

2024 EDITION

MOJO NATION

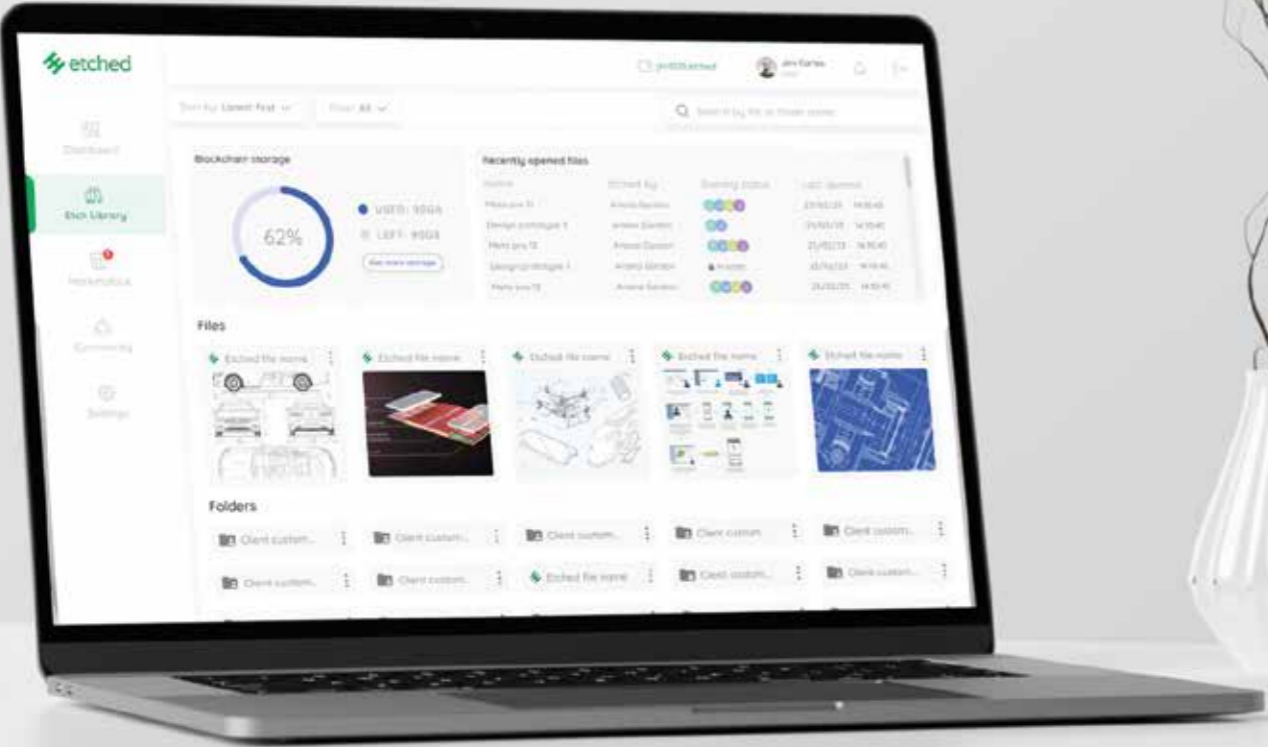


CELEBRATING THE 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL FIGURES
WORKING IN TOY AND GAME DESIGN TODAY

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"59% of this year's Mojo Nation 100 are new faces compared to the 2023 listing – one of the highest-ever year-to-year turnovers of faces."



First and foremost, a colossal well done to those that've made this year's listing... And welcome to this year's edition of the Mojo Nation 100, our annual celebration of the industry's designer and inventor talent... As voted for by you.

It's been a tough year for the industry, with job casualties felt across in-house design and development teams as well as at prominent invention studios, including the sad closure of BMT. Even in tricky times, though, the toy and game sector finds ways to surprise, delight and innovate.

This year's 100 serves as a welcome reminder of the incredible work and achievements by the industry's creative backbone... Whether top toy talent or the brains behind the games, figures in the list are responsible for some of the year's top launches: from Pictionary vs AI to Pigs on Trampolines, Biggies to Bitzee...

It's also worth noting that 59% of this year's Mojo Nation 100 are new faces compared to the 2023 listing – one of the highest-ever year-to-year turnovers of faces. This is a testament to the wealth of talent we're fortunate enough to see ply their trade in our space.

As well as the 100 itself, the book is full of tremendous insights from some of our top creative thought-leaders. Highlights include an exclusive chat with Hasbro's new Head of Global Design, Dean Carley; Mattel's Ted Wu on crafting creative cultures, and a deep dive into Squishmallows with Gerhard Runken from Jazwares. Elsewhere, designer Ellie Dix talks creative connections, Joost Poulus discusses innovation at Moose Toys... And Deirdre Cross tells us why the motto at Funko Games is "Just Effing Make it!" There's also a fascinating piece looking at whether being an introvert or extrovert makes a difference when it comes to being successful at inventing...

So! All that's left for me to say is a big thank you to our sponsors, as well as to everyone who nominated their colleagues and peers. Finally, huge thanks to our panel of experts that helped whittle the longlist down to the final 100.



Billy Langsworthy,
Co-Founder, Mojo Nation

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TOYZONE

SUPPORTING INVENTORS AND DESIGNERS MAKE THEIR MARK ON THE INDUSTRY

Toy Fair 2024

- Greenhouse Area dedicated to nurturing and supporting new and smaller inventors
- Stand discount of 24% for BTHA members

Advocacy

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

BTHA Training Hub

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



We are pleased to continue the British Toy & Hobby Association's support of Mojo Nation and the Mojo Nation 100 to celebrate the leading figures in the toy and design community over the last 12 months.

The toy industry's success is driven by new designs and innovative ideas, so we're proud to support this initiative which recognises the individuals behind them. On behalf of the BTHA, congratulations to everyone who made it onto this year's Mojo Nation 100 list.

The toy industry is a fast-paced, fashion-driven sector, and toy companies understand they always need to be looking ahead to develop toys and games that pique the interests of today's children. There have been many iconic creations that have stood the test of time, but it's new products that are paramount to driving sales. This has never been more important, with the toy industry operating against a backdrop of challenging economic conditions and increased competition for consumer spend.

As part of our work to support the inventors, entrepreneurs and start-up companies, we have a dedicated section at our Toy Fair called the Green House for new and innovative products to be exhibited in. This helps elevate smaller companies' presence on the show floor with the aim of attracting the attention of important buyers and retailers.

We're excited that – at this year's Toy Fair, as part of the show's 70-year celebrations – the BTHA has teamed up with Mojo Nation to survey more than 100 inventors on the toys they wished they'd invented in the last 70 years. Some of these winning toys will be displayed at the show to visitors and the media.

Off the back of a challenging year, continuing to attract the best talent into the toy industry will be crucial for toy companies. The BTHA is delighted to continue its support of the inventor community and wish everyone success for the year ahead. We look forward to seeing the new product releases over the next 12 months, which we know will bring fun and happiness to children all over the UK.



Roland Earl,
Director General,
British Toy & Hobby Association



NEW
DATES

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

play creators
conference

June 26th, 2024

Stamford Bridge Stadium, London

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

Part of
play
creators festival

For more information visit
www.playcreatorsconference.co.uk

"Passionate, talented people are the bedrock of every meaningful play experience."



The core of our community rests in the minds of inventors, designers and every other creative force, contributing to not only bringing a product to market – but also serving as the genius behind the magical moment when a toy comes into the hands of a child.

Passionate, talented people are the bedrock of every meaningful play experience. This makes supporting the Mojo Nation 100 and its celebration of extraordinary individuals a cause we at The Toy Association wholeheartedly champion.

The Mojo Nation 100 not only acknowledges excellence but also inspires a culture of innovation that propels our industry forward – a culture that The Toy Association, too, is committed to nurturing. Our year-round commitment to supporting this community has been reflected in various initiatives.

Our webinars and research impart business-impacting education on toy safety, compliance, and technical matters. Programming like Toy Fair Student Congress and Creative Factor Inventor Days pave the way for new industry talent and provide creative professionals with a comprehensive platform to kickstart their ideas and connect with leading toy manufacturers and design firms. The next Inventor Day will be held on March 4th.

Additionally, as part of its dedication to ensuring the designer and inventor community is equipped with the latest information and tools, The Toy Association recently collaborated with the United Inventors Association's Toy Hub to update our Inventor & Designer Guide. It serves as a comprehensive resource to industry newcomers, providing invaluable insights and support in navigating the intricate path of toy creation.

These initiatives demonstrate how, by pooling resources and expertise, we can work together to empower inventors and designers to thrive in a dynamic and competitive industry.

As we celebrate the Mojo Nation 100, let us collectively champion the inventors and designers who, through passion and ingenuity, infuse magic into the world of play. We look forward to connecting with each of you in 2024 and again at Toy Fair 2025, taking place March 1st to 4th in New York City. Here's to a bright future filled with boundless innovation and endless possibilities!

Warm regards,



Steve Pasierb,
President and CEO, The Toy Association

NEW
DATES

LOOKING TO UNEARTH YOUR NEXT HIT PRODUCT?

MOJO PITCH

June 27th, 2024

Stamford Bridge Stadium, London

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

Part of
play
creators festival

For more information visit
www.mojo-pitch.com

MOJO NATION 100

"We know that a vibrant, engaged and diverse inventor community is essential to creating the best play experiences for families around the world."



Congratulations to the 2024 Mojo Nation 100! At Hasbro, we know that a vibrant, engaged and diverse inventor community is essential to creating the best play experiences for families around the world.

In 2023 – our 100th year in business – we launched the Hasbro Women Innovators of Play initiative, and we were floored by the quality of incredible new women-led toy and game inventions. The initiative helped shine a light on the lesser-known inventors, and underscored just how much Hasbro relies on the inventor community to bring fresh thinking, shake up the status

quo and fuel our innovation.

What sets Hasbro apart is our focus on play that brings people together. During a time when the epidemic of loneliness is impacting so many around the world, we believe that play is a fundamental human right – and the perfect way to gather friends, families, and communities.

Our core purpose at Hasbro is to connect generations of fans through the wonder of storytelling and the exhilaration of play; whether it's a heated game of Monopoly, a creative Play-Doh session or jumping in muddy puddles with Peppa Pig... Play is simply more fun when it's with other people.

In partnership with talented toy and game developers that are deeply connected to the mindset of fans across all demographics, we know that Hasbro can continue bringing to market games and toys that delight our fans. So thank you for all that you do to challenge our industry to keep upping our game.

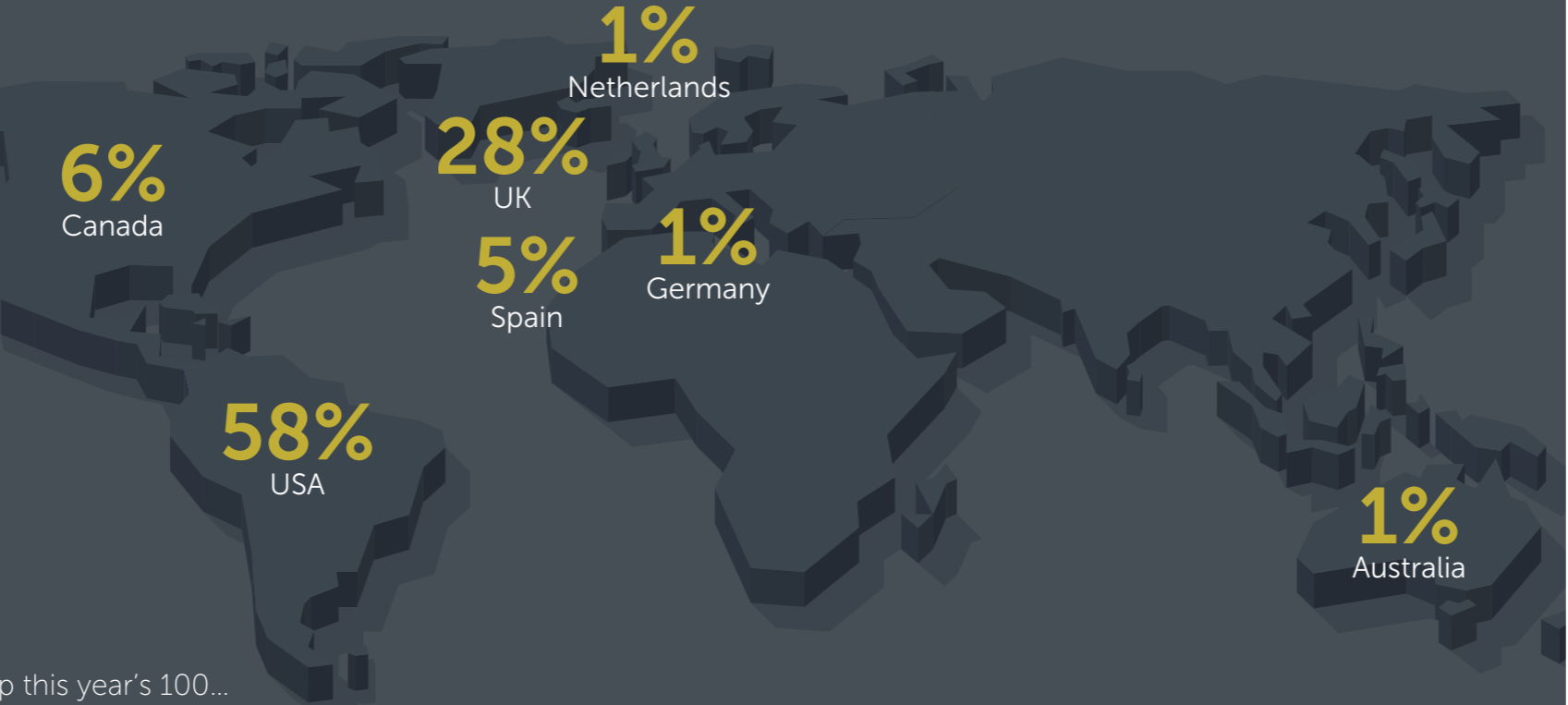
Congrats again to the 2024 Mojo Nation 100. Keep up the excellent work! I look forward to seeing many of you in the new year.



Tim Kilpin

President, Toys, Licensing & Entertainment
Hasbro

100 BREAK DOWN



We take a closer look at who makes up this year's 100...

Territory-wise, the USA once again leads the way with 58% of this year's 100 being Stateside. Meanwhile, 28% are based in the UK, with the next best-represented territories being Canada and Spain with 6% and 5% respectively. Figures from Germany, Australia and the Netherlands make up the rest of this year's listing.

Company-wise, Hasbro leads the way with 11 entries,

followed by Spin Master with six, Mattel with five, Eolo/ ToyZone with four and Moose Toys with three.

There's been a real influx of new faces to the 100 this year, with 59% of the listing made up of people who did not appear in 2023's edition. Year-to-year, this marks one of the biggest turnovers of people in the 100 to date...

