agreement with Formula 1 and all teams on the grid is unprecedented. We know F1 has seen a huge surge with younger fans – more than four million children aged eight to 12 now actively follow the sport across the EU and US – and 40% of followers on Instagram are now under the age of 25.

Our new range will continue to broaden that appeal with sets from LEGO City, LEGO Speed Champions, LEGO DUPLO and LEGO Collectibles. Beyond products, 2025 will offer fans a host of content and experiences – on digital platforms and at races through interactive fan zones during Grand Prix weekends, bringing a whole season of ‘Build the Thrill’ activities to F1 and LEGO fans.

Let’s look ahead! It’s Toy Fair season – what’s new?

We’re not in London or Nuremberg with one ‘marquee’ reveal – we’re demonstrating a whole host of innovations across our sets for builders of all ages... From pre-school with LEGO DUPLO and exciting new IPs, to our ranges for younger builders such as LEGO City, LEGO Friends, LEGO NINJAGO and more... There are also new creations designed for older builders across LEGO Technic, LEGO ICONS.



I’m also excited to show how we’re appealing to even more passions and interests. The world of gaming is an area in which we’re continuing to offer more. For example, this year sees the introduction of LEGO Super Mario: Mario Kart, bringing Nintendo’s iconic Mario Kart franchise to the world of LEGO bricks for the very first time.

Sounds terrific. Work also continues on LEGO’s Innovation Campus. This is due to open in 2027. How will it help shape LEGO’s approach to design and creativity?

As a Billund local, the Innovation Campus is hugely exciting. As our Chief Product and Marketing Officer, Julia Goldin, said a couple of months ago, we have a truly global and diverse team and this new building is designed to represent the fun and innovation that the LEGO brand embodies.

The Innovation Campus is set to house 1,700 creative colleagues from across product marketing and development, gaming, product and quality teams. That includes more than 600 LEGO Group designers in one space. Another cool thing is that the Innovation Campus is built in a way that honours the modular design of LEGO brick. It’s an innovative building in six overlapping modules, with up to four floors featuring play zones and atria – and a bustling PlayWay that moves through neighbourhoods and connects people and functions.

There will be lots of green spaces and maximised daylight to spark creativity, in a structure made entirely from sustainable

wood. I’ve also been told the building will be home to the world’s largest library of LEGO elements, covering a collection of around 20,000 different LEGO elements in 70 different colours!

Wow! Bring on 2027! Now, before we let you go, LEGO launches a lot of products each year. Is there a recent set that you feel maybe didn’t get the ‘spotlight’ as much as other lines, but that is worth shouting about?

I’ve got a lot of love for our LEGO DREAMZzz theme, which has just released its second season and had a fantastic year of even more incredible, creative products released. The range has everything from Narwhal Hot-Air Balloons to Robot Dinosaurs – the sets are so incredibly creative and diverse; there’s something for everyone. In another vein, while you certainly can’t argue these sets don’t get the ‘spotlight’, I wanted to call out a piece of news that may have gone under the radar for some...

Go on...

Our LEGO Botanicals is becoming its own theme... Accompanied by its own logo and new products. We just announced four new LEGO Botanicals sets arriving on shelf from early 2025. Since its introduction in 2021, the LEGO Botanicals collection has become one of our most popular product ranges. It’s unique blend of creativity and relaxation captivates builders and plant lovers... These sets offer a fresh experience to building and we’ll be releasing more sets for fans of all ages to create lifelike plants and flowers using LEGO bricks.



Child's Play?

Kidult: Hot new trend? Flash in the pan? Or something that's been a mainstay of the industry for decades? We ask industry figures for their take...

The Cambridge Dictionary's word of 2024 was 'Manifest'. If the toy industry got together and picked our very own word of the year, there's a decent chance it would've been 'kidult'.

Companies sat firmly in this sector have thrived, while others have tweaked strategies to dive into the kidult space – or reposition existing ranges with this audience in mind.

Lucy Salisbury – as Director of Group Licensing at Funko – is at the heart of all-things kidult. She tells us: "The kidult trend is deeply engrained into what Funko is all about. Whether it's from major studios like Disney, Marvel, Universal, Netflix and Warner Bros., or smaller licensors with cult properties beloved by our fans, Funko provokes a feeling of nostalgia across its series... Which is a feeling that we know resonates with the kidult audience."

