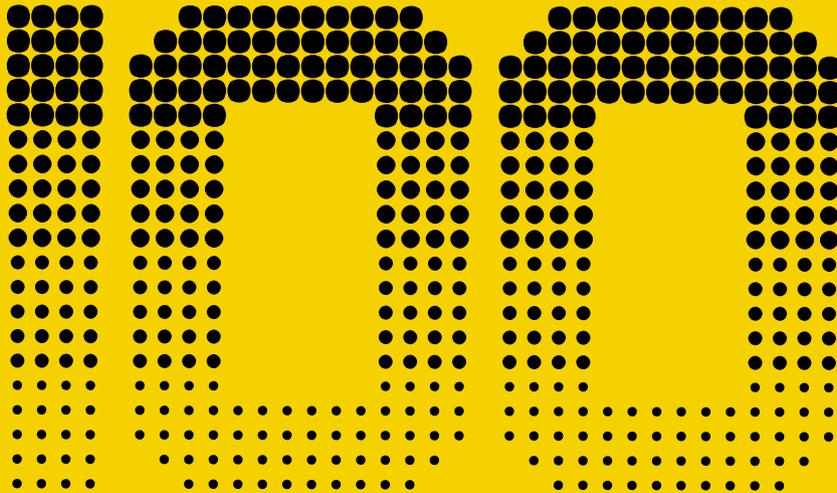


2021 EDITION

# MOJO NATION



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

In association with





You can create **magical**  
toys and games

You just need to know where to start  
**toyandgameschool.com**



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## A BRAND NEW SITE LAUNCHING IN FEBRUARY FROM THE TEAM BEHIND MOJO NATION



# BRANDS UNTAPPED

LAUNCHING FEBRUARY 2021...

Brought to you by **MOJO NATION**

*"60% of this year's list is made up of faces that were not present in last year's edition. This is an encouraging sign of the industry's ever-growing pool of design talent."*



Hello, and welcome to this year's Mojo Nation 100; our annual listing of 100 figures from the world of toy and game design that have done outstanding work over the last 12 months.

In previous opening columns for the 100, I've called it a rundown of folks 'that have had a great year'. It feels a little odd to go in that direction this time around. 2020 has, as we all know, been incredibly challenging for all corners of the industry. As we enter 2021, some of the challenges look set to rumble on for a while yet.

But, true to form, the toy and game design and invention community showed tremendous ingenuity and resilience to get through the tough times. Whether it was companies adapting to see concepts online, inventors embracing virtual pitching - warts 'n' all - or in-house design teams continuing to innovate from home rather than the office, the heartbeat of the industry thumped louder than ever.

The industry's creative backbone also stepped up outside the day job, with toy firms ramping up charitable initiatives to raise funds for great causes and celebrate frontline workers. Some highlights include Mattel's Fisher-Price Thank You Heroes action figures, Hasbro's Guess Who? Hometown Helpers game, the Top Trumps: Key Workers pack from Winning Moves, and Cartamundi's NHS Heroes playing cards. Designers and inventors also went the extra mile at the start of the pandemic by providing face masks, vital PPE and other medical supplies to hospitals in need.

In truth, we'd need a Mojo 500 to shine a spotlight on everyone in the industry that stepped up and did great things in 2020. However, this year's 100 remains a showcase of the wealth of design talent we are lucky to have in our industry. 60% of this year's 100 is made up of faces that were not present in last year's edition. This is an encouraging sign of the rich pool of talent working in our industry, as well as a promising indication that plenty of new designers are continuing to resist the lure of homewares and pour into the toy industry instead.

Finally, I just want to say a huge thanks to our sponsors for making the book happen, to our panel of judges for helping to narrow the list down to 100, as well as to everyone who sent in nominations. Congratulations to all those who made this year's 100; your place is well deserved and we hope it's a bit of good news to kick off a year that will hopefully be filled with lots of it.



**Billy Langsworthy,**  
Co-Founder, Mojo Nation

# SUPPORTING INVENTORS AND DESIGNERS MAKE THEIR MARK ON THE INDUSTRY



## Toy Fair 2022

- Greenhouse Area dedicated to nurturing and supporting new and smaller inventors
- Stand discount of **24%** for BTHA members
- Student Design Seminar to promote the toy industry as a future career destination

## Advocacy

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

## BTHA Training Hub

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

*"With what has been an unprecedented year, the British Toy and Hobby Association sees attracting talent, creativity and invention to the sector as paramount to ensure the industry remains competitive."*



Design and creativity is the lifeblood of the UK toy industry. The continuous creation of fantastic new products has helped to keep the UK toy industry competitive; the largest in Europe and fourth largest toy sector in the world.

In such a fast-paced, fashion driven industry, toy companies are always looking ahead, and there is an endless list of iconic creations coming from our sector. This couldn't be achieved without an incredibly strong toy design community - helping to ensure companies stay on top of their game. The British Toy & Hobby Association congratulates everyone who made it onto

this year's Mojo 100 list.

Attracting the best creative talent into the industry is key for our sector and something the BTHA has supported for many years now by hosting our annual student design seminar at Toy Fair. Whilst Toy Fair will unfortunately be unable to take place in January 2021 due to restrictions surrounding the Coronavirus, we are looking forward to welcoming back design students from around the country to our 11th student design seminar at Toy Fair in 2022.

We are always appreciative of the designers who give up their time to present to the students at the seminar and encourage them to consider the toy industry as a career destination. Toy Fair is a fantastic backdrop for this, with hundreds of exhibitors and thousands of innovative products all under one roof, key to inspiring the next generation of toy makers; we can't wait to welcome everyone back in 2022.

The importance of play for child development is core to the work of the BTHA. Toys are the tools of play - helping children learn key life skills from co-ordination and spatial awareness, to communication and social skills. Exciting and innovative toys can foster children's creativity in a playful environment, helping them to explore new things and learn about themselves.

With what has been an unprecedented year, the BTHA sees attracting talent, creativity and invention to the sector as paramount to ensure that the industry remains competitive. The BTHA is delighted to be a continued supporter of Mojo Nation, the Mojo 100 and the hundreds of inventors and designers that contribute to the innovative and exciting toy industry.



**Natasha Crookes,**

Director of Public Affairs and Communications, the BTHA

For more information visit [www.btha.co.uk](http://www.btha.co.uk) and for membership enquiries please contact [queries@btha.co.uk](mailto:queries@btha.co.uk)



# ATTEND THE VIRTUAL TOY OF THE YEAR AWARDS!

Friday, February 12, 2021 @ 4 pm ET

Reserve your complimentary ticket  
at [toyassociation.org/TOTY](https://toyassociation.org/TOTY)

Registration closes February 9

*“Talented toy inventors and designers are the foundation of every meaningful play experience, and their inspiring work has never been more important than in a year like 2020.”*



Over months of the pandemic, as always, creative and innovative toys have proven to be essential tools for helping millions of children learn new skills and build family memories through play. I think we can all agree that talented toy inventors and designers are the foundation of every meaningful play experience, and their inspiring work has never been more apparent – or more important – than in a year like 2020.

While the significance of engaging toys and games has certainly been reaffirmed, The US Toy Association remains a decades-long proud and ardent supporter of the inventor and designer community. Our world-renowned trade events, global partnerships with like-minded organisations, and long-standing support for college toy design programs remain an essential and rewarding part of our work.

The Toy Association’s Toy Fair New York marketplace offers dedicated programming for inventors and designers and provides the global community a place to foster and build connections. At our last NY event in February 2020, the Creative Factor program of presentations and workshops sparked unique ideas and offered guidance to entrepreneurs and inventors trying to get their foot in the door or evolve their business. The CF@TF Inventor Day held just prior to Toy Fair provided inventors and designers the ability to pitch their product concepts directly to an audience of toy manufacturing partners.

Mojo’s Billy Langworthy is integral to our work on Creative Factor, serving as a member of the Creative Factor Advisory Board, alongside Brett Klisch (Peru Meridian Studios and Co-founder of Creative Factor); Robin Raskin (founder of Solving for Tech and Living in Digital Times); and Matt Nuccio (Design Edge). News about upcoming programming will be announced by the advisory board in the months ahead.

As a proud, ongoing supporter of Mojo Nation, we hope many others in the toy, game and play community will join us! Partnering with Mojo Nation brings important perspective to the quality engagements we provide to the creative community and strengthens our ability to connect the dots from product concept to consumer. It’s a perfect match.

As we reflect on 2020 and look to the possibilities of a brighter 2021, I hope all will join me in raising a glass to toast all across our wonderful community who work day-in and day-out to inspire the next generation of children through outstanding products and skill-building play. All good wishes for your good health and success.



**Steve Pasierb,**  
President and CEO, The Toy Association

# LOOKING TO UNEARTH YOUR NEXT HIT PRODUCT?

## MOJO PITCH

Wednesday, September 8th 2021 | Stamford Bridge, London

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

Part of  
**play** 2021  
creators festival

For more information visit  
[www.mojo-pitch.com](http://www.mojo-pitch.com)

*"Congratulations to everyone on the 2021 Mojo 100 list. Now more than ever, the world needs innovators to create experiences that bring joy, and connect friends, families and fans through play."*



Like all industries, the global pandemic has forced the toy and game industry to adapt. This has impacted everything from the way we design and develop products and experiences to the way they're delivered to the consumer. It's also changed how we interact with one another.

Collaborative creation under these circumstances seemed a daunting task at the outset. Yet, our industry, especially those highlighted in this list, have more than risen to the challenge.

Inventors have found new ways to pitch ideas. Designers and developers are creating and collaborating virtually. Companies have transformed the process of getting product through production. Retailers are reaching consumers in new ways. The challenges we've all been through have prompted innovations we never could have imagined just a year ago.

Through it all, families are coming together in the home to play more games and puzzles, arrange virtual play dates and binge-watch their favourite shows. They are why we do what we do. It's about bringing people together, raising a smile and connecting with the people, characters and stories we love, through play.

Moving into 2021, we have the opportunity to amplify invention and creativity, and engage and collaborate with each other like never before. This will lead us to continue to produce magical and rewarding consumer play experiences.

The world needs us now more than ever. The group recognised in this year's Mojo Nation 100 list are leading the way. Congratulations again to all those featured on this year's list!

And thank you to Mojo Nation for continuing to be a champion of these toy and game creators whose ingenuity, passion and hard work brings happiness to millions around the world.

Looking forward to a great 2021!



**Eric Nyman,**  
Chief Consumer Officer,  
Hasbro

# The 100: Breakdown

The results are in! Mojo's **Billy Langsworthy** dives into this year's Mojo Nation 100 listing, looking at where the 100 are based, which companies make up the bulk of the list and how it compares to the illustrious line-up of 2020

First up, where in the world are this year's 100 based? Well, the US comes out on top here with 60% of the line-up being based Stateside. This is a big jump up from last year's figure of 46% being US-based.

Elsewhere, 30% are based in the UK, a drop from 44% in 2020, while designers from Israel, Germany, Turkey and India also make the list.

Company-wise, Hasbro leads the way with nine entries in the 100, followed by Mattel with six, Jazwares with five and both Spin Master and The Marketing Store with four. Category-wise, Spin Master leads the Design Champions category, Hasbro emerged on top in Rising Stars while Mattel had the most entries in the R&D section.

Looking at gender, the split is almost identical to last year's list, with 59% of the 100 male, 25% female and the rest made up by mixed teams.

Finally, in what is an encouraging sign of the breadth of talent in the inventor and design space, 60% of this year's 100 is made up of faces that were not present in last year's edition.



## GENDER



59 Men 25 Women 16 Mixed Teams



## COMPANIES REPRESENTED IN THE MOJO NATION 100

- |                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Anjar/Becker Associates           | Loik Studios               |
| Bang Zoom                         | Making Things Studio       |
| Big Ideas                         | Mattel                     |
| Big Monster Toys                  | Mondo Games                |
| BionicToys                        | Moose Toys UK              |
| Bluesquare Innovation             | Nextoy                     |
| Bubblegum Stuff                   | Open 2 Design              |
| Catapult Concepts                 | People of Play             |
| ClueCrypted                       | Products of Change         |
| Creating Unique Toys              | Seven Towns                |
| Design Edge                       | SG Labs                    |
| DesignbyTouch                     | Shenanigans Toys and Games |
| DICE Toy Labs                     | So Sound                   |
| Fat Brain Toys                    | Solid Roots                |
| Fun-Damental Invention            | Spin Master                |
| Funko Games                       | Studio Play                |
| FUSE London                       | Tantrum Innovation         |
| Galactic Sneeze                   | The Affable Design Company |
| Gray Matters Games                | The Fantastic Factory      |
| Hasbro                            | The Marketing Store        |
| Heaves Design/PlayLenz            | The Toy Coach              |
| Identity Games                    | The V&A Museum             |
| IDEO                              | This is YARD               |
| Interplay UK                      | TinkerTini                 |
| InventRight                       | Toyi                       |
| Jazwares                          | Tricky                     |
| JMP Creative                      | Triclops Studio            |
| Kenny Kiernan Illustration Studio | Ulco Toy & Game Co.        |
| KID Group                         | What Do You Meme?          |
| Kid@Heart                         | Wow! Stuff                 |
| LEGO                              |                            |



# Character Building

Triclops Studio's **Luc Hudson** and **Rob Ames** explore how great character development and innovative toy design go hand in hand

Dolls are believed to be the earliest toys ever created, with examples unearthed dating back to 2100BC. Whether humans, animals, gods or monsters, the compulsion to depict characters as an aid to imaginative play is evidently deeply rooted. However, there is an art to successfully conveying character in contemporary toy product; it goes beyond just making a plastic effigy of the lead in the latest blockbuster.

In our role as concept designers, we can be placed at several stages in the character design process depending on the project.

Sometimes, as in the case of CBeebies' Go Jetters, we are lucky enough to be sought out at inception. We arrive to a blank canvas and a general premise which needs fleshing out to include individual characters, their accessories or special abilities, vehicles and environments.

In these cases, we are 'world-building' and are free to interpret the nature of the property; exploring aesthetics, colour and form with relatively free rein. We try to instil 'promise in the premise', laying the foundations which result in rich play experiences.

Other projects may have a visual style which we inherit; perhaps the IP already exists and the licensor wants to develop toys. We'll pick apart the content to see where we can hook potential toy features. Here we also have the chance to evolve characters as they move from 2D to 3D - retaining the core DNA, but enhancing and embellishing as we go to make better toys.

*"It is key to consider the toy potential from the outset with IP creation. If your beautifully illustrated character has a huge head and tiny feet, the toy version will not stand up!"*

The third option is where the IP is already popular and represented across various platforms, including toys, and is therefore more of a known quantity. In this instance, we are tasked with translating elements of the familiar characters in fresh new ways to suggest toy features; a process which we refer to as 'squeezing the juice out.' Occasionally we are not the first to squeeze and there may not be much juice left!

It is really important to consider the toy potential from the outset with IP creation. If your beautifully illustrated character has a huge head and tiny feet, the toy version will not stand up. If the character is too spindly and there is insufficient internal space, there will be no room for the mechanisms to drive cool toy features. If you have designed a character without hands, they will find it hard to grasp an accessory or weapon should their world require one.

