

2022 EDITION

# MOJO NATION



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

In association with



# play

LONDON | SEPTEMBER

## creators festival

New ideas and fresh talent are the lifeblood of the industry. This event brings together some of the brightest design talent to share ideas, give advice and help toy and games firms of all sizes and specialities uncover their next hit product. Whether a

toy-design stalwart, a product design student or an industry outsider looking for a route in, the *Play Creators Festival* is here to champion the industry's creative backbone and ensure the greatest ideas don't just stay ideas.



DAY 1



DAY 2



DAY 2



DAY 3

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**MOJO NATION**



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

## play creators conference

September | London

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*"Among the continued uncertainty, one happy constant has been the reliable creative nous of in-house R&D teams, creative leaders and the global inventor community."*



Hello, and thanks for picking up – physically or digitally – a copy of this year's Mojo Nation 100; our annual listing of 100 figures from the world of toy and game design that have done brilliant work over the past 12 months.

It's been another topsy-turvy year for the toy and games industry, but in among the continued uncertainty, one happy constant has been the reliable creative nous of in-house R&D teams, creative leaders and the global inventor community.

Proof, if it were needed, comes in the pages of this year's Mojo Nation 100. We had a record number of nominations, and the final listing is a great reminder of the innovation, creativity and passion for play that creators in our space have in spades. This community is, in my opinion, what makes our industry so special.

While there are, deservedly, some familiar faces in this year's 100, it's worth noting that a whopping 68% of our 2022 listing is made up of figures who were not present in last year's book.

It's the biggest turnover of new faces we've ever had in the 100, and a nice indicator that, even in turbulent times, our industry is spoilt when it comes to creative talent, from senior level right the way through to graduates choosing to showcase their design skills in toys.

The world seems to change every 30 minutes at the moment, but at the time of typing, the Mojo team is looking forward to a return to live events, where we'll hopefully see you at Toy Fairs, as well as at our own events later in the year as our Play Creators Festival returns. It's mad to think in the time since we last hosted a live event, I've lost my hair and gained a baby. A fair trade, or so I keep telling myself.

Anyway, thanks for reading this opening. You've resisted the lure of far-juicer pages and before you dive in, I just want to say a huge thanks to our sponsors for making this year's book happen; to our panel of judges for helping to narrow the list down to 100, as well as to everyone who sent in nominations.

A huge congratulations to all those who made this year's 100. You're all doing exceptional work. Hope to see you soon.



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





# SUPPORTING INVENTORS AND DESIGNERS MAKE THEIR MARK ON THE INDUSTRY



## Toy Fair 2022

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

## Advocacy

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

## BTHA Training Hub

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

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

*"Toy inventors and designers showed great strength in 2021, with many new toy and game properties entering, and being successful in, the UK market."*



Over the last 12 months, as we've continued to live through the pandemic, toys and games have remained essential for children and their families, providing fun and supporting children to learn new skills.

The British Toy & Hobby Association has been a long-time advocate of the importance of play for child development, and toys are the tools of play. Exciting and innovative toys enrich and prolong children's play experiences and it's with thanks to our talented toy design community that children and their families can create and share these positive experiences and

memories together.

Toy inventors and designers showed great strength in 2021, with many new toy and game properties entering, and being successful in, the UK market. These new inventions and designs have helped companies stay competitive during a challenging period and are vital to the overall success of the UK toy industry. A huge congratulations from everyone at the BTHA to those who made the Mojo 100 list.

The BTHA has hosted and supported initiatives over many years to attract talent and support new products onto the UK toy market. Through the BTHA's trade show, Toy Fair, we're committed to supporting newcomers in the industry as part of the Greenhouse Area. This is a dedicated area of the show which supports new inventors and companies bringing products to market. We remain excited to see what new designs launch in this area and across the show floor at Toy Fair 2022.

As part of our ongoing work to attract the top creative talent to our sector, we also host our annual Student Design Seminar at the show. Unfortunately, due to restrictions at the show this year, it won't take place, but we look forward to welcoming students from across the country back in 2023 to inspire the next generation of toy makers.

As we head into a new year, leading innovation and design will be paramount for the success of the toy industry. The BTHA will continue to support Mojo Nation, and the toy design community who work hard to bring joy to millions of children in the UK.

Wishing you every success in 2022.



**Roland Earl,**  
Director General,  
BTHA



FEBRUARY  
19-22  
2022

# TOY FAIR NEW YORK



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### WHY EVERY TOY COMPANY SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT MINTING AN NFT

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Play to Buy Strategy

### FROM BEER TO BOARD GAMES:

Inside Champion's Catan Beer  
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### HOW THE PANDEMIC CHANGED PLAY

SESSIONS WILL CONTINUE TO BE ADDED UP UNTIL THE SHOW.  
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MOJO NATION 100

*"Toy, game and play inventors, designers – and every other sort of creative professional who brings a product to market – are the essence that sustains our community."*



Toy, game and play inventors, designers – and every other sort of creative professional who brings a product to market – are the essence that sustains our community. Each great product, every global brand, began with a spark of 'what if' pushed forward by someone dedicated to giving it life. It's this relentless passion of individuals and organisations, together with the benefits of play in all forms, that make celebrations like the Mojo Nation 100 and its recognition of wonderful people so important.

For our part, among The Toy Association's array of year-round services and actions that protect and promote the toy and play community, we acknowledge we're still best known for a magical set of days each year in New York City. We've learned that in the minds of the tens of thousands from around the world who attend, Toy Fair New York is not simply a marketplace. Around all the selling and buying come the interests, passions, desire for learning, and need for human connection that make the toy and play community so special. Perhaps none more important than the inventor and designer attendees.

Toy Fair New York is dedicated to special programming for inventors and designers under the Creative Factor banner. Programming will cover the toy lifecycle, design innovation, IP protection, VR character modelling, and beyond. These sessions are included in Toy Fair registration, so we invite all creative professionals to join for education, discovery, and networking.

What's more, the Creative Factor @ Toy Fair Inventor Day will once again be held on February 18th, prior to the international trade show opening on the 19th. CF@TF provides inventors and designers exclusive opportunity to directly pitch product concepts to potential toy manufacturing partners.

And we continue to proudly support the global toy design community, including Mojo Nation and its events, and the college toy design programs at FIT in New York City and Otis College in LA who will have their students on site. As part of our focus on the creativity pipeline, we are for the second time hosting a Student Congress at Toy Fair on February 22nd to help introduce the next generation of toy inventors to industry partners.

To all dedicated to providing inspiring, educational, and skill-building play experiences – heartfelt thanks for your hard work. I look forward to seeing many of you in person at Toy Fair New York and connecting throughout the year ahead.



Steve Pasierb,  
President and CEO, The Toy Association

# CELEBRATING INVENTORS AND DESIGNERS THAT EXCEL...

play creators  
awards

September | London

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

Part of  
**play**  
creators festival

For more information visit  
[www.playcreatorsawards.com](http://www.playcreatorsawards.com)

*"Hasbro is proud to partner with inventors and innovators who are telling the stories that entertain, educate and inspire..."*



Congratulations to all of those recognised in this year's Mojo Nation 100. Our industry is defined by extraordinary individuals – creators and visionaries like those featured in these pages who lead us in new directions and help to create the future of play. In 2021, we said goodbye to one such individual: Hasbro's Brian Goldner.

Brian was not only an extraordinary leader, but also a true champion of innovation who changed our industry forever through the strength of his vision and the perseverance to see it through.

After joining Hasbro in the year 2000, Brian transformed Hasbro from being just a toy company into a global play and entertainment leader culminating in the purchase of Entertainment One in 2019. His vision, also known as Hasbro's Brand Blueprint, activated brands like Transformers and My Little Pony across all consumer touchpoints of toy, licensing, entertainment, music, digital gaming, location-based entertainment and more.

And perhaps more important, Brian was a leader who brought not only business success, but also a sense of purpose and passion for thousands of Hasbro employees while making an impact on the communities and people we touch around the globe.

At his core, Brian was a master storyteller and seeker of great play experiences. An unrelenting innovator who always painted a picture of what could be. This spirit lives on in our industry, especially in those individuals featured in the pages of the Mojo Nation 100.

Hasbro is proud to partner with Mojo Nation and celebrate these inventors and innovators who, like Brian, are telling the stories that entertain, educate, inspire and bring people together through play. There is no more noble legacy.

As we look ahead to 2022, our industry is primed for innovation like never before. From new integrated technologies, to advances in sustainable materials – the future is ours to create. We at Hasbro are excited for what that future holds and the difference we can all make as ambassadors of play.



**Rich Stoddart,**  
Interim Chief Executive Officer,  
Hasbro

100

BREAK  
DOWN

Territory-wise, the USA once again leads the way with 58% of this year's 100 being based Stateside. This falls in line with 2021's 100, when 60% of the 100 were based in the US. Elsewhere, 30% of this year's 100 are based in the UK, followed by Canada (5%), Australia (2%) and Netherlands (2%). Figures from Germany, Spain and India make up the rest of this year's listing.

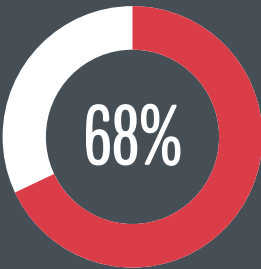
Company-wise, Hasbro leads the way with 11 entries, followed by TOMY with six. Mattel and Jazwares both have four entries, while Spin Master and Moose Toys have three each. Hasbro had more entries in the R&D section than any other

company, while the future looks bright for TOMY, with more figures represented in the Rising Star category than any other firm.

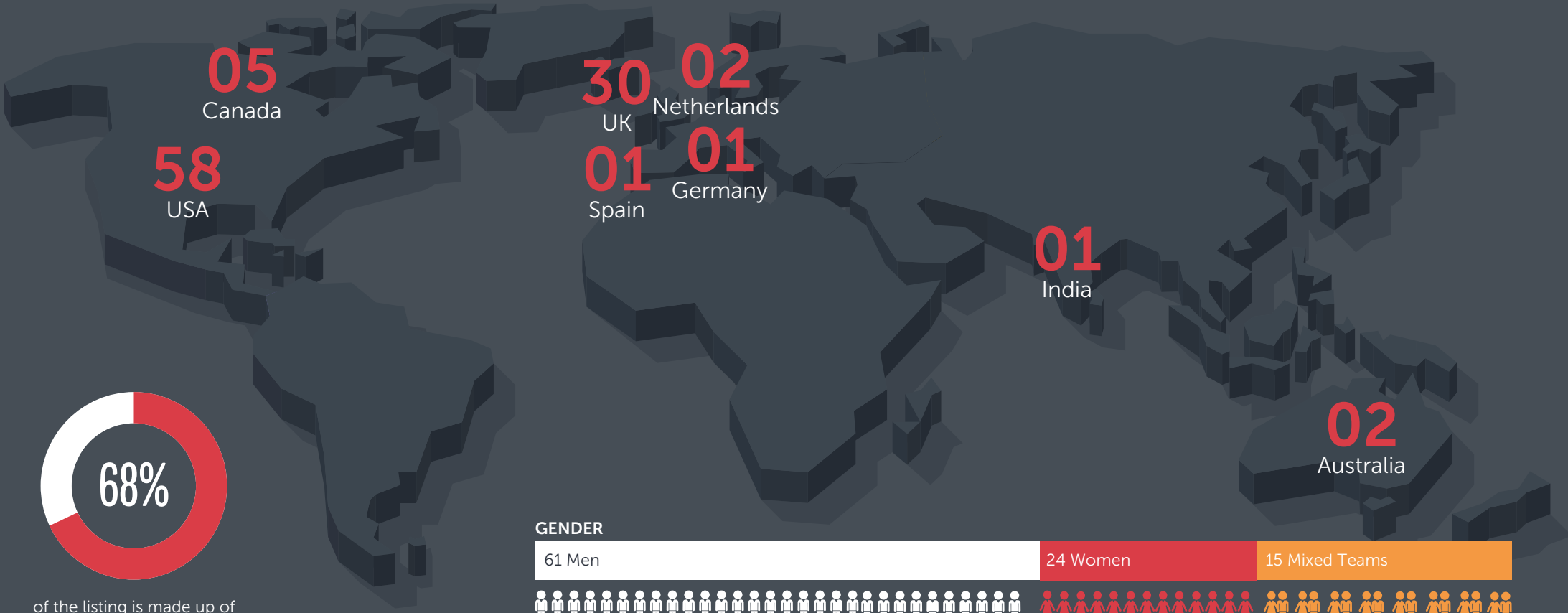
Looking at gender, the list remains similar to previous years, with 61% male, 24% female and 15% made up of mixed teams.

Finally, there's been a real influx of new faces to the 100 this year, with 68% of the listing made up of people who did not appear in 2021's edition.

Year-to-year, this marks the biggest turnover of people in the 100 to date... A healthy sign of the breadth of skills and talent boasted by this industry's design and inventor communities.



of the listing is made up of people who did not appear in the 2021 edition



GENDER



COMPANIES REPRESENTED IN THE MOJO NATION 100

Anderson Innovations  
Anjar & Becker Associates  
Bang Zoom  
Big Monster Toys  
BOTI  
Brainy Chick Inc  
Cartamundi  
Casdon  
Catapult Concepts

Colorway Game Labs  
Company5  
Design Edge  
Design Lead Play  
DICE Toy Labs  
Educational Insights  
Format Games  
Fun-Damental Invention  
FUSE

Galactic Sneeze  
Gallium Ventures  
Gamely Games  
Gibsons  
Goliath  
GPI  
Hard Boiled Games  
Hasbro  
Hayes Design

Identity Games  
IDEO  
Jazwares  
JMP Creative  
Kenny Kiernan Illustration & Design Studio  
KidKenn  
Kite & Rocket Research  
Little Rebels

Lunch Squares  
Making Things  
Mattel  
Moose Toys  
Nextoy  
Open 2 Design  
Papaton Kids  
Paper Bag Creative  
Peggy Brown Creative

Pixicade  
PlayMonster  
Product Counsel  
Professor Puzzle  
RN Brand & Licensing  
Shenanigans Toys & Games  
So Sound  
Spin Master  
Sponge Creative

Streamline Design  
Tantrum Innovation  
The Fantastic Factory  
The Marketing Store  
The Toy Coach  
TinkerTini  
Toikido  
TOMY  
Toy Zone

TrendBible  
Tricky  
Triclops  
Wild Optimists  
WITH Creative  
Women in Toys  
Yay Games  
You-Betcha Interactive



# Designed for Life

With as much as 95% of a product's environmental impact determined at the design stage, the need for the industry's innovative thinkers has never been greater. Products of Change's **Robert Hutchins** explores the relationship between sustainability and the creative approach of the design industry.



London's Design Museum is currently playing host to an exhibition showcasing a load of old rubbish. No, honestly – it really is trash. Wall-to-wall garbage. And it's charging an entrance fee. Yet ironically, it could just about be the most important exhibition you ever visit.

That's because it also happens to be a celebration of innovative thinking; a recalibration of our relationship with the everyday things we simply throw away, and a showcase of answers to the biggest question the world faces today. We all know waste is a big problem... So how are we going to fix it?