COMPANIES REPRESENTED IN THE MOJO NATION 100

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4A's Creations• 7Pips• Anjar & Becker Associates• Arti By Design• Barry & Jason Games and Entertainment• Big Ideas• Bladez Toyz• Brainy Chick Inc• BRIK• Buffalo Games | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Catapult Concepts• Creativity Inc• Design Edge• DesignbyTouch• EAP Toys and Games• Eolo Toys/ToyZone• Fat Brain Toys• Fun-Damental Invention• Fuse• Galactic Sneeze• Gallium Ventures | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Genie Toys• Golden Bear• Gray Matters Games• Hasbro• Hootenanny Games• Hunch Studios• Identity Games• Indy Toy Lab• Jazwares• Kenny Kiernan Illustration & Design Studio | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• KID Group• Made Real Design• Making Things Studio• Mattel• Melissa & Doug• Metre Ideas and Design• Moose Toys• Nextoy• Open 2 Design• Pace Development• Paper Bag Creative | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peggy Brown Creative• Playmodo Design• PlayMonster• Raising Nerd• See Jane Fun• Seven Towns• SG Labs• Shenanigans Toys & Games• So Sound• Spin Master• Steffen Spiele | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streamline Design• StudioPlay• Tantrum Innovation• The Fantastic Factory• The Happy Puzzle Company• The Op• tms• TOMY• Tricky• Triclops Studio• YuMe Toys |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|



**Where
Gamers Go
to Ignite
Their Minds.**

Discover one of the greatest thinking tools ever devised: Edward de Bono's **Six Thinking Hats**



Let me start with a confession! The first time I heard about Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats, it sounded like namby-pamby claptrap. It turns out, though, that it's a truly powerful tool... One that helps improve everything from team dynamics and creativity to time management and critical thinking. So... What is it?

In short, it's a way of bringing flexible structure to your thinking. It was devised by the renowned psychologist Edward de Bono – the man that coined the phrase 'lateral thinking'. Mr. de Bono noted that people habitually process their thoughts using six different styles. He metaphorically referred to these as hats... They include facts, emotions, positive thoughts – and critical ones.

Unfortunately, most people rarely make a distinction between these styles. That means one person on a team can be focusing on solutions even as their colleague is flaw finding... Similarly, one might be discussing facts while another merely says how they feel! This means most attempts to problem solve are nothing more than a mishmash of thoughts through which we try to muddle.

Six Thinking Hats addresses this. It helps you and your team routinely look at ideas, plans and solutions using all six thinking styles. As a result, ideas are more robust, meetings are shorter and people are more productive. Here's how it works...

Whether you're generating ideas on your own or in a brainstorm, you can call on the six thinking styles one at a time. You all focus on the same style of thinking until the meeting facilitator calls for the next colour. The six hats are...

Blue: Think of this as the 'control hat'. It helps you think about thinking. For example, when someone explains Six Thinking

Creative consultant
Deej Johnson
on Edward de Bono's most powerful creative technique...



Hats, or calls for a change of focus, they're wearing the Blue Hat. So, "This is a Green Hat meeting..." is a Blue Hat statement!

White: The White Hat lets you present facts, figures, information needs and gaps. White Hat thinking means putting aside objections, opinions and emotions to just look at data.

Red: This lets you put forward feelings and instincts without justifying them. "I hate it!" is a Red Hat remark. The Red Hat gives full permission to declare feelings without any logic – it lets you say what you feel.

Black: A hat for flaw finding, thinking about caution, concerns, judgment – and playing Devil's Advocate. This thinking style may seem negative but it's essential... When you call for Black Hat thinking, you're looking to find problems without yet expecting to solve them – or deny they exist!

Yellow: The positive hat. This style explores why things will work. Use it to find value in what's already happened, and to look forward to the upsides and benefits of ideas and plans.

Green: This represents creativity, ideation, alternatives, interests, possibilities and change! So if you were brainstorming with a team, you'd almost certainly call for them to predominantly use Green Hat thinking. That is to say: there'd be no objections, facts, or opinions getting in the way of just coming up with ideas.

As you start to use Six Thinking Hats, you might wonder when it helps to use which hat. Here are some combinations to try. Do yourself a favour, though: buy yourself the book! Six Thinking Hats is available from all good book sellers. And some shit ones.

Design: Blue, Green, Red

New Ideas: Blue, White, Green

Improving: Blue, Yellow, Black, Green

New Client Briefs: Red, Blue, White, Green

Full Creative: Blue, White, Green; Blue, Red, Black, Yellow; Blue, Green, Red, Blue



"There's so much unbridled creativity within the inventor community"

Dean Carley – Head of Global Design at Hasbro – talks inventors, creativity and bringing innovation to beloved brands.

Dean, it's great to connect. To kick things off, was a career in toy design always on the cards?

I didn't know that toy design was thing when I was growing up. If I did, I would've thought what I now know – that toy design is one of the coolest jobs in the world! I always loved sketching and building things; I was the kid who took everything apart to try to figure out how things worked.

This eventually led to me getting my undergrad in Industrial Design and in my senior year I had about 12 projects I had to put together to complete my senior show. Many of those projects centred around children and the idea of play. I did a children's interior for a nursery school, a children's furniture project and – during that process – started to think about toys as something I could really focus on. It matched my personality in that, in my mind and life, I am just a big kid.

Then Hasbro came on campus to do interviews and about two weeks later I ended up getting an interview. I landed the job about a month before I graduated. It was all a big whirlwind and I just picked up and moved to Rhode Island. I've been here ever since.

Yes, you've spent close to 40 years with Hasbro now. What is it about the company that has kept you there for such an impressive amount of time?


From the day I started I've always felt the same thing... That Hasbro has such an awesome array of brands and play experiences. I love the challenge and pace of innovation. I'm fortunate to have had the opportunity to innovate and create toys on most of Hasbro's brand portfolio and have launched – and reimaged – so many of the world's most popular toy brands.

I've also had the opportunity to lead cross-functionally, including design, engineering, branding, packaging and marketing... I've been able to see innovation and creativity from more than just the design perspective. The thing that has kept me at Hasbro for all this time, however, are the incredible people and talent that I am surrounded by each day.

2023 saw you take on a new role as Head of Global Design. What does an expansive role like this entail?

First, it's something I've been looking forward to for a long time. As I said before, I've had the opportunity to lead in all four of Hasbro's toy categories at different times throughout my career... And now I have the honour of overseeing all of them at one time. It's incredibly exciting, but also a responsibility that I don't take lightly.

I couldn't do this without excellent innovative leaders throughout the design organisation. It's my job to inspire, facilitate and elevate the role of design within Hasbro. There



"It's my job to inspire, facilitate and elevate the role of design within Hasbro."



are so many chances to deepen our collective knowledge, create and validate incredible market opportunities and do things differently than we have done before. Inventors are a big part of that. I look forward to deepening our relationship with the inventing community across all our brands and our key partner brands as well.

You mention inventors – why are they important to Hasbro?

I actually spent a few years inventing myself, so have a deep appreciation for the hard work that goes into being an inventor. There's just so much unbridled creativity within the inventor community. The way inventors tend to think differently consistently inspires us. If I can foster an even more open and ongoing dialogue with our inventor community – and share what we're seeing in terms of consumer insights and interests – we can build a stronger flow of applicable innovation and increase our hit rate together.

Great answer. Now, let's talk innovation! What's the key to innovating around your existing brands without losing touch with what made them successful in the first place?

We're a branded toy company so, of course, we're always looking for ways to innovate within our brands. That can be challenging because we're so familiar with our brands and it can be hard to see new ways that the brands could flourish. We need to change that and be much more open and flexible with the way we look at new play patterns, or other ways we can express our brands. This is another invaluable role that inventors play. Their fresh perspective and the unbiased lens through which they look at our brands often results in ideas we didn't even know we were looking for.



Are there any recent launches that encapsulate how Hasbro sees innovation today?

I recently finished up developing our latest Furby and the new Furby Furbles. This was an incredible and unique opportunity from an innovation perspective. Originally an inventor item, Furby has such a rich history and has had so many forms and executions over the years. However, we needed to reinvent Furby in a way that would really resonate with today's consumer.

We put a lot of effort into understanding not only what consumers wanted to see in a new Furby, but also – just as importantly – what they loved about the original. We ended up with an amazing blend of attributes that stays true to the core of Furby, while simultaneously giving it a modern twist. The consumer response has been fantastic!

Dean, this has been great. One last question! What helps fuel your creativity?

It really comes down to curiosity. I've always felt that the knowledge and awareness I have in the moment is never enough to keep up with the rapid pace of culture, technology and all the other factors that affect how we innovate.

My team will roll their eyes when I say I'm a voracious reader, but reading challenges my thinking and helps me more readily see unique combinations, and the seeds of innovation, to build on. I love to engage in robust conversations and push the bar higher on innovation. When a team starts to really break through the expected and innovate in new and fresh ways, I find that truly inspiring.

"We put a lot of effort into understanding not only what consumers wanted to see in a new Furby, but also what they loved about the original."



"The more feedback you provide for others, the more able you are to evaluate your own designs."

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Award-winning game inventor **Ellie Dix** reveals the benefits of spending time with other designers.



Game design can be a solitary activity – but if you stay in your own little corner, you're missing out.

In my experience, spending time with other game designers can have a disproportionately huge impact. Here are some of the things it lets you do:

SPARK IDEAS

Playtesting and design discussions spark ideas. A small window into another designer's mind could provide new perspective. So invest in a good notebook, because a single question or throw-away comment could inspire a new game or elevate an existing one. As inventor Josh Ewart says: "Discussing game design just puts my brain in the right space to pick my own designs back up again."

DEVELOP GAMES

Playtesting with other designers gives you access to a collective wealth of experience. They'll tell you why your game is broken, suggest improvements, explain why some solutions are better than others and – crucially – tell you when you have something special. The game designer Shawn Hoult says: "I don't think I could design without [other designers]. They are both my biggest cheerleaders and my biggest reality checks."

INCREASE YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Your game design problems are not unique. Other people have dealt with the issues you're facing. Mechanics and structures will be discussed, dissected, examined, evaluated and bolted back together. You'll learn why some designs fly and others are abandoned. You'll discover how small changes can have a huge impact.

BUILD YOUR TOOLKIT

Learning how others structure their game design and development activity helps expand your own ways of working. You'll pick up tips and tricks for creating prototypes, note-keeping, working with co-designers, organising feedback... Your exposure to different approaches then shapes and informs your own style. As game designer Bez Shahriari puts it: "We're a tribe... And there's no

denying that it's a joy to have a geeky talk about this amazing thing that we've all dedicated our lives to."

EXPAND YOUR FRAME OF REFERENCE

A discussion around a concept can trigger a string of references from others: games to play, books to read, videos to watch, podcasts to hear. Ask game designers about what they've played – and pay attention to what impresses, excites and inspires them.

IMPROVE ANALYSIS

Playtesting gives you practise at playing a game while still evaluating the design. Sharing feedback forces you to structure your thoughts. Being challenged encourages you to delve deeper and refine your rationale. Your shared language grows. The more feedback you provide for others, the more able you are to evaluate your own designs.

GROW YOUR NETWORK

Other designers are likely to tell you about playtesting events, conferences, conventions, online groups, pitching events and meet-ups. You'll receive invitations and introductions, develop a reputation and find people to pitch to.

GET YOUR GAME TO MARKET

Most designers are happy to share their experience of dealing with publishers. The knowledge you gain helps you lean into best practice and avoid common pitfalls when pitching ideas or signing a contract.

GAIN PERSPECTIVE

Hearing successful designers share their stories of failure is valuable. Conversations reveal shared experiences, frustrations and blocks. Game designer Doruk Kicikoglu sums it up: "Game designers are your guides, advisors, playtesters, co-designers, partners and friends." It's easy to think you need to take the advice of someone more experienced if that's the only voice you hear... So my advice is to make sure you can hear a whole chorus of voices – and don't be afraid to add yours to the mix.

Sponsored by



Cars, Creations & Creative Cultures

Ted Wu – VP of Design for Vehicles and Mattel Creations at Mattel – on fuelling creativity, building design teams and working with inventors.

Ted, it's great to connect! 2023 marked your 20th anniversary with Mattel. What is it about the company that's kept you there for such an impressive length of time?

I would have never thought I'd be at the same company for 20 years, but if you know Mattel, it's not hard to understand. Mattel is filled with the most talented people in the business, which makes for an environment that's both inspiring and exhilarating. More importantly, there's a strong sense of community and culture. People in the company are all working toward the same goal and want to see others succeed.

The other reason is that it's a place that encourages learning new disciplines. During my time at Mattel, I felt like I've had multiple mini-careers working in different groups: content creation, marketing, packaging, product design... These jumps to different disciplines keep the job fresh.

On that, does your marketing experience shape your work today as VP of Design?

My time in marketing has been invaluable to see things from a more holistic point of view. There's always going to be a natural, healthy tension between marketing and design, so the trick is to try and thread the needle. As with any business endeavour, you must work within a set of rules for your

product to be commercially viable. Having a strong business sense helps me understand which rules to prioritise and which rules can be broken.

Hot Wheels has a remarkable legacy. How do you approach keeping the brand on top of its game design-wise?

A key part of our success is building the right design team. I'm honoured to have a design team that's the best in the business. Our die-cast design team is a group of automotive designers, graphic designers and sculptors who are true car enthusiasts and have their fingers on the pulse of car culture. We also have designers who are pop culture experts, hype beasts and toy collectors who bring another unique perspective. This wide range of expertise has allowed us to create some of the hottest new die-cast lines, launch new, unexpected toy lines – like Hot Wheels Skate and Hot Wheels Racerverse – and continue to design big holiday top toy staples like the Hot Wheels Ultimate Garage.

How important a role does the external inventor community play in the success of Hot Wheels?

I view the inventor community as an extension of our team. We have two inventor items that I'm particularly proud of this past holiday season. One is the Hot Wheels Monster Trucks



"I view the inventor community as an extension of our team."

Transforming Rhinomite R/C which is from Pace. It's an item that not only drives as an R/C vehicle, but also turns into a launcher for your 1:64 scale Hot Wheels Monster Trucks. The second is the Hot Wheels Ultimate T-Rex Transporter from Fuse. It's a giant die-cast car hauler that transforms into a T-Rex that eats and poops cars! Both of these items represent the magic that can happen when the inventor community and the brand work together as one team.

There're some exciting things happening on your Mattel Creations platform. What sort of creative doors does this platform open for your brands?

Mattel Creations allows us to connect with adult collectors. It's also where we can explore unique and unexpected collaborations. Mattel Creations showcases what happens when you bring together the creative power of Mattel with the most creative brands and people in the world.

How do you fuel your creativity? What helps you have ideas?

Inspiration can truly come from anywhere. I think it helps to stay curious and open to learning new things. And staying up to date on pop culture and trends is important. If you can identify the macro trends that are swirling around in the zeitgeist and combine them with your brand or product, that's usually a great place to start.



Congratulations to this year's Mojo 100 Recipients!



Celebrating 100 Years of Play!

OUR TEAM



Mike Noruiya
Comms, Contracts
& Events

Naomi Brugnattelli
Preschool, Dolls
& Fashion

Mark Garcia
Action Brands

Angus Walker
Head of Hasbro
Inventor Relations

David Laskowski
NERF, Play-Doh &
New Technology

Tanya Thompson
Games

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

Visit our submission portal at
spark.hasbro.com

Inside TOMY's Idea Hub

TOMY's Director of Development & Project Management **James Wing** on how their new Idea Hub brings inventors closer than ever...



James, it's always great to catch up. Before we dive into TOMY's Idea Hub, why is the inventor community important to TOMY?

The inventor community is key to TOMY because it's where real innovation can emerge from. Our in-house development is, of course, amazing – but as with any in-house development, it's always skewed a little towards that company's thinking. Inventors have the freedom to think without perceived restrictions. As a result, the ideas we get from inventors push at these boundaries. This community is vital for us in finding the next big thing!