A successful toy line should run for several seasons so if your character does not wear clothes or have 'gear', it will be difficult to encourage multiple purchases of the same hero and unfortunately one of the fundamental goals of the toy industry is to sell lots of product!

When working on an established IP, there may be constraints in place due to the inherent rules of the built world. They may be peace-loving beings so weapons are out of the question, or they may be unable to swim - so bath toys are not worth considering. The crucial question to ask yourself is; 'How does this character suggest a toy line?'

For Ben 10, the stroke of genius responsible for enduring appeal is the Omnitrix, generating Ben's alter egos and therefore multiple characters, all to be collected.

With collectibles, it's important to ask; 'Why collect these?' Why would consumers want one, let alone 50, and what do they do with them? Often that collectability hinges on great character design infused with on-trend styling and themes which help them stand out from the sea of competition.





*"The industry has been chugging along during the pandemic with optimism. Catapult Concepts is a two-person office - so as soon as New York allowed non-essential business we returned to the office, and we have successfully licensed big ticket items for 2021 by way of Zoom meetings. We've found that with everyone at home, folks can hop onto Zoom meetings and actually give our concept more attention! Despite this, for me, in-person meetings have always been the best way to build relationships."*  
Westley Ciaramella,  
Catapult Concepts



*"The lack of physical conventions have forced me to get better with using online game testing platforms, like Tabletop Simulator. I've used it a bunch for testing concepts with co-designers, and with publishers that games are in development with. It's been a bummer to not see everyone face to face at conventions, but publishers have been great about being available for virtual pitch meetings. I'm very much looking forward to getting back to shows when it's safe."*  
Ken Gruhl,  
Game Designer



*"Trade shows are not only an important part of our industry, they are essential! It is the opportunity for industry friends to catch up, shoot the gab, and it allows for competitive companies to meet at events, share meals and have drinks together while getting to know the human sides of one another. The trade shows allow people a chance to see other cultures and learn how their unique sense of aesthetic directs the way they design and market their toys and games. Trade shows foster a communal unity that no chat room on Zoom would be large enough to handle nor are they nurturing enough to encourage the quality of interaction that is present when meeting on the proverbial common ground. So, while it may be convenient to roll out of bed, turn on a screen and become a floating head in a Zoom chat, the world will be a better place when we all have pants on, shirts buttoned, and meeting face to face, coffee and ideas in hand."*  
Matt Nuccio, Design Edge



*"It is a massive blow, but that is the nature of the world in which we live at present, so we must find new ways of communicating. As an inventor company, we are programmed to find creative ways of getting around these latest issues being thrown at us. The big negative is meeting people in the flesh. Whilst VC is great and enables us to do our job, there is nothing like meeting face to face, showing product and getting our partners to play with our games and have fun doing so. The personal touch, so to say, is so much better. Also being at Toy Fairs gives us valuable insight to what our partners are showing for the future, which in turn gives us ideas of what we could present to fit their product lines. We are in very uncertain times but you must stay positive, find a way to get the best results you can heading into 2021 and hope that by 2022 we can go back to the glitz and glamour of Toy Fairs and finally meet those you miss in person."*  
David Snow,  
The Fantastic Factory

# That's No Fair

With London Toy Fair cancelled, Spielwarenmesse pushed back to summer and no New York Toy Fair, we asked inventors what the absence of a traditional Toy Fair season means for the industry and the impact it may have on how inventors look to license their concepts

# How to Negotiate License Agreements

Negotiating license agreements is a skill anyone can learn. While people tend to make negotiating a license seem complicated, **Richard C. Levy** and **Ronald O. Weingartner** insist that it isn't



First things first... Never fear to negotiate. Never negotiate out of fear. If there's something you don't understand as you negotiate – ask. If you still don't understand, ask again.

Asking dumb questions is easier than correcting dumb mistakes.

That said, the next basic rule of negotiation is to conduct business according to your own style. Set the pace. Don't get caught up in a company's timetable or priorities. Things tend to get worse under pressure. There are also two upfront requirements to explore before any negotiation begins...

**1)** Is the company willing to pay a fair and equitable quarterly royalty on each item sold, based upon a to-be-defined Net Wholesale price?

**2)** Will the company pay a non-refundable advance against royalties?

Once these points have been aired, nothing should stand in the way – as long as both sides are willing to negotiate a win-win deal.

That said, no matter how many agreements an inventor has signed, it's a good idea to have legal counsel review a company's proposed contract, especially if the company is a global behemoth. An offer presented by – say – Hasbro or Mattel, will probably be more complex and lawyered-up than one from a smaller company.

When looking for legal advice, try to find a former counsel for a toy company. They will have an understanding of the esoterica found in toy-and-game licenses. They may also have

- 1.** Negotiation is about relationships, not transactions. Deals should contain terms that make both parties desire a long-term association.
- 2.** Negotiation is mostly about listening. You must understand the company's position.
- 3.** Every deal has two sides – yours and theirs. Don't be selfish and over-reaching in your wants.
- 4.** Assume everything is negotiable. If something seems non-negotiable, you have nothing to lose by asking. At the same time, have a strategy for compromise.
- 5.** Set the tone and volume for easy listening. The atmosphere needs to be friendly and non-confrontational.

*“If there's something you don't understand - ask. If you still don't understand, ask again. Asking dumb questions is easier than correcting dumb mistakes.”*

gravitas with potential licensees, or – even better – an existing relationship that industry outsiders lack.

It's better if an inventor has both know-how and know-who working.

Finally, if you hire a lawyer, don't imagine he or she will do everything for you. You must still make the critical decisions. No one has more to gain or lose than you.

The reality is that a lawyer may not be able to negotiate a better deal, especially when it comes to the key points. You can read more of our advice on this at [www.mojonation.com](http://www.mojonation.com), and in the Toy & Game Inventor's Handbook. The third edition is available exclusively as an e-book through amazon.

In the meanwhile, below are our top 10 negotiation tips...



- 6.** Don't turn a technical disagreement into a civil war.
- 7.** If you hire legal counsel, stay part of the negotiation. No one will negotiate better than you. No one has more to gain or lose.
- 8.** Exceptions always outnumber rules. There are always exceptions to established exceptions. By the time one learns the exceptions, no one remembers the rules to which they apply.
- 9.** If it ain't on the page, it ain't on the stage. Confirm every conversation with email so there's never a misunderstanding about who agreed to what.
- 10.** Things considered “boilerplate” or standard should be treated as variable. Nothing is as temporary as that which is called permanent.



# Pursuing the Possible

**Kimberly Carcone**, Vice President of Market Events at The Toy Association, looks at how the organisation transformed their suite of events in the wake of the pandemic, and what inventors can engage with - both in person and digitally - throughout 2021 and beyond

When the pandemic struck, it quickly became clear to all of us that the world would not be the same for some time. As the US Toy Association representing all businesses that deliver toys and youth entertainment products for children of all ages, we knew that it was our responsibility to 'pursue the possible' and position the global toy community for success - by finding innovative ways to work around the worldwide restrictions on gatherings, face-to-face meetings, and business travel.

First, we quickly pivoted to develop our digital wholesale marketplace for toy buyers and sellers at [www.ToyFairEverywhere.com](http://www.ToyFairEverywhere.com), offering three targeted and highly successful market weeks in the summer months that drew more global buyers than we saw at our last in-person Toy Fair New York in February.

Toy Fair Everywhere is now a year-round e-commerce solution for the toy community and an important platform to help businesses forge ahead. COVID-19 has certainly accelerated the move to online business solutions, but this is not a temporary shift. The tools we have set up via Toy Fair Everywhere will be a permanent fixture to meet the new needs of the 21st century workforce.

Of course, the emotional connection and personal satisfaction derived from in-person gatherings cannot be replicated online. The Toy Association is focused on the future by bringing the industry back together in person for Toy Fair Dallas in October and the eagerly anticipated return of Toy Fair New York, slated for February 19th to 22nd, 2022. The newly expanded Jacob K. Javits Convention Center will allow for new exhibitors, new educational offerings, expanded networking opportunities and more.

The Toy Association has also been offering virtual private-preview opportunities to connect toy companies with major retail buyers. These efforts, initiated to help companies expand their businesses during these difficult times, will also continue beyond the pandemic, offering yet another avenue for toymakers to get their creative products on retail shelves.

The Toy Association is also exploring a series of US and international Student Congress events this year. Our first Student Congress was held at Toy Fair New York 2020 and, while we will continue to offer these events in person when doing so is realistic, delivering student programming and engagement in a digital format will allow more students from around the world to contribute, learn, and connect with their peers.

The Toy Association is thrilled to continue our support of the student community, whether in-person or digitally, and believe strongly in championing the next generation of play professionals.

Looking ahead, our "hybrid" portfolio of solutions for the toy industry will evolve, as new challenges arise, and new opportunities are presented. Our mindset right now and going forward is 'realistic optimism' - the belief that in spite of so much uncertainty, there are many exciting possibilities on the horizon. The Toy Association is proudly committed to offering a range of business engagements, including, but not limited to, the seven days of in-person activity at New York and Dallas.

This is an exciting time for The Toy Association, our 1,000 members, the global play community, and the next chapter of B2B. We are continually inspired by the community we serve and excited to see what comes next!

*"Our mindset right now, and going forward, is 'realistic optimism' - the belief that in spite of so much uncertainty, there are many exciting possibilities on the horizon."*





2020 has been a different kind of year, but Hasbro is still smiling and looking for new ways to bring smiles to kids and families around the world!

We look forward to seeing your best ideas!





## Jared Wade

Senior Vice President,  
Design &  
Development  
Hasbro



*“Invention is the lifeblood of the toy and game industry; any company that expects to be successful in the long term needs to embrace and champion ideas that come from outside its own walls.”*

# Inventor Centre

We caught up with **Jared Wade**, SVP of Design & Development at Hasbro, to learn more about his start in the industry and why inventors remain crucial to Hasbro’s ongoing success

### **How did you get started in the world of design, and what drew you to Hasbro?**

I started at Hasbro after graduating from the University of Cincinnati with a degree in Digital Design. I loved comic books and collected some toys back then, but at the time it was more about finding a summer job to start paying off my school loans! Luckily, I had a roommate who worked at Hasbro through UC’s co-op program and his recommendation got me in the door part-time.

### **Did you love the industry right from the off?**

Yes! Once I was exposed to the craft of toy making, I was hooked! It combined all of the aspects of design that I was drawn too – the spark of invention and tinkering I experienced as a kid messing around with my father’s tools, the art of creating a satisfying user experience which I had fallen in love with in design school, and the creation of beautiful physical designs which is inherently important to me as an artist and illustrator.

On top of that, I got to see my creations in the hands of kids and fans. That is the most gratifying and addictive part of wanting to create toys for a living, but I have to say that it has been the amazing people I’ve had the honour to work with at Hasbro that have kept me here for the last 22 years.

### **What was your first exposure the inventor community?**

In my very first year at Hasbro working on Transformers, I

learned about Henry Orenstein and how he helped to inspire the connection between Takara and Hasbro. This was my first lesson in the “business” of toy invention; albeit a very high bar to start with!

As a young designer working with various inventors, I knew about the incredible value of the community, but I don’t think I understood just how critical this community is to the success of any company, big or small, until I moved into our Playskool brands and worked more closely with a broader swath of the inventor community.

Getting to know the inventors, their teams and networks, and seeing the amazing concepts that they brought not only to Hasbro but also to other companies; I’d say that was my real education in just how much the inventor community raises the level of innovation for the entire industry.

### **Different companies engage with inventors in different ways. What makes this community so vital for Hasbro?**

Invention is the lifeblood of the toy and game industry, and any company that expects to be successful in the long term needs to embrace and champion ideas that come from outside its own walls. It’s as simple as walking down the toy aisle or checking the top toy lists – the inventor community brings so much of the greatest innovation to market year after year, and Hasbro wants to be the partner to help bring more of those amazing experiences to life!



*“The single most important aspect of developing stronger relationships with inventors and getting more ideas to market is good communication.”*

Our mission is to create the world’s best play and entertainment experiences, and we wouldn’t be able to achieve that without the inventor community.

**You see ideas both from professional inventors as well as amateurs and newcomers; do you think it’s true that a great idea can really come from anywhere?**

Absolutely! There’s no doubt that the pros will continue to bring great concepts to the table, but there are truly break-frame play experiences that come from taking the time to support new inventors and that future pipeline.

We’re constantly seeking out new ways to engage with emerging talent and value our partnerships with organisations like Mojo Nation who do so much to support them as well.

**That’s kind of you to say! Now, we hear of ‘Not Invented Here’ syndrome being present with some companies, but Hasbro has long established roots in supporting inventors. What is key to ensuring the success of an inventor item, once it moves into the hands of an in-house team?**

It sounds simple but I think the single most important aspect of developing stronger relationships with inventors and getting more ideas to market is good communication. Clear, honest and timely communication makes all the difference in making quick decisions, building trust and making sure that together, we capture the magic of what makes a toy great. There are always challenges of juggling so many priorities in this fast-paced industry, but we all share the goal of getting the best possible product into people’s hands.

**You’ve been at Hasbro for over 20 years; what are some of the biggest changes in that time to how you work with inventors?**

In many ways, I feel like the biggest change in the way we work has come in the last nine months! We’ve missed the in-person meetings and summits, but I know the whole industry has adapted quickly to use virtual tools. I’m happy to see that it hasn’t slowed down our engagement, and in the process of adapting, we’ve found new ways to work more quickly and more connectedly with our invention partners.

I think these new ways of working can actually increase accessibility to new inventors. Those developments, coupled with rapidly changing technology, new storytelling formats, a strong resurgence of gaming and new ways to engage consumers directly through different business models, make this an extremely exciting time to be a toy and game inventor.

**So, for any new inventors reading that now is a great time to be inventing, why should they bring their best ideas to Hasbro?**

There are the obvious reasons I could cite about the breadth of our distribution network, our great brands and partner brands, our retail partnerships and our marketing expertise.

But if I put myself in the shoes of a new inventor and the reasons I would want to come to Hasbro, it boils down to the same thing that’s kept me here for more than 20 years – the people. I would want to entrust my

ideas to development and manufacturing partners who believe in the integrity of a great idea, will be my champion inside of Hasbro and to the broader community, and most importantly will treat me with respect and honesty.

These are the standards by which I judge our success as Hasbro’s Inventor Relations group.



*“There has never been a better time to be an inventor. The demand for open innovation is upon us and we are evolving to meet those demands.”*

# Looms and Quilts

TinkerTini’s **Trina McFarland** looks at the many initiatives and services out there providing companies with access to inventors and outside ideas... And why a combination of them holds the key to successful external outreach

For many years, our industry’s Inventor Relations - i.e. our open innovation experts - have been looming away in tidy rows doing what we do in mostly the same way, with many of the same inventors over and over again. It works and yields a cozy solution. But this approach has ensured a limited and relatively small, specialised pool of experts. Our pro inventors are cherished, and critically needed until the day they retire! But companies now have more options than ever before to cobble together a diverse approach to inventor engagement. These days, TinkerTini is working the “pro-loom” and also quilting on the side for our clients everyday.