It'll come as no surprise to anyone reading this that many of the answers rest in design. This is, after all, an industry that requires looking upon problems from entirely new perspectives, and to do that often means redesigning the social norm.

What you'll find within the walls of London's Design Museum is just a selection of the global efforts being made in every industry – from fashion and food, to electronics and packaging – to discover the lost value in our waste.

"Instead of thinking of objects as things that have an end of life, they can have many lives," says Design Museum curator, Gemma Curtin. "This is not just an exhibition, it's a campaign – and we all have an active part in our future."

Mattel joined the ranks of major toy firms addressing the issue of waste as it launched its PlayBack programme across the US in May last year. The toy take-back lets the company 'turn materials from used toys into recycled materials for new products', helping the toy maker tackle waste

*"Designers are amazing problem solvers. With 95% of a product's carbon output determined at the design stage, and over 100 million designers globally, the design industry is crucial to transforming how we produce and transition society to a sustainable future."*

and avoid the financial and environmental costs of producing new, virgin plastics.

Of course, any means of keeping plastics out of the waste system is welcome... You'll need no reminding that plastics can take up to 400 years to degrade in landfill while, by some estimates, the emissions from the plastics industry could overtake those from coal by as soon as 2030.

Yet if toy products and play patterns saw circularity in their design from the outset, both these issues could find themselves promptly addressed. As Helena Mansell-Stopher, CEO and founder of Products of Change, says: "Designers are amazing problem solvers, with 95% of a product's carbon output determined at the design stage... The design industry is crucial to transforming how we produce and transition society to a sustainable future."

Paul De'ath, course leader in BA Product and Industrial Design at Central Saint Martins at the University of the Arts London, calls it investigative design... An approach that goes beyond the question, "What are we making, and can we make it better?" to the bigger, more fundamental rumination: "Do we need to make this at all?"

Is this radical thinking? Perhaps to some. But less so when you place it within a sustainability framework such as the one developed by UK supermarket giant Tesco. Known as the Four Rs – Remove, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle – it's a system that asks Tesco's suppliers, as well as its own R&D team, to look at the materials used in its products and consider what can be designed out rather than in to create impactful, environmentally friendly results.

In toys, LEGO is ploughing \$400 million into its own sustainability efforts right now; the results of which include the development of a prototype LEGO brick made from recycled PET.

Meanwhile, Headstart International made headlines last year with the launch of Recyclings... Each product in this line of toy collectibles is made up of 70% recycled bottle caps. In the UK, Big Potato flexed its environmentally friendly muscles by partnering with post-consumer plastics specialist, Waste2Wear, to launch the first range of playing cards made from ocean plastics. Keel Toys is keeping a running total of plastic bottles it has rescued from our seas to turn into soft toys now in its hundreds of thousands.

Each are superb examples of businesses acting to remove waste from our environment. The next step is keeping toys out of the waste stream altogether and firmly in the value stream – and that's an area in which design can become really creative.

Felicity Thompson, technical manager at Tesco, tells us: "One of the things we're looking at right now are collectable toys and the little plastic balls that so many of these toys turn up in. We're trying to encourage suppliers to make them part of the play pattern and to help move away from the throwaway culture."

"So, it's not just the materials, but how it will stay in the value system and keep being used. Make the plastic packaging a part of that play pattern and do away with this throwaway nature."

And that is quite possibly the toy industry's most exciting brief to date.



# Getting Your Foot in the Door

Open 2 Design's **Matt Burtonwood** shines a spotlight on the challenges around finding new design hires – and details what he looks for when it comes to fresh talent.



I don't think I can ever remember a time when people said: "This is a great time to be graduating, there's loads of job out there – you can have your pick of the bunch." There always seems to be some kind of financial peril or natural disaster on the cards. But, what with one thing and another, it can't have been easy for graduates in the last couple of years.

Equally, for employers, it's been a tricky time to find new hires. With the traditional degree shows and New Designers scaled back or put on hold, it's been hard to get a sense of what's out there. So, as things hopefully start to open back up, we wanted to put our two pence worth forward on what we like to see when that job enquiry lands in our inbox.

**1. Send us some pictures.** We're a visual industry and we get excited by pictures. We receive lots of applications created in Word, and it's hard to get excited by a description of what you can do. Show, don't tell.

**2. Try and cover off all the core skills.** Unless you're focusing on a really defined role, design teams want to see where they can put you to work. Are you good at ideas, concept sketching, presentation visuals, 3D for presentation, 3D for models, character design or graphic treatments? You don't need to show lots of examples for everything, but a strong example for each will stand you in good stead.

**3. Work outside your university syllabus.** Most university courses dial in on a couple of projects in your final year. This means when your skills are at their maddest, you'll have two or three things to put in

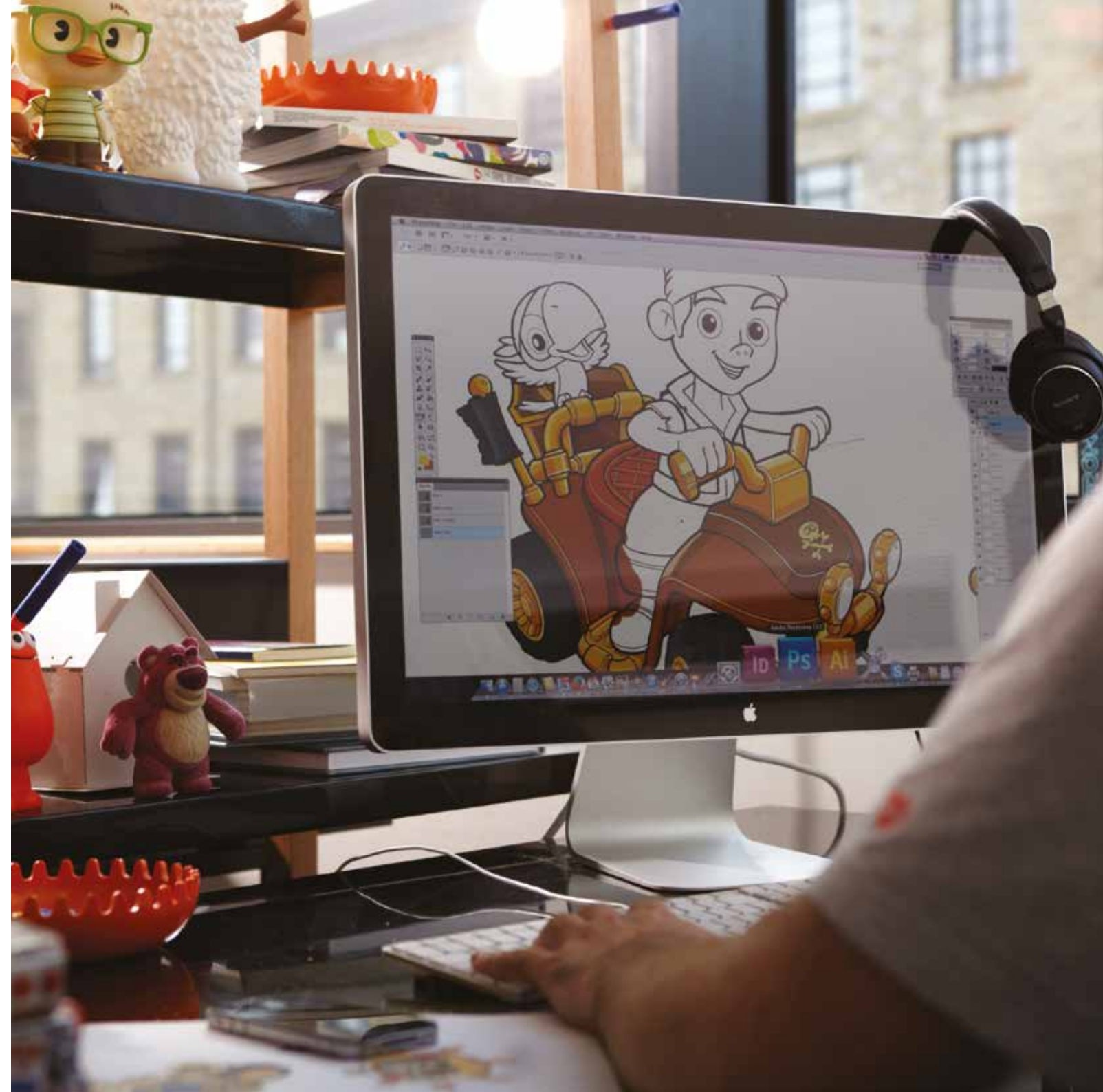
your portfolio if you're lucky. So, don't wait to be told what to do – set yourself projects. If you focus on creating one extra piece a week, by the end of the year you'll be able to filter out the bits you're not so happy with. Or, even better, you'll be able to tweak your presentation to suit a specific audience.

**4. Get experience wherever you can.** The biggest concern for most firms is that an intern will be tricky to manage into their workflow, so make it easy for them. Start small, look to get a few weeks somewhere so they can see how it could work for them. Offer to pick up a live project to show them what you can do – worst case scenario, you'll get something to drop into your portfolio.

**5. Don't get too caught up in your degree classification.** It's a good way to measure a candidate's ability to learn and sometimes it evinces skills, but I'd be lying if I told you any employer ever asked me what degree I left university with. Focus on the things people can see.

**6. Have an interest in what you do.** Sounds weird, but we often go into universities to work with students and there's nothing more demoralising than hearing students say they're bored. Don't get me wrong, I can go on a bit, but if you can't sustain interest in a drawing exercise for more than an hour you're going to have some long days ahead of you.

So that's what we're looking for. I'd open the same question up to graduates. What are you looking for in an employer? To work well, it can't be a one-way conversation. Recent events have shown us that just because that's the way we've always done it, it doesn't mean it's necessarily the best way to do things. If there's ever been a chance to make a positive change, it feels like this could be it.



# WHY DESIGN?

A love of toys? An inspirational teacher? An eye-opening exhibition? We asked figures from across the world of toy and game design what set them on the path to working in design and development.



**Nikki Bauman**

Manager of Fisher-Price Inventor Relations, Mattel

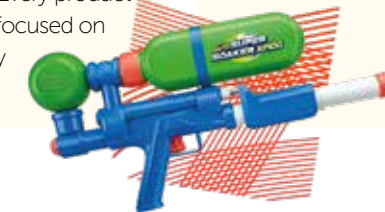
"What inspired me to go into product design was the Biomedical Engineering program at Wright State University in Ohio. It's where I started college and set on my path to designing prosthetics, initially. Two years into the program, I realised how grossed out I was by Anatomy and Physiology class... And having to dissect roadkill – blegh! I then changed course and transferred into the Industrial Design program at the University of Cincinnati. I was much more comfortable designing furniture and electronics – not quite as gross! Then I discovered my love of toy design after two internships at Fisher-Price. 13 years into toy design at Fisher-Price, I've switched gears again and been on the Inventor Relations team for six years. It's been a very long and winding path that's landed me on my favourite team so far!"



**Ste Smith**

Creative Director, WITH Creative

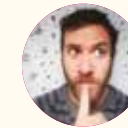
"I was always curious about how things were made. Much to my Mum's frustration, taking things apart to see how they were built – and sometimes not being able to put them back together again... But I really became obsessed when I got my first Super Soaker. A few pumps and I could spray my friends from a distance. I vividly remember the moment where – while hiding for cover during a battle – I looked down at my gun and thought 'It was someone's job to create this drench weapon?! I want that to be my job!' Not only was I fascinated with how it was made, it was the why it was made that really gripped me. Those feelings of joy and the fun memories it creates, that's why this thing existed. Every product I've designed and created in my career has been focused on sparking feelings of joy and happiness. That is why I do what I do."



**Alex Reynolds**

Head of Research & Development, Casdon

"I'd go for TOMY's Kong Man. I was always obsessed with how all the internal mechanisms created such an amazing and magical play experience... The magnetic wall was my favourite! As a child, I used to take it apart and be mesmerised by what seemed like millions of pieces all working in unison behind the scenes. Since then, I've always had the inclination to take things apart, see how they really work, and it's inspired me to design my own toy mechanisms that bring 'magic' to kids."



**James Austin-Smith**

Director of Innovation, Moose Toys

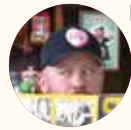
"I'm not sure that this put me on the path to toy invention consciously, but in an unconscious way my childhood toys had a big effect on me, igniting a passion that was never met until the world of toy design opened up to me. Starcom in particular had an awesome blend of 'imaginative storytelling supported by a little moment of magic' to produce the surprise and delight that I look for in my work today. It was a classic 80's space-themed range of vehicles and pilots. The pilots had magnetic boots that activated features on the vehicles and allowed them to defy gravity as they clung to plates on the sides of the ships. The magnetic boots also triggered transformations in the vehicles and playsets that were powered by clockwork mechanisms, meaning they never needed batteries and made an awesome buzzing sound as they activated. It was great fuel to roleplay space adventures to, and has always stayed in my memories as an immersive experience powered by a great mechanism, married with an exciting execution."



**Phil Sage**

Sr Director Hasbro SPARK Inventor Relations  
– Toy and Technology, Hasbro

"At university, I would take the train from Swansea to London, and open my mind to the impossible. I was fascinated with getting around on the London Underground. Some describe it as organised chaos, but I appreciated its holistic system design. It gave me a deeper appreciation of how a product experience was made up of so many layers. It was designed that way; the system architecture, the trains, the technologies, the signal systems, the payment systems, the front-facing iconography and flow diagrams explaining where you are and where to go... They all need to talk in order to be efficient and embraced by its users, over and over again."

**Luc Hudson**

Co-Founder, Triclops Studio

"I didn't have a huge collection of toys as a kid – unfortunately I can't say the same now!

But I did have – and still have – my original Boglin. I was obsessed with Jim Henson and his movies like Labyrinth and The Dark Crystal. I was fascinated by animatronics and the Boglin was like entry-level puppetry. While still at school, I made a clay head and tried to cast a puppet head from it, coating it with lots of layers of liquid latex. That interest in 'bringing toys to life' stayed with me through my early years as a designer when I made mechanical toys and automata – I think I get my mechanical mind from my Dad who is a car nut, specialising in the restoration of vintage Citroens."

**Barry McLaughlin**

Co-Founder, Barry & Jason Games

"As a kid I was fascinated by mechanical games with clever analog designs. I loved the simple-yet-satisfying action created by pushing down the lever to make a hippopotamus munch on some tasty marbles in Hungry Hungry Hippos. Or the use of gravity to send flaming orbs careening down the mountain in Fireball Island. Even KerPlunk had a special place in my heart, using the simplicity of a tube, some sticks and a bunch of marbles to create a pretty action-packed game... Whoa! I had no idea that the use of marbles in game design was so special to me until listing those three games together. What a breakthrough! How much do I owe for this session, doc? As for Barry & Jason, we carry this childhood wonder forward with creations that are simple, clever, and analog; with rich illustrations that often include backstories. And up next... Bring me my marbles!"