TOMY has launched its own inventor platform in the guise of the Idea Hub. What prompted the launch?

We wanted to get closer to the community... To be able to talk to inventors directly and control our own filters. We've had some really positive successes with inventors over the last few years and the Idea Hub allows us to build on that. It's something we've had in the background for a while and the time was right to bring it up-to-date and kickstart this new phase of TOMY's inventor relations.

Can you talk us through some of its key features?

Inventors are likely to be pretty familiar with a lot of them. I have a sneaky feeling there's a lot of commonality between the hubs that are used at most toy companies. But obviously the TOMY Idea Hub is the best... It's the only one that gets inventors' ideas directly in front of the eyeballs of TOMY decisionmakers across the UK, Europe and the US!

There are two standout features for me. The first is messaging. This allows us to ask questions, share more information and provide both context and insight into our decisions as to whether or not we take an idea forward. That's a crucial difference between

a cold 'pass', a "We're not sure; what about this?" or "Can we work together to consider this?" This collaborative approach gives ideas a better chance. I'd like to think that it also helps strengthen our direct relationships with inventors and gives them more understanding of TOMY and what we're trying to achieve.

Great stuff. And the second?

The second is the wishlist. We're able to post long-term search plans; what we're looking for along with what we're not. We can also use that feature to post fast briefs when we're looking to fill a hole in the range quickly or want to jump on a trend.

What are some of the biggest benefits of having a platform like this?

For TOMY, it means we see more ideas from a wider pool of creatives. We need that. Inventors and toy companies alike know that – sadly – the rejection rate of ideas is high 98 out of a hundred maybe... And even the majority of ideas that make it through don't last as long as everyone would like at retail – but we want them to!

So we need those innovations from inventors, and the TOMY Idea Hub gives us a place to find them. For inventors, it's a way of getting everything out there. Once inventors upload their ideas, all the supporting documents, videos, pictures and descriptions go directly to the creative team leads in their relevant category. So the concepts come across exactly as inventors want them to. There are no meeting time constraints or awkward calendar juggles to get things going.

Before we wrap up, how can inventors sign up to the Idea Hub?

Easy! Stop everything and immediately go to <https://inventors.tomy.com/>. Register to become a TOMY inventor, then – after a few clicks – you'll be ready to go. You could be submitting ideas for the next toy, game or baby product of the year in less time than it's taken you to read this interview!

"The inventor community is key to TOMY because it's where real innovation can emerge from."



“In the creative process, imperfections are not setbacks; they’re steppingstones.”



Just Effing Make It!

Deirdre Cross – General Manager of Funko Games – discusses embracing imperfection in the creative process.

There’s no shortage of good ideas. Unfortunately, there’s also no shortage of uninformed opinions. We’ve all been in a room full of people pontificating about something they’ve never seen or experienced. Without manifesting it, a good idea can die too early, or a bad idea can get too far down the road, and you run out of time to iterate. Frustrating, right?

At Prospero Hall, we live by the motto ‘Just Effing Make It’ or JFMI. It’s more than a slogan; it’s our approach to creating a crude prototype that we can test, understand and use to truly inform the conversation. When inventing new physical products, making the thing informs success or failure very quickly. JFMI lets you...

CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR EXPLORATION

To innovate, we need a creative environment that allows for experimentation and exploration without fear of judgment. Think of these rapid prototypes as a starting point, not the final incarnation of an idea. Researcher, Dr. Brené Brown promotes ‘Sh*tty First Drafts’ in her organisation – this is their code for creating a crude approximation of the final product, one that’s just ‘okay’. We encourage our team to bring the prototype to the table not to critique as if it were final, but to inform the discourse and move more efficiently towards the right answers.

ENCOURAGE DECISION MAKING

In the creative process, imperfections are not setbacks; they’re steppingstones. Embrace the journey, make something imperfect – and help it evolve into something extraordinary... In your next creative brainstorm, remember: JFMI!

EMBRACE IMPERFECTION

David Kelley, founder of IDEO, is credited with the slogan: ‘Fail faster, succeed sooner.’ That’s the heart of JFMI. Creating tangible prototypes or products can reveal insights and potential shortcomings early in the process. We’ve witnessed this first-hand; quick iterations and prototypes often lead to successful outcomes. Years ago, we even used this method to prototype interactive video games for a AAA video game publisher using 30-foot-long rolls of butcher paper!

So... If you have an idea for a new product, make it crude and make it fast: JFMI! Want to know what your audience thinks? JFMI – and show them! If you have a brilliant packaging concept, don’t debate it in the abstract – JFMI! Sales pitch strategy to explore? JFMI! Breathe a bit of life into your idea and see what shakes out...

Just Effing Make It!



Meet the team...

We check in with the team at **ToyZone** and explore the various arms of the business, from design and video games to graphics and licensing.



Antonio Castaño,
Chief Operations Officer,
ToyZone

Antonio! It's great to connect. What areas does your department cover?

Sourcing, procurement, engineering and product development, quality, and customer service – a great mixture of nationalities, personalities and experiences.

What does a typical day look like?

It depends on who you ask and which month we're in! The tasks and issues are very dynamic. What I can guarantee is that you won't get bored.

What fuels your creativity?

Well, the shortcomings we deal with are completely unexpected – this creates a continuous need for out-of-the-box thinking to overcome problems. Creativity is a tremendous asset.

What have been some major recent projects for you?

We've embarked on a digital transformation in the product development process. The team made an incredible effort while still delivering specific projects in a timely way. It's been a great example of co-operation between many teams.



Pablo García,
Video Games, ToyZone - CuiCui Studios

Pablo, for anyone new to the game studio within ToyZone, what should we know?

At our game studio, we have a diverse and multidisciplinary creative team. CuiCui comprises illustrators, animators, producers, programmers, and specialists in video game marketing; there are even educators! We have experts in education and psychology who analyse and supervise content targeting young audiences. The entire game development process demands a wide range of skills: user experience, art, animation, programming, music, promotion, and data analytics.

That's a broad line-up of disciplines!

Yes! And in a game studio, each day is intense. Programmers code while cracking bad jokes, artists sketch characters that animators then breathe life into within the game. Some days, we work remotely but Discord keeps us connected. Oh, and we indulge in lots of coffee and delicious treats brought in by our team's kitchen whizzes to share!

Alongside coffee and treats, what fuels the team's creative juices?

Our passion for gaming is a wellspring of inspiration and creativity. Our team members aren't just game designers and developers; they're gamers who enjoy and play hundreds of games. This gamer insight gives us a wealth of references and ideas when tackling new projects.

Speaking of projects, what's been keeping you busy this past year?

Over the last year, we've been involved in three significant game projects for the toy sector.

There was Piggies, a virtual pet with numerous collectible outfits and small games, and Cutie Land, a universe of adorable animals to care for and play with. Then there was Biggies, a platform game inspired by pinball and featuring chubby climbing animals. We've also worked on updates for other games, like Supermasked and Battle Cubes.



Paula Pitiot,
IP Licensing, ToyZone

Paula, it's good to connect. Is there a trait that binds everyone at ToyZone?

If there's one thing that characterizes us all, it's the constant desire to surpass ourselves. No matter how challenging the tasks may be, we always leave a part of ourselves in the projects. Work never stops; there are always projects and toys waiting to come to life. But we're definitely not your typical quiet company...

Our offices are consistently filled with laughter, music and stories from colleagues that help us work with enthusiasm, pushing us forward every day.

Yes, the camaraderie between you all comes through loud and clear.

Teamwork is everything! Communication among colleagues, communal brainstorming, and passion for our projects make even the craziest ideas flow. We're always ambitious and supported by our fantastic team of engineers to bring our concepts to reality.

What's been the stand-out project for your team this past year?

It's hard to choose, but one of the most fun was the GooMobiles. We explored many proposals to find the right materials, and we created several prototypes throughout the project to test that. Playing with them was super fun!



Laura Estrada,
Design, ToyZone

What does a typical day look like for the design department?

A typical day in our department involves showers of absurd ideas, crazy phrases, lots of laughter, but also plenty of work. There's always something to improve, change, or develop amid all that madness! We always have a different musical vibe depending on who's in charge of Spotify that day. Meetings, decisions and tasks to complete, while occasionally sneaking off to the kitchen for cookies!

What helps you and the team have ideas?

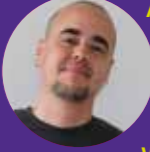
Lots of laughter, glitter, jiggly things, vibrant and saturated colours, and coffee – lots of coffee!

Ha! I thought so!

Speaking more seriously, I believe the formula that makes our team work well – and keeps everything going – is that we genuinely enjoy working together. And coffee... Did I say the coffee helps?

I'm going to have to try this coffee! Aside from that, what have you been excited to be a part of this year?

Biggies – yes, literally our biggest project is Biggies! It's been many hours of development, generating concepts, refining and improving packs and products – and searching for beautiful and soft materials that make the product unique and eye-catching. We've also developed different waves of the product in its pocket version called Little Biggies. Despite its confusing name, it's been a significant project!



Amed Adan,
Motion
Graphics,
ToyZone

What fuels creativity in the office?

Music is an important element. That's a must! But sharing ideas with the rest of the team is what motivates us to generate solutions.

What are some recent projects?

The JigglyPets rebranding, which was entirely generated in 3D. We had a big focus on Spiky the Jiggly Hedgehog as part of that!



Leonardo Martinez,
Animation,
ToyZone

What is a typical day for your department like?

It starts with morning meetings to review project progress. Throughout the day, we work on creating and refining animations, as well as modeling, rigging, and texturing, both for characters and props. We collaborate closely to ensure coherence and quality.

Additionally, we always keep an eye on the latest trends and technologies in animation to stay updated and foster innovation in our work.

Creative Community Connections

Kimberly Carcone – Executive Vice President of Global Market Events at The Toy Association – on upcoming inventor events, from pitching opportunities and education to LA-based activities.

"2024 promises to be another significant year with a renewed focus on serving inventors, designers and creatives."



In the dynamic world of toys and games, innovation is the heart of the industry. Behind the scenes, designers and inventors are constantly working to bring fresh ideas and creativity to the forefront. This year, The Toy Association will offer more resources and opportunities to help the creative community

find success.

The Toy Association has long been a champion of innovation, and 2024 promises to be another significant year with a renewed focus on serving inventors, designers and other creatives. This activity kicks off on March 4th when The Toy Association holds its first virtual Creative Factor Inventor Day of the year.

These inventor days have become a critical component to our year-round work. They create opportunities for industry newcomers to meet with seasoned toy and game professionals, share ideas, gain insights, and – most importantly – connect with manufacturers who can help bring their creations to life.

As a complement to its existing resources, such as a newly updated Inventor & Designer Guide – designed in collaboration with the United Inventors Association's Toy Hub – The Toy Association is also rolling out digital recordings of all 2023 Toy Fair University educational sessions through May 2024. The recordings feature experts covering everything from how to market in the metaverse to utilising generative AI programs like ChatGPT; from adhering to safety regulations to unlocking

new retail strategies. These insights are designed to further empower toy professionals at all stages with additional knowledge needed to successfully navigate the intricacies of the industry.

In addition to digital offerings, and in response to the demands from the toy community, plans are also underway for Toy Association-hosted activity in Los Angeles in Fall 2024, providing another valuable platform for businesses to connect and engage. Details are forthcoming, but the marketplace is designed to maintain the momentum generated by Toy Fair 2023, build momentum towards Toy Fair 2025 and provide additional touchpoints for the industry to network, collaborate and showcase product. All in a place and time that have growing importance to the global industry.

By fostering connections, providing education and creating platforms for collaboration, The Toy Association is laying the groundwork for an even more vibrant and innovative toy industry. In embracing the spirit of creativity through Creative Factor Inventor Days, Toy Fair University's educational programming and upcoming events in Los Angeles and New York, The Toy Association is not just supporting inventors, but also paving the way for a stronger innovation pipeline; a new era of relationships, partnerships, cooperation and success in the world of toys and games.

The global toy industry will come together once again for the 119th North American International Toy Fair, taking place March 1st to 4th, 2025 at the Javits Center in New York City.



Fans, brands and 24 plans

Felipe Noriega – Vice President & Regional Director at YuMe Toys – talks innovation, brand partnerships and ‘YuMefication’.



Felipe, it's great to tie-in. How has 2023 been for YuMe?

As you know, 2023 was tough for the toy industry – but we planned ahead. Last year, we set our 2023 product line to fit the expected challenging economic environment. We kept most products under €15, focused on trending brands and maintained top quality. This strategy led to significant sales and wider distribution.

And product-wise, what've been some of the key highlights?

YuMe's Disney 100 Surprise Capsules were a hit globally, establishing us as experts in original unboxing features. Series 1 sold out fast during the first semester of 2023, and we expect the same for Series 2 during the holiday season. Our Jujutsu Kaisen range – all priced under €15 – broke the price-entry barrier traditionally erected by classic anime-themed statues. We achieved mass appeal with surprise capsules, bobbleheads and squishies.

Yes, they look great. You mentioned your original unboxing features there... How key is innovation to YuMe?

In a crowded market, YuMe focuses on innovative products – turning ordinary items like advent calendars and plush toys into unique experiences. Creativity and technical expertise from our teams ‘YuMefies’ our toys and brings extra enjoyment to consumers, making innovation the hallmark of a YuMe Toys product.

We've spoken about Disney and Jujutsu Kaisen, so what makes a brand right for YuMe?

A substantial fan base is a must. We're not afraid to bet on brands we predict will succeed in the near future though. Our speed to market allows us to develop and launch products faster than larger toy companies, capturing trends as they rise.

You're launching Direct to Retail and Direct to Consumer offerings soon! Why is now the right time for that?

After five years in the market, YuMe Toys has gained enough expertise and traction. With quality products and strong social-media interaction, we believe it's the right time for DTR and D2C offerings. Our sales organisation is also ready for this more complex setup.

Does going direct to retailers and consumers change any aspect of what YuMe will design?

Going direct to consumers affords us higher margins. This opens up possibilities for more complex, high-quality designs comprising premium materials and components.

We'll keep our eyes peeled for that. Looking ahead to the rest of 2024, what are some of your key goals?

This year, we're doubling the number of SKUs in our portfolio in relation to 2023. We're forecasting explosive growth off the back of this product expansion. Like we did in 2023 with Disney, we're celebrating another fan-favourite anniversary with a new Hello Kitty range for her 50th birthday. Our Squid Game range aims to satisfy fans with original collectibles. Additionally, we're excited to offer a unique product in 2024: a premium item featuring eight of Netflix's all-time most-watched programs and movies. Stay tuned!



“In a crowded market, YuMe focuses on innovative products.”

“Play keeps our curiosity alive as we grow older. It encourages us to question, to experiment and to look at the world with a fresh perspective.”



The Power of Play

Paper Bag Creative’s **Ed Gartin** and **April Mitchell** from 4A’s Creations discuss how play can be a powerful catalyst for creativity.



Ed Gartin, Creative Catalyst, Paper Bag Creative:

You know, I was just thinking it’s remarkable how play is a thread that weaves through our entire lives. From childhood into adulthood, it continues to shape us in such profound and deeply impactful ways.



April Mitchell, Founder, 4A’s Creations:

Absolutely. Play is not something we outgrow... It evolves with us and serves different purposes as we grow older.

EG: One thing that strikes me is how play in adulthood is a really powerful catalyst for creativity. When we engage in playful activities – whether it’s painting, writing or simply daydreaming – it unlocks our full creative potential.