Most of the toy industry has finally embraced the concept of open innovation and has a curiosity around what it can do for their business. Lucky for them, many programs and services exist to provide some type of access to inventors and outside ideas. It’s important to clearly define the differences between some of these so we can elevate the conversation to how companies should use a combination of these services to build and then manage a comprehensive external outreach.

**PROGRAM: Inventor Relations (revenue stream: Company)**

Inventor Relations works on behalf of a toy and game company (or in TinkerTini’s case: several). There is some flex

between toy companies but the scope of IR’s responsibilities are typically: Creating the operational and legal structure around an outreach and then managing it; Cultivating, educating and managing our inventing network; Mining for new ideas; Managing concepts through the evaluation and development process with our design leaders; Contract negotiations with our legal teams, and then lastly, ensuring contractual samples and royalty accounting is in order with finance. We are simultaneously the company bodyguard and inventor advocate to ensure both company and inventors have a harmonious and productive long-term working relationship.

**SERVICE: Targeted Student Challenges & Education (revenue stream: Varied)**

There are a few services that offer targeted challenges to help companies quickly round up ideas from non-traditional invention sources. PoP (formerly ChiTAG) offers access to younger students. Mojo does phenomenal work with many universities. The Toy Coach educates and helps students prepare and refine their concepts for the prime time. These are all wonderful ways to access and tap into new pools of talent with great promise. I believe any company with established IR should tap into these ways of working to explore outside of their typical inventor

engagement. This is how you effectively cast a wider net while simultaneously inspiring and recruiting fresh talent for potential hire, as well as, growing our collective inventing network.

**SERVICE: Hosted Pitching Events (revenue stream: Varied)**

Many organisations like Mojo Nation, WIT, POP and The Toy Association offer pitching events to connect companies and inventors across different regions. Hosted inventor pitching events are very needed and necessary! Inventor Relations is typically who attends these events and then (hopefully) manages the outcome of these events to ensure concepts convert to real product and opportunities.

**SERVICE: Agents (revenue stream: Inventors/Shared)**

There are a handful of agents in our industry that have been part of our ecosystem for decades, and they are also needed to help IR mine and look for that needle in a haystack. We leverage their product filters and experience as an extra set of eyes. I foresee some shifts to the agent structure in the future and more collaborative efforts to capture, educate, and then license ideas in new ways. This role is ripe for collaboration and a reinvention of what it means to be an agent in the industry.

The demand for open innovation is upon us and we are evolving to meet those demands. With all these different options available to us, we can loom away with the pros as we always have while also exploring the concept of a more vibrant, patchwork quilt of ways of working to cultivate the most diverse and productive creative pipeline we can.

There has never been a better time to be in the space of open innovation or to be an inventor. Inventor Relations has matured to the point of multitasking well; I know TinkerTini has! It’s very possible I’ve been enjoying the maddening cosiness of quarantine much too long, but to me, the future is looking like looms *and* quilts.





# The Impact Covid-19 Has Had on E-Commerce and the Toy Industry

No one quite imagined 2020 to be the year it has been. Si digital's **Steven Piper** looks at why it's important to recognise the cultural shift that's taken place and identify new opportunities



We all know that we live in a digital age, and if you weren't living in this age, Covid-19 would have more than likely catapulted you into it, industries and individuals alike.

Suddenly the whole world has shifted from what was the norm, reshaping consumer shopping habits and buying

behaviours, and quickly changing the priorities of retailers and brands.

It's not surprising, then, that there have been some interesting headlines starting to surface:

- "Toy industry sales increased by 9% in the first half of 2020 across the 12 global markets"
- "COVID-19 to add £5.3bn to UK e-commerce in 2020"
- "Hornby sees sales rise by 33%"
- "Logic games and puzzles are on the rise as smart toys and games sees sales double over 2020"
- "Toy stores thrive amid pandemic's return to board games, chess and card collecting"

This is because the COVID-19 pandemic has had a minimal impact on the global toy industry, despite the supply chain

disruptions and closure of retail outlets. Why? Because e-commerce channels facilitated the growth of the market as the demand increased.

In a competitive, convenience focused society, it's never been more important to have a strong e-commerce website with features that are perceived by your customers to add value. After all, your website is one of your best marketing tools, and - if optimised correctly - it could easily be your company's biggest asset. So, how can you optimise your e-commerce website and improve your conversion rate?

To begin with you need to understand your customer data... Who is using your website? Why are they using your website? Does it cater for their needs? Do you know your customers' journey? What stops them from converting into a sale? What improvements could be made to make their user journey the easiest one possible?

These questions are critical and the data gathered helps direct the focus of your website. Customer journeys also help you work out how people are going to interact with your platform and what they expect from it. In turn, this helps identify the different ways that enable them to achieve their

*"Suddenly the whole world has shifted from what was the norm, reshaping consumer shopping habits and buying behaviours, and quickly changing the priorities of retailers and brands."*

goal as quickly and easily as possible. There are also many other features that should be considered when looking to optimise your e-commerce platform to increase sales and compete within the industry.

For example, a full product description can decrease the abandonment rate and help customers to trust your brand. If your customer returns an item, more than half of them won't make another purchase from you.

The speed of your website is especially important – every second counts. Being fast and efficient not only keeps your search engine ranking relevant, leading to more visibility, traffic, conversions and revenue, but also prevents your customers from having to wait.

The more they have to wait for a page to load, the higher the chances are of them leaving. In addition to this, your e-commerce website should be built so that it is scalable and can accommodate growth, without the end customer ever being disrupted.

You can also make it easier for your customers to use your website by having features such as related product suggestions, or the option to do an on-site

search with drop down lists of frequently searched items. It also offers your customers an improved, smooth shopping experience by making things easier for them and in turn this helps to increase basket values.

Understanding your customers purchase histories and patterns gives rise to an opportunity to create an element of personalisation. This creates a depth to the technology your customers are using and builds brand loyalty.

When asked about why UX design and the need for e-commerce platforms to be optimised is important, Tom O'Malley, Head of Design at Si digital commented: "As technology continues to expand, expectations are at an all time high with customers looking for a convenient and flexible experience. Creating a shopping experience that customers want and need is an opportunity to give your business a competitive edge. Small design tweaks that focus on a customer's journey can have a profound impact on sales and profitability, which means it's never been more important to focus on the customer in order to succeed".

If you want to throw some ideas around or ask us a question about UX features and how your site could benefit, please contact us at [enquiries@sidigital.co](mailto:enquiries@sidigital.co), or visit our website to find out more about us at [sidigital.co](http://sidigital.co).



# The Future of Invention

Spin Master's **Tal Schrieber** - head of the firm's acclaimed Toy Invention Program - looks at why it's never been more important to get students engaged and interested in toy invention



Israel has always had a rich history of toy inventors. When I first started out, there were only around 10 inventors in Israel, all of them very successful and well-known in the toy industry.

Despite these success stories, no one outside of the industry in Israel knew of them.

There simply wasn't much thought given to the creators and inventors behind the toys and games. I include myself in that; I didn't know you could make a career out of being a 'toy inventor'. It was only really when I met Ora Coster - co-inventor of Guess Who - that I understood that it was a career option. That's when I decided that is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

When we launched the Toy Invention Program at Shenkar, people began to understand that you could become a toy inventor, either full time or part time.

## SHENKAR'S TOY INVENTION PROGRAM (TIP)

I kicked off the program at Shenkar after a few years of teaching toy invention to industrial design students. I realised people from other disciplines should learn it as well and I created a whole new program. I was especially driven once I started to work at Spin Master and needed to bring in cool concepts. The existing pool of inventor talent was small and there was so much opportunity for new blood – it was a win-win!

I went to Shenkar to teach the Toy Invention Program and during the final moments of that first year, I realised how special it was. I invited people from the industry to come and see the students' final projects, and wow – there was so much talent! It was incredibly exciting!

Two excellent students – Inna Shimelmits and Gilad Podgor – travelled with me to Spin Master's head office in Toronto with

a plan to apprentice for one month, and after three weeks, Spin Master asked them to stay longer. They eventually stayed for six months! Today, 14 students from that first year group of 21 students are still inventing and licensing toys.

Then we started building the second year of the program and it has continued to grow over the years!

When I started, I had a small storage room at Shenkar... In the second year I had two storage rooms, and last year they opened a space just for the toy invention students - it's an amazing place.

The day our graduates finish the program, they understand the industry, they know how to pitch and they know how to license their ideas.

And now the entire toy industry is aware of the great hub of inventor talent in Israel. Around 50 inventors from Israel attended the New York Toy Fair last year and in general, we have approximately 90 inventors working in toys and games; it's an extremely unique, open, collaborative community.

## DESIGN VS INVENTION

In toy companies, most of the people that work in creating products are toy designers. Invention is totally different from design. A toy inventor can be a designer but they can also be scientists, engineers, teachers and more.

The Toy Invention Program prepares future inventors by teaching the entire process of toy invention, including inventive thinking, concept creation, prototyping and marketing of toys, games and interactive experiences, while also providing knowledge and insight into the toy industry as a whole. We also strive to remain connected to the toy industry. The program relies on its connection to the industry, offering a different way of professional development.



*"In April 2021, we're hoping to open a Toy Invention Program in Kyoto, Japan, and in September 2021 we'll be opening one in London, England."*

## THE FUTURE

Toy invention is the best career in the world. If you can bring it into your life, even if you choose to do it alongside a 'normal job', do it. It fuels happiness, both for kids and also for the inventors themselves.

We're a really unique industry in the sense that most of the toys and games we play with come from outside inventors. Spin Master understands that diverse thinking and new ideas are essential to driving innovation. We, and every company, need a strong, global inventor community to thrive, so getting kids,

students and creative figures across other industries interested in toy invention, and play in general, has never been more vital.

In April 2021, we're hoping to open a toy invention program in Kyoto, Japan, and in September 2021 we'll be opening one in London, England. These will join the program we launched at Ryerson University in Toronto back in 2019, led by Paul Reynolds.

Every culture brings something different to toy invention and by building a global community and program, we hope to continue to inspire young inventors and bring creativity and innovation to children and families around the world.

*“We need international publishers to look to India for new concepts, engage with Indian designers, give them access to wishlists and be open to pitches from this community. It will make a huge difference.”*

# Gaming Goldmine

Phalgun Polepalli, Director at DICE Toy Labs, spells out what needs to happen for the Indian board game market to soar, and why international publishers - both tabletop and mass market - should look to license their next hit from India's growing community of inventors



Board games in India are on a path to epic growth, and there are many factors paving the way.

The Indian games market is fuelled by the growing middle class and their purchasing power is growing too. A quarter of the Indian population is between three to 12 years of age, and with both Gen-Z and Millennials getting a lot of exposure to pop culture, board games are finding their way onto the table in many homes.

The game design community itself is growing rapidly in India. We're seeing graduates from design schools across the country embrace game design, and anyone that's passionate about the craft are being welcomed into the community every day.

Designers are also finding there is infinite content yet to be tapped when it comes to bringing Indian culture and stories to life in board games and a few have embraced self-publishing.

The wider board gaming community is also growing, with many cafes and gaming groups popping up all over India, and a noticeable rise in social-media content based around the playing and designing of games.

Well, you might be wondering, then: what's the roadblock for a country-wide adoption of games? If the target market is there, why isn't India a major player on the world stage when it comes to board games, and game design?

At DICE Toy Labs, we're among only a handful of companies designing and publishing games in India. We've found the four main things that are holding India back are: a lack of games, a lack of suppliers for games, a lack of publishers and a lack of knowledge and contacts for budding designers.

We have found solutions for some of these, and some we've already implemented, but we know that the Indian design scene needs support to reach its full potential.

So, what are the key factors that we think can fuel board game consumption in India? Simply put: we need more board game publishers. We think we need at least 10 here in India to help fuel noticeable growth in this sector.

We have lots of game designers creating lots of concepts, but someone has to pick these concepts up and push them into the market. For this, we need international publishers - both hobby and mass market - to look to India for new concepts; engage with Indian game designers, give them access to wishlists and other useful material and be open to pitches from this community. It will make a huge difference.

International publishers could kick-start relationships by engaging with board game events in India, like MeepleCon. Awareness on the tabletop side could also be improved by producing and publishing Spiel De Jahres-winning games in India.

In short, India is a goldmine when it comes to great game ideas and talented designers... We're here and we're ready to connect!



## THE INDIAN BOARD GAME CONSUMER...

Here's a small note to international publishers interested in engaging with the Indian market:

- Indian families want a good family game that plays for 60 minutes at a minimum and boasts a fun theme.

- Games with player interaction, strategy, problem-solving and engine building mechanisms are popular, like Ticket to Ride, Splendor and Azul.

- India is not like other countries; Indians prefer their content to be in English. There is a common misconception that games should be in Hindi to be launched successfully in India, but Gen-Z and Millennials are very fluent in English, and in many cases English has become their first language.

- As well as mass-market opportunities, the hobby gaming community is also growing rapidly. This community, however, relies on getting games brought over from abroad with the help of friends or family. Why? Customs is very high, hence the suggestion to produce locally.



**MATTEL**

Always open for business to review  
your toy and game concepts!

# Jazwares' Michael Rinzler on Building the Yankees of Inventor Relations

**Michael Rinzler** – Executive VP and Partner at Jazwares – talks us through building the Yankees of Inventor Relations and why inventors are vital to the firm's plans moving forward



## To kick us off, why are inventors so important to Jazwares?

When you're in a job at a company, people don't always have the time to dedicate to ideation and coming up with amazing ideas.

But for inventors, that's their job! That's what makes our industry work; product is king. It's been that way since the Chattering Teeth and it always will be.

Today, as crazy as the world is, if somebody has a great product that they invented in their garage, they can make it happen. I've always admired how inventors understand how the business works, what kids want and then do things that are outside the box.

## Talk us through Jazwares' BlueJ division; this is the team that engages with inventors, right?

BlueJ consists of our own internal IP Development, where we have a Business Development team led by Danielle Marder, and a Design Team led by Stefanie Barone. But the third piece of the puzzle is the inventor relations group.

Until now, Jazwares has not done a great job working with the inventing community. We've always been a license-driven business and we haven't had the right people or experience to know what to do. But now, we're doing things the right way.

## And as part of that, you've hired some great people to lead the inventor relations team.

Yes, I like to do things the right way and I understand how the

inventing community works, but I also don't have a full day to give to this community, so I knew we had to build the right team.

I found the right team in a couple of different ways. One way was to look at who has done this better than anyone over the last 20 years, as a company. The second thing I did was talk to lots of inventors and ask who they thought was really good.