Felipe Noriega – VP & Regional Director EMEA at YuMe Toys – is also feeling the benefits of this engaged consumer segment. He says: "Kidult has been on everyone's lips, and it's been huge for us. Buyers that were perhaps sceptical, reticent or simply ignorant to the trend have now come to terms with it... Buyers from speciality retailers – toy retailers that would traditionally have said 'Not for us' have embraced our ranges. They recognise it's the fastest growing segment in our market.

Elsewhere, Alpesh Patel – VP of Global Toy Design at TOMY – says: "The kidult trend is very important to our business, and we've seen some fantastic success. We've fully cranked our engine to offer more to the Kidult market – it's one of our core global strategies.

“Buyers that were perhaps sceptical, reticent or simply ignorant to the trend have now come to terms with it...”

"We're investing heavily in our DTC fan platform – TOMY Plus – to offer new, limited-edition products in collaboration with top licences that really capture the essence of unique collectibles. We're also expanding licensing of our kidult-focused Jixelz Remix range and increasing development of kidult-focused games. On top of all that, we have our amazing plush ranges that continue to expand – Club Mocchi Mocchi, Suya-Suya, Niriguru Knit and Warhammer."

Nico Blauw – CEO at BOTI – agrees. He adds: "The trend has resonated for us in a big way. This is a blessing for our industry – adults not only reliving their youth but also finding joy in buying collectible and high-end collectible products."

So, it's here and proving a compelling source of success for companies and engagement for fans. But is kidult the right definition?

"We try to use the term Adult Collector," says Jamie Sikorski, VP of Brand & Design at Jazwares, adding: "For many of our fans out there, collecting is a serious and lucrative endeavour that stems beyond play, but includes expression of lifestyle, self-identification, and even financial investment.

"My team and I spearhead our Pokémon business. Many of our fans that grew up with the launch of the property are now adults, many with kids of their own. Their fandom has never wavered! It's expressed differently now as they've evolved into a new life stage where they're able to seek the nostalgia of their youth through the joy of collecting premium items and toys."

LICENSE TO THRILL

Collectibles are driving the trend – especially those based on brands. But is this something limited to licensed toys?

"It's true that licensed toys have spiked the kidult trend the past years, but it's not exclusive to licensed toys," adds BOTI's Nico Blauw. "Certain games, puzzles, construction toys and arts and craft brands have been popular among older consumers for years. We find adults of today buying into the brands they used to favour as a kid. Think of TMNT, Pokémon, One Piece or Naruto. Movie and gaming merchandise at higher price points attracts them as well."

Jamie Sikorski from Jazwares agrees: "It definitely expands beyond licensed toys, with

homegrown brands in categories such as plush. A successful brand with a great collector strategy and captivating product can masterfully transform a brand into a global license powerhouse... Just look at what we've done with Squishmallows. Once primarily considered a plush brand, Squishmallows has grown into a global lifestyle phenomenon going well beyond the toy aisle."

NOTHING NEW?

While the term is very 'of the moment', plenty argue the trend is a reframing of something that's been a constant in toys for years. As David Snow of The Fantastic Factory tells us: "Adults have been buying toys they like for years – think Hornby trains and LEGO, say. During covid, people really enjoyed playing with toys and games and were more open about it. If the kidult trend brings more people to toys and games then brilliant – but I think they've always been there. Now it's just seen as a cool category instead of geeky or weird."

LEGO comes up a lot in discussions around the kidult trend, but what does the company itself make of its relationship to the craze...

"Children will always be our top priority," William Thorogood, Head of Design for New Business at The LEGO Group, tells us.

"Making products that they want to put at the top of their wish lists and that help them learn through play is our core focus. However, we know that the joy of LEGO building can transcend age, with many adults telling us they enjoy building and find it helps them relax, feel creative and explore their love for films, sports and music in a new way. So, to help adults switch off and relax, we have over 100 different products designed to appeal to adults whatever their interests are.

"Take as just one example our LEGO ICONS theme, where adult builders can expand their skills by building varied creations such as The Endurance, Concorde, a Retro Radio or vehicles like the iconic Lamborghini Countach 5000 Quattrovalvole. There are so many options for all interests and passions, and we're excited to continue adding to that offering."



“This is a blessing for our industry – adults not only reliving their youth but also finding joy in buying collectible and high-end collectible products.”



INVENTOR OPPORTUNITIES

So, companies are enjoying the opportunities that the kidult craze is bringing – but are inventors? Are the sectors most associated with this trend ones that inventors can play in?

“The simple answer is yes – we can invent and create for kidults and the significant market of the collectors and adult fans,” says Pete Cartidge, Partner at renowned invention house Fuse. “What we’ve been deliberating is what categories of play, features and play patterns should we focus on creating and enhancing with our knowhow...”