AM: That’s so true. As children, play is often about exploring our imagination and learning about the world around us. That doesn’t change as adults. In fact, play is one of the most effective ways to maintain a vibrant and creative mind throughout our lives. I also think play helps us stay young and open to new ideas – everyone should be encouraged to play!

EG: I totally agree. Play keeps our curiosity alive as we grow older. It encourages us to question, to experiment and to look at the world with a fresh perspective.

AM: It’s that childlike wonder that allows us to see possibilities where others might see limitations. Whether it’s approaching a problem at work with a playful mindset or finding inspiration for a new project, play fuels our creativity. When people engage in play, they can unleash the best of what their mind has to offer.

EG: Let’s not forget that play can be an excellent stress reliever too. For me, that usually means playing board games with friends. Let’s be honest, life can be pretty hectic these days and it’s been really stressful these past three years... Having an outlet for play, whether it’s playing sports, board games or any other enjoyable activity, can help us decompress and find the balance we need.

AM: I agree, Ed! Play is like a pressure valve. It lets off steam and rejuvenates our spirits. It’s a reminder that life doesn’t have to be all work and responsibility; there’s joy to be found in play. I also love how play brings people together. The shared experiences and memories being made are so valuable. Whether playing games or creating an impromptu dance party, play can create a ripple effect in our lives.

EG: So, as we celebrate the incredible power of play from childhood to adulthood, let’s remember that it’s not just a pastime; it’s what we do. It’s a lifelong source of creativity and vitality.

AM: Well said. Play keeps the flame of creativity burning bright throughout our lives. It’s a reminder that no matter how old we get, there’s always room for imagination, wonder, and exploration.

EG: When you approach each day with a playful curiosity, the world becomes a canvas of endless possibilities, waiting for you to discover it. It’s amazing what you can see and do when you approach everything with a playful attitude, always ready for creative inspiration to reveal itself.

AM: 100%, Ed! Play isn’t just a childhood memory; it’s like a lifelong friend on the journey of self-discovery and creative expression. On that note – let’s all start our days ready to play!

Squishful Thinking

Gerhard Runken – Senior Vice President of Brand at Jazwares – takes us inside the toy sensation that is Squishmallows.



Gerhard, it's great to tie-in. 2023 saw Squishmallows win Toy of the Year for the third year in a row. When did it first become clear the brand was resonating?

Well, people don't realise Squishmallows is going into its seventh year! I joined Jazwares as part of the Wicked Cool acquisition in 2019 and then Jazwares acquired Kelly Toys in 2020... That brought Squishmallows into the business – and turned Jazwares into the biggest plush manufacturer on the planet.

It was always on an upward trajectory, but when we acquired Squishmallows, it didn't have the biggest global footprint and the strategy was different. They were creating a lot of characters, but they weren't diving into any one particular character. We saw that certain characters, squads and archetypes were really resonating with fans – and we wanted to give the fans more of what they wanted. That's when we realised that Squishmallows wasn't just a plush... People really love Cam the Cat and Benny the Bigfoot – they love these characters bios. And they were collecting in different ways: by squad, by scale, by type.

So there were lot of insights to be taken and used to fuel where to take the brand next?

We collected a lot of data because we wanted to understand this multi-generational fanbase. The brand attracts everyone from a four-year old to a 50-year old. We saw Squishmallows as more than just a plush and the industry had evolved in a way that meant they were ready for that.

In what sense?

Well, the plush category is now like the action-figure space. People used to look at plush as a commodity, but now there're collectors for plush, there're stories and characters driving plush, there're rarities in plush... There's a huge following for plush and Squishmallows is the trend leader and the trend setter. We were at the heart of this evolution for the plush category, and we did that by putting fans first. It was key to us growing this not only as a plush brand, but as a global lifestyle brand.

Design-wise, why has Squishmallows clicked with people?

The tactile feel of a Squishmallows is like nothing else. You want to touch it, hold it and carry it with you. There's also a unique look to a Squishmallows. So when you touch it, you know it's a Squishmallows. When you see it, you know it's a Squishmallows.

And every character we design, we design with purpose. We don't

just look at what the most popular characters are and keep doing those; that's how you burn a brand out. We always want to evolve the Squishmallows world with things we haven't done before. What would work for fans around the globe? We also don't want to do 'one-hit wonders' – we want characters that we can extend and expand upon. We also create backgrounds and relatable aspects for people to really get invested in the Squishmallows characters.

Everything – from the bios and the colours to the materials – we put a higher level of focus on than any of our competitors. A lot of people are trying to copy what we do, but they're not doing that with a fan-focus; it's just an attempt at driving revenue. We look at Squishmallows as a 20-year, evergreen property that services fans with the greatest products.



"We look at Squishmallows as a 20-year, evergreen property."



On that, what's key in ensuring a successful brand lives for a long time?

The number-one thing is knowing where you came from and who your fanbase is. You have to stay authentic to them. The second thing is about production... A lot of companies don't put production caps on products. We always look at how much we're producing because we don't sell to what's being asked. We always try and limit the market. We want to bring newness to the market, and we don't want to oversell at any retailer, in any country.

The other place where a lot of people go wrong when they have a hot product is to charge more money for the brand. We've stayed true to our core pricing from when the brand started.

The last thing is fan services. Whenever we talk about marketing, or product development, or an event, the key things that come up are: How will a fan react to this? And

does it feel authentic? That's not a lens that a lot of other companies put on their brands because people know that brands don't last that long. But we put that lens on every aspect of the Squishmallows brand. If we don't do that, we won't be talking about Squishmallows in 10 or 15 years.

Gerhard, this has been great. To wrap up, what does this year have in store for Squishmallows?

Lots of exciting partnerships, including recently launched Squishmallows x H&M, PUMA this spring, and a collaboration with East Side Games that gets us into mobile gaming. We also have Squishmallows Day on March 7th. That's where we'll give the fans 24 hours of announcements. There will be a lot of exciting new drops and details then. We'll also expand our fan engagement on a global scale. It's an exciting time for the brand.

Trendspotting

Retro toys, licensed ranges, sustainability... **Heather Delaney** from Gallium Ventures reveals the trends set to dominate the industry over the next 12 months.



We're set to see a handful of toy trends taking hold this year. These span several different themes – from retro toys, TV and movie tie-ins, sustainability, education, and of course digital experiences.

The trend of throwback toys will likely be topping wishlists over the next twelve months.

Thanks to Barbie being such a massive success last year, the world's most-popular doll will continue to dominate the shelves for a long time, as will several other familiar faces from our past.

Speaking of familiar faces, retro-themed toys will continue their successful resurgence and popularity as millennials aim to not only have their young children interested in things they grew up with, but also a drive to once again own these items themselves. Expect to see several staples of a millennial's childhood getting kid-friendly makeovers: cassette players, flip phones and boom boxes.

Pop culture and TV will continue to impact toy trends, especially those that trigger the nostalgia factor. Netflix's *Stranger Things* made massive waves in the music industry, with Kate Bush and Metallica seeing huge boosts in streams – and the toy industry felt its TV glow as well. *Lite Brite* – which featured in the last season of the show – was welcomed back to the party along with the aforementioned cassette players and boom boxes. With *Stranger Things* returning one last time, we can expect another wave of yesteryear products to be at the top of wishlists.

We're also seeing a much wider range of sustainable toys avoiding the hard-to-recycle plastics in favour of wood and cardboard. As

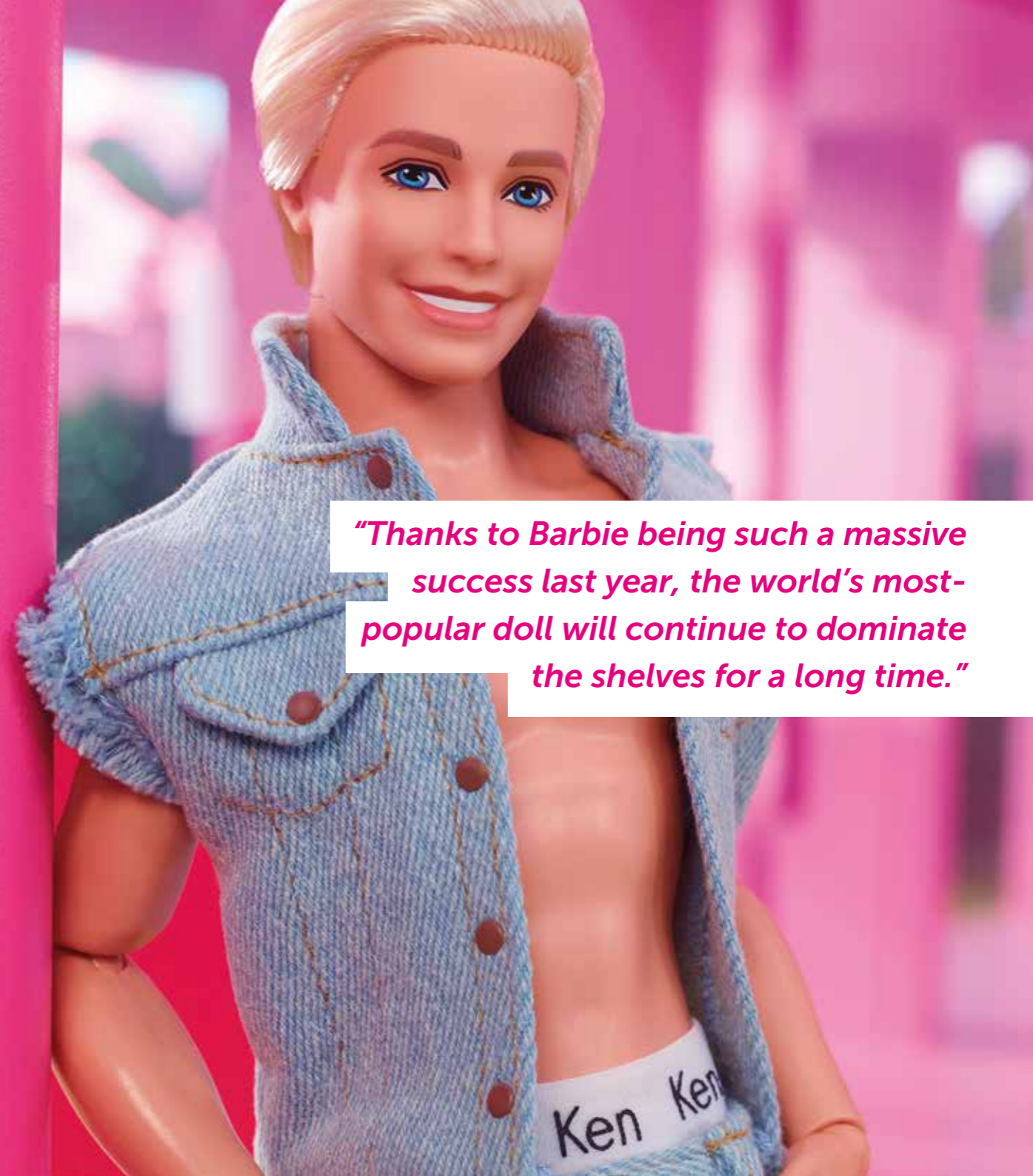
we become more eco-conscious as a society, the toy industry as a whole seems to be looking back at the impact it's made over the years. Things are starting to shift towards making sure products and packaging are recyclable or reusable in some way, shape or form.

Toy companies such as Mattel are also making moves... They're pledging to make all their products more sustainable over the next 15 to 20 years by using recyclable or bio-based plastics materials in its products and packaging – pretty spectacular news. Hasbro is taking steps, too, with their Global Hasbro Toy Recycling Program. This allows consumers to ship off old, unused and broken toys to Terracycle for responsible disposal.

Parents and caregivers are also looking more toward toys that, as well as providing entertainment value, can provide more of an educational impact on their little ones – with technology playing a much larger role in this than before. Expect to see more Augmented- and Virtual-Reality applications with toys over the next few years.

As our world continues to become more tech-focused, 'something-a-verses' will likely grow even more popular over the next few years. This is thanks – in no small part – to games and experiences such as Roblox and Fortnite, the latter of which has recently unveiled its LEGO tie-in.

This partnership will allow players to jump into their own digital LEGO world within Fortnite to get lost in their very own block-based adventure... One that will include creative building, battling monsters and playing with LEGO versions of their favourite Fortnite characters. No doubt this is a partnership that'll transfer to the real world too, with Fortnite LEGO sets soon to arrive on store shelves.



"Thanks to Barbie being such a massive success last year, the world's most-popular doll will continue to dominate the shelves for a long time."

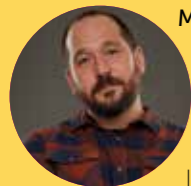
Introverts, Extraverts and Inventing

Which personality type is more useful for a career in toy and game invention? Inventors share their thoughts...



RON DUBREN,
Inventor, Ron Dubren & Associates

Introverts have a leg up on the creative inventing side. They're less likely to be distracted by social life and obligations, and very much enjoy introspection, analysis and problem solving. Extraverts do well on the selling side. You need over-confidence, persistence and a thick skin. I found that to prosper as a toy inventor, I have to wear both hats.



MATT NUCCIO,
President, Design Edge

Both introverts and extraverts can excel as toy or game inventors. Introverts may thrive in the creative solitude of idea generation, independent brainstorming, crafting intricate designs and diving deep into details. Extraverts might excel in pitching concepts, collaborating with others, networking, presenting ideas with enthusiasm, and navigating collaborative projects. A balanced approach that incorporates the strengths of both personalities can lead to success by adapting to different aspects of the toy and game industry.



FI MURRAY,
Founder, Making Things Studio

I read a study recently that showed 'extraversion' is powered by the hormone oxytocin, meaning – essentially – that warmth, trust and emotions can power your personality in any given moment. Oxytocin levels can affect how we perceive ourselves and how extraverted we are in social settings. For example, I feel confident, energised vibes after a pitch that's been met with excitement, open arms and praise. It's a huge oxytocin hit! But if met with coldness, or a lack of interest or passion – especially from someone I don't know very well – my 'extraness' would plummet, no matter the pitch resilience I've built up.

Over years of exposure to new situations, we find it easier to power up our extraness in times of need. Like a walking juxtaposition, I love tradeshow, pitch events, networking shows, but boy do I need a few calm, heads down, project-work days with my closest teams to counter it – a dopamine refuel!



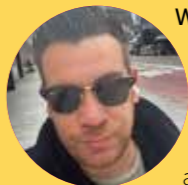
DANIELLE REYNOLDS,
Project Director, Wacky Wizard Games

Being an extravert has proven useful as an inventor. I have a large social battery, so I'm able to attend around 12 conventions a year without burning out. Thanks to my large network, I have an easy time recruiting playtesters. Being an extravert has helped me market myself – and my games – to more publishers, which has increased my likelihood of getting signed. I've had publishers tell me that they love signing a title with an inventor that will self-promote the game. The only downside to being an extravert is that I want to spend time with people outside of working in games and sometimes that's hard to balance due to all the convention travel... I don't give myself a lot of non-productive alone time. Plus, I get a drop in my mood after conventions. It's something that, as an extravert, I've learned to balance so I stay mentally healthy.



DAVID SNOW,
Owner, The Fantastic Factory

Both personality types can do very well in inventing. It's more important to be confident in your pitch and the reasons why your invention should be considered by companies. If your confidence is high, this comes across in the pitch. As you get to know companies, you can adapt your style to suit each inventor relations person. This comes with time, and time is on your side as an inventor.