**Fi Murray**

Founder, Making Things Studio

"For me it was Crayola and their 'sticks' as we call them... Crayons, markers, pencils and so on! They not only opened my eyes to what a wonderful product experience feels like – from the iconic scents of their ink and wax to the quality of the lay down, to the packaging and design – but they also gave me the tools to create, to doodle and to have colouring-in competitions with my nan, Iris. She'd get me a colouring book, get me to pick a page and give me 50p if she thought I did a better job than her. She wasn't a fan if I didn't stay in the lines or started drawing something else! That was probably an early sign that I didn't have the make-up to be a methodical detail designer!"

**Richard Heayes**

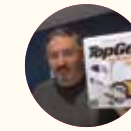
Founder, Heayes Design and PlayLenz

"I first started to think about design being something different from art when I watched Thunderbirds, Joe 90, Captain Scarlet and Space: 1999 as a kid – I was an Anderson fanboy for sure! I loved the different spacecrafts, vehicles and gadgets which made me want to imagine what else International Rescue might need and how those might work. I used to draw up ideas and make them in LEGO! It wasn't just how something looked but also how it functioned and how cool it was overall. My father was an engineer, so I learnt how to use basic workshop tools when I was fairly young and this gave me confidence to make stuff from what was lying around. From there, I continued to design spacecrafts, gadgets and imaginary objects of the future at school. I only discovered Industrial Design was a 'thing' once I left senior school, but luckily I found the perfect college and went onto study I.D. After working in I.D. for a few years, I discovered toys and games and never looked back. I try to keep that eight-year-old me front of mind even though the 50-year-old me often spoils the party with practical issues like costs and feasibility!"

**Darren Lee Phillipson**

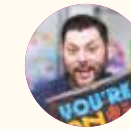
Toy & Content Development Architect,  
Design Lead Play

"One of my biggest, singular creative inspirations as a young designer was when I came across an article about the 1980's Italian design movement called Memphis. Designers such as Michele De Lucchi, Ettore Sottsass and Martin Bedin created products with geometric shapes in bold colours and patterns. Their creations really spoke to me and certainly helped to inform my own personal design language and overall approach to product and toy design."

**David Snow**

Owner, The Fantastic Factory

"Product development came later in life for me; I was focused on a career in sales. It wasn't until I was pitching to the BBC to get the rights for a Top Gear board game... Once we'd been through that development process, I got the bug and had a hand in developing lots more games. Developing these games was how I met my business partner, Steve; an all-round creative genius – that's how we started The Fantastic Factory."

**Gary Pyper**

Founder, Fun-Damental Invention

"I was a 16-year-old art student on a college trip to Barcelona, when – due to a San Miguel induced stupor – I opted to skip visiting Gaudi's masterpiece The Sagrada Familia to instead wander around the shops aimlessly. That afternoon, I purchased a souvenir that has made a huge impact on how I have approached industrial design since. The object is the Christy sugar bowl produced by Alessi – but, more importantly, it was designed by Dr Christopher Dresser. Aesthetically, you might 'place' the bowl in the last few decades, but it was, in fact, first produced in 1885. A masterclass in playful and timeless design, with a single-shot plastic 20c twist. If I can recreate anything half as elegant and as timeless as this in my lifetime, I'll be eternally satisfied."

**Geoff Smyrk**

VP, Global Creative Director, The Marketing Store London

"For me, it was the LEGO Tug Boat. Just imagine a boat, that comes in bits – even the hull – and is made from relatively heavy parts, that you build and actually floats in the bath. It blew my mind!"



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# "WE ARE IN A GREAT TIME FOR DESIGN IN THE TOY AND GAME SPACE."

**Brian Chapman**, Head of Global Design and Development at Hasbro, discusses inventors, inspiration and the importance of embracing disruption.

**Brian, it's great to connect. Let's start at the beginning. What sparked your interest in design?**

Hi, it's awesome to connect! My initial interest in design was based on my time spent with my grandfather, Oriel Lee. He was a small farmer in rural Indiana and he would always make parts for his equipment and machinery when they needed repair. I remember fabricating mufflers for his chainsaws, welding broken parts on his tractors or even helping him make an evaporator for homemade maple syrup. He was so clever and I realised I loved to create and make things from my time spent with him. It wasn't until later that I discovered Industrial Design while studying mechanical engineering at Purdue, and I realised I could have a career based on this creativity.

**Was a career in toys and games always on the cards or were any other industries ever in contention?**

It's funny, I never even thought about designing toys and games as a career. When I put my portfolio together to go looking for a job, I had a lot of passion projects in it. I loved drawing dinosaurs, fantasy weapons, crazy cars, and giant bionic warriors. My first interview was with Kenner Products, and they couldn't believe my portfolio. They needed designers to work on Jurassic Park, make Batmobiles, come up with Nerf blasters and do action figures. It was a perfect match and they offered me the job!

**Sounds like the stars aligned! Now, if LinkedIn is to be believed, this is your 30<sup>th</sup> year with Hasbro. Has your approach to design changed much across the decades?**

Wow, has it really been 30 years? Time flies when you're having fun! Yes, my approach to design has changed. Early in my career, it was about discovering the insights to make my projects the most successful they could be; now it's about building a culture that enables creativity and innovation. I'm super passionate about how to nurture that creative culture and unlock the potential in everyone to drive great toy and game play experiences.

**Your design teams are working on some of the most iconic brands around – many of which have been around for years and years. From a design point of view, what's the key to keeping Hasbro's portfolio of brands fresh and exciting?**

It's about being open minded, harvesting the best ideas possible from around the globe and ultimately being a champion for these ideas to take it from a concept sketched on a piece of paper to a toy or game in the hands of a kid. The process requires both left and right brain problem solving, a good amount of collaboration, and a lot of fortitude and determination.

**Let's talk inventors. What was your first experience of working with the inventor community?**

It was in the 90s when I was working at Kenner on their radio-control vehicle business, X-RC. We partnered closely with inventors to bring heavily featured, radio-controlled vehicles to the market. Ricochet, Stunt Boss, Air-Devil and Crashback were all very cool, successful vehicles that were brought to us by inventors. We worked closely – with and relied heavily on – the inventor community to make those toys super successful. It was a great time, full of many challenges and lots of fun!

**Why are inventors vital to Hasbro's continued success?**

We rely on inventors to bring outside thinking to Hasbro. We need to push ourselves to not get caught up in traditional thinking. I like to think that the inventors, not encumbered by the day-to-day of the business, can think more freely and sometimes be more connected to new, creative opportunities. They're not confined by the way we define brands, segments or categories.

**What's the key to a successful inventor/company relationship?**

Open communication, partnership and an open mind. Any product we take to market has many cost, safety,

price-value and manufacturing challenges, and the type of innovation we receive from inventors adds to the complexity. We all must work relentlessly together, inventor and Hasbro developers, to solve issues throughout the entire process. We must iterate and adjust the play experience to resonate with kids, fans and families. Not easy, but so rewarding!

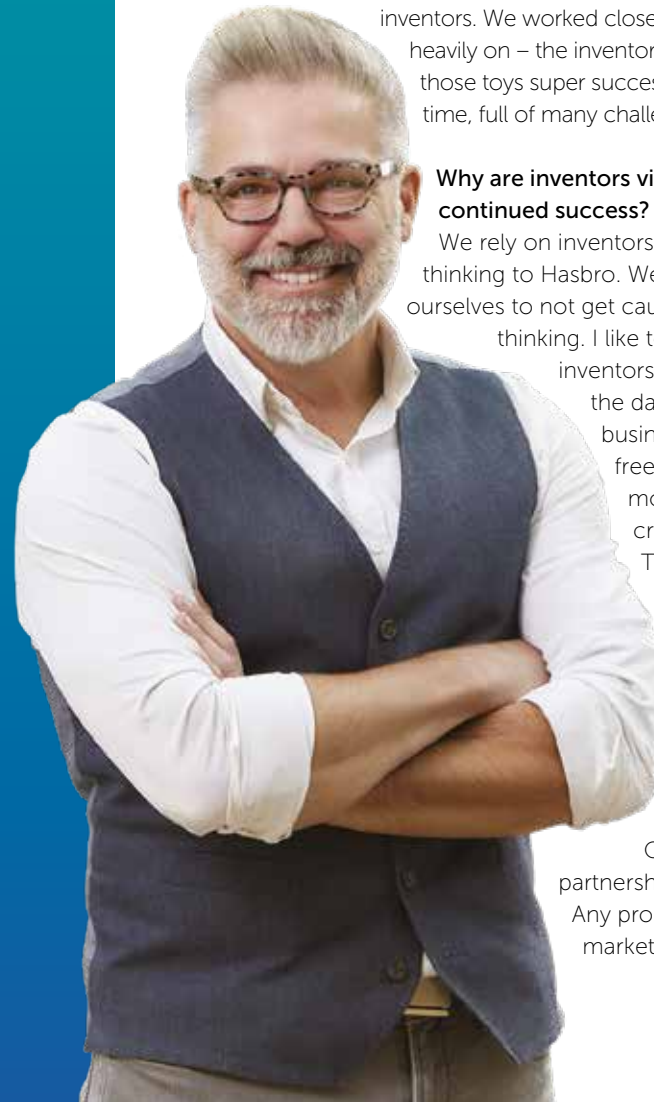
**Absolutely. Looking more broadly, do you think the industry is in a good place creatively at present when it comes to design?**

Yes, we're at an interesting time for design. We have the explosion of creative-led entrepreneurs being super successful. Tesla and Uber are a couple of examples of how these companies are disrupting their industry with a focus on great design and awesome user experience. The toy industry is no exception. We see cool designs and dream products being created and delivered directly to the consumer, we see price-point thresholds removed, we see digital and physical products converging, and we see a big focus on sustainability. We're in a great time for design in the toy and game space and we must embrace this change and disruption.

**Brian, this has been great. One last question! How do you fuel your creativity?**

For me, it's about fuelling my passion and finding my personal inspiration. When I'm not creating or making at work, I'm finding new ways to challenge my create-and-make skills at home. I tend to jump into things like cooking, gardening, home restoration, or fixing up vintage vehicles to keep those skills sharp. All of these things require research, creativity and hands-on making to be successful.

Last night I was up late in a barn taking apart and cleaning the fuel system for an old bulldozer. Never done it before, had a few setbacks, but figured it all out... Kind of like what we do in the toy and game industry every day!



# What is the Future of...?



PlayLenz's **Richard Heayes** shines a spotlight on the tricky act of trend spotting... And which other elements inventors can rely on when predicting how concepts will resonate.

Pretty much all toy and game inventors are trying to predict the future of how people will be playing in the next one to five years. It's very easy to fall down the rabbit hole of macro, micro and meaningless trends; trying to decipher what those really mean for the consumer and companies alike. You can easily convince yourself that this or that trend – if hit head on – is going to pay off, but for anyone forecasting the future it can be like playing darts on a spinning base with your eyes shut.

So, is it worth looking at trends at all? Well, it can be, but you need to be pragmatic and realise that 95% of consumers you're aiming at won't really understand the trends that are slowly influencing them on a global scale often for many years. However, there are a couple of routes that seem to have more success...

The first is hot third-party licences, or companies licensing new brands into their portfolio. Keeping an eye on what TV shows or movies are in production, or what's planned, gives you a feel for what companies might be interested in if they own the rights that cover those properties. Also, if a company licenses a brand, they might need new ideas very quickly so it's worth keeping an eye on the pages of Mojo Nation – and Brands Untapped – to get some insights.

***"Trend spotting is important but don't bet your whole idea on selling that trend into a toy company."***

Second is to focus on the micro trends, which are more obvious to the consumer as they're the hot news. That said, this can be a very tricky thing to achieve. As an inventor, you need to design something and then get a company to buy into that trend, manufacture it and ship it. By the time it hits the shelves, real or virtual, there's a good chance that trend will be as relevant as 'Covfefe'.

So how on earth do you have any idea what you're doing is going to make any sense? Well, anyone who has that playbook sorted please drop me a line! However, it's easy to get hung up on the latest trend and forget what makes us humans tick. We work in the business of 'cool' and 'fun' and although both of those can be related to what's current, there are also some core human traits that influence how we react to something.

**Surprise:** It has some unusual or magical effect that surprises you. Something that's not as predictable as you were led to believe when you first saw it. We love to be surprised and we love to share those surprises with others. When we get a surprise, we actually freeze for 1/25th of a second, then our emotions are fired up about 400%. If it's a nice surprise, then happiness and joy take centre stage in the brain. Finding repeatable moments of surprise can come from physical action and mental gymnastics.



**Winning:** We all have a level of competitiveness in us. We see that many recent games have focused on co-operative play, but you're still competing against the game. We get dopamine hits in different ways, not just when we complete something but in the process of doing it as well. When you record small wins, when you share success with others, when you learn to focus on one task... If you think about it, these are all key parts of many good games.

**Social:** Many people are more social than they've ever been in terms of sharing what they're feeling, what they've been doing or what they're planning to do; of course mainly on

social media. However, physical social connections have been tested too – and no more so than over the last few years. Humans share mirror neurons that unconsciously match others' emotions whenever we're actively engaged in storytelling and listening. This is most easily done when we're physically present, so think about those play experiences that let us individuals shine and really connect with each other.

So, in summary, trend spotting is important but don't bet your whole idea on selling that trend into a toy company. Most know that, at the end of the day, these trends tend to come and go, so it's important to get the fundamentals right.



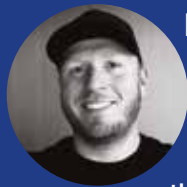


**MATTEL**

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



# ***“There’s a collective ambition to push the boundaries of what we’re capable of...”***



**David Winter** – Head of New Product Acquisition and Inventor Relations at Jazwares, on products, trends and being part of a culture of innovation.

**David, it’s always great to catch up. Let’s dive straight in: Why should inventors bring their concepts to Jazwares?**

Jazwares has an extensive portfolio of owned and licensed IP that we can partner with inventors – incredible brands such as Squishmallows, Pokémon, CoComelon, and Fortnite, to name a few, and we’re always looking for inventors to help keep the lines feeling innovative and fresh.

Jazwares plays in the top toy supercategories, and if we’re not in one then we’re looking for break-frame; category-buster items from inventors to get us into those spaces! Jazwares has amazing momentum, and we’re growing. We’re firing on all cylinders to leverage our expertise and resources in product development, combined with stellar marketing to promote our products to consumers across a variety of platforms worldwide.

To diversify our portfolio with new brand IP from inventors, Jazwares created a team called BlueJ that’s dedicated to building up and fleshing out the design, play pattern and positioning of inventor product concepts into new brand opportunities. For inventors, the advantage is having dedicated design and development resources for their items where we create custom graphics, build models, and design presentations of inventor concepts to get in front of our leadership team.

With more than 250 inventors globally, and over 25 businesses in our portfolio, we’ve staffed up the team with new talent that have a passion for people and product. Lauren Mershon and Brian Thornber joined the inventor relations team to help connect inventors to the opportunities in the licensed portfolio, and are also part of BlueJ to craft product concepts into entirely new brand candidates.