“Older consumers are much more discerning when choosing products and less likely to be swayed by sizzle ads showing products with lots of ‘bells and whistles’ as many conventional toys do. Aspects like quality, piece count, display, authenticity, and longevity are higher considerations for kidults. We’re considering how to elevate and add value to all of these.

“Also, price is so different for this consumer and client brief. Unlike almost all our other projects, price isn’t the overriding driver in the product development brief – that’s really refreshing! Inventors are playing in this space with authenticity, adding detail and innovation to role-play lines... A good example is Goliath’s Power Saber – which I think a lot of kidults will buy.”

Danny Kishon of All in 1 Products agrees, saying: “Inventors should ‘think kidult’. It’s where the market is expanding and, so far, has been led by nostalgia rather than innovation.”

Barry McLaughlin, Co-Founder of Barry & Jason Games and Entertainment, tells us: “With every idea, we always have to think of the intended audience. If they’re just a bit older, I don’t think that complicates things – and I feel like kidults include people who buy adult party games.”

Barry & Jason Games and Entertainment’s Jason Lautenschleger adds: “Kidults want things that are cool, premium – and authentic. Because of that last one, it can be tricky to intentionally make them the target audience. Your best chance

is to make something that resonates deeply with you as the creator. It’s kind of like playing hard to get... Just be you and play it cool, man!”

Fi Murray, Innovation Director at Making Studio, adds: “We design for everyone – from groms to grannies! When it comes to kidults, we divide them into two key groups: adult collectors or players buying for themselves, and those buying things they love for the kids in their lives, hoping to share their nostalgia. Our focus tends to be on the latter.

“We’ve worked on numerous infant, preschool, and kids’ ranges inspired by classic legacy brands – often retro or pop-culture icons – and reimagined them as brand extensions for little hands. It’s an incredibly fun and creative process because you’re designing with two audiences in mind: the child who’ll play with it and the adult who’ll buy it.

“This dual focus requires us to approach design and marketing simultaneously from the very beginning, ensuring the product resonates with both groups. It’s all about blending nostalgia with modern playability in a way that delights both generations.”

THINK OF THE CHILDREN!

Fi raises an interesting point – the impact, and influence, this trend is having on sectors of our industry focused on kids. Hasbro CEO Chris Cocks told us that one of the toy giant’s biggest challenges this year will be: “Balancing our offerings to cater to both kids and adults... To thrive for another century, we need to engage the little ones who are just starting with us and the dedicated adult fans who have grown with us.”

It’s a concern echoed by Rob Ames and Luc Hudson of Triclops Studio. If the trend is booming, does the market for kids’ toys suffer as a result? They tell us: “It feels quite dangerous to focus on creating for the kidult market, if that takes precedence over designing great toys for kids... We’ve been asked by various clients over the past



couple of years to design for the kidult market, and while there is obviously money to be made in that arena, our concern is saturation.”

“We see the kidult market as referencing a snapshot in time and that relatively short period is being pillaged again and again for the same old licences. Also, the target audience is purchasing for display, so the product isn’t imbued with play features or innovation in the way that toys for kids should be. We can see a decline overall in the number of cool toys for kids on the market. While some conclude this is because kids no longer want to play with toys, we’d argue there’s little to engage them in the same way as we were inspired – ironically – by the original iterations of the products now being resold to us as kidults!”

HERE TO STAY?

Other questions being asked surround the longevity of all-things kidult? Is this a re-shaping of fundamental aspects of the industry – or a fad that will fizzle out in time?

“I don’t think it’s simply a trend,” says YuMe’s Felipe Noriega. “People are waking up to the fact that kidults are part of a society... Adults – in the way they consume content and products – are refusing to ‘grow up’, so to speak. They’re sticking to what they enjoyed when they were kids. That’s not going to change. It’s not just a trend.”

It’s a sentiment shared by TOMY’s Alpesh Patel; he tells us: “This is an evergreen trend. This type of consumer has existed in Asian countries such as

Hong Kong, Korea and Japan for decades and I feel the same will happen in the western world. What we might see in the future is less of a quantity purchasing pattern, and more of a quality purchasing pattern...”

Funko’s Lucy Salisbury adds: “The kidult phenomenon will be here for a while, because the factors that drive the trend aren’t going away. Nostalgia, escapism, the familiar joy of a much-loved movie or show all help keep fans engaged with kidult properties.”