WESTLEY CIARAMELLA,
Partner, Catapult Concepts

Being extraverted has been key to my success! Some of my closest friends are in the toy industry. Late nights and extracurricular gatherings are nice breaks from the inventing grind!



BRENDAN BOYLE,
Associate Director, Fuse & Adjunct Professor, Stanford University

I started teaching at Stanford the year after I graduated with my MS degree. Although I was confident in the content, speaking in front of 60 students terrified me. Fast forward a few decades of teaching, and being in front of a group now feels easy and natural and my classes are well-received. I now feel like an extravert – but this comes from practice and repetition. The comfort of being in front of groups has boosted my confidence in pitching new toy concepts to companies.

For my creative extravert friends, I coach them to experiment with being less extraverted; I suggest being a better listener. My friend and long-time colleague Fred Dust wrote Making Conversations and I've been practicing several of Fred's techniques, especially his 'creative listening' approach, when receiving feedback.

We all fall somewhere between extroversion and introversion. With a mindful and purposeful approach, an intentional acknowledgment of our place on the spectrum allows us to tap into our creativity and encourages meaningful development in our roles as innovators and educators.

"Things never stand still at Moose"

Joost Poulus, Chief Product Officer at Moose Toys, talks innovation, creativity and new launches.



You've been with Moose for over two decades. What's kept you there for such an impressive stretch?

Moose has a commitment to doing things differently. Part of that comes from being based in Australia; we're less encumbered by traditional thinking. We strive to remain agile and trend-focused, and are completely obsessed with innovation. Our directors are still involved in the company in different ways which is incredible. They're a constant source of inspiration to me personally and the wider business.

Things never stand still at Moose. From our Directors and Senior Leadership team down, we constantly look toward the future to ensure we're better than we were in the past. This goes from the products and brands that we build to the way we market them; from the way we operate to how we build and nurture relationships. Everyone is encouraged to think outside the box – which means the opportunities for success are endless!

You mention the importance of innovation. How is the team set up to successfully innovate?

At Moose, innovation isn't just a buzzword; it's the very core of our business. We have exceptional in-house teams across all design and marketing disciplines – alongside robust partnerships within the inventor community – which really sets us up for success. These two elements working together constantly enable us to come up with new, exciting, imaginative play experiences for kids around the world.

Diversifying our categories has also been a game-changer... From youth electronics like Magic Mixes and Little Live Pets, to action figures like Goo Jit Zu, and pre-school hits like Bluey, each category expansion has been a triumph. And there's plenty more to come over the next few years!

What recent launch would you say typifies Moose's approach to innovation?

Magic Mixies – it really epitomizes our disruptive approach to toy creation. We've always been known as the creators of the ultimate unboxing experience – from Shopkins to Scruff-a-Luvs – and Magic Mixies takes this concept to unprecedented heights. The response has been nothing short of phenomenal, with well over a million Magic Mixie Cauldrons sold globally since launch.

A proper toy titan! And two of your recent launches also innovate around the idea of 'the reveal'.

Yes, Beast Lab is an incredible new action figure line that takes the creation process to the next level! There is so much magic to this toy that it's like sitting down and watching a power-packed movie trailer! The design and engineering team used some old toy tricks – like the famous 'magic milk bottle' – plus some new ones to bring it all to life. They never cease to amaze us with how they bring such incredibly unrealistic toy ideas into actual reality!

And Cookeez Makery is another absolute stand out! Again, it plays into a tried-and-tested play pattern that we all know kids love – cooking! Cookeez has become a viral sensation and a sell out for us in 2023.

Joost, before we wrap up, what fuels your creativity?

Having the best design team in the entire global toy industry helps... a LOT! At Moose, there are so many creative people who all inspire each other, ensuring that ideas are built into even better ideas with collaboration. We also have real clarity as to how high we've set the bar, and the team is super understanding when we push for concepts to be taken to another level!

"At Moose, innovation isn't just a buzzword; it's the very core of our business."



CONGRATS!



MOJO NATION 100 RECIPIENTS

FROM THE INVENTOR RELATIONS TEAM AT



Rich Mazel
VP,
Inventor Relations



Dougal Grimes
VP,
Inventor Relations



Arielle Egoian
Coordinator



Nina Dizenhuz
Associate



Tal Schrieber
Plush & T.I.P.,
Spin Master Israel



Ichiro Ishikawa
Spin Master Japan



Ben Dermer
SVP,
Toy Innovation

The Future of IP Security

Etched founder **Victor Caddy** reveals how his company's unique use of blockchain helps protect IP.



Victor, for anyone new to Etched, how would you describe the company's approach to IP protection?

Etched is committed to future proofing the way copyright, and all IP and other intellectual assets, are secured. Our unique approach is to take 'luck' out of the equation. Having the most robust method of claiming your IP shouldn't be up for debate... Etched uses blockchain technology to verify what you create, and when: globally, immutably, de-centrally and at speed. In effect, Etched stamps – or 'etches' – your IP and other intellectual assets in stone.

In real terms, how might a toy company or inventor create an 'etch'?

Using the Etched platform is easy. Firstly, you access your account, using a username and password. Then you upload what you want to protect, which can be as simple as 'drag and drop'. And then you click 'etch'. A few seconds later, a message appears on screen confirming that you've created your 'etch'. The magic of creating this piece of evidence to establish ownership of your creation has happened. It's that quick!

Simple! And how would an 'etch' be used in practice?

Firstly, it's an asset portfolio builder. It enables you to create, log and manage your portfolio of intellectual assets. Second, it's a firm peg from which to hang a licence – and not just one licence either. You can use a single 'etch' as a peg for global licences because it has a tangible presence in every country.

And third, an 'etch' acts as a deterrent against future infringements. You can display the etched logo on your product, or on its packaging – and on your website – to instantly warn off would-be copycats, globally. Etch gives your legal team a stronger

hand. They can produce your 'etch' in a cease-and-desist letter as evidence. And if you do go to court – which is less likely because you have an 'etch' in the first place – they can produce it as the IP equivalent of DNA evidence.

Do you see this approach overtaking more traditional means of protection?

Absolutely! In today's digital landscape, modern creatives are craving a reliable and secure digital verification platform. Just as DNA became the standard in criminal cases, blockchain claim of ownership is set to become the new norm for intellectual property verification. You can 'etch' almost anything. It can be your product designs, art, animations, story boards, game mechanics, even 'works in progress' – giving verification of your creative process. It could also be meeting minutes, research notes, input from collaborators... The list goes on.

Etched will never replace official intellectual property systems for things like trademarks and patents. However, Etched enables people to take ownership of their IP. As an example, trademark registration for a new product is costly and can take several years to secure for all key territories. But if you 'etch' that name or product on the same day you file your first trademark application, you instantly have a global marker in the sand. Assuming the stylised version of the mark is protectable by copyright, you've secured your copyright everywhere – all on day one.

In summary, Etched is at the forefront of the future of IP and intellectual asset security, perfectly timed for the tides of change. If the internet is the vast ocean, home to predatory sharks looking to steal your IP and feed off your creativity, Etched is the ark on which your business can find protection. Like a port in a storm.

To find out more – or to be part of our early adopter scheme – please get in touch at www.etched.xyz or contact us directly at victor@etched.xyz or ben@etched.xyz.

"Etched uses blockchain technology to verify what you create, and when"



Building BRIDGES

Lee Allentuck looks at key considerations when fostering fruitful collaborations between inventors and toy companies



In the dynamic world of toy and game invention, the relationship between independent inventors and toy companies serves as a pivotal driver of innovation and market growth. My experience in the industry shows the value of these partnerships, where the alignment of goals and a deep understanding of each other's strengths are fundamental...

FOR INVENTORS: ENHANCING YOUR APPROACH AND NETWORK

1. Brand Alignment: Inventors must ensure their ideas resonate with a company's brand essence. This requires thorough research and a keen understanding of the company's market positioning. Aligning your concept with their values and target audience not only increases its appeal, but also demonstrates your commitment to adding genuine value to their brand.

2. Professionalism and Specificity: A well-structured, company-specific pitch reflects your professionalism and attention to detail. It's vital to understand the company's customer demographics, market strategy and product range... Integrating this knowledge into your pitch helps make a compelling case for your concept.

3. Enthusiasm and Strategic Insight: While passion is essential, it must be supported by market

insights and a clear vision for the future. Share the story behind your idea, its market potential and a strategic development roadmap. Highlight how it can stand out in a competitive environment.

4. Building a Network: Developing a strong network within the toy and game industry is crucial. Attend trade shows, join industry groups and engage in online communities. Find meaningful ways to stay connected to potential partners and look to expand your network with worthwhile connections – not just cold connecting on LinkedIn. Networking not only increases visibility for your work, but also provides valuable insights into industry trends and potential collaboration opportunities.



"The relationship between independent inventors and toy companies serves as a pivotal driver of innovation and market growth"

FOR TOY COMPANIES: CULTIVATING INVENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

1. Embracing External Innovation: Inventors offer a reservoir of fresh ideas, bringing unique perspectives that can drive a brand's growth. Being open to external innovation can lead to ground-breaking products that redefine markets and stimulate new consumer interests.

2. Expanding Skill Sets: Collaborating with inventors brings diverse skills and new creativity. Both are crucial for companies looking to broaden their product offerings and remain competitive.

3. Developing Inventor Relations: A well-organised inventor relations program is essential for discovering and nurturing new ideas. Building long-term, meaningful relationships with inventors means consistently engaging with them, providing feedback – and fostering an environment that values and rewards creativity.

4. Speed to Market: Collaborations with inventors often mean quicker development and launch times. Inventors frequently bring partially or fully developed concepts that you can rapidly adapt for the market, providing a significant competitive advantage.

The partnership between internal design teams and external inventors is a cornerstone in the contemporary toy and game industry. This collaboration blends in-house expertise with innovative outside ideas, driving the creation of diverse, exciting products.

Such synergistic relationships not only speed up innovation but also enrich product variety and enhance consumer appeal. They represent a progressive strategy where the combined strengths of both sides lead to ground-breaking play experiences.

This alliance isn't merely a route to success... It's also a commitment to continuously reinvent the joy of play, ensuring the industry stays vibrant and responsive in an ever-changing world.





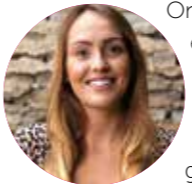
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What makes a perfect toy?

Children tell KidsKnowBest's **Elizabeth Croughan** and **Sian Rider** their thoughts on the key to a great toy...



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One shoe doesn't fit all. Life would be much easier if it did... But it's fair to say things would also get a little boring. At least, that's what kids are telling us.



At KidsKnowBest, we're on a mission to give kids a voice on the stuff that matters most to them. We speak to a panel of youngsters and their parents worldwide every day, so it's important for us to shout about their needs and wants, on their behalf.

With every child we listen to, each unique in their own way, we hear about their favourite toys and the different ways they choose to express themselves through play. Above all, we've noticed kids' common desire for products that incentivise 'open-ended play'. By this, we mean freedom to customise, individualise and create with toys – essentially, to put their own stamp on things.

"It's not something you just get from the shops and fiddle with for a bit. You actually have some enjoyment out of it and make it yourself. Then you're like, 'Oh, I made this. I'm so proud of myself'. I really want the Dr. Squish refill – it'll come with more powder and more squishy balls and stuff. Then I can continue making them." Girl, 8

Limited play can lead to immediate boredom and a lack of interest, especially for Gen Alpha and their ever-shortened attention spans. Toys with versatile functions, unrestricted usage or opportunities for personalisation all offer more exciting ways for kids to immerse themselves for longer.

Parents also value products that act as a canvas for creative storytelling. Such autonomy empowers children to be more imaginative and inventive in the ways they play.

"My favourite toys are just something you can do a lot with. Some toys are a bit boring because you can only do one thing with them." Boy, 10

In order to stay engaged and prolong the gratification period, kids like having the flexibility to determine their own outcomes.

When these experiences seem less restricted, kids feel a sense of pride in their co-creation with a brand. They appreciate when brands grant them a foundation on which they can build and demonstrate their individuality.

"There are different ways you can make Loom Bands – and you can basically make anything. You can make necklaces, rings... Anything you want. That's why I like them." Girl, 8

What better place to flex your imagination than in virtual reality? Kids are curious about VR's ability to transport them into immersive environments and craft their own play scenarios.

"This year I really want the Oculus. I've used my friend's before and I like the whole virtual reality, out-of-this-world type tech". Boy, 12

"My friend at school has got a VR set. They said you get Roblox on it, so I added it to my Christmas list." Girl, 9

We also asked kids to look into the future of toys and tell us what they see. So, no pressure, but here are their expectations...

"100 years into the future, I feel like it's going to all be like holographic and there's going to be just holograms everywhere". Boy, 12

"Dolls might be built with technology. So a normal doll now could maybe, in the future, turn into a doll that could walk." Girl, 11

From their fascination with open-ended play to the appreciation of versatile toys, children articulate a shared yearning for creative autonomy. Whether immersed in crafting with Loom Bands, engaging in imaginative play with Barbie, or exploring VR through Oculus, these observations emphasise toys as dynamic platforms for self-expression.

For toy creators ready to embrace this insight, it holds the key to unleashing the true joy and untapped potential within children's play. Here's to the exciting future of toys!

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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AUDREY WATANABE,
Associate Manager,
Inventor Relations,
Mattel

As Mattel's IR lead for games since 2021, Audrey Watanabe fast established

herself as a popular figure with the global inventor community. "Audrey is an amazing ambassador for Mattel's commitment to building meaningful partnerships with inventors," said one nominator. They added: "She embodies the gold standard of inventor relations – she's always accessible, diligent and a joy to work with." Another told us: "Audrey understands how to respectfully manage inventors' feelings and expectations, while being super organised and professional – a star!"



DANIEL CASTELLANOS,
Head Engineer,
Eolo & ToyZone

Behind every new launch from Eolo and ToyZone is Daniel Castellanos, who – according to nominators – is a "genius

who turns toy dreams into reality". Instrumental across everything from creating intricate prototypes to solving manufacturing challenges, Daniel is a vital part of a fruitful year for the company. Recent successful work includes Biggies, Cre-A-Tures and an upcoming addition to the Jiggly Pets line: Jiggly Bugs.



DANIELLE TISDALE,
Sr. Digital Product
Designer, Hasbro

One of the shining stars of Hasbro's sculpting team, Danielle Tisdale creates 3D-digital models for powerhouse brands like FurReal, My Little Pony, Baby Alive and Play-Doh. In her role, Danielle is responsible for creating original, high-resolution 3D-digital content, supporting workflows for new concepts, meeting rigorous mass-production tooling and quality-assurance standards. As one nominator told us: "Danielle is instrumental in Hasbro's digital R&D exploration."



CHRISTINE KIM,
Senior Design Manager, Mattel

Responsible for bringing fresh thinking into Mattel's doll lines, nominators describe Christine Kim as "Creative, driven and innovative".

Boasting strong knowledge of product development, Christine ensures that each item is consumer focused, with great play value. "Christine's understanding of play and her attention to fine detail are qualities that make her an expert of fun in the toy world," added one fan of her work.