**It sounds like a great set-up! Can you share with us a bit more about what you do there within BlueJ?**

BlueJ – Jazwares’ Blue Sky Design and Development division – is headed up by our EVP, Michael Rinzler, and together with the VP of Design, Stefanie Barone, I co-lead the team that plays, designs, and strategises product concepts into new brand opportunities for the organisation.

Inventor Relations is front of house to the inventor community where my team looks at all the concepts and selects those that have that extra ‘special something’. After the review process, I put on my Business Development hat and play with BlueJ. It’s here that the team establishes the vision, builds out the play pattern, and designs the overall direction for inventor items.

My counterpart, Stefanie, leads a talented creative team – Eric Yanovich, Kristi Bluhm and Adam Ostegard – to bring the visual



and physical elements to life. Together, we’ve greenlit some incredible inventor items which we’re very excited to one day have the chance to share with the world.

**We look forward to hearing about them! And how often are you reviewing inventor items?**

Roughly every month, we put together a concept review of all our top candidates for evaluation, in a well-designed presentation, with all the bells and whistles. This has allowed us to act swiftly to secure hot items, stay nimble and be opportunistic to product concepts as soon as they come in the door.

What’s also fantastic about BlueJ is our collaborative process, as well as our direct line to leadership to greenlight inventor items and turn them into brand opportunities. These are huge pluses for inventors to think of Jazwares for their product concepts – plus, we have a load of fun doing it together!

**Yes, let’s not undersell the fun aspect! We’re in a trend-driven industry, so what do you, and Jazwares, do to stay on the cutting edge of trends?**

In my opinion, by virtue of our licensed brands in the gaming industry, Jazwares has an incredible pulse on social media, emerging influencers and digital trends. I think we recognise that the channels of communication are evolving, and the way kids play and interface with content creators shapes the lens we use to evaluate product concepts... How well does this demo on social? Does it lend itself to viral-social-sharing?

In addition to a huge swath of young talent at the company keeping things fresh, BlueJ also spearheads a few initiatives that keep our team and the organisation on the pulse of all things trendy as well as has its ear to the ground to all new product/brand launches at retail.

As for myself, I’m fairly addicted to several subreddits, Imgur and various toy and tech blogs to round it out.

**David, this has been great. One last question; we often talk a lot about creative cultures at companies. What is the culture of innovation like at Jazwares?**

In my role, I interface with almost all the cross-functional teams at Jazwares – from brand, design, and product development, all the way to sales, finance and legal. One thing that’s stood out to me is everyone’s passion to innovate... Innovate new brands, innovate our product, innovate our contracts and, most importantly, innovate our processes. Jazwares is a company built on partnership, and it’s by virtue of the people that work here that we see challenges as opportunities.

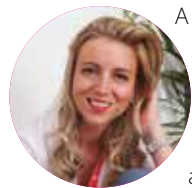
We like a challenge, and inventor items can sometimes be that challenge – new mechanisms, new chemistries, new transformations – it’s often the things that no one has ever seen before.

That’s what’s so motivating about being here at Jazwares – the collective ambition to the push boundaries of what we’re capable of is going to launch us even further as a company. I think inventors have taken notice of that, and I’m extremely proud to be a part of this team.

*"Referencing back to the dream review is my way of keeping the magic of the concept alive; of holding on to that original spark and its reason for being."*

# Dream Reviews

Making Things' Founder **Fi Murray** looks at the benefits of writing 'dream reviews' for concepts at the start of the creative process.



A while back, I was inspired by an initiative I saw in the publishing world. A collective of authors write reviews of their new books before the books have even been written. I loved their sentiment of thinking of the end at the beginning – with the end being what you hope the audience reaction will be.

I started to adopt this task into the studio's creative process. It takes just a few minutes! When an idea is shaped enough to form a concept, I write the dream review.

It's easy to forget the intent and ambition of a concept when you're up to your eyeballs in troubleshooting – the feasibility, costing, value engineering, passes and so on – the inevitable perspiration of commercialising a concept. Referencing back to the dream review is my way of keeping the magic of the concept alive; of holding on to that original spark and its reason for being.

Is this 'concept manifesting?' Hmm, I'm not sure... Only the future will tell if any of the dream reviews I've written align with real reviews. Fingers crossed elements of them make it through to the end!

The dream review can also function as a brief. It can be an emotive driver for creative teams to support the factual brief of

say: "Create a £14.99, on-the-go playset for brand A that does X, Y and Z." It keeps the consumer reaction at the forefront of the mind.

And then there's the pitching and selling process – be it the inventor sizzle, internal line review presentation, retailer previews, TVCs and all digital advertising content... They all need to elicit an emotional reaction to spark a response from the consumer. What do you want them to feel and think after they've interacted with your content and product? The dream review can be the intended outcome – the goal.

By way of example, here's a dream review – I've edited out some specifics for confidentiality...

"CUTE factor overload! I've never seen my kids' imaginations so alive. The play feels wholesome and open ended while still feeling fun and fresh. Day or night, they're playing away! If you're a fan of this brand, you need to check out the animated series... It's captivating – I feel like I'm watching a Pixar movie! We can't wait to expand the world – I think we know what will be on the birthday lists coming up."

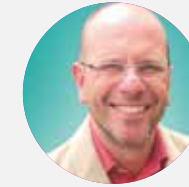
Why don't you have a go at writing a dream review? Maybe all your dreams will come true!





# CREATIVE CLOCK

Creative Consultant  
**Deej Johnson** on  
how a little-known  
body rhythm  
affects creativity.



If you could wave a magic wand and instantly feel more creative and energetic, would you do it? What if waving the wand also increased productivity, reduced stress and let you have better ideas? Well, while there isn't a magic wand that lets you do that, there's a little-known body clock that does...

## Tick-Tock

As you already know, your body has an in-built 24-hour clock that tells you when to wake up and go to sleep. But did you know that other body clocks affect our creativity and behaviour far more often? They're known as ultradian rhythms... And one of them compels us to change our brain state every 90 to 120 minutes.

## Then What?

After 90 to 120 minutes, our brains send signals that it's time to stop focusing for about 20 minutes. Hardwired into our DNA, these timings help govern our energy production. So like it or not, they routinely regulate your productivity. In other words, if you pay attention to the signals, you work much more effectively. The signals that you need to stop focusing include the following...

- Noticing you need the loo
- Realising you've been reading and not taking things in
- Undergoing a bout of yawning
- Struggling to recall things on the tip of your tongue
- Catching yourself daydreaming
- Experiencing unexplained tension or discomfort
- Discovering you've tranced out
- Becoming aware of an urge to stretch or move
- Finding it difficult to concentrate
- Suddenly realising you feel fatigued
- Having an irritating memory problem
- Facing difficulty typing, reading or counting
- Feeling slow, hazy, or foggy headed
- Getting sudden pains in the lower back

## Doesn't That Stuff ALWAYS Happen?

No... That stuff routinely happens; it happens within a cycle. When you get a concentration-breaking signal, you should ideally take a 20-minute break... Even if that just means switching to less taxing activities. Relaxing is ideal, but taking a short walk, daydreaming or stretching in your seat can help. The big mistake is to override the signals and carry on working.

## What If You Do Carry On?

Overriding your brain's many cries for rest fires a physical stress response. And why wouldn't it?! Your unconscious mind – responsible for producing ideas – tells you it needs a break. In response, you carry on doing the very thing to which it's saying stop! It's no wonder so many people find ideation difficult when they see taking a break as inconvenient or weak.

## The Break IS Work

Studies prove that following a simple pattern increases our abilities to find solutions. We're more productive when we work on something, stop for a while, then return to the task... So one way to harness ultradian rhythms is to see taking a break as an essential part of creativity... Not an interruption to it. Studies also suggest that the best way to take a break is to have a laugh...

## As British Comedian Bob Monkhouse Said:

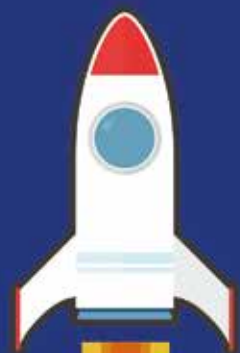
"I'd like to die like my old dad: peacefully in his sleep – not screaming like his passengers." This joke perfectly illustrates how even a one-liner sets up our expectations... Then presents a conclusion that dashes them. Some scientists believe the surprising nature of humour automatically stimulates creativity. But why would that be?

## Make Connections

It's because juxtapositions found in humour help our unconscious minds make connections. So while taking a break and relaxing are good ways to incubate and produce ideas, laughing is a much better one. And the best news? Well, if enjoying humour is part of your creative process, you can claim Chris Rock tickets on expenses.

# STARTING A TOY AND GAME BUSINESS

Toy and Game School's **Adam Borton** shares his top tips around launching your own play-centric company...



If you read stats about startups succeeding, you'll know that about 20% of new businesses go bust in their first year... That rises to 60% after three years, so it's important to have a solid plan to help avoid being a casualty! Having worked at and run multiple toy and game businesses in the industry, I've seen many come and go. There are various reasons why, some of which are out of your control – a global pandemic, for example! Generally, though, many businesses make decisions with consequences that could've been avoided with more discipline and planning.

Below I've listed my top tips for starting a toy and game business... To see the full article, drop me a line or visit [www.mojo-nation.com](http://www.mojo-nation.com).

## 1. Learn as Much as You Can

One of the most important things for your long-term future is to gain relevant knowledge and experience. That way, decision making becomes much easier while running a business... Is this person ripping you off? Do they need to change that part? Will it really take that long? Where are all these costs coming from?! By learning the in's and out's of the toy and game industry, you'll give yourself a fighting chance of making it through those crucial first few years.

## 2. Keep Overheads and Expenses Low

This is vital when starting any business, as you need to fund the finding and keeping of customers – whether that's the general public or business customers. Getting set up with the right tools is important too... Whether it's hardware or software, you need to invest in vital equipment before getting any money in. A social-media presence really helps as well, especially if you don't have existing industry contacts. Social media also helps confirm that there's an audience for your product. These accounts are generally free – but your time and equipment costs aren't.

## 3. Say "Yes" to Lots of Things

When you first start out, grabbing every little opportunity that comes your way – by being in the right place, with the right people, at the right time – helps establish you and build your reputation. Even if you already have some standing in the industry, but are now starting your own thing, people may look at you as experienced but without the backing of your old company... You'll need to prove yourself all over again!

## 4. Say "No" to Lots of Things

Further down the line, start saying "No thanks" to work opportunities that aren't part of your long-term planning. I've been offered various freelance, job and TV opportunities in the past that just haven't been the right fit. By sticking to my goals, I'm able to work on the projects I most enjoy, freeing up my time and creativity. It can be hard to turn down opportunities and money – but time is the most valuable thing you have... You need to use it wisely.

'Cashflow is King' is a mantra that really needs to be top of mind when running any business, so you need to make sure that any opportunities that come up don't have the potential to evaporate your short-term cash flow, especially for paying salaries and rent. The moment that salaries or bills can't be paid is the moment most companies go under. Saying "No thanks" to expansion or hiring may mean you grow slower than other companies but, in the long run, could mean the difference between staying in – or going out of – business!

## 5. Manage Your Time

How you manage your time links to the previous two points. You need to think strategically about your time, and how you can add value to your business for the future.

Focus is very important to success, and you need to choose the areas that you focus on carefully. If your focus is too narrow, there might not be enough business to sustain yourself long term. If your focus is too broad, you won't have the time to do a really great job and stand out.

Article continues at [www.mojo-nation.com](http://www.mojo-nation.com)

# MYTH BUSTERS

What are some of the biggest misconceptions floating around the world of toy and game invention? PlayMonster's **Adam Hocherman**, Kids Brand Insight's **Steve Reece**, Paper Bag Creative's **Ed Gartin** and Spin Master's **Harrie Sivanander** and **Dougal Grimes** are on hand to debunk the myths.



**ED GARTIN,**  
Owner & Creative  
Catalyst, Paper Bag  
Creative

**MYTH:** "There are plenty of myths out there around how to get a "yes" from an inventor relations person, but here's the simple truth: the quickest way to get that "yes" is to be in the right room with the right product. The quickest path to that is by doing your research... What kind of company is it? What kind of products do they sell? Does your concept align with their brand and their product line? If so, then you're in the right room."



**HARRIE SIVANANDER,**  
Director of Innovation & Preliminary Design,  
Spin Master

**MYTH:** "Everyone thinks an idea is worth a million dollars, but it's just a starting point. I want to know that you believe in it so much that you built something to prove it out. I need to see something to truly get me inspired, then I'm happy to team up with you."

**MYTH:** "Age equals wisdom. Sure, this might be true in many ways, but I've seen a lot of seasoned vets who don't get it, or can't look past the scope they've been trained in – myself included. I've also had the most incredible teachings from the most junior of designers."

**MYTH:** "Talent is everything. I've met a ton of people who are so incredibly talented but a pain to work with and it breaks my heart. I love working with people who are fun, organised and make me feel heard. I love being challenged when it's done with respect. I'm sure I've been on both sides of this."



**ADAM HOCHERMAN,**  
VP New Business, PlayMonster

**MYTH:** "Perhaps the most important myth to dispel is that toy or game manufacturers are out to steal your idea. While there have been some high-profile conflicts in the industry, these are the exception and not the norm. One of the great things about the toy industry is that it's very tight-knit. The inventors know one another. The inventor relations execs know one another. It's very collaborative in many aspects. While it's simply wrong to capitalise on an inventor concept without paying for it, it's also worth noting that this is simply 'bad business' and a manufacturer or publisher that engages in such behavior will be quickly black-balled."



**STEVE REECE,**  
MD, Kids Brand Insight

**MYTH:** "One of the biggest misconceptions new inventors often have is the thought that becoming a professional inventor is going to be all fun, fun, fun. People sometimes go down this path so they can spend all their time creating. But the bottom line is that you need to be as much a hard-nosed sales person as you do a creative if you actually want any of your work to come to market – and the sales process is really, really grinding."

**MYTH:** "It's also a mistake to think one product brought to market will pay out for life. Products come and go. More than two thirds of toys on sale each year are new, so to become a professional inventor you need to be almost ridiculously prolific."

**MYTH:** "One last one... There's often a bright spark in toy companies – often in the finance department – who thinks the company could do better without paying inventor royalties. They are nearly always wrong. If you look at nearly every iconic toy that has sold for years and years in high volumes, there is nearly always an inventor behind it."



**DOUGAL GRIMES,**  
Vice President of Innovation and Inventor  
Relations, Spin Master

**MYTH:** "Toy companies require an invention or concept to have a patent to be submitted. The reality is that we review thousands of concepts a year which don't have a patent, or a patent application filed. Submitting the concept under NDA to a company maintains the confidentiality of the concept and – in most instances – the toy companies will work with the inventor on any IP protection such as patents should they license the invention."





# "Almost everything we develop is born out of our manufacturing roots."

**David Blanchard** – Vice President of Business Development and Design and Development Lead at GPI – on creativity, collaboration and the studio's vast design capabilities.