To use a sports analogy, from an inventor relations standpoint, we were a minor league baseball team, but I wanted to build the Yankees - and this is coming from a New York Mets fan! So I went out and I met David Winter, who is an easy guy to love. He's a very smart product guy who knows instinctively what could be great. From a relationship perspective, he knows the whole community and knows how to treat people well... He gets back to people, he's well organised, he keeps inventors up to speed and he's strong in all the areas that drive both our business and also the inventors' businesses.

Then we brought in Naomi Brugnattelli, and it was the same kind of strategy there. Naomi was a name that kept coming up in discussions around who the inventing community enjoyed working with and who knows the business.

We also brought in Jiselle Hernandez as a coordinator and that is a very important role. Inventors want to know what's going on: did we show anyone internally yet, where's the prototype, etc. They want to know you take them seriously and that you care, so it was key to have a person that can be core to that trusted relationship.

That's the trifecta of talent that we're starting with, and with these guys I feel we flicked a switch and went from a nobody to

*"To use a sports analogy, from an inventor relations standpoint we were a minor league baseball team, but I wanted to build the Yankees - and this is coming from a New York Mets fan!"*

a somebody very quickly. The quality of product, the way the team is working with the community and the buzz we're getting internally from seeing great concepts from inventors is exciting.

## That's brilliant. And if the team wasn't reason enough, why should inventors be taking great ideas to Jazwares?

After acquiring Wicked Cool and Kelly Toys - the Squishmallow brand - Jazwares is now a top ten toy company. We now have the manpower, but we also have the financial wherewithal to invest in developing new brands and marketing those brands appropriately.

Our licensed brands will always be incredibly important to us, but we also want to build some of our own IP. You need the talent and the vision of the inventing community to do that, so it became a critical objective for us.

For inventors, there are multiple opportunities. We're interested in the most innovative concepts that you've got, but we also have some of the best brands in the business - like Pokémon, Fortnite, Roblox, CoComelon... I could go on and on - and there's always going to be opportunities to invent for those brands.

The biggest thing is that this has become important to us. You've seen that in the investment we've made in people, but you'll also see it in how we option products we like, and doing deals, developing them and marketing them in the right way.



### MEET THE TEAM



**David Winter**  
Sr. Director of  
Inventor Relations



**Naomi Brugnattelli**  
Manager of  
Inventor Relations



**Jiselle Hernandez,**  
Coordinator,  
Inventor Relations

# Leave it Out!

## Ten Words to Avoid in Rules

Writer **Deej Johnson** on ten words that make rules worse



How many positive words can you think of that start **sn**? There's **snug**, **snooze**, **snack**, **snazzy**... Without adapting those, can you quickly get three more?

Chances are the answer's no. That's because words starting **sn** force you to give a tiny sneer! As a result, **sn** mostly starts unpleasant words: **snot**, **snarl**, **snag**, **snitch**, **snake**...

For that reason, words that start **sn** are quite rare in game rules. There are, though, dozens of much-worse words that are far more common. They waste space and send the reading age rocketing. Here are just ten of them...

### GAME

Of all the wasteful words in rules, **game** is the most inane. Objective of the Game. Setting Up the Game. Playing the Game. Winning the Game... People aren't morons; they know what they're playing! Why keep writing it? Why waste the whitespace?

### OBJECTIVE

This kind of over-hard word subtly raises the reading age. Say **aim**.

### OF THE

You often see **of the** chewing up space like this: **The winner scores the points showing on the cards of the other player.** If you use an apostrophe, it takes up less space – and breath: **The winner scores the points showing on the other player's cards.**

So! Now you know I don't care for the words **game**, **objective**, or **of the**... Just imagine how I feel when rules start: **Objective of the Game!**

### RULES or INSTRUCTIONS

Who wants to obey **rules**? Or take **instructions**? Neither word sounds fun! Most of the time, I suggest **How to Play**.

### WILL

The word **will** always makes actions feel less lively and more distant. Where you can, drop it and add an **S** to the verb it

affects. As soon as you do, your writing will improve... Or rather: as soon as you do, your writing *improves*. Here's an example, taken from the BANANAGRAMS strapline: **The Anagram Game That Will Drive You Bananas vs The Anagram Game That Drives You Bananas.**

### THAT

Take a look at something that you've written. Search for the word **that**. Now... Does it need to be there? If you're writing in a relaxed tone, you can often lose it. The first sentence here proves the point: **Take a look at something that you've written vs Take a look at something you've written.**

### TAKE then PUT

Humour me, would you? Put your finger on this black dot and count to three.

Now, whether you did it or not, how did you find my request? Clear? If so, you'll know why I didn't waste Mojo's ink or your time by saying: **Take your finger, put it on the black dot and count to three.**

When you see certain words in a sentence, **take** is rarely needed. These words include **put**, **position**, **give**, **present** and **show**. The same edit also gets rid of other fluff: a comma perhaps, or words like **and**, **the** and **it**, as here: **The first player to say "Pass" takes the Red Token and puts it in front of them vs The first person to say "Pass" puts the Red Token in front of them.**

That's because *putting* things requires you to *have* them... Which means there's rarely a need to write **take**, then **put**.

So... That's just ten of the 101 words I like to avoid in rules. No one of them sounds like much on its own... In fact, I'm often asked if these things really *matter*.

My answer's always the same: It depends! Do you think buyers actually WANT long, cramped rules that are harder to read?

As it happens, when you add them up, these little tweaks not only lose about a third of the overall text... They also lower the reading age and free up whitespace for advertising.

And that's not to be **sniffed**, **sniped** or **sneered** at!

# The **New** Normal

Heaves Design's **Richard Heaves** takes a look at how toys marketed to – and designed specifically for – adults are no longer just a passing trend



In some respects, the toy industry doesn't appear to have changed at all in the last 30 years. Classic Monopoly – check! Play-Doh extruder – check! Hot Wheels loop-the-loop – check! LEGO Fire Truck – check!

There are so many toys that have had nips and tucks, but if a child from the Eighties

turned up in a reverse Life on Mars kinda thing at their local toy shop, they'd feel right at home. The 'rinse repeat' formula seems to be working just fine for many.

But when December 25th comes along, they may be very surprised to see what Santa brought the rest of the family. Dad unboxing a £500 LEGO Star Wars Death Star, Mum gleeful at her collection of adult colouring books and Pusheen collectables, older sibling with their £200 Kickstarter board game in the flesh, Granny unpacking the latest VR headset for some Call of Duty action.

What the hell is going on?! Kids play with toys; you lot are supposed to be getting gardening gloves and boring books, like The 100 Most Interesting AA Walks!

Well, welcome to the new normal!

Grown-up toys are certainly a thing and, for many, a very lucrative thing. I am pretty sure Hornby's recent surge is not driven by 10 year olds, and LEGO's range of adult targeted products like the recent LEGO Art range are not just higher-priced versions of kids' toys, but toys designed specifically for the adult market.



One could also point towards the huge growth of high-end games on crowdfunding sites like the recent relaunch of Hero Quest from Hasbro. Another recent crowdfunding item that really caught my imagination was the Spectre & Vox 3D haunted house escape game. It's a real 3D dollhouse! Now some might see all this as a fad, but there are clear reasons why this is happening.

Let's start with birth rate. In the States it was 3.85 births per woman during the Eighties; that's now 1.77. Stats in the UK show in 1980 that 13% of 17 to 30 years olds went onto university education; now it's 35%. A recent study from Loughborough University showed that 54% of young adults were living with their parents into their late Twenties.

All this shows that adults are staying younger for longer. Social media has also made it totally acceptable to share 'play', from daft stunts, toy experiences, and generally adults being big kids. TikTok and the newer platforms even more so. Things considered geeky are now just cool or alternative.

There are also hundreds of online adult toy and game reviewers alongside many sites dedicated to marketing toys towards teens and adults, constantly feeding their toy habit. The launch of a hot Nerf Blaster or Mandalorian collectible can get the same press as the latest tech gadgets.

Let's also not forget we are entering a period of extreme turmoil in the job market. Toys and games have always offered an escape, so this trend is really just a new permanent segment of the toy business. Welcome to the new normal!

***"A recent study from Loughborough University found that 54% of young adults were living with their parents into their late Twenties. Adults are staying younger for longer."***





# Toy Design: It's Not Just Child's Play

The Marketing Store's Global Product Creative Director, **Geoff Smyrk**, looks at the power of great toy design... And why it's an art form



**Hi Geoff, so to kick off, how did you get started in the world of toy design?**

My interest in toy design started for me from about the age of six, admiring how my LEGO boat made of bricks could actually float and wondering why the lightsaber with my Darth Vader Star Wars figure didn't look quite right.

My fascination with design led me to an Industrial Design degree at Brunel University. Whilst there, I managed to squeeze in a teaching certificate, watching children interact and play gave me a fantastic insight into creating designs with consumers being top of mind.

From University, I went into mechanical engineering and very quickly realised it wasn't for me. I took a step back, put a portfolio together and got a job at a promotional agency in London and then quickly progressed to the position of Senior Toy Designer at The Marketing Store where I worked with a great team, creating McDonald's Happy Meal toys for the European markets.

**And this was your first stint at The Marketing Store?**

My first stint concluded in 2004 when I moved to the toy company, Vivid Imaginations. The work was hands-on, from setting up Toy Fair stands on freezing January mornings, to working closely with the likes of Keith Chapman on his pre-school properties. My time at Vivid helped build my

consumer knowledge and the realisation that great design also needs to be built on commercial viability.

In 2011, I was given the opportunity to move to the best-loved toy brand in the world, The LEGO Group. I helped establish and lead the UK arm of the internal global-creative agency working across everything retail from e-commerce, social, to creating in-store experiences and occasions campaigns.

I moved from being a Creative Director in the UK to the less sunny climate of LEGO HQ in Billund, Denmark to head up the LEGO IP team. I led a fantastic team of international designers, all highly skilled model makers responsible for creating the LEGO IP products from Star Wars, Harry Potter, Jurassic Park to Marvel and Batman sets; from a toy design perspective, it's pretty high up on the list of attainment.

With a young family at home in the UK and changes being made in The LEGO Group, I was given the opportunity to re-join The Marketing Store. I've been back for nearly three years as Global Product Creative Director. I have a job that makes me smile every day, I look after all the McDonald's Happy Meal toys we develop globally, aside from the US market, and all the supporting communication that goes with it.

**I could line up 10 different creative directors - they'd each have differing roles and responsibilities... So, how would you define what you do as a creative director?**

My job is to influence, propose relevant license partners, ensure we are really digging into the DNA of a licence to understand the

*"Toys and games shape memories and reinforce learning experiences through fun and play! Could you say the same for a typical household appliance?"*

emotional connection with consumers that ultimately builds the foundation of a great play experience. I make sure sustainability is embedded into our design thinking, challenge the team and clients to put the consumer top of mind and encourage research - all to facilitate strategic, insight-driven solutions.

**Now, let's get onto a spikier subject that I know you're passionate about: snobbery in toy design.**

You may have had a similar experience, when people ask what you do and you tell them you work in the toy industry or in toy design, it usually puts a smile on their face, soon followed by a flippant comment about 'colouring in' and 'drawing pictures'.

Some people have assumed that toy design is a lower form of design compared to product or industrial design - almost child's play. The reality couldn't be further from the truth.

Look at it this way: break down people's lives and consider the impact that toys, games and video games have had on their childhood... Toys shape memories and reinforce learning experiences through fun and play! Could you say the same for a typical household appliance?

Toy design is complex when you take all the considerations on board like ergonomics, aesthetics, user experience, material selection, cost, safety, commercial viability, manufacturing requirements, human behaviours, sustainability, I could go on. These are all wrapped up to create a memorable experience. It's an art form and certainly not child's play.

**Do Happy Meal toys suffer from that kind of design snobbery more than the commercial toy space does?**

People make a choice to purchase toys at retail, this inherently gives retail products a perceived value. Promotional goods are distributed free, therefore they have no inherent value.

When you look at the volume of Happy Meal toys we design and manufacture each year, we are the biggest toy manufacturer in the world. We have a huge responsibility to make sure every play experience counts. The QA standards we work to and our focus on sustainability is higher than most retail standards. We strive to deliver great quality, a strong play experience and a perceived value that rivals, if not surpasses, products at retail.





# Introducing the Toy and Game School

Inventor **Adam Borton** has launched a new online platform designed to teach everyone how to create toys and games that people will buy, play and recommend. We caught up with him to learn what his Toy and Game School course covers and why he developed it

**Hi Adam; so this year you're launching an exciting new initiative called the Toy and Game School, tell us about it?**

I'm aiming to create the toy and game version of Masterclass.com. I want it to be the world's best online toy and game school; that's the plan! The online platform is designed to teach everyone how to create toys and games that people will buy, play and recommend.

I'm teaching via videos. The videos range in content but ultimately you'll watch and learn real skills. I'm not just telling people about my experiences, I'll be showing you how I do them. And if you have a 3D printer, you'll actually be able to follow along and 3D-print a brand new toyetic game.

**What sort of areas will your Toy and Game School cover?**

There's loads of content. We'll cover product categories, companies, different careers, what events to attend, as well as sessions that delve into design, sales, distribution, production, licensing and retail. The core fundamentals of the toy industry will be well covered. We'll also have lessons looking at how to have great ideas as well as what makes a good idea a good idea, and we'll also have practical sessions on areas like sketching, building test models, 3D modelling, sculpting and 3D printing.

**As an inventor that has licensed successful items, why launch a platform like the Toy and Game School? Is your aim to grow the industry's pool of inventor talent?**

I think it all comes down to quality over quantity; I'm trying to ensure newcomers contribute to the quality side of it. Hopefully, the Toy and Game School will lead to toy firms getting higher quality concepts from a new pool of inventors.

That's been my own approach. I don't pitch as often as toy companies expect me to because I focus on quality. Pixar founder John Lasseter said: "Quality is the best business plan." You can go for two years and not pitch, but if a company knows you'll be presenting quality, they'll still meet with you.

Toy and game professionals will look at your work and judge it on its design, graphics and marketing potential. I judge my own work that way too. You have to constantly be learning high quality techniques to stay relevant. It's why it's so difficult to license concepts to the big companies, because their quality bar is so high. They only license a few things a year, so they're looking for high quality and that's what I want my students to grasp. There are lots of different pieces in the puzzle of what makes up a great toy; I want to help people put the pieces together.

**How can people access the Toy and Game School?**

It's a one-year membership where you pay one time and you get full access to all of the content for a whole year. There's modules and tests and the course is full of condensed, organised, valuable information that can take people through each part of the toy and game process. Head to [www.toyandgameschool.com](http://www.toyandgameschool.com) to get 40% off during the pre-launch period.

A photograph of Adam Borton, a man with short brown hair and a beard, wearing a dark red sweater. He is smiling and has his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a dimly lit room with blue and purple lighting, possibly a workshop or studio.

**"I'M AIMING TO CREATE THE  
TOY AND GAME VERSION OF  
MASTERCLASS.COM."**

*“With innovations around packaging, recycled plastics and green transportation, as well as fresh business models being embraced by consumers, 2020 highlighted the change required and steered our ships onto a new course.”*

## 2021: The Year to Go Green

Products of Change’s **Helena Mansell-Stopher** looks back at how the events of 2020 put a spotlight on sustainability... And why she believes 2021 will be the year of fruitful collaboration and positive change when it comes to issues around eco-friendliness and toys



The world changed in 2020! For some it was truly devastating and many will be working hard to steer their life back to some kind of normality. For others, the year enabled them to take a breath and realign what their purpose is; reassessing how they want to live their life and run their business.