BOTI’s Nico Blauw believes there may be a tipping point, stating: “It’s on-trend now, but at same time we are seeing a kidult bubble... At the recent Deauville Toy Show in France, 70% of the exhibitors claimed kidults as one of their key categories! That is nonsense of course – but this is what buyers are looking for so, for manufacturers, it’s easy to add a kidult label to a product.

“This kidult bubble will burst in the next two to three years – but remain at a significant level. Buyers need to be aware who the kidults are and what this consumer group is looking for. Buying a product just because it’s labelled kidult is the beginning of the end...”

Either way, let’s hope the kidult trend can manifest strong sales and plenty of product innovation for the rest of 2025 and the coming years.



ToyPal Every Soft Toy Becomes a Storyteller
Ever Changing, Never Ending Stories

Attachable to Any Soft Toy
Bringing your child's favorite cuddly companion to life.

Create Your Own Adventures
Turn your child into the hero of their own tales.

500+ Free Personalized Stories
making every story unique and special.

Once upon a time in a far, far galaxy...

Be part of the AI Toy-volution.
Let's give all soft toys a heart and a voice.
The future of play—personalized, magical, and meaningful.
Bundle your soft toys with ToyPal! Email us at info@toypal.ai

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

First to Worst

Dyce

Show Highlights

Wondering what to make time for at the shows this year? Be sure to check these out...



ASMODEE

Fresh from exploding onto the market in the US and quickly generating virality on TikTok, **Piles!** from The Lost Boy Entertainment is a fast-paced set collecting game designed for kids and families. This frantic, fast-paced party game will be available from February 2025, be suitable for players aged eight and above, and has an IRRP of £19.99.

The classic fast-paced matching game you love is now bigger, bolder, and more exciting than ever with **Dobble Giant** from Zygomatic. This giant version takes everything that makes the original game fun and turns it up to the next level! Including four unique games in one box, Dobble Giant is coming to retail in April, for players aged six plus and will have an RRP of £23.99. Other Dobble highlights include **Dobble Super Mario**, **Dobble Stitch** and **Dobble Connect!**



Stand N12
TOYFAIR

Hall 10.1 | Stands C-10, D-11, F-28
spielwaremesse

Stand 1815
TOYFAIR

CASDON

Casdon is preparing for an exciting 2025 with a range of new product launches and partnerships that build on its reputation for imaginative and engaging toys.

The first new license for 2025 introduces officially licensed **Build-a-Bear Workshop** toys. This collection features six SKUs, including a **Stuffing Station** that lets children recreate their own furry friends at home. In true Casdon style, the product includes child-friendly features such as an ergonomic 'push pump,' allowing children aged three plus to stuff their bears independently. The bears themselves have also been thoughtfully designed and made from high-quality plush for an extra-soft, cuddly experience.

Casdon's collaboration with the iconic **Heinz** brand brings another exciting collection of six SKUs, combining the brand's playful ethos with role-play food toys. Highlights include an **American Diner Set** and a

Fish & Chips Takeaway Set, featuring clever details like flip-and-dip sauce pots and a Heinz Tomato Ketchup bottle with a surprise sauce element. Designed for children from age two plus, the range fosters creativity while introducing basic meal preparation concepts through authentic, food-inspired designs.

Lastly, Casdon will launch a licensed **Toxic Waste Hazardously Sour Candy** range, allowing children to recreate an interactive candy store experience at home. The two-SKU collection includes the **Toxic Waste Candy Store**, designed for ages five plus, with features like a rotating candy tray, scoop, play money, and candy storage.

All three ranges will launch in summer 2025 and will be supported through PR, influencer collaborations, social media, and online advertising, offering children new ways to play, create, and imagine.



Stand E30
TOYFAIR

Hall 12 | Stand C-04
spielwaremesse

CRAFT BUDDY

Following a standout 2024, Craft Buddy is unveiling its most expansive range yet, featuring fresh additions to its renowned Crystal Art lines. Licensing partners include Disney, Warner Bros. Discovery, Marvel, Star Wars, LOL!, DC, and Peter Rabbit, alongside original Craft Buddy designs. With four major launches in Q1 alone, Craft Buddy aims to inspire creativity and spark imaginations.

Leading the Spring 2025 line up is the enchanting **Harry Potter Crystal Art Sticker Album**, developed in-house to bring Hogwarts magic to life. This collectible product, made in collaboration with Warner Bros. Discovery, includes a 102-sticker album and two blind bags (three stickers each). Additional blind bags are available for completing the series. Fans craft their stickers with sparkling crystal gems and place them in the

16-page album featuring iconic locations, from the Sorting Hat ceremony to Quidditch matches.