**David, great to catch up. To kick us off, talk us through how you came to be working in toys and games? Was it always on the cards?**

Ha ha! Good one! I wouldn't say it was "on the cards" exactly. I guess you could call taking the job at GPI more of a "roll of the dice!"

**We've officially peaked. The interview can only go downhill from here.**

Ha! Well, at the time, I was contemplating going back to school for a master's degree so I thought that I'd be stopping by GPI only temporarily. But I immediately got a taste of game development, sales and marketing with GPI's sister company The Haywire Group, which was sold to University Games in 2018. I absolutely loved the balance between the creative side and the business side of the industry. 15 years later, I still love it!

**GPI is maybe best known for the manufacturing side of the business. When it comes to the design side, what should companies know about GPI's capabilities?**  
Companies utilise our design and development services in a variety of ways. Sometimes it's

collaborative and behind the scenes, like the packaging design we helped Exploding Kittens with on their TOTY-nominated Cat and Mouth game. Other times our clients take advantage of our soup-to-nuts range of services: from ideation and playtesting all the way through to graphic design and manufacturing.

**Can you give us any examples of games you've worked on?**

We're really excited about a couple of new games we made for Big G Creative this year. Hangry and No Filter were on an endcap at Walgreens this past Q4, along with several other titles that involved us in either the development, graphic design, or manufacturing.

**Great stuff. Hangry and No Filter are both party games – is that the main type of concept you're pitching to companies?**

The games in our current portfolio are actually quite diverse. The common threads tend to include culturally relevant themes built from a foundation of tried-and-true play mechanics with a unique twist. Oh, and easy to understand rules so you're up and playing quickly!

Family party and light strategy games tend to come most naturally to our particular crew, so that's a sweet spot when a client asks us to design something for them.

**We should also mention you're open to collaboration with inventors – and helping new inventors too. What sort of ways do you like to collaborate?**

While most of the games in our portfolio were designed in-house, some were designed in collaboration with – or even exclusively by – an outside designer. We're fortunate to know a lot of great designers in the community just from being in the industry for so long, and we're happy to get some of their ideas in front of publishers they might not personally have access to.

Sometimes an inventor reaches out to GPI because they've been considering self-publishing and they need our manufacturing services... It's great to have this separate design and development arm where we can potentially pitch their game to other companies should they decide not to self-publish after all.

**On that, does the manufacturing arm of GPI inform your approach on the design side?**

Absolutely. Almost everything we develop is born out of our manufacturing roots. I've seen a lot of first-time inventors design and develop their game in a vacuum only to have their dreams of self-publishing crushed when they see how much it'll cost to produce.

Having the experience of quoting hundreds if not thousands of games over the years, we're constantly doing the math as we design a game to ensure we don't develop something that isn't economically viable.

**Yes, that makes total sense. Now, before we wrap things up, let me ask you this: How**

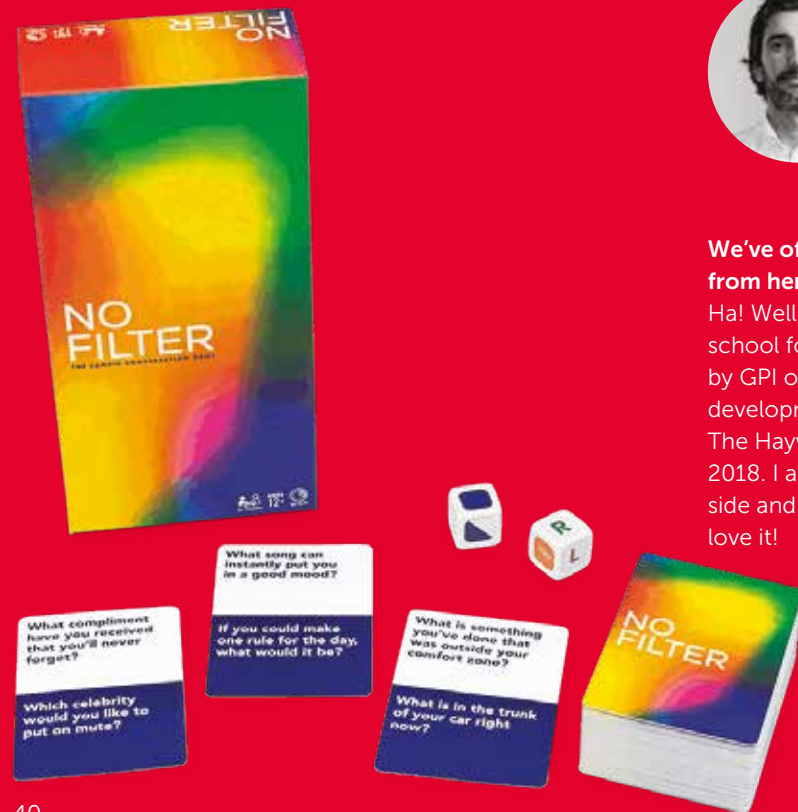
**does the GPI team fuel its creativity?**

We've got a talented group of people here. Whether it's discovering an exciting new play mechanic, having a fun idea for a theme, or even starting with a clever name and working backwards, our ideation sessions can be brutal for whoever is tasked with taking notes!

But having ideas is the easy part. Having the resources to turn an idea into a product people actually want to play is the work. Admittedly, it's pretty fun work!

**Finally, how can inventors or companies interested in collaborating reach out?**

Simply drop us a note at [info@madebygpi.com](mailto:info@madebygpi.com) – we'd love to discuss how we might collaborate with you!



# The Growing Importance of Professional Toy and Game Inventors

Kids Brand Insight's **Steve Reece** looks at why innovation and creativity are the order of the day – and what that means for the value and importance of the global inventor community.



There've never been fewer barriers to entering the toy and games market! That isn't to say that it's easy to create a product and bring it to market successfully... In some ways it's harder than ever to achieve success because the ease of market entry has led to a massive proliferation of products in market.

Standing out from the crowd is harder than ever. Established companies use their existing distribution strength and relationships with retailers to maintain their advantage, but increasingly product originators can circumvent traditional distribution by going straight to Amazon. With Amazon's market share growing substantially through the pandemic, this creates a bigger challenge to existing toy and game companies, as new entrants can find success without playing the game the old way.

Another major trend which is ongoing in our business is some manufacturing moving out of China. China's economy has advanced beyond the point where labour is cheap enough to be routinely deployed to produce toys for \$3 or \$4 per unit. China is increasingly geared up for manufacturing higher-end products – today China is better suited to manufacturing real cars versus toy cars!

One of the implications of this trend is that factories which have only produced toys for the past three or four decades

are suddenly faced with an existential problem: if making other people's products is no longer guaranteed to be the viable business it was, how do they use what they know to stay in business? Many are shifting to produce their own toys, but often lack the prerequisite creative skills to produce compelling products. This leads to yet more product proliferation as reams of generic 'me too' product churn out into the market.

The reality then is that quality of concept has and will continue to be critical for ongoing success. One of the major advantages that companies can deploy is true innovation, creativity and professional reworking of known formulae to create and bring to market products which are more likely to rise above the general melee.

These products have huge play and entertainment value and with obvious commercial potential. This is where the professional inventing community is as important as it ever has been. In a world of ever more toys and games on offer, originality and innovation only grow in importance.

Another area in which professional inventors are well set to aid toy and games companies in changing times is in the realm of product marketing. Traditionally, companies asked inventors for TV advertisable features. The prevailing marketing hook has slowly shifted somewhat from this focus

to facilitating virality and funny or entertaining user-generated content. In a market where so many companies are trying to secure virality and stand out, professional creative excellence is ever more critical. Successful professional inventors are usually as focused on how a product will be sold in and marketed out as they are on the product itself.

Looking forward in these fast-moving times, it's hard to predict how technology will change the role of inventors in the toy and game business, but where many back-office functions and manufacturing processes will be

revolutionised – and jobs made redundant by the ongoing artificial intelligence revolution – experts in AI broadly agree that true creativity is unlikely to come from AI... At least not in our lifetimes!

As such, anyone embarking on a career as a professional inventor seems likely to have a good future ahead. As ever, though, success in this sphere depends on ideating multiple 'wow!' concepts with a built-in marketing mechanism, embracing the sales grind and commercial understanding.





# Does the Metaverse Matter, and Should You Be Paying Attention?

Gallium Ventures' **Heather Delaney** looks at what the metaverse means to toy and game designers – and its potential to re-energise the ideation process.



Let's start with the basics. The technological definition of a metaverse is a "Hypothesized iteration of the internet, supporting persistent online 3D virtual environments through conventional personal computing, as well as virtual and augmented reality headsets."

Sounds complicated, right?

In practice, we've been living with them for some years already. It's all about creating digital worlds where we can interact both with other people, and the digital world itself. Think World of Warcraft, Fortnite, and so on. They each have dynamic worlds, characters – even economic systems – and are all early iterations of the potential for metaverses.

So where does the potential lie for the toy and gaming industry? As things currently stand, there isn't the low barrier to entry for products involving metaverses that would encourage mass consumer adoption, as the right equipment is required. Although a VR headset and the software or

platform for the metaverse isn't the only way to experience it, many of the more exciting parts are accessible via headsets. This, therefore, will exclude some demographics. High-cost, fragile and immersive technology isn't necessarily the right format for toys aimed at children who love to smash things, for example.

But there are many uses right now for inventors, creatives and in the ideation process.

While toy and gaming products which force the user into the metaverse are unlikely to make it to physical stores in the immediate future, there is great potential in creating new products – and launching products which originated in the metaverse. We can already see this in the pitch process. Creators and inventors can use the virtual world found within the metaverse to showcase products to key-decision makers.

This makes for a far more engaging experience on both sides, as there's a physicality that just can't be captured in a Zoom meeting... And the manufacturer is more likely to remember it over the hundreds of other video calls.

There's also great potential in ideation, as the metaverse is designed with collaboration in mind. It can be a complete conversion of the IRL experience into the digital realm. Just as you hop between whiteboard ideas, drawing diagrams and concepts in a real meeting space, so can you do so in the metaverse. Remote creativity no longer has to be a series of static talking heads... Instead it can be a dynamic and engaging experience once again. Assuming you have a good Wi-Fi connection, that is!

Meanwhile, there's also a massive opportunity for product testing. We know consumers are willing to pay high sums for digital-only products, including hundreds – if not tens of thousands – on unique items to enhance their avatars' accessories and fashion sense. So it stands to reason that toy makers can use the interest for such items as a way to test the market out and understand if consumers will buy the real-world version of the digital product. Less risk and fewer costs while still generating revenue.

It's certain that a creative industry like toy and games will embrace the metaverse, but it's still early stages when thinking about products since it currently only appeals to a small subsection of key demographics. As it develops, this will naturally change – but there's still scope for the metaverse today.

Right now, the metaverse is a key differentiator for designers and inventors. In the immediate future, it'll be a way to test products. But the real potential comes with mass adoption, where the toy and gaming industry will be able to develop innovative ideas with the metaverse at its heart.



## Fisher-Price's Nikki Bauman on understanding inventors, overthinking ideas – and killing creativity

Nikki Bauman, Manager of Inventor Relations, discusses Fisher-Price's process... And not building walls.

**Hi Nikki, thanks for joining us. When we first spoke, we discussed Fisher-Price's origins, and the nostalgia the brand instills in people. How is it moving forward today?**

Fisher-Price is moving forward today as it always has: with eyes on the future of play, researching new trends, while still maintaining the quality in the products that everyone knows and expects. We keep the brand fresh by not only doing a lot of research but also by having kids test ideas through our Play Lab.

**That's your internal playtesting process?**

Right. We bring in babies, toddlers and preschoolers to test and play with everything we're working on...

Kids are amazingly honest when it comes to telling us what they really think! They help us stay fresh and on trend.

**So when inventors bring you new items, what do you look for?**

We're looking for concepts that surprise us, something we've never seen before. A new mechanism for our preschool groups that's unexpected... A new way for the littlest of babies to play, or help them develop gross motor skills. Fisher-Price products are everything

from 0-5: Baby Gear to Imaginext. There are so many opportunities and brand teams for the inventors to create concepts for – something for everyone.

**And what happens when you see a product that's "too old" for you?**

If someone submits a concept that's "too old", we can suggest who to submit it to on the Mattel side! We work very closely with our Mattel counterparts on a daily basis and can help guide inventors to where we feel their ideas would best fit.

**When an idea gets your attention, then, what's the process?**

We have standing meetings with all our brand-team leads to show them new concepts as they come in. We either show the concepts ourselves, or have meetings with the inventors presenting directly. If a team's interested in something, they review it, brainstorm against it, bring the model in to test with kids, show it to their team and discuss next steps. If it's something they want to put into the line, our internal designers, engineers, packaging designers and marketing teams are amazing at bringing concepts to life!

**You don't just whisk it off and come back to the inventor in a year?!**

No! We love it when we can get inventors' help along the way. That's where I feel my experience as a designer has helped me – I understand both sides. I can speak the design language and understand the brand team's needs and give feedback to inventors. It's a thrill to see an inventor's idea on shelf!

**You sound very passionate about that! Tell us about your experience in design...**

I was a product designer for Fisher-Price for 13 years before moving to the IR team! I'm lucky in that my team looks to me if anything on the more creative side is needed... From the look of our IR portal – where inventors submit concepts – to logos, invitations, news articles, presentations... I live in Excel sheets

***"Remove the barriers, free your mind and just come up with a great idea. The rest of it will fall into place..."***

and Power Point presentations, but always try to make them look cool! I try to stay creative in everything I do.

**In your experience, what's the biggest hurdle to creativity?**

The biggest hurdle to creativity is overthinking. You can get in your own way if you're always thinking about the safety, the engineering... You can start asking the right questions at the wrong time: is there a slot? What's the price point? Where will this go?

Because that's what we live every day in the reality of product design, right?

**Right! Presumably then, you feel that builds walls; that you can box yourself in?**

Exactly: if you're overthinking, you can't let yourself "go there" to come up with new ideas. Remove the barriers, free your mind and just come up with a great idea. The rest of it will fall into place as you go through the development process. If we're always handcuffing ourselves to the rules from the start, that next great idea may never come to light.

**Beautifully put. Nikki, we need to wrap this up but can you tell me one thing about Fisher-Price that I might not have heard before?**

I can tell you that inventors have been an integral part of our product development from the very beginning... We have a copy of a letter in our files – dated July 13, 1930 – that was written by one of our founders, Herm Fisher, to another, Irving Price. In it, he's discussing the royalty and advance terms for an inventor idea!

**In July 1930? Well, that's amazing... That's less than a month after they founded the company, right?**

Right! So to quote my boss, Dave Harris, "When we celebrate the longevity of our company, we celebrate inventors as well. They've been a part of our DNA from the absolute beginning."



# RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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

2021 saw James Austin-Smith promoted to the role of Director of Innovation at Moose Toys, where he has been responsible for leading the innovation team through a challenging pandemic year. Despite these unprecedented circumstances, James ensured that creativity and playfulness were at the heart of his team's process and spearheaded the creation of one of 2021's smash-hit toys in Magic Mixies. "Creative, generous and genuinely passionate about great toys, James is one of the industry's proper design stars – and Magic Mixies is a knockout!" said one nominator.