So many questions were thrown up in the air which brought a real focus to how to reset and build a better future. Many progressed their business by five years within a few months, which is an extraordinary achievement.

Building that better future leads me nicely into the work I have been driving at Products of Change, working closely with the brand and licensing industry, from licensors, retailers and manufacturers through to the creative industry supporting this phenomenal business to build more sustainable practices.

With climate change impacting business this year like never before, we can see the correlation between our ‘take, make, waste’ society and the impact that has on our ability to operate as normal. We need to reimagine what normal looks like to future-proof our business and take those first, simple steps to becoming more sustainable as a business and, more importantly, as an industry.

This isn’t only what is required of industry, but what the consumer is requesting. According to research from YouGov, 64% of people want to support local businesses and buy local products as a result of coronavirus. We are also seeing huge shifts in consumer behaviour regarding second-hand shopping, with the online second-hand market set to grow 69% from 2019 to 2021. According to the ThreadUp’s Resale Report in 2020, this new market will grow to almost twice the size of fast fashion by 2029; a huge shift.

Imagine if we take these new business models and bring them in to the toy space. Take for example Patagonia, where you can either buy new or have an option to buy re-used for a little less money on the same platform.

Take a second and think about this; it’s so clever... You don’t have the cost of producing, packaging and shipping a new product - or the carbon output and cost to the environment.

There is a huge value to this. If you sell at a price that’s 70% of the new product price, the majority of that is pure profit, which rapidly becomes an extremely efficient business model that is good for the environment. Offer a blended service and you have the best of both worlds.

This year, Ikea launched a similar scheme where customers receive a gift card for sending back fully-

assembled pieces of Ikea furniture. The customer then uses that gift card in store, whilst the used furniture creates a bargain in their savers section.

“Sustainability is the defining issue of our time and Ikea is committed to being part of the solution to promote sustainable consumption and combat climate change,” said Peter Jelkeby, Ikea UK and Ireland Chief Executive and Chief Sustainability Officer.

The latest retail report from Cybertill and Retail Gazettes - ‘Lets Innovate Sustainably’ - released in November 2020, states that sustainable packaging remains the biggest investment focus, with 44% of retail tech leaders saying it’s their company’s priority.

We heard this first-hand from LEGO during their presentation at the Sustainability in Licensing Conference held in November 2020, as well as in their statement detailing a move to recyclable paper packaging.

The report goes on to say that Sainsbury’s revealed it would work towards cutting its plastic packaging by 50% over the next five years, and that ethical product lines are the most popular area of focus for retailers (42%) followed by product recycling (32%).

With the arrival of new technology for packaging, recycled plastics, green transportation, as well as new business models being embraced by consumers, 2020 highlighted the change required and steered our ships onto a new course.

Looking to the New Year, 2021 will be the year of collaboration for change, technological growth and investment as well as the advancement of green industry; how exciting!

*Helena Mansell-Stopher is the Founder of Products of Change, an online education platform and peer-to-peer networking hub ([www.productsofchange.com](http://www.productsofchange.com)), as well as Conference Director for the Sustainability in Licensing Conference, taking place on June 24th at The British Library.*



RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

# RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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**DOUGAL GRIMES,**  
VP of Innovation and Inventor  
Relations, Spin Master

2020 was a special year for Dougal Grimes as he was promoted to VP of Innovation and Inventor Relations at Spin Master. One of the most popular figures in the world of inventor relations, Dougal exhibits boundless energy and enthusiasm in working with inventors and representing their ideas internally. As one Grimes fan puts it: "Not only is he genuinely passionate about great play experiences, Dougal deserves a lot of credit for his great work in helping set up design collaborations with inventors and inventor groups."



**TARA MCGRATH,**  
Director of Design, Mattel

Tara McGrath serves as a Director of Design at Mattel, responsible for leading all Disney Pixar Brands. With over 20 years at Mattel, she has worked on various brands such as Barbie, Polly Pocket, Disney Princess, Uno Games, and Disney Cars. Before Mattel, Tara worked in the world of inventing at Pace Development Group in NYC. Tara and her team had a stellar year in 2020, winning a TOTY Award for the Toy Story 4 figure line and also doing great work on Mattel's Minions: The Rise of Gru product range.



**PHIL SAGE,**  
Senior Director,  
Product Development,  
Design and Inventor  
Relations, Hasbro

A much-loved figure in the world of toy invention, Phil Sage continues to drive innovation across the industry, serving in a leadership role within Hasbro's Design Center of Excellence. As well as defining business growth pipelines and accelerating disruptions and fresh revenue opportunities, 2020 also saw Phil look to help a new wave of design talent enter the toy space by partnering with Brunel University on a Nerf challenge. One nominator summed him up as: "Truly passionate about innovation and disruption, boasting a great eye for product and respected by the global inventor scene, Phil is a gem."



**NAOMI BRUGNATELLI,**  
Manager, Inventor Relations,  
Jazwares

A household name among inventors, especially gamers, Naomi Brugnattelli took the leap to Jazwares for a lead role as Manager of Inventor Relations in 2020. Naomi brings her strong eye for innovation and her years of dedicated IR experience to the table. As one nominator wrote: "Naomi will be working closely with the internal brand teams and the inventor community to bring exciting opportunities to partner on at Jazwares and everyone is so excited to see what she comes out with!"



**ANDREW HAJITHEMISTOU,**  
Head of Innovation,  
The Marketing Store

Since taking on the role of Head of Innovation at The Marketing Store, Andrew Hajithemistou has elevated it to new levels. He is an innovative thinker, constantly pushing the boundaries and thinking outside of the box for new solutions, not just for materials but also when designing. "He is a true self-starter and is constantly researching the marketplace to make solid and valuable recommendations," said one nominator, adding: "Andrew has new, creative ideas to support his client's aspirations – many of which have made a tremendous impact to marketplaces from a sustainability standpoint."



**JAN-MAURITS DUPARC,**  
Chief Creation, Identity Games

JM Duparc has been at Identity Games for more than 15 years, and is dedicated to bringing unique play experiences to market. In 2020, he did exactly that with the launch of Nightmare Horror Adventures, a properly scary horror game boasting some truly novel twists and turns. "Whether through escape room games or even the blow-up-doll-inspired Who's the Dude?, JM and his team are constantly looking to innovate and drive change in what can sometimes feel like a risk-averse industry," said one nominator.



**KENNA O'BRIEN,**  
Design Manager, Barbie, Mattel

A thoughtful, inspiring and energetic force of design, Kenna O'Brien constantly pushes her design colleagues and partners to think of innovative new ways to expand Barbie's world. She is a key leader behind Mattel's incredibly successful new Barbie segment, Color Reveal, which has gone on to be a 2021 TOTY nominee for Doll of The Year. As one nominator put it: "Incorporating insights from research and new innovative technology, Kenna championed break-frame ideas that led to a successful, never-before-seen play experience within the Barbie portfolio."



**LAUREN MAYOR,**  
Concept Designer,  
Moose Toys UK

Lauren Mayor joined the Moose family during lockdown and according to one of her colleagues, "She has quickly injected an exciting freshness into our concept creation." Having previously worked at TOMY, Vivid and Goliath, Lauren has a deep rooted creativity and excellent industry knowledge that spans many categories - despite still being in her twenties. Another nominator waxed lyrical, stating: "Lauren brings a great professionalism and team spirit with her as she drives innovation at the UK Moose office," adding: "We are lucky to have her on the team!"



**GERRY CODY,**  
Director of Design, Hot Wheels  
Innovation, Mattel

Gerry Cody serves as a Director of Design at Mattel, responsible for leading the Hot Wheels Advanced Play & RC group. He led the design team that developed TechMods and most recently, the acclaimed Hot Wheels id. "Gerry's creativity and competitive spirit fuel his mission to create the future of play for 'Car Kids!'" said one nominator. They added: "He has a lifelong passion for vehicles in both the automotive and toy industries. He deserves a lot of credit for tirelessly promoting a culture of disruptive thinking and curiosity."



**DAVID WINTER,**  
Senior Director, Inventor  
Relations, Jazwares

A true champion of innovation in the toy industry, Jazwares' David Winter can be seen supporting inventors at every industry event with a smile on his face and open arms for all who have a concept to share. As one nominator put it: "Tirelessly working to support inventors, David truly understands what it means to be innovative," adding: "Inventors can rely on him to be there throughout the process, whether that is holding their hand as they progress through reviews or liaising between the inventor and Jazwares to ensure that the item is shown in its best light."



**ANGUS WALKER,**  
Senior Director,  
Design and  
Development,  
Games, Hasbro

Angus Walker has been with Hasbro for over 15 years. During that time, he has worked across global brand development, strategy and marketing, and now, design and development for the games division. "Angus really is one of the best in the business," said one of his fans, while another stated: "When you look at his experience working across both marketing and design, it's rare for people to wear both of those hats; I think that's what makes him so good at what he does."



**WARREN JACOBS,**  
Product Development  
Manager, Interplay UK

A much-loved figure in the UK toy design scene, Warren Jacobs is the Product Development Manager at Interplay UK. Among the wave of nominations were testimonials including: "Warren is superb at what he does" and "Try to find a nicer guy working in toy design; you won't find one!"



#### MATTEL'S INVENTOR RELATIONS TEAM

(Dave Harris, Allison Gabbey, Gillian Ruan, Helen De La Cruz, Nikki Bauman, Sarah Franco, Wendy Duplantier)

Inventors have been a part of Mattel's DNA since the company started 75 years ago. To this day, the Inventor Relations team at Mattel knows that inventors are vital to the company's ongoing success. As one nominator put it: "The IR team at Mattel give full-transparency throughout their process, are fair, quick and detailed with their feedback and are relentless champions for the inventor community." Another said: "The IR Team's mission is the same as the inventors they serve; to create the most innovative products for kids from the very young to the young at heart."



**STEFANIE BARONE,**  
VP of Design, Jazwares

Coming to New York as a sculptor ready to take the design world by storm as the toast of SoHo, Stefanie Barone found herself on a much different path than the one she envisioned having been sucked into the whimsical world of toy design. She since flourished in a successful career of 20 years and counting; partnering with companies like ToyBiz, Play Along, and Jakks before joining friends Jeremy Padawer and Michael Rinzler at Wicked Cool Toys. While there, Stefanie led design for brands such as Cabbage Patch Kids, AEW and Pokémon, but with the recent acquisition of WCT by Jazwares, she now leads as VP of Design at the firm's BlueJ division, which sees internal and inventor innovation brought to life with exceptional attention to design.



**CHRISTIAN CASTRO,**  
Design Director, What Do You Meme?

Christian Castro had a great start to 2020 as he was promoted to the role of Design Director at What Do You Meme? before going on to lead design on five new family items for the firm. These included a first for the company: a toddler toy in the form of Silly Poopy's Hide and Seek which quickly became an 'Amazon's Choice' toy. That wasn't the only case of the company breaking new ground in 2020... Christian also spearheaded the design and assisted in the content development of 'What Do You Meme? En Español', the company's first ever non-English game designed for sale in the US market.



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**MIKE DE CAMP,**  
Senior Business Development Manager,  
Jazwares

Having been with Jazwares since near inception, Mike De Camp has grown with the company for over 20 years. Mike has been a key member and

brain-trust on many iconic video-game and pop-culture toy lines launched by Jazwares. These include Mortal Kombat, Street Fighter and Adventure Time and more recently Minecraft, Roblox and Fortnite. In the last 12 months, Mike has joined Jazwares' innovation division - BlueJ - as Senior Business Development Manager where he'll lean on his extensive creative talents and his two children who inspire him to be bigger, better and to create a positive impact on the state of play for kids and dreamers alike.



**DR. MARK GASSON,**  
Head of Technology, Wow! Stuff

Dr. Mark Gasson is Head of Technology at Wow! Stuff, and the inventor of the firm's award-winning Harry Potter Invisibility Cloak. The cloak got off to the perfect start last

year, winning a TOTY Award for Innovative Toy of the Year, a category celebrating toys that 'utilise innovative design, technology, or manufacturing processes to enhance play value'. As one fan of Mark's puts it: "Wow! Stuff's Invisibility Cloak is magical in every sense of the word, and Mark is a perfect embodiment of the creative drive that fuels what Wow! Stuff is all about."



**TANYA THOMPSON,**  
Director of Global Product Acquisition, Games, Hasbro

One of the most popular figures in the world of inventor relations, Tanya Thompson works with inventors around the world, from all experience levels, to help create brilliant play experiences for Hasbro Gaming. "Great to work with and a true champion of the inventor community, Tanya is a legend," said one nominator, while another added: "Her love and passion for games is truly unrivalled."



**CHRIS DOWN,**  
Chief Design Officer, Mattel

Chris Down is Chief Design Officer at Mattel and has been with the company for over 16 years. During his time at the company, Chris has worked on brands including the likes of Hot Wheels, Monster

High and Barbie. He is known for being a big supporter of the global toy inventor community. "Chris is a true toy guy and he's transforming the way kids play through the power of design and technology," said one nominator.

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**KURT HUNTSBERGER,**  
VP, Head of Design,  
Fisher-Price Pre-School,  
Mattel

Kurt Huntsberger has been at Fisher-Price for almost 30 years, joining the company as an Associate Designer and working his way up to become the VP of Design for all of the

Fisher-Price pre-school businesses. As one nominator puts it: "He is a champion for not only his own design teams, but also the external inventor community and uses his level of experience and knowledge to challenge the designers and inventors to think like kids and have fun."



**SAMUEL JOHNSON,**  
Design Manager, The  
LEGO Group

Samuel Johnson is a Design Manager at The LEGO Group, and Creative Lead for LEGO Ideas and LEGO Art, two brands that enjoyed a great year in 2020. On

the LEGO Ideas front, 2020 saw sets including Sesame Street, the International Space Station, a Ship in a Bottle and the Grand Piano launch via the platform. Samuel won further recognition with a 2021 Toy of the Year nomination for the LEGO Grand Piano. Another one of Samuel's biggest launches of the past year was LEGO Art, a successful new range aimed at adults that allows consumers to create LEGO artwork based on brands including Marilyn Monroe, Harry Potter, Marvel, Star Wars and The Beatles.



**DEIRDRE CROSS,**  
Director of Product  
Development,  
Funko Games

Deirdre Cross is Director of Product Development at Funko Games, the arm of Funko that in recent times has helped bring brands as eclectic as Groundhog Day, Footloose and even Pan

Am into the games space. The past year has seen Deirdre and her team bring another exciting slate of games to retail. These include titles based on existing brands like Godzilla: Tokyo Clash, Marvel Battleworld and Back to the Future: Back in Time. There are also original titles like the real-time co-op game, Last Defense. "Deirdre is the hardest working woman in the business and is incredibly smart and creative," said one nominator, adding: "She keeps the ship moving!"