JOHN BELL,
Director of Inventor Relations and Preliminary
Design, Buffalo Games

"An unsung hero", "A pleasure to work with" and "A rare talent in the industry" are just some of the ways nominators describe Buffalo's John Bell. Titles John has worked on in the past year include Junior Detective, Pop It Pro, Pop It Go!, Oh No Volcano and Spin Some for Dim Sum – and he is a huge advocate of inventor talent. In 2023 alone, John sought out and worked with more than 20 inventors who were new to Buffalo. "John has amazing attention to detail and great insight," said one nominator. Another told us: "He has a knack for understanding the consumer, knowing what's trendy and how to put a twist on a game to help it stand out."



TONY SEREBRIANY,
Head of Inventor Relations
& International Sales,
The Op

Responsible for some of the most popular titles that The Op publishes, Tony Serebriany is much loved

among those he finds, develops and champions. "Tony is exactly what you want from someone working in inventor relations..." said one fan, adding: "...passionate, fair, fun – and a genuinely lovely person". Another told us: "As well as being great with inventors, Tony has an eye for interesting licenses and international trends. He's able to bring in games that do very well around the globe." Recent launches in which Tony has been involved with include The Perfect Wave, Express Route and A.R.T. Project – as well as the upcoming launch of Gnome Hollow.



JM DUPARC,
Chief Creation, Identity
Games International

2023 proved to be another incredible year for JM Duparc and the

team at Identity Games. One big success story was their adaptation of the globally successful TV show, The Traitors. The game got great reviews and picked up two Dutch Toy of the Year Awards in the Kidult and Public Vote categories. Elsewhere, JM collaborated with a raft of inventors on upcoming games that were pitched without prototypes, videos or PDFs. "For JM, an elevator pitch is enough – and this unique way of working with inventors proves very fruitful for all parties," said one nominator.



ERICA GOLUB,
Director of Product
Development,
PlayMonster

"Visionary", "A gem" and "That rare blend of strategic thinking combined with blue-sky ideating" are just a few ways that nominators sing the praises of PlayMonster's Erica Golub. In the last 12 months, she directed development across games, pre-school and Koosh. This includes bringing to life titles like the award-winning Pigs on Trampolines, reimagining Playskool with beautiful new aesthetics, and taking Koosh to new heights. As one fan of her work puts it: "Erica has the energy of five people – give her a seed and she'll grow a forest of amazing product."



DAVID WEIAND,
Senior Model Maker, Hasbro

An incredibly talented mechanism designer, David Weiand is responsible for creating original mechanisms based on rough ideas or sketches from Hasbro's development partners. He has specialised in Nerf development, providing the team with innovative, low-cost mechanism solutions that deliver across the portfolio. "David's unique skill set enables Hasbro to move from concept through production-ready CAD in record time... That continually allows the toy giant to have new play patterns in the market," said one fan.



MOOSE TOYS R&D TEAM

Moose's aim to become the most innovative toy company is driven by a real passion for R&D. The UK team – led by James Austin-Smith – consists of Lauren Geach, Ross Monks, Dave Emblin, Lucy Gilbert, Eddie Percy-Hughes, Nina Harris and Abbi Udell. Together with the global innovation team, known as RADAR, this small but mighty team is the origin point for smash hits like Cookeez Makery, Beast Lab, Magic Mixies, Mama Surprise and My Puppy's Home. "Time and again, the R&D team at Moose demonstrates industry-leading ingenuity and innovation," said one nominator.



GEORGE LEESON,
Product Development
Manager, Bladez Toyz

Last year saw George Leeson promoted to Product Development Manager at Bladez Toyz, capping off an exciting year for him – and the company. He was an integral part of the team that brought Bladez's Hot Wheels Mini Monster Trucks Maker Kit to life... And the range is set to be a big hit.

"George is a real asset to Bladez," said one fan of his work, adding: "He should be really proud of the part he's played in the whole process."



MARK GARCIA,
Inventor Relations Manager,
Hasbro

Mark Garcia is described as an integral part of Hasbro's popular inventor relations team. "His energy and enthusiasm are infectious, and he's a really good guy to boot," said one fan. Another told us: "Mark is always open and honest with feedback. Inventing with him is a very smooth and easy process."



GOLDEN BEAR'S SOCCER BOT R&D TEAM
Chris Marsden, Gareth Lloyd & Ollie Hales

One of Golden Bear's big hits of 2023 was the latest incarnation of its SmartBall range: Soccer Bot. This innovative training football was brought to life by Golden Bear's Chris Marsden, Gareth Lloyd and Ollie Hales. As one fan of their work told us: "The team's passion for product and meticulous attention to detail have delivered a real success story."



ERICA BOUYOURIS,
Design Lead,
Spin Master Games

Since joining the Spin Master Games team in 2021, Erica Bouyouris has become one of the industry's leading designers of licensed games. Recent launches from Erica include Harry Potter Magical Mayhem, a Disney Robin Hood re-theme of Sheriff of Nottingham and I

Need a New Butt: The Game. 2023 also saw Erica bring Dumb Ways to Die to the tabletop; a design that was up for a TOTY and saw Erica nominated for Game Designer of the Year at the Play Creators Awards. Erica has more games scheduled for release later this year, including Goosebumps: The Game.

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SARAH FRANCO,
Inventor Relations
Manager, Mattel

"A champion of product," "Dedicated to her brands" and "Committed" are just some of the ways nominators describe Mattel's Sarah Franco. With over 13 years of service, Sarah is an integral member of the

Inventor Relations team; her relentless championing of innovators has got her noticed in the inventor world. She's also recognised for her proactive, reliable and supportive nature. "Sarah is an invaluable asset, continually striving to innovate and bring Mattel the most exceptional ideas," added one fan.



LARA RIPLEY,
Senior Designer,
Activities, Dolls &
Interactive, Spin Master

With a proven track record in exceeding performance and boasting a strong vision, Spin Master's Lara Ripley

has a passion for developing unique products that inspire people to imagine, play and create. Always a champion of inventors, she recently spearheaded the Cool Maker PopStyle Bracelet Maker, a partnership with RDMAK from Japan and a new innovation in bracelet making.



NICK HAYES,
Key Lead Product
Designer,
Mattel Games

In the past year, Mattel's Nick Hayes has contributed to the development of many instant fan-favourite games. These include UNO Show 'Em No Mercy, Scrabble Together, Pictionary vs. AI and several licensed launches. As one nominator told us: "Whether providing insightful feedback during inventor pitch meetings, mentoring his teammates or bringing his own proposals to life, Nick's dedication to helping others and creating compelling play experiences is unmatched."



HEATH SABER,
Inventor Relations Director,
Moose Toys

A popular industry figure, Heath Saber is described as "A total star". His passion for great ideas fuels every pitch he delivers as he champions the great work inventors submit to Moose Toys. "Heath understands the critical role that inventors play in our industry," said one fan of his work. They added: "His focus on people, collaboration and innovation is always front and centre."



TMS

Armando Zuniga, Annette Field, Andrew Hajithemistou, Warren Kronberger, Francis Ng, Robert Ma, Keith Kwok, Sam Costidell, Sameer Bargir, Ben Stoddart-Stones, Samuel Price

The Future Lab is redefining innovation at tms. From Chicago to London, Hong Kong to China, this cross-functional team embodies global collaboration. Made up of product development engineers, creatives, industrial designers, inventors, and material scientists, the team is tasked with defining the future of play for the global brand, Happy Meal. In the past year, the Future Lab team has also worked with the inventor community, universities and kids to identify innovation, while scientists are inventing new sustainable materials that can deliver high perceived value.



SPIN MASTER'S BITZEE TEAM

Amir Haddadi, Harrie Sivanander, Ben Dermer, Marinus Lurz, Paul Reynolds, Martin Labrecque, Nora MacLeod, Alex Barton, Kat Turner, Kurt Scanlan, Chieu Tran, Jessica Livingston, Anne Charbonneau, Yael Feldman

One of 2023's biggest toy launches was Bitzee – and the Spin Master success story was brought to life by a team of designers, builders, engineers, content creators, brand visionaries and more! From the earliest stages, Spin Master recognised it had something unique with Bitzee and the team worked tirelessly to bring the item to life. "The teams at Spin Master strive to push the boundaries of innovation, creativity and fun – Bitzee embodies this very spirit!" said one fan of their work.



DANIEL LUTHER,
Product Design Manager,
Hasbro

As a design leader on Nerf, Hasbro's Daniel Luther is a critical partner in building the future vision for the mammoth toy brand. With his expanded role, Daniel has become a real ally for the inventor community, all while contributing to the creation and launch of the brand's NerfBall sport.



JOSHUA GARRETT,
VP of Development,
Creativity Inc &
Chief Creative
Officer, Readyland

It's been a remarkable year for Joshua Garrett. In his role at Creativity Inc, Joshua contributed to a raft of stand-out toys. These include Kidkraft's TOTY-nominated Beat Board, Just Play's TOTY-winning CoComelon Ultimate Adventure Learning Bus and Spin Master's Bitzee. In addition, Joshua also worked on Fingerlings and Dog-E for WowWee. Additionally, Josh led the creation of Readyland's voice-tech enabled storybook Owl & Dragon – an amazon collaboration that enjoyed holiday sell-out status.



MARY LUZ RIU,
Head of Design, Eolo Toys

Mary Luz Riu is described as "The design star of Eolo Toys." It's been a banner year for Mary and her team, having been involved with stand-out launches like Jiggly Pets and Biggies. The latter is deemed a "phenomenon" since its debut last year. "Mary's designs turn ordinary into extraordinary, leaving us all in awe of her imagination," said one of her champions.



NAOMI BRUGNATELLI,
Inventor Relations Manager, Games, Hasbro

"Passionate", "Fun" and "The gold standard for inventor relations" are just a few ways that nominators describe Hasbro's Naomi Brugnattelli. A popular figure in the inventor space, it's been another fruitful 12 months for Naomi. She was directly involved in a raft of launches, including Galaxy Goldmines, Risk Strike, Twister Air, Clue Conspiracy and Battleship Royale.

DESIGN AGENCIES & INVENTION STUDIOS

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TANTRUM INNOVATION

It's been a year of big launches and award wins for Tantrum Innovation's Steve Moore. The studio secured new product releases with the likes of Playmates, Goliath, Spin Master and Mattel. They

also won the Play Creators Award for Toy Designer of the Year (Licensed Product) for the TMNT Mutant Mayhem Ninja Kick Cycle with Playmates. Elsewhere on the awards front, Steve scooped Mattel's Game of the Year award for the recently launched Pictionary vs AI.



FUN-DAMENTAL INVENTION

It's been another amazing year for the Fun-Damental Invention team: Gary Pyper, Stacey Pyper and Toby Kinsey. Their 2023 launches include TOMY's Pillow Bash, Golden Bear's Farty Freddie and Fat Brain's Make That Most Magnificent Thing. In addition, there was Irritable Vowels from University Games and Biggies from ToyZone. "From craft and games to plastic action, this nimble studio does it all," said one nominator. Another told us: "Their thinking, model making and holistic approach puts them at the pinnacle of toy invention."



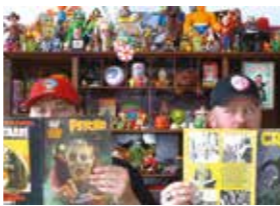
MAKING THINGS STUDIO

"A star", "Supreme innovator" and someone who "... blends creativity with deep consumer insight" are just some of the ways nominators describe Making Things Studio. As one fan told us: "Founder Fi Murray brings innovation and creativity to everything! I'm always excited to see what she's working on as I know it'll be considered, clever and fun!" Fi's recent highlights include the ongoing success of Character's Mouse in the House and the launch of Easy Peasy Lemon Squeaky – a game collaboration with The Fantastic Factory.



PACE DEVELOPMENT

Robert Schwartzman and Peter Williams run the prolific Pace Development, an inventing powerhouse that's licensed well over 100 successful toys and games, spanning virtually every category – and to every major toy company. 2023 successes include Hot Wheels Monster Trucks Rhinomite RC and Disney's The Little Mermaid Transforming Ariel doll. "Peter and Robert are simply top of their game," said one fan of their work.



TRICLOPS STUDIO

"Legends" is a word that came up time and again in nominations for Triclops Studio's Rob Ames and Luc Hudson. "They're two of the hardest working, most creative and enthusiastic inventors out there," said one fan of their work. Another added: "They produce so much great stuff! We love working with them and look for every opportunity to bag time in their schedule."



SEVEN TOWNS

As one nominator told us: "Seven Towns are best-in-class invention and development partners; consistently brilliant." The renowned invention house enjoyed another positive year, with launches including Basic Fun's Misfittens, Goliath's Smack 'N' Snack and Funrise's Sugar Surprises, along with Pocket Money Piggies and Dr Squish with BOTI. There are some big launches ahead in 2024 too. "The team brings innovation to all brands across our portfolio," said one fan of their work.



KID GROUP

It's been another big year for Dan Klitsner, Brian Clemens, Gary Levenberg, James Stermolle and Xavier Mendoza at KID Group. Launches include Crystal Caper from Hasbro, This Side Up from John Adams, Taco Smash from Yulu and Free Fall with ThinkFun. The group also placed Beat Blast with Goliath, along with Let's Go Gecko – a collaboration with Sweet Spot Studio. "KID Group has a unique perspective and brings us concepts we never expect," said one fan. Another told us: "Their dedication to creating engaging play experiences is evident in every design, reflecting their love for the craft."



PEGGY BROWN CREATIVE

2023 proved to be another winning year for the funmakers at Peggy Brown Creative, made up of Connor Kriha, Natalie Bichler, Marty Brown and – of course – Peggy Brown. Highlights included SnapTrap from Lansay, Who's the G.O.A.T.? by Go! Games. Meanwhile, Smash Down by John Adams landed in the US with University Games as Give 'Em the Finger. Said one fan of their work: "Peggy and her team never fail to impress."



OPEN 2 DESIGN

Nominators use glowing terms to describe the team at Open 2 Design: "Super talented", "A joy to work with" and "One of the best around". "Honest, humble and always delivering great quality, Matt Burtonwood, Ben Williams and Verity Warner are as dependable as they are personable," said one fan, adding: "From invention to design services, they're flexible and refreshingly straightforward." Another said: "They don't take themselves too seriously, while delivering seriously great products... A British innovation export to be proud of!"



SO SOUND

It's been another stellar year for the team at So Sound, a pioneering invention company whose capabilities cover electronics, graphic design, CAD and sound design. 2023 highlights include a raft of collaborations with Wilder Toys, among which is the app-infused party title The Audio Game. Elsewhere, the firm teamed up with an industry giant on an exciting licensed opportunity. So Sound also has more games set to land across this year and 2025. "So Sound is an exceptional team to collaborate with," said one nominator.



PLAYMODO DESIGN

It was a big year for Scott Daly and Playmodo Design. The studio helped Spin Master with the design and development of its line of Paw Patrol: The Mighty Movie items. They created concept drawings and control drawings for various products... As well as plush and basic vehicle launches for the brand, these include Paw Patrol: The Mighty Movie Aircraft Carrier HQ, Paw Patrol: The Mighty Movie Transforming Skye's Rescue Jet. Away from Paw Patrol, the team also worked on brands like Rubble and Crew, Gabby's Dollhouse and Vida the Vet. "They are a truly valuable resource," said one fan of their work.



CATAPULT CONCEPTS

2023 was packed with exciting launches from Keith Millman and Westley Ciaramella of Catapult Concepts. This past year saw the release of two versions of Puzl it with Hasbro, as well as Pop Off with Goliath. Elsewhere, Mattel debuted Catapult's Barbie Cute 'n' Cozy Café as well as its Flippin' Pancakes games. Other recent highlights for the duo include the Build It Blue Prints Tractor with TOMY and Simba Dickie's Magic Wedding Steffi Love.