**HEATH SABER,**  
Inventor Relations Manager,  
Moose Toys

Passionate about toys and the inventor community, Heath Saber has worked in inventor relations at Moose Toys since 2016. "Aside from being a wonderful person, Heath has a way of communicating the needs of his company while adding his own creative angle to it," said one of his nominators. They continued: "Heath knows how to get the most out of inventors to find those special concepts."



**ADAM HOCHERMAN,**  
Vice President, New  
Business,  
PlayMonster

A popular figure in the world of inventor relations, PlayMonster's Adam Hocherman is consistently cited as a major inventor champion who provides meaningful feedback on each and every concept pitched – unprompted! "Adam has worked tirelessly to bring PlayMonster to the top of mind for inventors" stated one nominator, while another added: "He is one of the most courteous and professional inventor relations execs out there; truly respectful to inventors and understands the implications of his requests and actions."



**SARA FURAY,**  
Director of Inventor Relations,  
Goliath

Goliath's Sara Furay has been a key figure in the company's impressive growth over recent years. Sara has helped Goliath form great partnerships with the inventor community and, as one advocate puts it, "She works with inventors to take good concepts and turn them into great ones, like the Sequence Stacks game or Rattlesnake Jake", adding: "Sara genuinely wants to learn from every encounter and help everyone around her achieve their maximum potential."

**DOM GUBITOSI,**  
Director of Product Design,  
Fisher-Price Infant, Mattel

Dom Gubitosi's expertise in the toy industry stretches far and wide having spent almost 30 years at Fisher-Price. Starting as an Associate Designer, Dom has supported Preschool, Baby gear, Power Wheels, and now Infant Toy. As Director of Product Design in the Infant category, Dom has been the lead behind many innovative new platforms and TOTY award-winning products, while also being a true champion for the inventor community. As one nominator puts it: "He challenges his teams to work collaboratively with inventors on concepts from the very beginning. This helps create the very best products on the market."



**ED DUNCAN,**  
SVP Design,  
Mattel

Ed Duncan is a toy industry veteran, kicking off his career at Fisher-Price and then working for Hasbro, Disney and TOMY until his most recent role at Mattel where he heads up Inventor Relations, along with the Action Figures, Games and Plush Design categories. "Ed's big picture strategic thinking and flawless design execution bring continuous innovation to Mattel's design process and products," said one supporter. They added: "His vast global toy experience and intimate knowledge of play makes him a key contributor to Mattel's culture of creativity and curiosity."



**BRENT GEPPERT,**  
Senior Product Manager,  
Educational Insights

Educational Insights prides itself on strong inventor relationships across toys, games, and learning products. Brent Geppert – Senior Product Manager – has taken on the charge to manage a roster of award-winning collaborations for some of the firm's best-selling products. "Inventors love working with Brent and Educational Insights because they proudly feature product inventors on their packaging and share their stories with the world," said one fan.



**ALEX REYNOLDS,**  
Head of Research &  
Development,  
Casdon

2021 was a big year for Alex Reynolds, as he moved from Goliath to Casdon to take on the role of Head of Research & Development. Alex has worked in the world of toys and licensing for over 20 years, having previously held roles at CPLG, Vivid and Hasbro. At Casdon he is tasked with leading the creative development of compelling and exciting ranges for children. "Passionate about his craft and always pushing to develop the best play experiences possible, Casdon is lucky to have Alex," said one nominator.



**SIMONE MONAHAN,**  
Head of UK Product  
Development, Cartamundi

Since joining Cartamundi in 2020 as Head of UK Product Development, Simone Monahan has worked on several award-winning games and product ranges, while also cultivating positive relationships with the global inventor community. "Simone has done a fantastic job working with inventors, bringing ideas to life and winning awards," said one of her fans. Her work from the past 12 months includes the Twisted History trivia game, and the award-winning Shuffle Junior Into The Wild range.

**PHIL SAGE,**  
Sr Director Hasbro SPARK Inventor Relations,  
Toy and Technology, Hasbro

Phil Sage re-joined the Hasbro SPARK Inventor Relations team in 2020 to lead Toy and Technology and has been instrumental in forging new partnerships across Hasbro's Fashion, Pre-school, Nerf and Play-Doh categories. As one nominator puts it: "Phil's passion for driving innovation is obvious to all who work with him." Phil's experience and broad network have helped to accelerate more and bigger inventor ideas to market throughout the past 12 months.







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

Identity Games' JM Duparc is dedicated to bringing unique play experiences to the market. In 2021, JM and his team bolstered the successful Escape Room The Game brand with two new titles: Escape Room The Game: Puzzle Adventures and Escape Your House. Both products won the Dutch Toy of the Year award in the family and puzzle categories and were nominated for Toy of the Year in Norway. The cherry on top of a great 2021 came when JM was named the TAGIE Hassenfeld Family Initiatives Humanitarian Award Honouree for his work helping homeless people with The Amsterdam Project TV show.



#### JAZWARES' BLUEJ TEAM

BlueJ is Jazwares' innovation arm for Blue Sky development. The team works on creating the next blockbuster toy hits. This super group is

stacked with designers, business development, inventor relations and executive leadership. They have the focus and resources of the entire organisation to develop product from both external inventor partnerships and internal initiatives.



**DAIZO UEHARA,**  
VP Hasbro SPARK Inventor Relations,  
Action and Asia Business Development, Hasbro

Hasbro's Daizo Uehara is a 25-year-veteran of the toy industry, with an impressive career leading all aspects of bringing great toys to market. Most recently, he led the Transformers and Beyblade development teams through some of the most successful years in the brands' histories. 2020 saw Daizo join the Hasbro SPARK Inventor Relations team, leading inventor relations for the Action Brands category and Asia New Business Development. One nominator states: "Daizo's industry connections and development know-how have made him extremely effective in growing Hasbro's Action Brands inventor partnerships, as well as deepening the company's connections across Asia."



**HAZEL REYNOLDS,**  
Founder and CEO, Gamely

As the Founder and CEO of Gamely, Hazel Reynolds has been the driving force behind the firm's portfolio of popular card games, which now includes the likes of Randomise, Soundiculous and The Pretender. 2021 saw Gamely launch its latest title, Six Second Scibbles, and it became the company's fastest selling game to date. Last year also saw Gamely strike up an exciting partnership with Moose Toys, who will be taking the bestselling Soundiculous global this year. "Hazel is always full of ideas, cares about people and wants to make a difference in the world," said one nominator. It's something that's evident in the way Gamely doubled its Games for Good programme in 2021, a feat which saw the company donate more than 5,000 free games to charities and good causes.



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**SAHAD RIVERA SONDA,**  
Toy Designer,  
Educational Insights

Educational Insights' Design & Drill Bolt Buddies brand has grown substantially with the aptly timed release of the Bolt Buddies Fire Truck, Police Motorcycle, and Rescue Helicopter. These help kids develop fine motor skills and role-play as first responders. Sahad Rivera Sonda was instrumental in creating these stand-out designs for characters, sidekicks, drillable vehicles and playset extras that complement the Design & Drill's thrill of using real-working tools. Sahad was also responsible for creating the award-winning innovative packaging design, where kids are encouraged to keep the box as it unfolds into a playset scene.



**TONY LANGONE,**  
Senior Director, Design &  
Engineering,  
Hasbro

Hasbro's Tony Langone is a development leader for Hasbro Gaming, where he manages and mentors mechanical, electrical and design engineers at the company. Recent highlights for Tony over the past year include the launch of Foosketball and re-launch of Bulls-Eye Ball, where he provided technical oversight and leadership to the design and engineering teams. Tony is also a big champion for sustainability, leading efforts around plastic-free packaging and sustainable sourcing.



**DAVID EMBLIN,**  
Senior Product Designer,  
Moose Toys

David Emblin has been at Moose Toys since the Worlds Apart days and brings a creative energy and years of experience to the developments he's involved in. In the last year, he led the design of the Cutie Cuts offshoot from the hit Scruff-A-Luvs brand. The item required a unique manufacturing set up and offers a never-before-seen hair-cutting play for kids. The design had to straddle complex challenges around QA, manufacturing feasibilities and costing, all amidst the pandemic, but came out looking and working brilliantly to strong sales and great reviews. "Dave brings a boundless positivity and can-do approach to the innovation process at Moose. He is a champion of quality in his products and the experiences they deliver to kids," said one nominator.



**JEFF HALL,**  
Chief Creative Officer,  
Toikido

2021 saw the launch of a brand-new toy and entertainment company in Toikido. The firm quickly made an impression with toys and deals signed for IP like the smash-hit social-deduction game Among Us and Netflix's Back to the Outback. Alongside CEO Darran Garnham, Jeff leads the creative side of the company and he was instrumental in working with IP owners to bring product into retail in less than six months. Toikido now has over 100 SKUs on shelves in over 100 countries; the future looks bright.



**TANYA THOMPSON,**  
Senior Director Hasbro SPARK Inventor Relations, Hasbro Gaming, Hasbro

Hasbro's Tanya Thompson continues to be one of the most dynamic and prolific inventor relations representatives in the industry. Tanya's experience and expertise are well known and in the past year she has brought to market award-winning games like Ka-Blab!, Foosketball, Not Your Ma's Jong and many more. "Not only is she passionate about bringing new ideas to market, she's worked tirelessly to help to elevate the inventor community and bring on board the next generation of toy and game inventors," said one nominator.



THE  
MARKETING  
STORE

### THE MARKETING STORE

At The Marketing Store London resides a small product design team solely dedicated to designing innovative, fun and engaging Happy Meal toys for McDonald's on a global scale. With this huge scale comes a great sense of responsibility, specifically towards sustainability. The team spearheaded the introduction of fibre and other sustainable materials into Happy Meal programs to achieve McDonald's ambition of removing non-sustainable plastics from Happy Meal toys. The team has had to change their entire process, refine their capabilities and make a huge change to their offerings and the toys are now live around the world. Ranges that hit the UK market in 2021 included many innovative milestones, such as the first paper-only Happy Meal program with Top Trumps, and the first paper-only construction toy Happy Meal program with Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous.

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



"Rich Mazel and Dougal Grimes are two of the industry's brightest sparks: passionate, creative and true inventor champions." This is just one nomination received for Spin Master's inventor relations gurus, who were also described as "Powerful allies to inventors everywhere". Recent highlights for the firm include games

like Grouch Couch, Disney Sidekicks and Curb Your Enthusiasm: A Pretty, Pretty, Pretty Good Party Game. On the toy side, inventor success stories include IDEO's WeWearCute Inkfluencer Click N Color Marker Set, Q&Q Japan's Peek-a-Roo and Fuse's Mega Batman Playset.



# DESIGN AGENCIES & INVENTION STUDIOS

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#### OPEN 2 DESIGN

The team at Open 2 Design – Matt Burtonwood, Ben Williams and Verity Warner – combine industry-leading design capabilities with a thriving invention arm. Looking at the past 12 months, Open 2 Design's

licensed line-up included Ginger Fox's Play Your Number and Top Gear: Fastest Lap, as well as TOMY's Pop-Up Pirate card-game, Ahoy There. Elsewhere, highlights on the design studio side include working with the Fisher-Price team on Little People Play House and the Little People Frozen Castle, work on TOMY's Toomies Jurassic World and projects with some of Spin Master's outdoor lines. "Open 2 are able to work on pretty much anything and it's done at a level that is consistently fantastic," said one nominator, adding: "They are the best at what they do."



#### PEGGY BROWN CREATIVE

The team at Peggy Brown Creative has had another fruitful year. Made up of Miranda Branley, Connor Kriha, Kim Henry, Marty Brown and Peggy Brown, the woman-owned, woman-led invention studio won a TAGIE Award for Game Innovator of the Year in 2021. They had a raft of games and puzzles launch, including

Jay@Play's Hideaway Pets and The Canadian Group's Cat's Pyjamas. The studio also had a stellar year when it comes to working with brands, having created the Kraft/Heinz Variety Pack with Big G Creative, as well as Gudetama and Aggretsuko games with ReMarks.



#### JIM MCCAFFERTY, President/CEO, JMP Creative

As President and CEO of JMP Creative, Jim McCafferty has continually spearheaded the efforts to bring unique and magical toys and games to the market. With a challenging climate in the toy business, he and his team of inventors found ways to bring innovation to a raft of toy company clients. While Jim is JMP's secret weapon, the collective team is adept in tracking trends, conceptual development, toy design, marketing and pitching to toy companies. These traits made 2021 a fruitful year for JMP, with inventions sold and placed to companies such as Spin Master, Crayola, WowWee and Blue Orange Games.



#### FUN-DAMENTAL INVENTION

Gary Pyper, Stacey Pyper and Toby Kinsey make up the team at Fun-Damental Invention. The studio enjoyed a stellar year in 2021, with items launched including Buffalo Games' You're on Mute and John Adams' Giddy Up. Last year saw the team expand into a new studio space and, alongside continued success for their Windy Knickers game, their work on Giddy Up also got a TAGIE nomination for Game Innovator of the Year. "Gary and the team are always thinking outside the box thematically, with an eye to rising trends," said one nominator, adding: "Fun-Damental always comes to the table with a toy chest stuffed with new opportunities to excite and delight."



#### FUSE

"Constantly great," "A powerhouse" and "Top of their game" were just a few things mentioned by nominators of the prolific invention firm, Fuse – winners of the Design Agency/Invention Studio of the Year award at the 2021 Play Creators Awards. The team's highlights from the past year include Jazwares' Micro Machines Super Van City play-set, Fisher-Price's Bat-Tech BatBot and the Deluxe Batman play-set with Spin Master. "The team at Fuse are incredible partners on any portfolio and are sure to bring the magical marvels of flip-down, fold-out, spring-activated or how-did-it-do-that wizardry to any item they create," said one fan of the company.



#### CATAPULT CONCEPTS

Westley Ciaramella and Keith Millman of Catapult Concepts enjoyed another prolific year in 2021, with TV drivers for their

Barbie Fast Cast Clinic, WWE Wrekk'n' Kickout Ring and Flying Feathers game, all with Mattel. Elsewhere, Catapult enjoyed success in the feature plush space with Mattel's Marvel City Swinging Spider-Man plush, and in the world of RC with Sharper Image's new Split Twister RC. Looking ahead, this year will see product land from Catapult with TOMY, Simba Dickie and more.



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

"David's talents combine the creativity of an artist and the precision of an engineer with the joyfulness and curiosity of a playful kid." So says one nominator of David Yakos, co-owner of the invention studio Streamline Design and engineering firm Salient Technologies. The past year has seen David and Streamline sign over a dozen toys and games with some of the industry's leading players. 2021 also saw David launch Hidden Role, a weekly podcast that interviews toy and game designers. "Simply put, he's one of the most creative people I know," said another nominator.