**ALISA MCCOY,**  
Senior Director, Product Development,  
Hasbro Games

A brand-builder with expertise in art direction, writing and brand strategy, Hasbro's Alisa McCoy takes good products and makes them great. Alisa's

team recently reimagined Guess Who? to feature more diverse and inclusive character illustrations, and as one nominator puts it: "She sets a high standard of excellence for herself and her team, unlocking creative potential and delivering results."

**DESIGN  
AGENCIES &  
INVENTION  
STUDIOS**

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**THE FANTASTIC FACTORY**

The Fantastic Factory, run by David Snow and Steve Evans, has enjoyed a year to remember. One of the group's biggest success stories was Trapped, The Fantastic Factory's new line of escape room games published by Golden Bear and co-created with ClueCrypted's Adam Howard. The range won



The Fantastic Factory a Play Creators Award for Game Designer of the Year and more titles are in the works. Elsewhere in 2020, the studio launched Silly Sounds with Interplay UK and Dumb Criminals with University Games.



**DAN KLITSNER,**  
Co-Founder, KID Group

KID Group is the toy invention and licensing group behind some of today's most successful electronic games and interactive toys, including iconic products like Bop It and Perplexus. Dan Klitsner, along with his partners Brian Clemens and Gary Levenberg, had another good year in 2020, with notable successes including Spin Master's mind-bending Rubik's Perplexus Hybrid and Yulu's Break the Board, a game that sees players chop, strike and swipe their way through levels in a bid to become a karate master.



**GIL ZALAYET,**  
Owner and Creative Director, Studio Play

Year after year, Gil Zalayet's Studio Play has continually provided top-quality concepts to the toy industry, and it's been another stellar year for the firm. Gil, along with co-inventor Ryan Kratz, picked up a TAGIE Award in 2019 for their work on Fisher-Price's RC Imaginext Batmobile. The two were finalists again at last year's event, being recognised for Mattel's Toy Story Galaxy Explorer Spacecraft and Spin Master's Batman Rapid Change Utility Belt 12 Inch Action Figure. The latter also bagged Gil and Ryan a nomination for Toy Inventor of the Year in the Licensed Product category at last year's Play Creators Awards virtual event.



**FUSE LONDON**

As one of the industry's leading invention firms, FUSE London enjoyed another stellar year in 2020. Recent highlights for the firm include Moose Toys' Oh My Gif! collectibles range, Jazwares' Micro Machines Super Van City Play-Set and Hasbro's Frozen 2 Transforming Dress Assortment. Elsewhere, the world of action figures has been fruitful for the firm, with Hasbro's Power Rangers Deluxe 2-in-1 action figures and Spin Master's Batman Mega Gear range enjoying strong launches.



**STEVE MOORE,**  
Creative Director, Tantrum Innovation

"He's a veteran who deserves to be recognised for sheer determination, and belief in their abilities to strike out and make a name for themselves on their own..." So says one nominator of Steve Moore, Creative Director at Tantrum. In 2020, Steve secured deals for several products due to launch later this year, and was nominated for Hasbro's New Inventor of the Year award. "His dedication to innovation is astounding and he consistently delivers with even the vaguest of briefs," said one nominator, adding: "We are so excited to partner with Steve and look forward to future products we'll make together."



**FI MURRAY,**  
Creative Director and Founder, Making Things Studio

2020 saw Making Things' Fi Murray modify her approach to the ever-changing 'COVID and beyond' consumers; going virtual with Making Things' innovation workshops and boosting her studio's inventing output. Making Things has an exciting slate of products set to launch with various partners across 2021 and 2022, and as one nominator stated: "Fi is a creative force of nature! Whether it's through knockout inventor items or her incredibly useful workshops, she's fast established Making Things as a star of the UK's toy design scene."



**SG LABS**

SG Labs' Rory Sledge and Michael Gramelspacher enjoyed a prolific year in 2020. October saw SG Labs awarded the Inventors Choice Award from Mattel and Fisher-Price by the vote of the professional inventor community for their Rollin' Rovee item. Other launches from the team last year included Color Poppin' Poppy from Just Play. SG Labs also played a significant role in the development of Grouch Couch from Spin Master and Squeakee from Moose Toys, both with long-time partner Bang Zoom Design.



**GARY PYPER,**  
Founder, Fun-Damental Invention

A powerhouse designer, Gary Pyper is the creative force behind Fun-Damental Invention. Since leaving Seven Towns to go it alone in 2019, Fun-Damental has gone from strength to strength, and 2020 saw one of Gary's big creations hit the shelves in the form of Windy Knickers from John Adams. This saw Gary nominated for Game Inventor of the Year at both the TAGIEs and the Play Creators Awards. As one nominator puts it: "Breaking out on your own takes courage and vision which Gary has shown plenty of," adding: "We are always so excited to see all the thoughtful and creative - and sometimes wacky and wonderful - concepts he comes up with."



**GEOFF HOUSE,**  
Owner, Tricky

Geoff House runs the invention studio Tricky, known for hit games like Googly Eyes. Geoff has recently teamed up with other inventors on a number of successful projects, including Tweet Beats with So Sound, Fill Your Pants with Sublevel Studios and a number of collaborations with Big Ideas. As one fan puts it: "Geoff is what the 100 is all about... Celebrating figures who do great work, are lovely to collaborate with and are far too humble to ever brag about themselves!"



**IDEO**

IDEO is one of the biggest players in the world of toy and game invention. Recent highlights for the firm include the PJ Masks Transforming 2-in-1 Mobile HQ with Just Play, which is in the running for a 2021 TOTY Award in the Vehicles category. Another one of IDEO's recent success stories has a history with the TOTYs as IDEO's 2020 Game of the Year-winning Pictionary Air has been given a follow-up in the form of Mattel's Pictionary Air: Kids vs Grown Ups.

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### SEVEN TOWNS

Seven Towns has had a great year in 2020 with some successful new launches and even a few award wins. One big debut from last year was Junk Bots. This new collectible line that launched with Innovation

First and saw Seven Towns named Toy Inventor of the Year at the 2020 Play Creators Awards. Elsewhere, the firm also enjoyed success in the activity space with Stuff-a-Loons, a new brand from BOTI that allows kids to create their own beautiful balloon gifts. Away from the product launches, 2020 was also a milestone year for Seven Towns... The company's studio enjoyed a redesign, resulting in a more spacious workshop complete with new 3D printers.



**DOMINIC YARD,**  
Founder, This is YARD

Based in Los Angeles, California, Dominic Yard runs the one-man invention studio known as This is YARD, which works with the world's largest toy companies.

As a self-contained operation, Dom managed to stay agile and invent interruption-free throughout the turbulence of 2020, cranking out more concepts and models than ever before. Some notable success stories from the past 12 months for Dom include the launch of his Little People 2-in-1 Batmobile from Fisher-Price, as well as continued strong sales of his Monster Jam, Tech Deck and Thomas items.



### NEXTOY

Nextoy's Robert and Alex Fuhrer have enjoyed another impressive 12 months, with highlights including highly-successful games in Gator Golf with Goliath; T-Rocks Rex with Hasbro, and continued strong

sales worldwide for Crocodile Dentist. Elsewhere in the games space, some of Nextoy's latest launches include the Play Creators Awards-nominated Puglicious with Mattel, Octopus Shootout with Spin Master and Don't Get Rattled with John Adams. The invention firm is also the driving force behind one of the fastest-growing puzzle brands in the world: KenKen Puzzle. What's more, Nextoy has also enjoyed success licensing the rotating discs puzzles TwinSpin with Ceaco and placing the astonishing GeoBender transforming cube in Japan with Kawada.



### GALACTIC SNEEZE

This Brooklyn-based game design studio is run by Sara Farber and Bryan Wilson and best known for party games like Spank the Yeti,

Schmovie and Goat Yoga. "Galactic Sneeze has been an amazing partner in the creation of new licensed games," said one nominator, adding: "Over the last 12 months, they have demonstrated their ability to be fast-moving and agile thinkers who always come to the table with fun and novel gameplay ideas." 2020 saw the team expand their line of games with Kikkerland thanks to the arrival of Unicornhole, a trendy twist on the classic corn-hole/bag toss game.

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David Winter,  
Sr. Director of Inventor Relations



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Naomi Brugnatelli,  
Manager of Inventor Relations

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**BANG ZOOM DESIGN**

"Bang Zoom continue to reinvent themselves and they are confidently among the most diverse-skilled invention houses in

the world," said one nominator. The Cincinnati-based invention company - made up of Steve Fink, Mike Hoeting, Steve Casino and Neil Hamilton - had a year that backs that up. Highlights for the firm include Fisher-Price's Rollin' Rovee, Hasbro's Play-Doh Animal Crew Cluck-a-Dee and Moose Toys' Squeakee the Balloon Dog, which is in the running for a 2021 Toy of the Year Award in the innovation category.



**DESIGNBYTOUCH**

Named Design Agency/Invention Studio of the Year at the 2020 Play Creators Awards, and winner of Hasbro's 2020

Partner of the Year Award, the last 12 months have been great for the team at DesignbyTouch, led by Matt Gouveia, Paul Boucher and David Baldin. As one fan said: "DesignbyTouch have been top of their game for some time", while another added: "The team's inventions are always fresh and delivered in videos that you simply can't say no to. Oh, and they are genuinely nice people to work with!"



**BIG MONSTER TOYS**

"Big Monster Toys have consistently been one of the industry's top invention and design groups, year-in, year-out; they really are remarkable." And that nominator isn't alone in being impressed by the firm's output

over the past year... BMT played a key role in the creation of Alpha Group's RC TerraTrax. On the games front, the group had two games launch with Goliath in Rattlesnake Jake and Burping Bobby. A skill game from Hasbro, Sky Score, also hit shelves. Capping off an impressive year, BMT won the 2020 Play Creators Award for Toy Inventor of the Year, Licensed Product, for its Paw Patrol Split Second 2-in-1 Vehicles with Spin Master.



**BIG IDEAS PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

Simon Skelton and Ruth Elliott are the team at Big Ideas Product Development, a design and invention studio known for creating great play experiences across toys, games and brands. Recent successes

for the firm include the Frozen II: Elsa's Magical Powers game and as one nominator said: "Simon and Ruth are true unsung heroes of the UK inventor scene." Another added: "A delight to work with, they have great ideas and phenomenal know-how."



**TRICLOPS STUDIOS**

As the two-headed monster behind Triclops Studios, Rob Ames and Luc Hudson run one of the industry's top design consultancies and invention hubs, working

with all of the toy sector's biggest players. "These guys really are the pinnacle of great design in the toy space," said one nominator, while another added: "Rob and Luc think differently, challenge the status quo and are never afraid to take risks; they are true innovators."



**JMP CREATIVE**

Led by award-winning innovator Jim McCafferty, JMP Creative has enjoyed continual success in the toy industry, creating products that have achieved

Toy-of-the-Year status, and developing concepts that have resulted in over a billion units of product reaching the marketplace. Achievements from the last 12 months include launching Bow'Sis with IMC Toys, two new Jay & Silent Bob party games with Playstorm Toys as well as creating a new emerging vehicle brand in Power Treads. Marketed by WowWee, Power Treads is a 2021 TOTY Finalist. And as one nominator puts it; "JMP is an amazing, driven and talented team, and they have a real love for creating toys and games which make people happy throughout the world."



**CATAPULT CONCEPTS**

Catapult Concepts, owned and operated by Westley Ciaramella and Keith Millman, has

enjoyed an impressive last 12 months. One of the firm's big success stories in 2020 was the Barbie Face Mask Spa Day playset. The item features dough and forms that kids use to make face masks for Barbie and her pup. Other recent hits with Mattel include the card game Pic Flip and the Take Aim Buzz Lightyear. The successful partnership looks set to continue as Catapult also has several TV drivers lined up with Mattel for 2021. Elsewhere, the firm also enjoyed success placing its Wobble Run with Fat Brain Toys and its Hot Pot Lobster game with Far Out Toys.



**OPEN 2 DESIGN**

Open 2 Design is an award-winning design and invention studio made up of Matt Burtonwood and Ben Williams. The firm has

made an increasing mark on the invention space over the last few years, thanks to success stories like Rubik's Cage and recent work with Fisher-Price on its Little People Wheelies Raceway. "Open 2 Design is an unsung hero of the industry," said one nominator, while another added: "Their level of thinking is brilliant and, time and time again, they deliver the best designs and styling for toys - period."



**RICHARD HEAYES,**  
Founder,  
Heayes Design and PlayLenz

Winner of the Design Icon award at last year's Play Creators Awards,

Richard Heayes has been at the vanguard of game design for the last three decades. "His passion for innovation and his creativity have consistently breathed new life into a category that can be stale and repetitive," said one fan. In 2020, his collaboration with Tactic Games brought Hack My Password and 15 Minutes to Destruction to market, and elsewhere he assisted Cartamundi with its impressive range of figurine-based Disney games.



**SO SOUND**

Over the past few years, So Sound has taken great strides in establishing itself as one of the UK's leading

players when it comes to design and invention. Led by TJ Morrison, So Sound's design division has enjoyed a successful last 12 months, with highlights including the launch of licensed games with Cartamundi spanning brands like Friends and Harry Potter, as well as establishing a thriving work-for-hire arm to the business. The company also boasts an industry-leading audio division which continues to thrive. As one nominator puts it: "Professional, creative and a joy to work with, So Sound are up there with the very best."





**INNA SHIMELMITS AND ROY KFIR,**  
Game Inventors

Inna Shimelmits and Roy Kfir met six years ago at Shenkar's prestigious Toy Invention Program. After many years of creating and inventing toys as a kindergarten teacher, Roy decided to take it to the next level by joining the course. Meanwhile, Inna was an industrial designer with a passion for fun and playful products... Together the two have enjoyed several successes in the toy industry. The most recent of these is Spin Master's Frozen II Frantic

Forest. They partnered with Michal Bergman and Mor Steinberg on the game, which sees players hang snowflakes on a tree until it pops open and sends Olaf flying. Inna and Roy work on new ideas with different companies in the toy industry and have plenty more cooking for 2021 and beyond.



**DANIELA AND CHRISTIAN STÖHR,**  
Game Inventors

Daniela and Christian Stöhr are the game design couple behind Pictures, the winners of the prestigious Spiel des Jahres 2020. The game, which sees players try to re-create images using a mishmash of objects, saw off competition from Reiner Knizia's My City and Nova Luna from Uwe Rosenberg and Corné van Moorsel. Summing up the game, the Spiel

des Jahres judges said... "The material sets in Pictures initially seem almost randomly thrown together... In reality they are chosen wisely: each set challenges the players in a different way, and so the incentive to experiment is enormous." They added, "The results are often astonishing, which is why the guessing sessions quickly resemble visiting art exhibitions! With great aha moments and amusing attempts to justify the misunderstood artist genius... Great creativity with the simplest of means."