For younger crafters, Craft Buddy debuts **Crystal Art Junior**, designed to support hand-eye coordination



and fine motor skills. With larger gems and an easy-to-use pen, this range features five beloved characters and comes with

everything needed to complete each piece. Finished creations can be hung or displayed, making it perfect for family fun.

Tapping into the collectibles trend, the **Crystal Art Pin Badge Collection** combines creativity with fashion. This blind bag range features 15 iconic Disney characters, including Mickey Mouse, Elsa, and Simba. Each 6cm pin can be worn or displayed as part of a collection.

Also new is the **Crystal Art Wildlife Buddies** series, featuring 20 original animal designs across habitats like Safari, Ocean, and Jungle. Each Buddy includes an 'EduCard' with fun facts and a QR code for more discoveries, blending crafting with learning.

Visit Craft Buddy at London Toy Fair and Spielwaremesse or contact trade@craftbuddyltd.co.uk to explore opportunities for 2025.

Stand E2
TOYFAIR

Hall 4 | Stand D-10
spielwaremesse

DYCE GAMES

Dyce Games is thrilled to present its 2025 product line, featuring awesome new games for both families and adults.

An all-new **Care Bears** edition of its best-selling family ranking game **First to Worst** brings all of the charm and positivity of the beloved brand to your family game night.

Elsewhere, gamers can enter the adventure-filled world of **Miraculous** with an engaging family-friendly race to the top of the Eiffel Tower featuring all of your favorite heroes and villains from the hit TV series.

Adding to the excitement, Dyce is releasing two new games in its popular line of officially-licensed HISTORY Channel games – **HISTORY: Stats & Facts** and **HISTORY: Through The Years**.

For adult players, **Bad Judgement** is on its way! Featuring an innovative pyramid card layout and the series' trademark humour and style, this highly anticipated fifth installment in the Bad series is already shaping up to be a standout favorite.

Another highlight from Dyce is **Rate My Friends**, the party game of figuring out how your friends rate themselves. This boasts eye-catching packaging, a cool rating dial to lock in your answers, and endless laughter and memorable moments.

Dyce is also adding a pair of new drinking games to its adult collection – **Drink If...** and **Drink UP!** - One offers a refreshingly simple approach to quick-playing fun, while the other introduces a clever bidding and bluffing mechanic never seen in this kind of drinking game before.

For couples, Spring 2025 will see the launch of **First to Worst: Couples Connection**, an adult version of Dyce's hit family party game First to Worst with a head-to-head twist, featuring a ton of engaging couples-centric content plus a more sophisticated visual style.



Hall 10.0 | Stand C-15
spielwaremesse

Stand 6511
TOYFAIR

GINGER FOX

Ginger Fox are swooping into 2025 with the flippingly brilliant game of **Wingin' It**. Players whack a bespoke launcher and watch bird tokens soar in the air in an explosive, bird-themed, push-your-luck race to collect four birds! It's time for these chicks to fly the nest!

Bish Bash Bosh! is a speedy, card-shedding game that's fast, loud and fun! Play the right card at the right time... Quickly! Make a mistake and you'll pay the price by picking up more cards! First to get rid of their cards wins. This pocket-friendly format with trending retro artwork is sure to be a popular title for Ginger Fox in 2025.

Next up and presented in a giftable tin format, Ginger Fox presents **Beaks**. You are seagulls battling against each other to complete the most takeaway orders by stealing food from a central food pile. Scrap, squawk and squabble as you try to steal the food you need from your fellow gulls. The game features adorable miniature wooden 'food' and beak-like tweezers.



Ginger Fox will also be launching the **Peaky Blinders Trivia Game**. Players test their loyalty to the Peaky Blinders in a trivia game with a cunning twist: each round, players answer a question in secret, but with no guarantee that they will hold onto their own answer. They will need to bid, bluff and steal to ensure they secure a correct answer, earn 'cash' and claim victory.

For more information about the above new games from Ginger Fox, please email sales@gingerfox.co.uk.



HACHETTE

Hachette is bringing an exciting range of new licensed and original games to London Toy Fair.

One Piece is making waves with two new formats: an **escape room game** and a **party game**, both bringing Monkey D. Luffy and his crew to life.

Also debuting is a **Squid Game party game**, showcasing just in time for season two of the show. Players can take on challenges from the series, without the life or death stakes!

From The Witcher universe, the first officially licensed **Gwent** tabletop game arrives. Featuring over 400 cards and a playmat, this adaptation ties into the upcoming Witcher 4 announcements.