#### BANG ZOOM

As one nominator puts it: "Bang Zoom is a key partner to any company's growth trajectory." The internationally renowned inventing firm had

another fruitful year in 2021, with items launched including interactive basketball toy B.B. Hoopster with Fisher-Price and Crossed Signals, a fast-paced light and sound matching game with Mattel. "Bang Zoom's expertise in mechanical marvels gives them the edge in big-ticket interactive items," said one fan of their work, adding: "Bang Zoom takes partnership to the next level and makes working together a breeze."



#### ROBERT VICTOR, CEO, Kite & Rocket

Robert Victor and his band of experts at Kite & Rocket have been nothing short of prolific for Hasbro. "Robert's a relentless innovator and a humble giant of the industry. He dedicates his time to solving the impossible, forging opportunities with the NERF development teams," said one nominator. His team's recent innovation is evident across Rival, Elite and ULTRA brands.





**ALEX PRIETO,**  
Director of Fun,  
ToyZone & Eolo Toys

"A great motivator," "One of the biggest smile-makers in the industry" and "A true innovator" were just some of the ways nominators described Alex Prieto. Success

stories from 2021 include the launch of the Super Masked toy line, the success of Jiggly Pets and the collaboration with BOTI on Marvel Battle Cubes.



#### GPI

After manufacturing games for over 40 years, GPI – Grand Prix International, Inc. – launched their Design and Development Team in 2018 when they sold their sister company, The Haywire Group, to University Games. The team – made up of Ryan Noonan and David Blanchard – hit its stride in 2021, collaborating with Big G Creative, Exploding Kittens, Project Genius, and others. A fall endcap at over 6,000 Walgreens stores in Q4 2021 showcased some of their work, with over a third of the SKUs being designed, developed, engineered, and/or manufactured by GPI. As well as designing games to spec and inventing, the team's services span playtesting sessions, graphic design services and rule writing. Surrounding the design team are manufacturing coordinators, safety, freight and industry experts rounding out a turnkey suite of services for the toy and game industry.



#### NEXTOY

Nextoy has been a leading creative force in the toy industry for over four decades, and the company has enjoyed another successful time of it over the past 12 months.

Recent highlights includes Spirograph Animator with PlayMonster, Spirit Stackin' Apples with Mattel and the Will Shortz Games range with Andrews McMeel. Elsewhere, Nextoy collaborated with the makers of Klasko on Hero Hockey, and enjoyed success with MagiColour with John Adams.

#### DESIGN EDGE

For over 30 years, Design Edge has been a leading toy and game development company. As top-tier designers, consultants and manufacturers, the team designs products and packaging, provides quality goods at targeted retail price points and advises on the pursuit of opportunities in licensing, sales and distribution. In 2021, Design Edge was nominated as Vendor of the Year for their packaging design work carried out for both Goliath and Hasbro.

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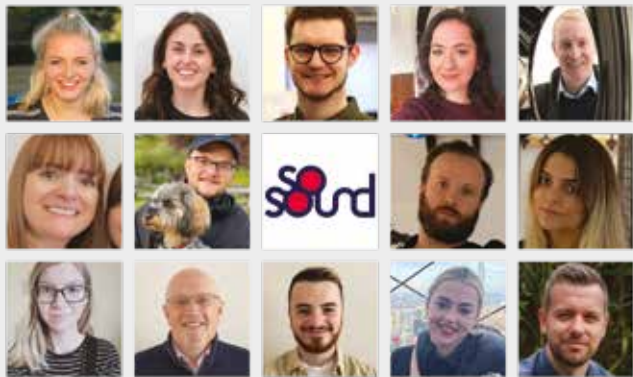
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**THE FANTASTIC FACTORY**  
Steve Evans and David Snow run The Fantastic Factory, one of the industry's top game-invention hubs. "Steve deserves recognition for his tireless work that delivers on great gameplay and wins awards," said one nominator. Another added: "David is a reliable source of fun, trendy game concepts; a creativity machine!". One recent highlight for The Fantastic Factory is the growth and expansion of their award-winning Trapped games range, which continues to welcome new fans.



**SO SOUND**  
2021 saw So Sound continue to bolster its reputation as one of the UK's leading design studios and invention houses. Led by TJ Morrison, So Sound's design division has enjoyed a successful last 12 months, with new team members adding strings to the company's bow. Highlights include the launch of party game inventions like Unpopular Opinions and Grab a Pizza That with Cartamundi. The firm's audio division also had a successful year, with one nominator stating: "Any work entrusted to So Sound always feels like it's their main priority and is given the care and focus to ensure it's perfect; they remain our first choice every time when it comes to audio projects for all our teams around the globe!"



**BIG MONSTER TOYS**  
A titan of the toy invention landscape, the team at Big Monster Toys continues to innovate and impress. "Big Monster Toys has a wonderful eye for innovation by taking the ordinary to the extraordinary," said one nominator, adding: "It's no wonder we're all eager to work with Big Monster Toys!" 2021 also brought the team a Toy Innovator of the Year TAGIE nomination for their work on Mattel's Polly Pocket Flip & Find range.



**IDEO**  
IDEO is one of the biggest players in the world of toy and game invention. As one fan of their work states: "IDEO's expertise in all categories makes them a top-ranked go-to for creating concepts that break the moulds and challenge the boundaries of what's possible in play." Recent highlights for the firm include creating the WeWearCute Inkfluencer Click N Color Marker Set for Spin Master, while IDEO's Pictionary Air got a magical revamp in 2021 with the release of Pictionary Air Harry Potter.



**TRICLOPS STUDIO**  
Rob Ames and Luc Hudson run Triclops Studio, one the industry's top design consultancies and invention hubs. Proof of just how highly the industry thinks of them came in 2021 when they won the Design Icon award at Mojo Nation's Play Creators Awards. "Rob and Luc are creative powerhouses; genuinely innovative, a dream to work with and great fun too," said one nominator. Another added: "Somehow the title of Design Icon still doesn't quite do them justice."



**RICHARD HEAYES,**  
Founder,  
PlayLenz & Heayes Design  
  
"One of best around" is just one of several nominations we received for Richard Heayes. Among many fruitful collaborations for Richard in 2021, highlights include a range of licensed games with Cartamundi that gave Jaws, Back to the Future and Knight Rider the card-game treatment. These saw Richard nominated for Game Designer of the Year (Licensed Product) at last year's Play Creators Awards. Elsewhere, Silhouettes with Cartamundi enjoyed a successful launch and Richard worked on more titles with Tactic Games, including Slingshot to Mars and the Crime Scene line of mystery-puzzle games.



**COMPANY5**  
Company5, made up of Carrie Burns, Damian Mucaro and Michele DeGrace, is one of the industry's leading design studios, with capabilities spanning everything from logo creation and branding to product development and 3D modelling. "Company5 have built, developed and ideated some great concepts for license," said one fan of their work, adding: "Easy developers to work with, the team boasts a go-above-and-beyond attitude."



**SEVEN TOWNS**  
Internationally renowned invention studio Seven Towns had another stellar year, filled with licenses and award wins. The team was involved in the successful return of Boggins, and having won Toy Designer of the Year at 2020's Play Creators Awards, Seven Towns won the accolade again in 2021, this time for its collaboration with BOTI on Stuff-a-Loons. The year ended on a high for the studio with the news that Seven Towns' Elizabeth Moody is nominated for the Deal Maker title at the upcoming 2022 Wonder Women Awards.



# INDEPENDENT CREATIVES

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**KIM VANDENBROUCKE,**  
Owner,  
Brainy Chick Inc

Prolific inventor Kim Vandenbroucke enjoyed another fruitful year in 2021, with games licensed and launched including Help! with Amigo, Fiesty Dice with Mindware and Share and Sparkle Unicorns with Peaceable Kingdom. As one nominator puts it: “Kim is a gifted designer with a mind for maths and game invention that she uses to create outstandingly balanced titles with a sense for shareable moments.”



**KENN MORTON,**  
Founder & Chief Creative Officer,  
KidKenn

One of Hasbro’s big new games of 2021 was Foosketball, a fast-paced, head-to-head skill game that combines foosball and basketball. Foosketball came from KidKenn, a family business led by Kenn Morton, formerly VP of Design at Fisher-Price. “The ingenious design of Foosketball brings tabletop play to a whole new level,” said one nominator. Foosketball also saw Kenn pick up the award for Game Designer of the Year (Kids/Family Game) at Mojo Nation’s Play Creators Awards.



**GEOFF HOUSE,**  
Owner,  
Tricky

In 2021, Tricky’s Geoff House saw a number of his inventions land on shelves, including Hide ‘n Cheek and Cluckle from Big G Creative and John Adams’ Flip Frog, all co-invented with Big Ideas’ Simon Skelton and Ruth Elliott. Elsewhere, Geoff’s Googly Eyes Spin was published by Goliath, while Drumond Park’s Fill Your Pants – a collaboration between Tricky and Sublevel Studios – hit the shelves. “Geoff is an all-round awesome person, creative thinker and tinkerer,” said one nominator, adding: “His ideas are fantastic, he’s constantly open to feedback and will do anything needed to provide support.”

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**JOHANNES SICH,**  
Co-Founder, Hard Boiled Games

2021 was a huge year for Johannes Sich and his team at Hard Boiled Games, as their MicroMacro: Crime City game launched to great acclaim and success. This includes picking up the prestigious Spiel des Jahres award, as well as a Play Innovator of the Year gong at Mojo Nation’s Play Creators Awards. The game comes with a giant city map, filled to the brim with characters, crimes and clues. Players have to scour the map to discover crime scenes, seek out suspects and, ultimately, crack 16 cases of increasing difficulty. “A large black-and-white poster and a few cards – that’s all MicroMacro: Crime City needs to captivate players,” read a statement from the Spiel des Jahres judges.



**ARIEL RUBIN & JULIANA MORENO PATEL,**  
Creators of Fun, Wild Optimists

Ariel Rubin and Juliana Moreno Patel are the design duo at Wild Optimists, who first burst onto the scene in 2018 with Mattel’s Escape Room In A Box: The Werewolf Experiment. The duo’s output has grown quickly with four new games launched in 2021. Two of these are brand extensions for Mattel’s Escape Room In A Box called Time Drifters: Kira’s Story and Time Drifters: Isabel’s Story. Inspired by quarantine, these games boast unique puzzles and materials, and players can unlock a third game by completing the mysteries in both Kira’s Story and Isabel’s Story. Elsewhere, Ariel and Juliana licensed Crimes & Capers: Lady Leona’s Will and Crimes & Capers: High School Hijinks to Renegade Games. Both have been credited with “reinventing the mystery party genre.”





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

A prolific inventor, Shenanigans' Jeremy Posner had a great 2021, with a record number of contracts signed. Last year also saw several of his products hit shelves, including Bluffaneer from Big G Creative, Beavis & Butt-Head: The Great Cornholio Game from Goliath, and Words Over Easy from Winning Moves. Jeremy also dipped a toe in the world of self-publishing, launching the card game Bunch of Butts with Ken Gruhl. "A strong sense for gaming mechanics allows Jeremy to approach even the toughest challenges with ease," said one fan of his work.



**ANDREW HARMAN,**  
Chief Creative,  
Yay Games

Andrew Harman is a prolific game designer, consultant and publisher, who enjoyed recent success as the inventor behind Gibsons' successful Transport for London-branded game, Connecting London. Released in 2021, it has been a hit with TfL fans and sold out in the run up to Christmas. "Andrew has been a dream partner," said one nominator, adding: "He took on every challenge thrown at him, conquered them and the end result is a fantastic game."



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

Making Things Studio's Fi Murray is regularly cited as one of the industry's top sources of toy and game concepts, design nous and all-round creativity. Alongside testimonials like "Superstar," "Powerhouse" and "A great collaborator," another nominator stated: "Fi is a wonderful person who makes and delivers great concepts, mixing tremendous industry insights with a great outlook and approach to her craft."



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

Regularly cited as a leading figure in the world of toy and game illustration and packaging design, Kenny Kiernan has enjoyed another good year in 2021. As well as collaborating with inventors on concept art, the past 12 months have also seen Kenny work on projects with companies including Spin Master, Funko, Super7 and Far Out Toys.

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**MARY JO REUTTER,**  
President & Founder,  
You-Betcha Interactive

Driven by the goal of inspiring creative play, the award-winning Mary Jo Reutter is a popular figure in the world of game invention. 2021 saw one of Mary's games – Even Steven's Odd – get revamped into Dice of Fury with Educational Insights. Boasting an updated look and feel, the game encourages all-play action and fast thinking, and saw Mary get nominated for Game Designer of the Year (Party Game) at Mojo Nation's Play Creators Awards.



**GALACTIC SNEEZE**

2021 saw a raft of games land from Sara Farber and Bryan Wilson of the creative studio, Galactic Sneeze. These included a trio of new games from Spin Master, each based on hit TV shows and brands. Love is Blind takes the Netflix reality show into the party game space, Curb Your Enthusiasm: A Pretty, Pretty, Pretty Good Party Game tasks players with embracing their inner Larry David, while Netflix: Trending Now sees players create the next big show for the streaming giant.



**DARREN LEE PHILLIPSON,**  
Toy and Content Development Architect,  
Design\_Lead\_Play\_

2021 was a banner year for Darren Lee Phillipson, as he launched his own creative studio, Design\_Lead\_Play\_. In year one, Darren has worked across the toy industry as well as with several animation studios, with clients including Retail Monster, What Do You Meme? and Mondo TV. "Darren is already doing great things with Design\_Lead\_Play\_," said one nominator, adding: "He's a creative powerhouse."



**JEFF ARNOLD,**  
Owner and Creative Director,  
Sponge Creative

Jeff Arnold, Owner and Creative Director at Sponge Creative, has spent decades involved in the prototyping and production of models for an array of the world's leading toy companies. "Jeff always goes above and beyond what is required," said one nominator. Another added: "He's one of the best model makers in the business."



**ANDREW & JACK LAWSON,** Inventors

Andrew and Jack Lawson are the inventing duo behind games like Imaginiff, Ninja Rush and Moods. 2021 proved to be a stand-out year for the Lawson brothers as they licensed a new party game to Hasbro called Ka-Blab! The fast, frenzied word game enjoyed a successful debut, becoming one of the biggest family game launches for Hasbro Gaming in years and winning Andrew and Jack the Game Designer of the Year (Party Game) award at Mojo Nation's Play Creators Awards.

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**PHIL HARVEY,**  
Illustrator

Flexible, quick and really, really good, Phil Harvey is one of the industry's leading freelance illustrators. He can draw in multiple styles to any level of finish, and takes direction well. He also has a highly imaginative head on his shoulders, so can run with a brief and explore multiple avenues independently. "Phil has been a key contributor to the character design of many of our leading toy brands and it's common to find his artwork adorning our final packaging too," said one nominator.



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

"Incredibly talented – one to watch," and "Already one of the brightest studios in the inventor space," are just a few comments from nominators of Steve Moore. 2021 saw Steve sign a number of deals, with a raft of products set to land later this year and in 2023. "Steve is a huge talent, an extremely decent chap and is building a strong invention company," said one champion.