**DAVID FUHRER,**  
President,  
BlueSquare Innovations

BlueSquare Innovations' David Fuhrer is an award-winning inventor, consultant and agent. David, along with his business partners Richard Kimbrough and Rob Schuyler, is the brains behind Spin Master's hit products Twisty Petz, Twisty Beauty and Twisty Girlz. This impressive range of 'Transformers for girls' sees beautiful bracelets magically transform into a doll, animal or beauty item. Debuting in 2020, Twisty Girlz and Twisty Petz Beauty became instant hits. As well as enjoying success at retail, the range is also a sensation on YouTube, tallying more than 60 million unique hits on Twisty videos.



**JEN AND CHRIS ARMSTRONG,**  
Founders, SolidRoots

Jen and Chris Armstrong are the founders of SolidRoots, a company on a mission to create 'unique content, products, and experiences that bring you closer to your people'. Since launching back in 2017, SolidRoots has created a line of games sold in retailers across the world. 2020 was a stand-out year for the firm as its new trivia game, Mind the Gap, was named one of Toys 'R' Us Canada's Top Toys of 2020. Elsewhere, last year also saw SolidRoots secure US distribution for the award-winning escape room game series Trapped, from inventors The Fantastic Factory.



**KENNY KIERNAN,**  
Founder, Kenny Kiernan  
Illustration Studio

One of the most prolific artists working in the toy space today, Kenny Kiernan continues to provide illustration, packaging design, character design and concept art for toy

companies and inventors alike. In the past 12 months alone, Kenny has collaborated with firms like Hasbro, Spin Master, Yulu, ThinkFun, Jakks Pacific and Skyrocket, as well as with brands like YouTube sensation Vlad & Niki. As one nominator puts it: "Professional, passionate, creative; Kenny is a star."



**PHIL HARVEY,**  
Illustrator

Phil Harvey is an illustration powerhouse. Versatile in style and blindingly quick on the draw, he has become a one-stop shop for all kinds of toy visuals for multiple companies across the industry. As one nominator puts it: "He is always professional and discreet when working on sensitive new secrets but has a wicked sense of humour and is

never phased by tricky requests or U-turns in direction," adding: "If we could have Phil on board for every project I would be a very happy bunny."



**JEREMY POSNER,**  
President and CEO,  
Shenanigans Toys & Games

Jeremy Posner is the President and CEO of Shenanigans Toys & Games, one of the top US invention studios. As one nominator puts it: "Since making a name for himself at legendary Chicago invention house Big Monster Toys, Jeremy has proven to be a major talent in his own right with Shenanigans." With an expansive portfolio spanning party games like Mattel's Sell Yourself Short to craft kits like Fat Brain Toys' Jixels, 2020 saw Jeremy

nominated, along with co-inventor Adam Borton, for Game Designer of the Year at the Play Creators Awards for his work on Entertoyment's Silly Seal.



**JO GOUGH,**  
Design Consultant

In the last 12 months, design consultant Jo Gough has continued to demonstrate her wealth of experience across many categories. Whether helping to bring innovation to new and existing character licences or giving brands the know-how they need to expand into

new global markets, Jo has had another impressive year. One recent highlight is designing and consulting on a successful product launch in the USA which is now being sold in over 1,700 stores. Elsewhere, several of Jo's design projects have been recognised. Her honours include being a Licensing Awards Finalist, a Creative Play Awards Winner, and a UKMUMS Choice Award Silver Winner. Last, but by no means least, Jo stepped up during the pandemic to make and deliver face masks to her local community - free of charge.



**EDMUND BARNETT-WARD,**  
Director,  
The Affable Design Company

Edmund Barnett-Ward is a Director at The Affable Design Company. This virtual design studio offers clients a wide array of services spanning design, development, project management, 3D scanning and prototyping. Benefitting from Edmund's 20 years' experience in licensed product design and development, The Affable Design Company has established itself as a key partner for many of the industry's biggest players. A recent highlight included handling sculpts for Character Options' Doctor Who action figure line for B&M. "Ed is a great 3D sculptor," said one fan of his work, adding: "Whether it's collectibles or bespoke, high-detail figures, Ed is fun to work with and always delivers high-quality sculpts."

# Do you have big plans this 2021?

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**PEGGY BROWN,**  
Owner, Peggy Brown  
Creative Consulting

One of the industry's top toy and game designers, and a popular figure in the inventor community, Peggy Brown enjoyed a 2020 filled with new

game launches and a big award win. Yes, last year saw Peggy pick up one of the industry's most highly sought after accolades – a TAGIE award... She was named Game Inventor of the Year for her work on ThinkFun's My First Rush Hour, as well as her two party games launched last year by Big G Creative: Bye Felicia and Who's the G.O.A.T.



**BRETT J. GILBERT,**  
Game Designer

With over 40 games published, Brett J. Gilbert is one of the UK's most prolific game designers and 2020 proved another impressive year for Brett and his various co-designers. Last year saw Piece of Pie, a

'tasty pastry' strategy game co-designed with Trevor Benjamin, published by Blue Orange. Meanwhile, he co-designed the ITB Games title Junk Forts with Matthew Dunstan. 2021 looks set to continue in the same vein, with an upcoming slate including Vivid from Floodgate Games; Spy Connection from Pegasus Spiel and Ankama's Nile Artifacts - all co-designed with Dunstan. "Brett is, without a doubt, one of the UK's brightest designers," said one nominator.



**SHARON YCHIE AND YAFIT-GAL LEVI,**  
Game Designers

Graduates of the acclaimed Toy Invention Programme at Shenkar, Sharon Ychie and Yafit-Gal Levi are regular collaborators that share a love for creating great new play experiences. The duo licensed three new games in 2020. Alongside a game with Spin Master launching later this year, Sharon and Yafit also licensed their dexterity game Rock the Boat to Splash Toys as well as Unicorn Wishes, set to launch later this year from Megableu. "Yafit-Gal and Sharon are on a roll at the moment, and it's no surprise; their creativity and design flair are a perfect recipe for success," said one nominator.



**KEN GRUHL,**  
Game Designer

Ken Gruhl has enjoyed another knockout year, licensing a raft of games across multiple styles with different publishers. Tower Tennis – published by Buffalo Games – was co-designed with Quentin

Weir and is a unique twist on table tennis. Ken and Quentin also collaborated on two games for UltraPRO: Gopher Broke and LookSee. On the solo front, Ken licensed his tile-placing strategy game, Quarrel Reef, to Mattel, while Blue Orange picked up his bluffing game, Rose Ceremony. Ken also found time to license his take on the current roll-and-write craze with Ripple Rush, a 'flip-and-write' game published by Stronghold Games.



**SCOTT PEASE AND JEFF SWENTY,**  
Inventors of Snap Ships

Having both enjoyed success in the video-games space working on the likes of Guitar Hero and the Tony Hawk series, last year saw Scott Pease and Jeff Swenty take to the world of toy invention like a duck to water with their creation, Snap Ships. Launched by PlayMonster, who called it "The biggest launch in the company's history," Snap Ships is a collectible modular-building system that invites kids to build, battle and display an exciting array of cool spacecraft. Away from the toy aisle, the brand also starred in its own animated YouTube series from Wind Sun Sky Entertainment Season, and launched alongside a free interactive AR app that sees detailed digital versions of the toy range come to life. Snap Ships also took off in the awards space, being nominated at the Play Creators Awards, the TAGIE Awards and is in the running for a TOTY award in the Construction Toy of the Year category. "Snap Ships is one of the most exciting new construction brands to come along in years," said one nominator. The success of Snap Ships looks set to grow and grow with new waves of product in the pipeline and a UK launch from Interplay confirmed for later this year.



**TIM WALSH,**  
Game Designer, Play Expert and Co-Founder, Roo Games

To launch a new company, license new games and start up a thriving YouTube series would be quite a feat in any year, but to do all three in 2020 seems particularly special... And that's exactly what Tim Walsh did. A renowned inventor, author, speaker and filmmaker, Tim embarked on several noteworthy projects last year and

saw his party game – Mega Mouth – launch from Big G Creative and gain a TAGIE nomination to boot. In the midst of lockdown, Tim also launched a new YouTube series called Where's the Fun From? that puts different inventor stories under the microscope, with deep dives into UNO, Jenga and Silly Putty being some of the products featured to date. Elsewhere, 2020 saw Tim team up with a few industry friends to launch a brand new games company in the form of Roo Games. The firm's impressive line-up already includes cute counting game Feed Fuzzy, grabby game Doggy Bags and the undercover strategy game Kloak.



**DON ULLMAN,**  
Owner, Ulco Toy and Game Company

"A diamond"; "One of the best in the biz" and "Probably the nicest guy in the industry" are just a few of the ways that fans of Don Ullman describe the award-winning toy and game inventor. Don has carved out an incredible track record over the years, with a string of hits to his name. These include Spin Master's Soggy Doggy, Megableu's Heist and Hasbro's Don't Step In It. The run continued in 2020 with the launch of Drone Home. Published by PlayMonster,

and co-designed alongside father-son inventor team Jose and Hans Leals, Drone Home is the first game to feature a real drone and sees players battle it out to flick their alien into the 'ship' and watch it take off! As one nominator bluntly put it: "If Don Ullman doesn't make the Mojo 100, it's not worth the paper it's printed on!"



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**TAL SCHRIEBER,**

Inventor Relations, Spin Master Israel and Head of Toy Invention Program at Shenkar College of Engineering and Design

Tal Schrieber looks after inventor relations for Spin Master Israel and is head of the renowned Toy Invention Program at Shenkar. 2020 saw Tal make strides to expand the reach of the program. Having teamed up with Ryerson University to launch a course in Canada back in 2019, this coming year sees Spin Master debut sister-programs in London and Kyoto. "There are few people in the industry doing more to welcome a new wave of inventor talent than Tal Schrieber," said one nominator, adding: "The thriving inventor scene in Israel and the success her students are having is testament to her fantastic work".



**STEPHEN KEY,**

Co-Founder, inventRight

Co-founded by Stephen Key and Andrew Krauss back in 1999, inventRight is the world's leading expert resource on product licensing, helping thousands of inventors get their ideas to market. As one nominator puts it: "Stephen is passionate, generous and incredibly open about the inventing process... He has taken the fear factor away." Another said: "Whether it's giving toy inventors exposure on inventRightTV, or celebrating the achievements of those who have licensed their ideas thanks to InventRight's help, it's clear the toy industry – and the many other sectors he touches – is stronger for having him in it."

**TRINA MCFARLAND,**

Owner and General Manager, TinkerTini

2020 has been a mammoth year for Trina McFarland and TinkerTini, as the company celebrated its second anniversary and packed in a raft of new launches and initiatives. One of the biggest launches for the firm was the arrival of Tinkerly, a first-of-its-kind innovation platform designed to seamlessly manage a variety of internal and external innovation programs. Elsewhere, the firm launched TinkerNext, a new arm dedicated to educating and investing in the next generation of inventor talent, be it recent graduates or toy industry professionals interested in the inventing model. "What Trina is doing both for her clients and the wider inventing world should be applauded," said one nominator. Another added: "The TinkerTini team are a real force for good; we're lucky to have them."



**JARED WADE,**

SVP, Design & Development, Hasbro

Having been at Hasbro for over 20 years, Jared Wade is a much-loved figure at the company and one of the biggest champions of design, innovation and the invention community within the firm. In his role, he leads the Inventor Relations group, the Hasbro Funlab - which conducts observational research for development - and a team of design specialists. "Jared is leading the charge of Hasbro's newly-established Design Center of Excellence... And there's no one better placed to do so," said one nominator. They added: "He boasts a positive attitude and is passionate about fostering fresh talent at Hasbro, as well as accelerating innovation and design within the firm's company culture."



**PAMELA STATHAKI,**

Head of Sustainability, The Marketing Store

Pamela Stathaki has been "nothing short of incredible" since joining The Marketing Store, with her commitment to educating the team helping to accelerate the firm's sustainability progress. "Pamela is constantly looking to better herself and the team to deliver fun, sustainable, safe solutions for Happy Meal toys globally. She has also been instrumental in upskilling our designers, engineers and even competitors on sustainable design," said one of her colleagues.



**AZHELLE WADE,**

President, The Toy Coach

2020 saw Azhelle Wade launch The Toy Coach, an online resource for innovators looking to crack the toy industry. Additionally, Azhelle's podcast, Making It In The Toy Industry, fast became a valuable source of industry inspiration, with one nominator stating: "It is required listening for anyone looking to thrive in the play space." One of Azhelle's biggest success stories from 2020 was the launch of her Toy Creators Academy, an exciting course designed to help guide new people into the toy space.

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**BEN RATHBONE,**

VP of Design, Spin Master Games

With over 30 years of industry experience, Ben Rathbone has worked on most of the biggest game brands out there, including classics like Monopoly, Scrabble and Hedbanz. A much-loved figure among the inventor community, Ben is known for being an avid champion of inventors and creatives across the world. As one nominator puts it: "He continues to challenge the industry with new thinking and new ways to game."



**MARY COUZIN,**

President and Founder, People of Play

2020 was a transformative year for Mary Couzin and her ChiTAG organisation as it rebranded as People of Play, or POP, to better reflect the company's global reach and its suite of events. POP's inaugural event was a virtual one due to the pandemic, but the line-up of workshops, conferences, pitching, awards and entertainment was a roaring success. "Mary and her team did a great job converting the events to 'virtual' in 2020. Under the new POP banner, I'm sure we can look forward to more fantastic inventor initiatives over the coming years," said one nominator.

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**MATT NUCCIO,**  
President, Design Edge

For over 30 years, Design Edge has been a leading design and development firm. Founded in 1987 by Mark and Linda Nuccio out of the family garage, Design Edge quickly rose to prominence by designing product and packaging for many now iconic brands. By 2004, Matt Nuccio, the son of Mark and Linda, was heading up the company's day-to-day operations. Design Edge has since grown into a complete design, consulting and production resource. As well as a creative force in his own right, Matt is one of the biggest champions of new talent in the industry. He is involved in many initiatives to promote and support the inventor space. These include being on The Toy Association's Creative Factor committee, sitting on the Board of Directors of the United Inventors Association of America (UIA) and playing a key role on POP's advisory board.



**ERIC LANG,**  
Board Game Designer

Eric Lang is a titan of the tabletop industry and 2020 was a big year for him on a number of fronts. He had a raft of new launches spanning CMON's Ankh: Gods of Egypt and Marvel United from Spin Master... Last year was also notable as he stepped down from his role as Game Director at CMON to focus on freelance design and his growing involvement with activism. "Eric is one of the best game designers in the industry. His work in championing lesser-known designers, and promoting diversity and inclusivity in the hobby, really carves him out as a special figure," said one fan. Another added: "Eric is a game design legend; even the mention of his name in the halls of Essen or Gen Con will cause gamers to lose their meeples."