Fans of **Asterix** will enjoy a new **card game** based on the beloved comic series, ahead of the 2025 Netflix release.

For younger players, **Gigantosaurus: The Adventure Game** offers a fun, interactive experience, featuring a large Gigantosaurus piece that players can 'ride' around the board.

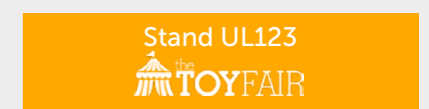
Wednesday: Creatures & Outcasts is a fast-playing card game for two to six players.

Also, a PAC-MAN shaped extension to the Quoridor series is now available. **Quoridor PAC-MAN** features stunning wooden pieces inspired by the classic arcade game, and a unique game mode to capture the feel of PAC-MAN.

Hachette continues to bring a range of fantastic titles for families through to hobbyist gamers. Here are a few must-play hits. **Courtisans** offers a fast, strategic card game with Disney-esque art and cutthroat bluffing gameplay.

Castle Combo has appeared in multiple top 10 lists for 2024. If you haven't yet seen it, Toy Fair is a great opportunity to try this amazing game. From Trefl, **Spy Guy** is an exploration game for children, where players search for objects on the board.

Lastly, **MicroMacro** returns with a **refreshed edition**, featuring a **jigsaw puzzle version** and the all-new **MicroMacro Kids**.



HASBRO

Hasbro invites fans to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the world's most popular family board game, Monopoly.

Monopoly continues to find new ways to engage fans, most recently with an **upgraded look and design**, and **three new Expansion Packs** to provide new twists and quick-turn gameplay. The revamped Monopoly board game will be available as early as April 2025 in the US and early 2025 in Europe.

Fans can also expect to experience the Monopoly brand through wide-ranging consumer touchpoints including in-person immersive experiences, fashion, digital games, home goods, entertainment and so much more.

Across its portfolio of Hasbro Games — **D&D, Magic: The Gathering, Play-Doh, Peppa Pig, Nerf, Beyblade, Furby** and so much more — Hasbro will unveil fresh designs, exciting collaborations, new adventures and even more reasons to celebrate. Watch this space!



MAGNA-TILES

The MAGNA-TILES team is kicking off 2025 by unveiling an exciting lineup of new products that will continue to ignite the imaginations of young builders worldwide.

Among these new introductions are the **Castle** and **Castle DLX sets**, which feature adorable new characters and are perfect for sparking storytelling and imaginative play.

For space enthusiasts aged three and up, the **Space set** is truly out of this world! Complete with a rover for intergalactic explorations and a one-of-a-kind shuttle that doubles as storage for its pieces.

MAGNA-TILES will also be showcasing **Builder XL**. A follow-up to their perennial fan-favorite Builder set, Builder XL takes construction play to even greater heights.

Also making waves at NYTF and Spielwarenmesse in 2025 is the

runaway hit, **microMAGS**. These compact, on-the-go playsets have taken social media by storm and captured hearts worldwide, with one sold every 90 seconds. Fully compatible with all MAGNA-TILES sets, including their very first sets from 1997, these pint-sized microMAGS pieces are perfect for travel. Slip them into a bag, purse, or even a pocket, for meaningful play wherever you go.

Designed to be simple enough for children as young as three, yet captivating enough for older kids and the young at heart, MAGNA-TILES sets are the definition of timeless fun for all ages. Always compatible and never requiring instructions, these open-ended sets encourage pure imagination, allowing each child to create, build, and explore their own way.



MAKE IT REAL

Make It Real's **Snap 'N Glam Hair Styling Set** serves as an example of the company's commitment to collaboration throughout the product development cycle. The concept for Snap 'N Glam was first introduced to Make It Real by Japan-based invention group Tokyo Unique.

Snap 'N Glam proposes to clip "anchors" and accessories onto hair. Tokyo Unique's sizzle showed a girl applying the clips on her hair in a very satisfying way. The tiny plastic clips were attached one by one in a fast and super simple gesture. The Make It Real design team was stunned by the ease of use.

However, the form factor resembled more of a stapler and was not super aesthetically appealing, especially for a fashion-oriented product. The team felt a friendlier and more recognisable shape would help better communicate the functionality of the product.

Make It Real first adjusted the design by moving from a bar-shaped to a disk-shaped cartridge. This way, the user could select any bead to begin with and the product footprint would be more compact. It's understated in the final design, but the designer who handled the technical development finely adjusted the mechanism to perfection. The result is the simultaneous clipping and rotation movement that users expect.