BIG IDEAS

Well known, respected and with a reputation for innovative concepts, Simon Skelton and Ruth Elliott have had another busy year at Big Ideas. Two recent successes are joint developments with Tricky's Geoff House: Whoopee Duck and Wibble Wobble Where. One nominator said: "Simon and Ruth are great to work with. Their depth of experience really helps get a product off to a flying start." Another added: "I just love these guys. Such fun to work with!"

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7PIPS

2023 was a milestone year for Amanda Birkinshaw, Richard Heayes and Scott Dean... The prolific designers teamed up to form their own studio in 7pips. Never known to rest on their laurels, 7pips has enjoyed

a fantastic first 12 months with a client list including the likes of Buffalo, Brainwright, Jumbo, Cartamundi, Fan Roll and TOMY. "They're a best-in-class invention studio – our secret weapon in the games industry," said one nominator, adding: "They're an absolute joy to work with and always knock it out of the park."



TOYZONE

ToyZone aims to be the perfect partner for anyone working in the toy industry; a one-stop solution for development, design, and entertainment needs. Highlights from past 12 months include a successful collaboration with Fun-Damental Invention on Biggies, as well as top work with BOTI Global on the Cre-A-Tures brand, a big seller in many markets. "ToyZone is a great team; fun and creative... Their work speaks for itself."



GALACTIC SNEEZE

"Fun pitches and great concepts are guaranteed when it comes to Galactic Sneeze!" So says one fan of this invention studio, run by Sara Farber and Bryan Wilson. The team enjoyed a stellar 2023, with launches including Snarkas by Hootennany Games, Tickle Pup by MGA, You Had One Job from Goliath and Burstin' Bubble Clouds from Funrise... All of which were inventor collaborations with Will Sakran. Futher proof of the trio's success came when Will, Sara and Bryan picked up the TAGIE award for Toy Innovator of the Year.



FUSE

It's been a transformative 12 months for the team at renowned invention firm Fuse. The company's Shepherds Bush studio welcomed former IDEO Play Lab Founder Brendan Boyle to the team. Elsewhere, Fuse picked up a Play Creators Award for Invention Studio/Design Agency of the Year. 2023 also saw the team's Hot Wheels City: Ultimate T-Rex Transporter nominated for a TOTY – as well as end up on many 'Top Toys for Christmas' lists.



TRICKY

As one nominator told us: "Tricky's Geoff House is a top inventor – and a wonderful guy!" It's been

another good year for Geoff, with recent success stories including Whoopee Duck and Wibble Wobble Where, both inventor collaborations with Big Ideas. "Geoff is amazing to work with," said one fan of his work, adding: "His creativity is off the charts!"



DESIGNBYTOUCH

Providing creative and technical support to top global toy companies for the last 18 years, Designbytouch has enjoyed another good year. Their successful licensed inventions include TOMY's Beat the Camera and Hasbro's Indiana Jones Trigger Whip. Elsewhere, on the consulting side of the business, the firm worked with brands like Peppa Pig, Furby and Paw Patrol. "Consistently one of the best studios in the industry, the team at Designbytouch is a pleasure to work with," said one nominator.



NEXTTOY

The team at Nexttoy enjoyed another fruitful year in 2023. Crocodile Dentist continued to be a best-selling classic game for Hasbro, and Goliath's Gator Golf also performed well. This year sees Goliath

launch the Power Saber Energy Blade, while the Horizon Group introduces ColorMotion. Elsewhere, there's been rapid worldwide expansion of KenKen Puzzles, especially in China, India, Egypt, Malaysia and UAE. The studio's newest division – Nexttoy Digital – is also introducing an artist and brand partnership with Spin Master and Rubik's Cube for a digital collectable later this year.



SG LABS

It's been a busy year for Rory Sledge and Michael Gramelspacher of SG Labs. Recent high-points include additions to Fisher-Price's DJ Bouncin' family with DJ Bouncin' Star and

DJ Groovin' Go. Fisher-Price then gave SG Labs a Collaboration Award for their focus on items for the infant and toddler teams. It was also a year of giving back to the community... As mentors, Michael and Rory lent their engineering skills to the high-school FIRST FRC Robotics team while sponsoring and coaching an after-school inventing club. Along with co-advisor Jon Harter, they were then awarded the Game Changer award at last year's TAGIEs.



THE FANTASTIC FACTORY

It's been another – well – fantastic year for The Fantastic Factory, with successful launches including Hit Send, Mind Reader and Easy Peasy Lemon Squeaky. "David and Steve are a go-to

partner for those looking to try something a bit different. Their business model is flexible to market changes, and they always offer unique and disruptive concepts," said one of their champions. They then added: "They're awesome!"

INDEPENDENT CREATIVES

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JORDAN GODDARD,
Founder, Indy Toy Lab

"His extraordinary design and invention skills, coupled with his remarkable engineering prowess, make him a standout in the toy and game design industry." So says one nominator of Indy Toy Lab's Jordan Goddard. He has enjoyed a great year, with launches including Pawvocados from Blue

Orange and The Night Hunter from University Games. "Jordan's enthusiasm and drive are contagious," said a fan, while another told us: "His innovative solutions and creative approach to design challenges are truly inspiring."



SCOTT BRADY,
Game Designer

2023 was a year to remember for game designer Scott Brady. His smash-hit second game – Boop – was named Game of the Year at Origins, earned him a Mensa Select distinction and saw Scott win Game Innovator of the

Year at the 2023 TAGIE Awards. With multiple games already licensed and slated for 2024 publication, the future looks bright – or as one nominator put it: "Boop is not the last big hit coming from Scott."



ELLIE DIX,
Game Designer

What a barnstorming 12 months for game designer Ellie Dix! She signed 10 games to companies including Ginger Fox, Gamewright, Mindware, Cheatwell, Quarto, LKP and Indie Boards and Cards. 2023 also saw Ellie win a gold at the Independent Toy Awards for Monster Chef, as well as being named one of the inaugural winners of Hasbro's Women Innovators of Play challenge. "Ellie is one to watch in the world of game design," said one nominator. Another highlighted the support she provides for others in the industry through her blog, adding: "Ellie's blog is a must-read for anyone in game invention: it's packed full of the most incredible insights."



APRIL MITCHELL,
Founder, 4A's Creations

It's been a year to remember for inventor April Mitchell. She secured several licensing deals – four of them in the toy and game industry. These include FormWorm from Martinex Toy and BamzBall from Hape. But as one fan puts it: "April isn't just a remarkable game designer – she's a

mentor who genuinely wants others to succeed." This can be seen in April's weekly LinkedIn videos with Ed Gartin and in their TableTop Game Design MasterCourse.



KIM VANDENBROUCKE,
Inventor & Game Designer,
Brainy Chick Inc

It's been another stand-out year for game designer Kim Vandenbroucke. Recent launches include Otter Space with Mudpuppy and Pigs on Trampolines with PlayMonster. The latter saw

Kim win a Play Creators Award for Game Designer of the Year (Family Games), and the title also bagged a TAGIE nomination. Elsewhere, 2023 saw the US version of Split launch with Winning Moves under the name Insert Card Here, while Ravensburger launched Hüpf-O-Fant, a licensed version of Kim's Heads Talk Tails Walk game.



CIARAN LARKIN,
Founder, Made Real Design

"A genius innovator" and "Best-in-class partner" are just some of the ways nominators describe Made Real Design's Ciaran Larkin. A perpetual problem solver, this past year has seen Ciaran land multiple innovations with some of the industry's biggest players. His exemplary efforts can be found in

areas from mechanical wizardry to compound alchemy, with one example of his work being the Magic: The Gathering Chandra Pyromancer's Gauntlet... An impressive role-play collectible boasting lights, sounds, and misting effects.



CASEY NORMAN,
Founder, Genie Toys

It's been another stellar 12 months for Casey Norman of Genie Toys. Recent launches from Casey include Pat Avenue's Battle Heads and the Spidey Flip and Jet vehicle from Jazwares. "No one builds finished models like Casey for a product presentation – absolutely no one!" said one nominator, adding: "Foam core does not exist in his lexicon."

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GIL ZALAYET,
Creative Director, StudioPlay

Led by Gil Zalayet, StudioPlay is a prolific toy invention company that's been going strong for 13 years. One highlight from Gil over the past 12 months is Foosbots, a fun collaboration with Fat Brain Toys. "I'm always impressed with how Gil is able to analyse an idea and figure out what makes for a good toy," said one nominator. They added: "He never settles and continues pushing to make a concept better, more fun, more interesting..."



NIKOLAJ ROADLEY-BATTIN,
Founder & Inventor, BRIK

After four years with IDEO, Nikolaj Roadley-Battin went it alone with his own invention studio, BRIK. 2023 has been a banner year for BRIK, as Nikolaj collaborated with Tantrum Innovation on Pictionary vs AI, a stand-out game launch for Mattel – and one of the first AI-focused mass-market efforts for the industry. "Nik harnesses

technologies to create new break-frame toy and game experiences," said one fan, adding: "He's a creative powerhouse: it's exciting to see what he'll create next!"



JEREMY POSNER,
President & CEO, Shenanigans
Toys & Games & **KEN GRUHL,**
Senior Game Designer,
Exploding Kittens

It's been a fruitful 12 months for inventing collaborators

Jeremy Posner and Ken Gruhl. Their assortment of party, family and kids' games appeals to a wide variety of gamers – and all placed in mass-market retailers. Titles include Heshey S'mores with Spin Master, and two titles with Exploding Kittens: The Best Worst Ice Cream, and I'm Just Here for the Snacks. Elsewhere, Jeremy landed his Text From Your Ex party game with Goliath, while Ken teamed with Quentin Weir on Sushi Go: Spin Some Dim Sum from Gamewright, and Really Loud Librarians with Exploding Kittens.



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WILL SAKRAN,
Owner & Principal Engineer,
Metre Ideas and Design

Terms like “Gem”, “Star” and “A joy” are just a few of the ways that champions sing the praises of Will Sakran. And rightly so in a year that saw Will named Toy Innovator of the Year at the

TAGIES, along with co-inventors Sara Farber and Bryan Wilson. The trio’s launches over the past 12 months include Goliath’s You Had One Job, MGA’s Tickle Pup, Funrise’s Burstin’ Bubble Clouds and Snarls from Hootenanny Games. 2024 is set to be another winner for Will as Hearsong ready the release of his construction toy system, Toobalink.



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

“A unique combination of a humble attitude and brilliant creative mind sets him apart as a leader in the industry.” So says one nominator of Steamline Design’s David Yakos! David’s recent highlights include a party-game twist on a classic with Hasbro’s Battleship

Royale, as well as Escape Room: The Game – The Golden Solution. Both of these saw David nominated for a TAGIE award. As one fan of his work told us: “David’s ability to continually push the boundaries of innovative play is astounding. He seems to have an endless flow of ideas, each more imaginative and ground-breaking than the last!”



PETER LEVIN and JAVIER QUINONEZ,
Co-Founders, Hunch Studios

It’s been another exciting year for Hunch Studios. The New York City-based design duo Peter Levin and Javier Quinonez followed up the success of titles like Tell Me Without Telling Me with a raft of exciting releases in 2023. These include the adult party game Tag Someone Who with Spin Master, murder mystery game Who Killed Mia with What Do You Meme and family party game Streaks with Buffalo Games.



CHRISSY FAGERHOLT,
Inventor/Creator, EAP Toys and Games

2023 saw Chrissy Fagerholt’s EAP Toy and Games launch its third game in The Lunch Room. As well as proving popular with consumers, it was nominated for best family game at Origins. Another cause for celebration came with the fact that all three of Chrissy’s games have found their way into mass-market stores in the US. Chrissy was also chosen to be a member of the Horizons Fellowship, which brings attention, education and support to underrepresented designers and retailers. “Chrissy continues to impress,” said one fan, adding: “Fun games, beautifully produced – I’m always excited to see what she’s up to.”



KENNY KIERNAN,
Creative Director,
Kenny Kiernan Illustration
& Design Studio

It’s been another fruitful 12 months for Kenny Kiernan, one of the

industry’s leading illustrators. The past year has seen Kenny expertly execute packaging designs and illustrations, logos, concept art and character designs for an ever-expanding roster of toy companies. Recent clients include Spin Master, Funko, WowWee and Identity Games. Meanwhile, he continues to impress with his raft of work for top toy inventors around the world.

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

“A creative powerhouse” and “A guaranteed source of fun” are just some of the ways nominators describe Barry McLaughlin and Jason Lautenschleger of Barry & Jason Games and Entertainment. 2023 proved to be a banner year with launches including the TOTY-nominated Game Night in a Can with Goliath as well as Okay Genius... with PlayMonster. The latter also bagged them a nomination for Game Designer of the Year at the Play Creators Awards. As one fan of their work puts it: “They excel at creating not just games, but comprehensive entertainment experiences.”

DESIGN CHAMPIONS





LEE ALLENTUCK,
Owner, Raising Nerd; Head of Content & Partnerships, The Last Gameboard; Principal, RN Branding & Licensing

Dedicated to championing inventors and opening doors for exciting new talent, Lee Allentuck remains an invaluable resource – and sounding board – for the industry’s creative backbone. “Lee is one of our favourite people to work with,” said one nominator, adding: “He’s always on, responsive and full of energy – I actually don’t think he sleeps!” Another told us: “If innovation was Premier League football, he’d be the top scout.”



MATT NUCCIO,
President, Design Edge

A prolific champion of the industry’s inventor community, Design Edge’s Matt Nuccio had a banner 2023. One highlight saw Matt spearhead the launch of the United Inventor Association’s Toy Hub platform – a free resource that’s already resonating with those looking for education around the world of toy and game invention. Other notable projects include his work with United Nations, IFIA and US Congress on inventor protection and patent reform.



RICH MAZEL,
VP Innovation & Inventor Relations, Spin Master

Popular industry figure Rich Mazel continues to be a champion for inventors across the globe. 2023 was another big year for Rich, placing items from a raft of inventors across brands like Batman, Monster Jam, Gabby’s Dollhouse, Unicorn Academy, Paw Patrol and How to Train your Dragon to name just a few.



TANYA THOMPSON,
Senior Director Inventor Relations & External Innovation, Hasbro Gaming

2023 kicked off in style for Hasbro’s Tanya Thompson when she picked up the prestigious IDIOT award at the UK Toy Inventors Dinner. The year carried on in a positive vein as Tanya spearheaded Hasbro’s Women Innovators of Play initiative and associated inventor challenge. As one nominator told us: “It was well attended, provided incredible information and served as a launchpad for future inventors.” They added: “Tanya’s forethought and expertise are what this industry needs.”



ED GARTIN,
Creative Catalyst, Paper Bag Creative

“Humble”, “Kind” and “Passionate” are some of the ways nominators describe Paper Bag Creative’s Ed Gartin. Whether giving invaluable advice through his LinkedIn videos with collaborators, or the Table Top Game Design Master Course alongside April Mitchell, Ed is seen as “An incredible coach to new and veteran inventors.” As one fan told us: “Ed’s contributions go beyond individual achievements. He is instrumental in shaping a thriving, more collaborative inventor community.”



DEAN CARLEY,
Head of Global Design, Hasbro

Hasbro’s Dean Carley is an internal design and innovation champion. He is known as an incomparable design and business leader, and a critical driver behind Hasbro’s action brands portfolio. 2023 was a big year for Dean as he was promoted to Head of Global Design. “Dean is always willing to lend an ear and provide guidance to teammates throughout the organisation,” said one fan of his work.