## MOJO NATION 100: DESIGN CHAMPIONS

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**STEVE STAROBINSKY,**  
Consultant and Senior Account Manager  
Diverse Marketing and Founder, Kid@Heart

As well as working for Diverse Marketing and setting up a new advertising and strategy agency called Kid@Heart in 2020, Steve Starobinsky also found time to launch a YouTube series called the Happy Half Hour. Each show sees Steve joined by different leaders from the toy, gift, and trend industries to share insights, experiences and to celebrate the achievements of those working in the play space. To date, Steve has welcomed execs from the likes of Walmart, Zuru and Hasbro, and as one fan puts it: "If anyone has had the pleasure to meet Steve, follow him on LinkedIn or to have seen his Happy Half Hour series, you'll know his passion for toys is off the scale."



**PATTI BECKER AND  
JONATHAN BECKER,**  
Founders and CEO,  
Anjar & Becker Associates

2020 was a banner year for Becker Associates and Anjar, an award-winning, full service, global licensor and IP brand management agency run by Patti and Jonathan Becker. The firm had 100 new items released at 2020 NY Toy Fair, and signed deals to represent major brands. These include one of the largest infant brands in Europe - Sophie la Girafe - as well a major design agency and invention studio in Eolo's ToyZone. Anjar also signed a record number of new licenses in 2020. Notable among these was the global reintroduction of the classic game, Go For Broke. Anjar & Becker Associates also secured a raft of hot new brands and creations from inventors of all experience levels.

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**ERIK QUAM,**  
Director of Product Development, Fat Brain Toys

As the Director of Product Development for Fat Brain Toy Co, Erik Quam is one of the most-popular figures in the world of inventor relations. He is known throughout the industry for his friendly smile and tireless advocacy for independent inventors. As a past ASTRA board member, Erik was also instrumental in opening the membership to inventors and championing their contributions to the industry. As one nominator puts it: "Erik has earned a well-deserved reputation for honesty, integrity and a keen eye for fun."



**PETER GRINSELL,**  
Creative Head of Product Design, The Marketing Store

Peter Grinsell has been instrumental in the work of developing paper

and card-based toys on behalf of The Marketing Store for McDonald's Happy Meals. "Peter always keeps consumers at the forefront of his mind, no matter the material. He continues to lead the team to adapt and take on new challenges regarding materials being used" said one nominator.



**JOHN FRASCOTTI**  
President and Chief Operating Officer, Hasbro

Since joining Hasbro in 2008, John Frascotti has championed a culture of creativity, curiosity and innovation at the company. John played a critical role in the re-invention of Hasbro's world-class portfolio of Franchise Brands, in addition to Hasbro's Gaming Business, and its portfolio of Partner and Emerging Brands. This includes tireless support of toy and game designers, catapulting brands like Nerf, Baby Alive and FurReal to new heights. John is retiring from Hasbro in March but as one nominator puts it: "The impact of John's outstanding leadership will continue to be felt at Hasbro and throughout the industry for decades to come."



**HELENA MANSELL-STOPHER,**  
CEO, Products of Change

Having worked at the likes of Marvel Entertainment, Mattel and National Geographic, Helena Mansell-Stopher is now a leading figure in the industry's fight to be greener as the founder of Products of Change. Launched in 2020, Products of Change is a global educational hub aimed at driving sustainable change across consumer product markets and beyond. The group brings together a strong community of designers, brand owners, retailers, manufacturing partners and marketing experts. "Helena should be commended as a champion of sustainable design practices," said one nominator.



**JUDE PULLEN,**  
Technologist and Design Engineer

In 2020, award-winning product design engineer Jude Pullen launched two stellar resources for those looking to find out more about the worlds of design and invention. The first was Lockdown Lectures, a YouTube series that covered areas such as prototyping, motivation and the importance of user research. The second was an interview series called Laterally Thinking that explored the crossroads between design and a diverse range of disciplines. "Jude's passion for design is infectious, and he has really interesting thought process," said one fan.



**ADAM BORTON,**  
Founder and CEO, Creating Unique Toys and Toy and Game School

Adam Borton is the award-winning founder of Creating Unique Toys, a toy and game invention company creating smash hit toys and games for some of the biggest companies in the world. Recent hits for Adam include Yulu's Oops Scoops, Mattel's Flushin' Frenzy, and its follow-up, Flushin' Frenzy: Overflow. 2020 saw Adam take time to develop an exciting new educational platform designed to help newcomers grasp the world of toy and game invention called the Toy & Game School. The new platform launches very soon and features an expansive line-up of video content. This is designed to help newcomers get up to speed on everything they need to know to be successful in the toy and games space.



**MICHELLE MOK,**  
Director of Environmental and Sustainability Affairs, The Marketing Store North America

Michelle Mok works closely with suppliers to find sustainable solutions to support The Marketing Store's client's aspirations. In addition, Michelle finds and onboards new suppliers and solutions to keep upholding those important goals. As one nominator puts it: "Michelle is tenacious and persistent, always finding opportunities amid challenges." They add: "She has a very commercial brain, so always considers cost implications as well as what this means in terms of performance requirements."

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**RICH MAZEL,**  
Vice President of Innovation and Inventor Relations, Spin Master

2020 was a milestone year for Rich Mazel. As one of the most popular figures in the toy-inventor scene, Rich moved from Hasbro to join Spin Master as Vice President of Innovation and Inventor Relations. Rich started his toy

career at Spin Master, and his re-joining the firm has been called "an exciting move for all involved". "I'm sure everyone in the industry knows how vital Rich's enthusiasm, passion and dedication to the inventor scene is, both for individuals and groups working in this space," said one fan, while another added: "I'm relieved he stayed in toys - the industry would be a poorer place without him!"



**DR. HELEN CHARMAN,**  
Director of Learning and National Programmes, Victoria & Albert Museum

Having previously worked at the Tate Modern and the Design Museum, 2018 saw Dr. Helen Charman join the V&A Museum as Director of Learning and

National Programmes. One of her most successful schemes is V&A Innovate. This is now an annual national competition designed to 'inspire the designers of tomorrow' and champion Design and Technology as an essential curriculum subject. "Helen and her team at V&A should be applauded," stated one nominator. They added: "At a time when D&T isn't getting the support it needs from Government, they're stepping up. Helen gives the subject - and students interested in design - a real outlet to fuel their creativity and develop their skills."



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**ROSS MONKS,**  
Product Designer, Moose Toys UK

"One to watch"; "He's making waves" and "I wish I was that good when I was his age" are just some of the glowing testimonials that came in for Ross Monks, Product Designer at Moose Toys UK. Boasting an unshakable 'can-do' attitude, Ross works on everything like it's a gift. His diverse skill set sees him illustrating licensed product one day, CAD-ing mechanisms the next and sketching concepts after that. Since joining the industry in 2018, Ross has already worked on some big hits for Moose... He has been heavily involved in a new launch for this year that the team hopes will "take the industry by storm."



**EMMA LARKINS,**  
Board Game Designer

Emma Larkins is a board game designer and co-host of Ludology, a podcast about the 'why' of gaming that she presents alongside fellow designer Gil Hova. 2020 saw the launch of her game, Abandon All Artichokes, published by Gamewright. The card game sees players have to 'prune' their deck by harvesting vegetables; each of which has its own unique power. The game was named Game of the Year by GeekDad, and as one nominator put it: "It's a great game and I'm convinced there'll be more special things to come from Emma."



**JISELLE HERNANDEZ,**  
Co-ordinator, Inventor Relations,  
Jazwares

A true rising star and already a key member of the BlueJ team at Jazwares, Jiselle Hernandez shines bright with energy. She has great enthusiasm and excitement for the new and wonderful world of working with inventors. Jiselle joined Jazwares as a true artist, with an eye for trendy, cool aesthetics, and as one fan puts it: "Her eye for innovation coupled with her strong organisational skills and ability to create a warm inviting vibe will make any meeting with her a treat."



**JAYME BOUCHER,**  
Director of Games, Mondo

Jayme Boucher heads up Mondo Games, overseeing the development of games and puzzles based on IP classics from Back to the Future to cult success stories like 2018's Mandy. Since joining the company in 2019, Jayme has been instrumental in the development of several hits for the firm, including Disney Shadowed Kingdom, King of the Movies: The Leonard Maltin Game and the Unmatched series with Restoration Games. "In a short amount of time, Jayme has helped establish Mondo Games as a source of truly striking games and puzzles," said one fan of her work.



**GRAY BRIGHT,**  
Senior Director of Product  
Development, Games, Hasbro

Hasbro's Gray Bright is a consumer products executive and creative technologist. He is also one of what must be a very small group of people who have performed stand-up comedy for NASA at the Kennedy Space Center - during a rocket launch. Gray joined Hasbro back in 2019 as the Senior Director of Product Development for Hasbro Gaming. He has been instrumental in some of the firm's biggest hits in the past few years. As one nominator stated: "Gray is an immense talent; he's going places."

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**MARCEL PASTERNAK,**  
Founder and MD,  
BionicToys

BionicToys was created by German product designer Marcel Pasternak as a way to introduce STEM-based skills to children. Through creative building, the firm's FlexBrick enables kids to replicate organic actions found in nature and learn about potential

energy and such principles as flexibility, elasticity, friction, levers and pivots. 2020 proved to be a milestone year for Marcel as he sold his first exclusive license to Clementoni and took over as product-development lead for the firm's Dynamix brand. Elsewhere, he also signed distribution contracts for BionicToys in USA, Canada, Mexico and Japan.



**JEANETTE BAITY,**  
Playmaker and Product Designer,  
Hasbro

One of Hasbro's most talented designers, Jeanette Baity always has big, bold, break-frame ideas designed to help move the company forward, especially with original IP. "She is one of the most inspiring and wildly creative people I've ever known," said one nominator.



# CONGRATULATIONS

to all the Mojo Nation 100



**ELIF ATMACA AND ÖGEDAY UÇURUM,**  
Co-Founders, Toyi

Winners of the Rising Star award at the 2020 Play Creators Awards, Elif Atmaca and Ögeday Uçurum are the founders of the Istanbul-based toy firm Toyi. Founded in 2017, Toyi is a limitless creative-play kit – without instructions! The kit lets children transform everyday objects into unique toys. “You can’t help but be impressed by what Toyi is doing... At a time when creative toys are on-trend, these guys are really doing something special| said one nominator.



**JOE BRADFORD,**  
Design Manager, Family Games, Hasbro

Joe Bradford works in the games team at Hasbro, helping to create amazing play experiences for families all over the world. Since joining Hasbro, Joe has worked across the firm’s entire portfolio of gaming heavy-hitters, including

Monopoly, Jenga, Bop It and Yahtzee, as well as brands spanning Star Wars, Super Mario and Stranger Things. Recent highlights include working on Hasbro’s range of games for The Ellen Show and The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, as well as giving the party game treatment to Netflix’s To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before. As one nominator puts it: “He’s an incredible games designer.”



**MARTY PARDOE,**  
Product Designer, Bubblegum Stuff

Marty Pardoe joined the Bubblegum Stuff team at the end of 2019. Over the last 12 months, Marty has played an integral part in developing eight card games for the firm. One highlight from the past year is an idea that she single-handedly

created and designed called Girl Power. Based on the traditional card game Spoons, Girl Power is a fast-paced game that celebrates modern women of today. “Marty’s game has not only become an instant top seller, but also delivered an important social message that helps inspire young players,” said one nominator.



**SAM ROBERTS,**

Toy and Game Inventor and Product Designer,  
So Sound

Sam Roberts is a toy and game inventor at the Sutton-based studio So Sound. Since joining the team at the start of 2020, Sam has consistently impressed. Her sketching ability has been a particularly valuable addition to the team when ideating and according to one colleague, "Sam boasts a first-class attitude to design and invention and is a great team player." Another nominator added: "I can't speak highly enough of Sam; the sky's the limit for her. She has all the key attributes needed to be one of the industry's top inventors: talent and determination!"

**JOE BARRON,**

Founder and Lead Designer, Gray Matters Games

Joe Barron, along with his wife Lauren, run Gray Matters Games; a company rooted in family, fun and community. Since 2017, Joe Barron has designed and published five games: You Bet-Cha, Ridiculous Expositions, Badmoji, Office Decathlon and the award-winning The Game of Wolf. The titles are sold at over 3,000 stores in five different countries. The Gray Matters mantra is 'be a force for good' and the company has raised thousands of dollars for the Alzheimer's Association over the past year. The icing on the cake of a strong 2020 was a well-deserved TAGIE nomination in the Rising Star Innovator of the Year category.



**JASON LOIK,**

Owner and Sculptor, Loik Studios

Jason Loik runs Loik Studios, a sculpting and inventing firm based in Rhode Island. A big success story for Jason from the past 12 months is Play-Doh Builder... This new invention takes Hasbro's Play-Doh brand into the construction space. With the Play-Doh Builder range of sets, kids can roll Play-Doh into sheets and use moulds to cut out shapes. These shapes can then be folded into each other to create fun structures. "Jason's new mould and fold innovation is a truly unique invention and provides kids with a fresh way to play and build with Play-Doh," said one nominator.

# JOIN US FOR EXCITING PANELS AND KEYNOTES FROM THE TALENT BEHIND SOME OF THE INDUSTRY'S MOST ICONIC CREATIONS

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**ADAM HOWARD,**  
Founder, ClueCrypted

Adam Howard is the founder of ClueCrypted, an escape room company based in the UK. 2020 saw Adam move into the world of game design thanks to a collaboration with invention studio The Fantastic Factory. Together they invented Trapped, a series of escape room games published by Golden Bear. Adam and The Fantastic Factory won Kids/Family Game Designer of the Year for their work on Trapped. The game gaining plaudits due to the innovative way it turns any room in your house into an escape room. "Adam is full of great ideas and you can expect to see more brilliant things to come from him," said one nominator.



**JULIO E. NAZARIO,**  
Game Inventor

Julio E. Nazario is a rising star of the game design world. His eye-catching titles like Ctrl and Holi: Festival of Colors lead tabletop royalty Eric Lang to recently tweet: "Julio Nazario will win a Spiel des Jahres before 2025." 2020 was a milestone year for Julio, as he saw his first three games published: Ctrl from Pandasaurus Games, Holi from Floodgate Games and Haunted by Talon Strikes Studio. "Take a look at any of Julio's published games to date and you'll know why there's so much buzz around him... They're unique, innovative and a true breath of fresh air for the tabletop space," said one fan, adding: "I can't wait to see what's next from him."



**PHALGUN POLEPALLI,**  
Director, DICE Toy Labs

Founded in 2018 by Phalgun Polepalli, DICE Toy Labs is on a mission to create cool games for India. Phalgun is passionate about licensing games from local inventors, and quick to champion the work of other publishers and designers. 2020 saw DICE Toy Labs welcome two new games to its portfolio: Seas the Day, a fast-paced memory game from designer Franz Dias, and Indus 2500 BCE, a city building game that boasts a flip-and-write mechanism from designer Amit Ghadge. One nominator stated: "Phalgun should be applauded for his efforts to promote Indian game design. He's practising what he preaches; giving inventors real opportunities to turn their great ideas into a reality."

# CELEBRATE THOSE IN THE TOY AND GAME DESIGN COMMUNITY THAT HAVE EXCELLED OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS

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