The Make it Real Advanced Design and Tokyo Unique teams succeeded in creating a device that is fun to use and provides lots of play value, thanks to the reusable clips.

Another benefit is that it accommodates any hair type and allows users to create simple or more complex hairstyles. It's been a successful collective effort that reinforces the company's commitment to collaboration with inventors.



Hall 4 | Stand D-17, E-18
spielwaremesse

Stand 1743
toyFAIR!

MOOSE TOYS

Renowned for having redefined the collectibles category with Shopkins, Moose Toys continues to lead with products that inspire creativity and play. In 2025, the focus turns to **XOX Kweenies**, a vibrant collection of vinyl figures celebrating individuality.

Featuring premium finishes like metallic, glow-in-the-dark, and iridescent effects, each figure includes playful features such as liquid fills and rattling beads. Fans can collect 26 characters across two series - Quirky and Fearless - including the iconic Kween of Cat Naps.

Little Live Pets Mama Surprise Families brings nurturing and imaginative play to a micro-collectible scale. Kids can reveal surprise puppies by wiping Mama's cheeks and opening her playhouse door. With over 80 puppies to collect, the range includes Mom and Baby Packs, Adoption Packs and a Hospital Playset.

Other highlights include **Cookeez Makery Yum Yumz**, scented collectible plush toys in Twin Packs or Single Packs.

Elsewhere, **Bibi-Chibis** are adorable baby figures representing emotions like gratitude and happiness, available in Single Packs and 5 Packs.

Bluey Mini Figures let fans of the UK's number one kids' show on CBeebies, BBC iPlayer and Disney+, collect eight one-inch characters.

Meanwhile, **MrBeast Lab Swarms**, a collaboration with YouTube star MrBeast, delivers fizz-reveal fun, with over 100 characters to discover in 2 Packs, 5 Packs, and 12 Packs.

To elevate the Toy Fair experience, Moose Toys will unveil a striking collectible wall at its stand, showcasing the diversity and innovation of its ranges, while continuing to pioneer the collectible space and shape the future of play.



Stand N15
toyFAIR!

Hall 12 | Stand D-10
spielwaremesse

Stand 2265
toyFAIR!

RAVENSBURGER

Continuing to expand its footprint the games category, Ravensburger will present a wealth of new items at Toy Fair, with games for all ages and skill levels. Introductions across the popular **Villainous** and **Horridified** franchises, as well as new children's and family games will keep tabletops buzzing with activity through the coming year.

Ravensburger is set to follow up recent launch Mycelia with **Gloomies**, a new addition to the 'cosy' games category. Gloomies takes players on a two-phase gameplay journey that is underlined by the captivating artwork throughout. Phase one is spent planting colourful flowers on the integrated game board. In phase two, it's time to harvest the flowers and decorate the Gloomies. At the end of the game, points are totalled from both phases with the winner having the most points accumulated.

The much-loved and lauded The Castles of Burgundy welcomes a new member to the family with **The Sandcastles of Burgundy**.

Incorporating core elements from the original, this game invites players as young as five years to experience the world of The Castles of Burgundy. The game introduces memory features with strong kid appeal, as well as providing ways to increase difficulty as players become more experienced.

The company will also present an expanded card game portfolio - adding to the lineup which already includes **That's Not a Hat** and **Minecraft Explorers** among others.

In 2025, a series of **Level 8** card games will be introduced in the UK and Republic of Ireland, including original, **Disney Stitch** and **Super Mario Bros** in its offer. This game has already demonstrated a strong track record since its launch by Ravensburger in 2016, features a rummy-style format, with players attempting to be the first to collect a series of card combinations.

Ravensburger's hit board game **Disney Eye Found It!** has also been translated for a handy card game item, perfect for take-along family play.



Stand N13
toyFAIR!

Hall 12.0 | Stand A-12, D-13
spielwaremesse

Stand 2403
toyFAIR!

SMART TOYS AND GAMES

Smart Toys and Games is home to 12 exciting award-winning educational brands. **SmartGames** is the worldwide leader in multi-level logic games, while **SmartMax** is a pioneering pre-school magnetic construction system for young children. Elsewhere, **GeoSmart** is the future of geomagnetic play, while other award-winning brands include **WOW Toys**, **Footy**, **Smartivity**, **Rockees**, **Happy Cube**, **Yatzy**, **MiMiQ**, and **All Jigsaw Puzzles**.