BEN DERMER,
SVP Toy Innovation, Spin Master

Ben Dermer heads up innovation and new idea acquisition at Spin Master... A role that involves the sourcing, evaluation, development, design, acquisition and licensing of new toys. He works with inventors, developers, creatives and designers – both inside and outside of Spin Master – to discover new toy ideas and take them through the development process to become new products. A recent highlight for Ben came when he led the development team behind Spin’s acclaimed interactive pet Bitzee.



ALEX PRIETO,
Director of Fun, Eolo Toys & ToyZone

“Alex is committed to pushing his teams at Eolo and ToyZone, but more than that, he’s committed to pushing the industry forward.” So says one fan of Alex Prieto. A key figure across all Eolo and ToyZone projects – and source of crazy ideas! Nominators tell us: “His creative genius knows no bounds: his playful spirit defines ToyZone’s identity.”



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

2023 was an exciting year for Anjar & Becker Associates, with a number of new product and brand-license agreements, and the development and launch of around 100 licensed products. Highlights include a Sophie la girafe plush range with Animal Adventure, the continued success and expansion of Big Fat Yarn from Jazwares, and an extensive Wham-O pets line. In addition, the Beckers oversaw the development of Vibr’Action – a new party game licensed to MegaBleu. The action game is set to debut at the 2024 Nuremberg Toy Fair.



DR. AMANDA GUMMER,
Founder, FUNdamentally Children
& The Good Play Guide

One of Dr. Amanda Gummer’s big success stories last year was the specialised research initiative, Seedlings. Offering crucial support to start-ups, Seedlings is accessible to any business with limited resources – and the seed of a toy or game idea. “Seedlings is proving a triumph for start-ups

in the toy space, and Amanda is instrumental to its success,” said one fan of her work, adding: “Her leadership style underscores the importance of focused research, dispelling myths and highlighting the commercial value of toys.”



GURDEEP BAINS,
Global Creative Director,
YuMe Toys

2023 saw Gurdeep Bains play a pivotal role leading YuMe’s creative team, guiding the creation of fan-loved toys and collectibles. The past year included award wins for Disney 100 Surprise Capsules, Jujutsu Kaisen Mystery Capsules and

DZNR plush toys, along with nominations at the Play Creators Awards. As one fan of his work told us: “Gurdeep consistently drives product innovation, providing unique, rich consumer experience. His eye for detail helps position YuMe as a company that licensors want to collaborate with.”



BRIAN THORNER,
Inventor Relations Manger, BlueJ, Jazwares

A champion of inventors, Brian Thornber focuses on developing inroads for them to innovate on the licensed-brands portfolio for Jazwares. Recent success stories for Brian include Cocomelon’s Push ‘n’ Sing Family Car, Dancing JJ and Spidey’s Web Spinning Hauler. “Brian can always be found supporting young inventor causes,” said one fan of his work.



GAVIN UCKO,
CEO, The Happy Puzzle Company

The last 12 months saw The Happy Puzzle Company’s Gavin Ucko working with a raft of inventors to bring innovative new games to market. These include IQ Jigsaw, Lost 4 Words and Cubeslinger. “Gavin helps inventors he’s never even met before keep going with their creations,” said one nominator... Another told us: “The Happy Puzzle

Company has been trading for over 30 years and Gavin still seems to possess the same passion for finding, developing and publishing fresh new games and puzzles.”



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JAMES WING,
Director of Development & Project Management, TOMY

As Director of Development and Project Management at TOMY, James Wing helps steer the company’s internal design activity as well as being a key part of its inventor relations outreach. As one fan of his work told us: “James is fantastic at what he does – and clearly enjoys doing it too. That makes him a joy to collaborate with.” Another said: “Smart, passionate and enthusiastic, he’s one of the best people to pitch to.”



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

Angus leads the charge for Hasbro’s Inventor Relations team and boasts a true passion for the entire inventor community – both inventors and others working in IR. “The industry is lucky to have Angus,” said one nominator. Another added: “Fun, fair and always keen to innovate, Angus is a leading light when it comes to the industry’s inventor relations community.”



BOBBY SAYGAN,
Sr. Director of Licensed Dolls, Mattel

With experience spanning companies such as Disney, Sanrio and Mattel, Bobby Saygan cherishes the task of bringing beloved brands and stories to life through play. In his most recent role, Bobby is the driving force behind several innovative doll lines and plays a major role in pitching creative visions for licensed brands. A passionate storyteller, Bobby strives to champion new ideas, his team and the brands he represents. As one nominator puts it: “His presentations are captivating and inspiring, which helps create the very best products on the market.”



DOUGAL GRIMES,
VP Innovation & Inventor Relations, Spin Master

An ever-popular figure in the world of toy and game invention, Spin Master’s Dougal Grimes enjoyed another year championing new inventors. Recent successes include collaborating with Hunch Studios on titles like If You Know You Know and Tag Someone Who, as well as licensing from fresh talent like Naama Weiss, Liat Waks and Uri Streigold – the creators of Spin’s Games HQ range. Elsewhere, Dougal continues to support Spin’s International Toy Invention Program, while 2023 also saw Dougal help establish the UIA’s Toy Hub... An exciting new source of free education on toy and game invention.



STEFFEN MÜHLHÄUSER,
Game Designer & Steffen-Spiele Founder

2023 was a milestone year for Steffen Mühlhäuser as he retired as a publisher following Helvetiq’s acquisition of Steffen-Spiele... Abstract-strategy-game players around the world will be pleased to know he’ll continue to create, though! That’s because, as a designer, his work – such as Linja and Copa – demonstrates a rare blend of simplicity and depth. He has also been instrumental in identifying and nurturing new talent such as Clemente Musa and Julien Griffon.



DON CAMERON,
Director of Animatronics Development, Hasbro

Perpetually serving inventor relations and brand teams with his extensive experience, great insight and perspective, Don Cameron is cited as one of Hasbro’s gems. His skill set can be seen across virtually every Hasbro project involving animatronics in the past year! Perhaps most notable, though, is Don’s work as animatronic lead on the relaunch of Furby. One nominator told us: “Don’s a great resource for all innovation and always available to help, advise or consult.”



MELISSA & DOUG DESIGN TEAM

It was a big year for Melissa & Doug, with the news of the company’s acquisition by Spin Master. 2023 also saw the wooden pre-school toy specialist enjoy plenty of successful launches, though... These include the Deluxe Grill & Pizza Oven Play Set, the Cool Scoops Ice Creamery and the Sort, Stock and Select Wooden Vending Machine Playset. Elsewhere, the team developed a line of toys to support the National Park Foundation and debuted a new way to play with stickers: Sticker Wow!’s character sticker stampers.



SCOTT ROGERS,
Tabletop Game Designer

2023 saw several games launch from designer Scott Rogers... These include Venom and Twisted Ambitions expansions for Ravensburger’s Disney Villainous series, and a Texas Chainsaw Massacre board game for Trick or Treat Studios. Alongside his design work, the year also saw Scott help the inventor community in different ways. Most notably, there was the launch of Scott’s book, Your Turn! The Guide to Great Tabletop Game Design. “When not actively designing, playtesting, or writing, Scott is very unselfish with his time,” said one fan.

HEATHER DELANEY,
MD & Founder, Gallium Ventures

As MD of the award-winning global tech communications consultancy Gallium Ventures, Heather Delaney continues to help clients with both the design and marketing of toys. This past year has most-notably seen Heather support the launch of WowWee’s robot dog, Dog-E. During the product development stage, Heather advised on features of the tech toy and its companion app, as well as on product pricing. Later, she also provided strategic counsel on messaging that helped Dog-E make headlines across various top-tier publications, including Wired, The Wall Street Journal and Metro UK.



RISING STARS

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KYLE GUTZMANN,
Lead Mechanical Engineer, Fat Brain Toys

In the past 12 months, many of Fat Brain's top new items have had Kyle Gutzmann as the engineering lead. These include Air Toobz and Volley Shot. Never afraid to roll up his sleeves and get out from behind the CAD box, Kyle also plays an essential role in many other aspects of the business. These include trade-show booth design, packaging solutions, product safety, game development and marketing and sales video development. "Kyle is a rare combination: a talented engineer who's comfortable in a front-facing sales capacity," said one fan.



ARTI JOSHI,
Founder, Arti by Design

Taking a modern approach to an ancient craft, Arti Joshi fast established herself as one of the industry's leading plush designers. Working for the likes of Goliath, Rainbow Designs, Making Things

Studio and Dynamo, Arti designs, prototypes and digitises 3D, one-off bespoke plush creations. As one nominator says, "Arti continues to storm it in the freelancer space, offering a rare talent that AI will never replace," They added: "She's a star in every way – a joy to work with!"



MAGDALENA EICHHORN,
Inventor Relations Manager, BlueJ, Jazwares

Coming from a family of toy veterans, Magdalena Eichhorn joined the BlueJ division at Jazwares as an Inventor Relations Manager in 2023. Committed to scouting, developing and securing new opportunities from the creative community, Magdalena has since established herself as a popular figure with inventors and colleagues alike.



GABE HICKS,
Game Writer & Designer

Described by nominators as a "Beacon of encouragement" and "A rising star in the tabletop game design space", Gabe Hicks is one to watch. 2023 saw Gabe's RPG The Session Zero System land with backers following a successful Kickstarter campaign. He also worked on design projects for the likes of Roll20 and Steamforged Games. As one of Gabe's fans told us: "If you're looking for up-and-coming game designers set to make an impact on the industry, Gabe Hicks is right up there with them."

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ABBI UDELL,
Product Designer & Illustrator,
Moose Toys

One of the stand-out launches of the year was Cookeez Makery from Moose Toys – and Abbi Udell single-handedly developed the look and feel of the brand, including its characters,

appliances and accessories. "Her flexible approach allows her to create evocative concept art... And her great eye for detail positions her to execute the intricate, photo-real finish in the final product artwork too," said one fan. They add: "Her skills move beyond 2D as a highly capable product designer able to shape her vision for Cookeez Makery characters in their plush forms as well – Abbi is definitely one to watch!"



WILLIAM BELKNAP,
Senior Model Maker, Hasbro

Leading Hasbro's 3D digital deco development, Will Belknap is responsible for developing much of the toy giant's graphic-heavy prototypes. He developed ways to UV print on organic 3D parts and was instrumental in applying

this technology to printing faces on Hasbro's 3.75" and 6" action figures. Will then improved that process, allowing the company to create Selfie series figures, where each face has a unique sculpt with custom deco. "Will's ability to take existing technology and use it in a new way has resulted in a whole new production method and product segment," said one of his champions.

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DANIELLE REYNOLDS,
Project Director, Wacky Wizard Games

Releasing new titles with National Geographic and Underdog Games, Danielle Reynolds is making quite a name for herself this year. She has a 2023 TAGIE nomination for Rising Star Innovator of the Year and hosts her own podcast, Game Design Unboxed. Danielle also holds board positions with Tabletop Gaymers, UNPUB and the newly formed Tabletop Game Design Association. “Danielle works hard to increase diversity in the gaming world,” said one fan, adding: “Being a rising star isn’t just about what’s going on the table, it’s about what’s happening around it too – and Danielle has a vision that includes it all.”



ALENA LYONS & SOPHIA RICCIARDI,
Designers, Gray Matters Games

Two of the brightest new talents at Gray Matters Games are Alena Lyons and Sophia Ricciardi. Alena and Sophia led the design of two new titles: Wrong Answers Only and The Donut Challenge – both launching in a combined total of 3,000 stores worldwide. Away from game design, they also created the branding for a philanthropic initiative called Give Em Joy, which celebrates underprivileged children by sending them a game and card on their birthdays.



BEN POWELL,
Inventor, So Sound



Joining the So Sound team in early 2023, Ben Powell hit the ground running and has not looked back. Incredibly talented, fast at building high-quality models and always enthusiastic, Ben quickly established himself as a key member of the team. As one nominator put it: “Ben has invented some amazing mechanical toys, including an incredible design centred around a blockbuster brand... He’s a star!”



ALEX FUHRER, Chief Creative Officer, Nextoy &
SAM FUHRER, Director of New Business Development, Nextoy

The third generation of the Fuhrer family is making an impact in the industry. Alex Fuhrer has a special gift for developing innovative toys and games and is working with his brother Sam in building Nextoy Digital. This new venture looks to bring celebrities to the toy industry – and the toy industry into the pop-culture sphere – in fresh ways, including through digital collectibles. Nextoy Digital’s first release is a collaboration with Spin Master, Rubik’s Cube and a renowned digital artist.

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BAILEY WHEATLAND,
Digital Product Designer,
Hasbro

One of the rising stars on Hasbro’s sculpting team, Bailey Wheatland creates 3D digital models for huge brands like Star Wars and Indiana Jones, as well as for new concepts. His background in VFX, animation and game-engine programming unlock new

ways for the team to work and create consumer-facing content. “Bailey is instrumental in challenging conventional norms and driving inventive ways to utilise 3D-digital content,” said one fan.



SOFIA LOBOV,
Project Leader, ToyZone

As the mind behind many stand-out ToyZone projects, Sofia Lobov is credited with getting the agency to reach new heights when it comes to design. “She’s an important force for the agency; a creative mind with lots of new ideas,” said one nominator. This past year has seen Sofia work closely with BOTI Global

on the development of Cre-A-Tures, enhancing the 360° design services of ToyZone and solving the customer’s need for an innovative, stand-out electronic toy.

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ALEX KIMERLING,
President,
Hootenanny
Games & **WHITNEY
KIMERLING,** Chief
Creative Officer,
Hootenanny
Games

2023 was a
milestone year for
Alex and Whitney
Kimerling as they
launched their own

company, Hootenanny Games. The firm unveiled its debut
slate at New York Toy Fair and, as one nominator puts it: "It
was one of the most exciting lines of games seen at the
show." Putting inventors at the heart of the business, Alex and
Whitney have fast established themselves as "Dream
collaborators" and the future looks very bright.



OLIVER CHANG,
Art Director, YuMe Toys

With a talent for crafting unique
collectibles that sit at the
intersection between Eastern and
Western aesthetic sensibilities,
YuMe's Oliver Chang continually

impresses. As a one-stop-shop toy designer, he's involved in
almost every stage of a given project, from initial sketches and
3D modelling to prototyping and mass production. "Oliver
strives to design products that foster storytelling, interactive
play and even a sense of environmentalism within the younger
audience," said one of his champions.



AMMON ANDERSON,
Game Designer

One of the tabletop-game scene's brightest new talents,
Ammon Anderson made quite an impression last year with his
title, Gnome Hollow. The game was called "The hottest ticket
at GAMA Expo 2023" and some predict it will be 2024's
stand-out tabletop title. Following interest from several
publishers, it will launch from The Op later this year. As well as
designing the game, Ammon also created all of its artwork.



JANE BREDEMUS,
Play Innovator, See Jane Fun

It's been a positive year for
Jane Bredemus of See Jane
Fun. Recent inventions
include Sticker Stackers and
Bead Stackers kits with
Fashion Angel... These unique
sets allow kids to build 3D
models using stickers and
beads. "Jane's exceptional
talents in thinking big and

creating brand-specific play experiences set her apart in the
industry," said one fan of her work. They added: "Her unique
ability to blend consumer insights, trends and retail dynamics
into innovative toy and game concepts is outstanding."



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