From SmartGames, there's lots to be excited about. Spring 2025 launches include **Graveyard Shift**, a brand new one-player puzzle game where players must plan a route for the girl and her cat to try and escape the skeletons and reach the exit by moving and rotating the puzzle pieces.

Apple Puzzler is a fun game which challenges players to fit all the worms inside a three-sliced apple by stacking the different layers on top of each other.

Counting Sheep is a new compact puzzle game suitable for all aged seven and above. The aim of the game is to find the right position for the flock of sheep. As players progress, the challenges become more difficult.

The IQ range is an immensely popular category for Smart Toys and Games. The team is thrilled to unveil **IQ Bubbles** for Spring 2025. In IQ Bubbles, players have 120 sparkling challenges to solve, creating a stunning checkerboard pattern of big and small bubbles.

Brand new for Autumn 2025 comes an **IQ Deluxe** range specially designed with adults in mind. The new collection will launch with four titles including **IQ Pentagon**. This gem of a puzzle game boasts a luxurious booklet, packaging and enigmatic playing board that will intrigue even the most demanding puzzler.



Stand F42
toyFAIR!

Hall 3A | Stand H-06
spielwaremesse

Stand 765
toyFAIR!

THINKFUN

Step into the enchanting world of **ThinkFun Friends**, an exciting new line from ThinkFun designed to engage and delight kids aged three and up.

Featuring three imaginative games, each led by a unique hero character, ThinkFun Friends inspires young minds to embrace problem-solving adventures in the whimsical land of Puzzleville. These games invite children to explore their creativity, boost their confidence, and practice their problem-solving skills – all while having loads of fun.

ThinkFun Friends Tree House encourages kids to match tokens with pictures, colours, shapes and numbers. Watch the excitement as they drop tokens into the tree and see them slide out the bottom.

In **ThinkFun Friends Splish Splash**, kids use challenge cards to figure out the perfect combination to fit all the adorable animals into the pool. This game builds perseverance and visual perception skills, making every splash a step forward in learning.

Boost observational skills and introduce object permanence with **ThinkFun Friends Play Date**. Young players recognise characters and pair up cards, all while joining the ThinkFun

Friends on their exciting adventures.

ThinkFun Friends games are designed to grow with your child, nurturing foundational skills through play. Each game provides just the right balance of challenge and fun, ensuring kids stay engaged and excited to play again and again.

Bring home the magic of ThinkFun Friends and watch your child discover the joy of being a powerful problem-solver!



YUME TOYS

YuMe Toys' portfolio features some of the biggest names in licensing, including flagship lines **Hero Box** and **Zoom Hero**, alongside its renowned plush collection, **DZNR**.

In the UK, YuMe partners with Bandai UK to launch Season Two of **Hello Kitty & Friends collectibles** in Spring 2025. Celebrating Hello Kitty's 50th anniversary, the expanded range introduces new characters and fan-favourites with creative features.

Highlights include 5cm and 7cm figurine collections in blind-box packaging, innovative keychains, light-up designs, and memo stands, blending nostalgia with modern flair for the growing kidult audience.

The **DZNR** plush range will also include **Hello Kitty** alongside new favourites from **Stranger Things**, **Squid Games** and **Jujutsu Kaisen**. Combining



unique fabrics, tactile 3D details, and eye-catching packaging, these 7.5 inch designer plush continue to captivate collectors and families.

Hero Box has become a standout collection, featuring global icons like **Spider-Man**, **Lilo & Stitch**, **Harry Potter** and **The Nightmare Before Christmas**. These collectible figurine boxes

capture each character's essence in a creative, collectible format, winning fans worldwide.

YuMe Toys will also showcase ranges, across leading IPs from Disney, Marvel, Jujutsu Kaisen and others, through their own lines **Zoom Hero**, **Pocket Hero**, **Squish Hero**, and **Bobble Hero**, ensuring something for every collector.



Ignite Your Mind!

ThinkFun's global reach ensures our games deliver retail results. Stock our best-sellers to offer your customers top-tier games that are trusted by families worldwide.



CRASHCATS™



**FOR FUN THAT'S JUST A
WHISKER AWAY, CONTACT
THINKFUN TODAY!**



For over 30 years, ThinkFun has created games that challenge minds and inspire imagination. From our latest hit, Crash Cats, to our iconic best-sellers like Rush Hour® and Zingo!, we are committed to delivering engaging, educational games for families, educators, and retailers alike.

Are you a brain and logic game inventor? We want to hear from you!

Contact us at submissions@thinkfun.com.

Learn more about ThinkFun at www.thinkfun.com.



Follow us on social media!