# DESIGN CHAMPIONS

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**DAVID WINTER,**  
Head of New Product Acquisition & Inventor Relations, Jazwares

A 12-year veteran of the toy and game industry, David Winter joined Jazwares in 2020 to spearhead and grow its innovation pipeline through inventor relations. David also works with BlueJ – Jazwares’ Blue Sky development team – to shape the future of new product launches. “David’s seasoned perspective on the trade, and deep understanding of product design and development make him a passionate contributor to the craft that elevate ideas, product and people,” said one nominator. Another added: “David really is a true treasure to the inventing community and one the industry is lucky to have.”



**BILL BENECKE,**  
Product Design Manager, Action Figures, Mattel

Bill Benecke has been with Mattel for almost 14 years and has worked on brands including DC, Masters of the Universe, Ghostbusters, Toy Story and, most recently, WWE. Bill believes that one of the best things about Mattel is getting to collaborate with some of the smartest, most creative people around – and his work with the inventor community is the epitome of that. “In the past, WWE was a brand that inventors shied away from, but Bill’s passion and positivity has sparked a real interest from inventors – because they enjoy working with Bill,” said one of his admirers, adding: “His efforts led to Mattel successfully placing inventor concepts in the WWE line for the first time in a long time.”



**JAMES WING,**  
European Head of Project Manager and Creative Services, TOMY

James Wing is a champion of not only his team at TOMY but also the firm’s external suppliers, vendors and inventors. His role combines so many different aspects, but he has a true passion for supporting the business with a creative core. “James is constantly engaging with outside support from graphic, illustration and product designers. He’s the person to rely on when it comes to ensuring inventors’ ideas are properly tested and reviewed,” said one nominator. In addition, James is a key champion of new talent through TOMY’s inventor programme with Brunel University.

**AZHELLE WADE,**  
President, The Toy Coach

As The Toy Coach, Azhelle Wade has helped countless aspiring toy inventors with practical advice, industry know-how and vital pitching opportunities. “Through both her Toy Creators Academy course and the Making It in the Toy Industry podcast, Azhelle has created top resources for anyone looking to succeed in this industry,” said one nominator. Another added: “The Toy Creators Academy was a game-changer for me and how I approach inventing.”



**ED GARTIN,**  
Owner & Creative Catalyst, Paper Bag Creative

As one person put it in their nomination, “When looking for a champion for designers within and outside of the toy and game business, look no further than the talented and respected Ed Gartin.” Having been part of an award-winning Thames & Kosmos team, 2021 saw Ed depart to set up his own creative agency in Paper Bag Creative, specialising in product development and inventor relations. As well as helping clients, the past year has seen Ed share his experience and talents through numerous podcasts, online panels and his blog to help new inventors learn and grow. This year also sees Ed launch his own advice column on LinkedIn called EdTalks.



**BRIAN BAKER,**  
VP, Global Brand Leader, Kids Gaming, Hasbro

2021 saw Hasbro’s Brian Baker take on the role as the global business unit leader for Kids Gaming, managing popular brands such as Operation, Guess Who?, Twister, Jenga, Connect 4, Battleship, Simon and more. “Brian has a passion for innovation and is an exceptional leader who always brings laughter into his meetings,” said one fan of his work.



**SHANNON VARCOE,**  
Program Manager, Women in Toys, Licensing & Entertainment

A key member of the Women in Toys team, Shannon Varcoe was heavily involved in putting on the 2021 Empower Days. The events brought together over 80 women inventors to pitch, connect and learn more about this part of the industry. “Shannon works with an incredible group of women to support and elevate the creative efforts of others and she should be recognised for all her hard work,” said one advocate.



**ADAM PORTER,**  
Game Designer

Adam Porter is the designer behind games like Doodle Rush, Pikoko and Qwuzzle. In the past year, Adam ramped up activity on his game design-focused YouTube channel, Adam in Wales. Through informative, honest and insightful videos, Adam has put a spotlight on subjects including getting published, designing for brands and prototyping tips. “Adam’s videos have already achieved must-watch status in the industry for me,” said one nominator, adding: “They’re a great resource for established pros and newcomers alike.”



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**JOE GRASSO,**  
Product Design Manager, Pre-school Toys & MPH,  
Hasbro

Joe Grasso is a highly collaborative, empathy-first product design lead at Hasbro. He's responsible for shaping development over the FurReal Friends brand at Hasbro and bridging the gap between internal development and external innovation. "There is no idea or concept too unique or strange in Joe's recipe for success, as it's often a combination of both that drives the brand into new spaces of possibility," said one nominator.



**TRINA MCFARLAND,**  
Owner & General Manager,  
TinkerTini

Trina McFarland and her team at TinkerTini are some of the industry's biggest champions of inventor talent. They have been working to innovate in the world of inventor relations since the launch of the company back in 2018. Connecting inventors and toy company clients through the Tinklerly platform, one fan stated: "TinkerTini has been pivotal in bringing new innovation to our organisation," adding: "Trina and her team are wonderful to work with – creative and efficient."

## MOJO NATION 100: DESIGN CHAMPIONS

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**ROBERT YUSIM,**  
Founder & President,  
Product Counsel

Boasting a passion for helping inventors and companies launch new products, Product Counsel's Robert Yusim had a successful 2021. He played a key role shaping Pixicade's overall strategy. The toy that turns

drawings into video games went on to be a Toy of the Year award winner in the Netherlands. Elsewhere, Robert was also instrumental in the success of global brands like Wubble Ball, LaserX and ProjeX, and licensed the toy invention Pop2Play.



**JENNA GALLEY,**  
Senior Trend Editor,  
TrendBible

A vital resource for trend forecasting and consumer insights, TrendBible was a trusted voice for designers in 2021. The firm's Senior Trend Editor Jenna Galley produced some trailblazing content last year

and launched TrendBible's new Baby and Kids Future Trends subscription platform. 2021 also saw Jenna produce a series of trend reports called The Changing Face of Boyhood. The series helped brands think about how they frame toys and messaging for the boys of tomorrow. This covered areas like toxic masculinity, equality and what it means to be a boy today. "Whether it's unpicking the environmental crisis or uncovering new play types, Jenna is one of the most forward-thinking trend experts, informing the biggest brands in the industry," said one nominator.





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

Phalgun Polepalli of DICE Toy Labs works hard to build, support and celebrate India's game design community. This includes creating an active group that conducts design contests and Phalgun has also developed a design kit to

help Indian designers prototype their games quickly. DICE Toy Labs has also supported this community by licensing games, with 2021 highlights including the company's first Kickstarter project, Karigar-e-Taj: Artisans of the Taj Mahal, from designer Amit Ghadge.



**KIM CULMONE,**  
SVP, Global Head of Design,  
Barbie & Fashion Dolls,  
Mattel

"Kim is a true visionary in the toy industry and beyond," said one nominator of Mattel's Kim Culmone. Highlights from the past 12 months include the Barbie Loves the Ocean range, made from ocean-bound

and recycled plastic, and Barbie winning the Fashion Icon Award from the Arab Fashion Council. "Kim is a joy to work with and inspires her design teams and the inventors she works with in amazing ways," added another fan of her work.



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

It's been another record year for Jonathan and Patti Becker of Anjar & Becker Associates,

and a transformative one. In March 2021, they were named the exclusive worldwide licensing agent for the Wham-O legacy brands and have since signed several major deals in categories ranging from retro toys to apparel. One such deal was licensing Wham-O Pet Toys to Jazwares, who then created an entirely new Pet Division around Wham-O's iconic brands. Last year also saw Anjar & Becker Associates debut a newly updated version of Go For Broke in Europe, as well as license a line of activity craft sets called Big Fat Yarn to Jazwares. "Patti and Jonathan are industry legends who empower creatives with their experience, determination and strong, well-respected relationships," said one nominator.



**JULIEN MCCLUNEY,**  
Vice President, Global Brand  
Leader, Hasbro Gaming,  
Hasbro

Having spent years on the Hasbro USA sales team, Julien McCluney then joined the world of design and marketing, where she now heads up Hasbro Gaming. "She is always exploring new ways to bring

games to market and her goal is to launch great games that families love to play," said one nominator, adding: "She was behind the launch of Ka-Blab! which was Hasbro's first new family party game in some years."



**LEE ALLENTUCK,**  
Principal,  
RN Branding &  
Licensing

Lee Allentuck is a 15-year veteran of the toy and game industry, having worked for some of the biggest brands including LEGO,

Hasbro, Melissa & Doug and more. Four years ago, Lee founded RN Branding & Licensing to provide the industry with a new way of developing products, brands and licensing partnerships. As the invention and innovation consultant for Melissa & Doug, Lee has built strong relationships within the global toy and game inventor community to bring in new, innovative ideas. Lee also engages with inventors in his role as a consultant for Never Wrong Toys. One recent highlight was the firm's relaunch of the Laser Pegs brand. Lee is also head of content and strategic partnerships at The Last Gameboard, where he has created fresh opportunities for designers and publishers by expanding the market to a whole new platform.



**DAVID LASKOWSKI,**  
Engineering Manager,  
Hasbro

David Laskowski is an amazingly creative and resourceful engineering lead at Hasbro. He has been a key part of driving the technical

blueprint and vision for the company's brands across several categories over the years. "David is always finding ways to bring the new and unexplored frontiers of what's next into focus and making them a reality," said one champion.



**HEATHER DELANEY,**  
Founder & Managing Director,  
Gallium Ventures

As an expert in tech, product development, branding and PR, Heather Delaney is one of the industry's brightest sparks – and a go-to guru for all things crowdfunding. One nominator states: "Known for building and fixing brands, products and sales, Heather is outstanding. She's the only person in the field to whom I refer my clients."



**BEN VARADI,**  
Co-Founder, EVP and Chief  
Creative Officer, Spin Master &  
**BEN DERMER,** Senior Vice  
President, Creative Development,  
Spin Master

Spin Master's Ben Varadi and Ben

Dermer guide the company's creative vision in the areas of product selection, brand direction, positioning, play patterns and advanced technical product development, across all brands. Both have played a vital role in establishing Spin Master as a forward-thinking, inventor-friendly company. One admirer said: "Inventors are a key part of Spin Master's DNA, and that's in large part to the work of Ben and Ben."





# RISING STARS

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**LAUREN MERSHON,**  
Inventor Relations  
Manager,  
Jazwares

2021 saw Jazwares' Lauren Mershon move from business development into inventor relations, where

she has firmly established herself as a star on the rise. Lauren leads the external innovation needs for Jazwares' Preschool, Plush and Costumes divisions. As one fan of her work stated: "Lauren is well served by her eye for style, pop culture and social media to identify concepts that can capitalise on emerging trends."



**LORENA MONTALVO,**  
Product Designer,  
TOMY

"Lorena is one in a million," said one nominator of TOMY's Lorena Montalvo. They added: "There are many talented designers in our industry, but Lorena is

just that extra bit special." As an exceptional product designer at TOMY, Lorena's work ethic, creativity, judgement, speed and ability to tackle any type of project have made her one to watch in the world of toy design.



**OMARI AKIL,**  
Co-Founder & Lead  
Designer,  
Colorway Game Labs

Omari Akil is a game designer and co-founder of Colorway Game Labs, a design studio and publisher focused on producing games that represent and celebrate black culture. Following self-published titles like Rap Godz and Hoop Godz, 2021 saw Omari get involved in the world of licensed games. He co-designed WizKids' Summertime – based on the song by DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince – as well as Home Alone: Keep the Change with NECA. Last year also saw Omari collaborate with critical-care physician Lakshman Swamy on Critical Care: The Game, a co-op game set in an intensive care unit that enjoyed a successful Kickstarter campaign, raising over \$75k.



**STE SMITH,**  
Creative Director,  
WITH Creative

Ste Smith is the Creative Director at WITH Creative, an industrial design agency and invention studio that creates innovative products to delight and inspire. Having worked across furniture, giftware and kitchenware, 2021 saw WITH Creative embrace the world of toys and games with great success. Under its Pikkii brand, the firm launched three new games in Recollect, Doppelganger and What the Actual Factual? 2022 also looks promising; several concepts are in development with some of the industry's biggest publishers.



**MATT SHOAFF,**  
Product Design Manager,  
Hasbro

Hasbro's Matt Shoaff has been the lead designer on several recent hits for the toy titan. These include Connect 4 Blast, Operation: Pet Scan, Hungry Hippos Launchers and Elefun Flyers – proving his talent for adding fresh, fun, innovative twists to some of the company's most iconic gaming brands. Matt is also passionate about growing and developing talent. He serves as manager and mentor to several young designers. One fan said: "Matt champions prototype and test design methodology, resulting in compelling concepts that are immediately ready for testing."



**LARISSA LOUWMAN,**  
Marketing & Product  
Development  
Manager,  
BOTI

Larissa Louwman had very little experience in product development back

when she took on the challenge to design and develop Stuff-A-Loons. The result was a product that saw both BOTI and Seven Towns named Toy Designer of the Year at Mojo Nation's Play Creators Awards, and it has since successfully launched around the globe. The work earned Larissa a promotion and she now heads up BOTI's product development and brand team.



**WILL ANDERSON,**  
Founder,  
Anderson Innovations

"If you haven't already booked your appointments with Will, then what are you waiting for?" So says one

advocate for Will Anderson. Based in Toronto, Canada, Will cut his teeth as an in-house designer at Spin Master, but is fast establishing himself as one to watch in the inventor space. "This new talent has broken onto the scene with incredible concepts. His focus on franchise licences is exceptional when it comes to teasing out areas to innovate on," said one of his fans, adding: "We're very excited to partner with Will and are delighted to see what he comes up with next!"



**SEAN MCKENNA,**  
Toy Designer,  
Interactive Team,  
Spin Master

Spin Master's Sean McKenna has only been involved in the world of toy design for two years, but he has already made a big impact. Sean was one of the main design forces behind Spin Master's Purse Pets, one of the company's big success stories of the holiday season. As one supporter puts it: "Sean's market and trend research really allowed him to make a very grown-up, fashion-forward product line that is already getting award nominations." They added: "Without a doubt, he will have many more hits in his career."



**DEMI NEWMAN,**  
Product  
Development  
Assistant,  
Gibsons

Demi Newman joined the Gibsons product

development team in 2021. Within days, Demi was making a huge impact on productivity. "Her enthusiasm, creativity, eye for detail and efficiency make her perfect for the role and a joy to work with," said one advocate. Demi was also cited as having a natural ability to generate ideas and give balanced, well-thought-out feedback. She looks destined to have a bright future in the industry.



**CARINE ROSALIA,**  
CEO, Lunch Squares

Carine Rosalia is a new face to the inventing space but has already made a strong impression. "Carine takes

her passion for play straight into her product concepts and thoughtfully applies the magic," said one nominator, adding: "We are very excited to work with Carine and delighted to see what she will cook up next!"





# CONGRATULATIONS

## to all the Mojo Nation 100



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

After only three years at Moose Toys, Ross Monks has demonstrated a highly creative and innovative approach to toy design. An inventive problem solver, Ross was a key player in the creation and realisation of Magic Mixies – one of 2021's big-hit toys. From play-pattern exploration to prototyping and problem solving, his influence on the smash-hit item was significant. He is also great team player, collaborating with his peers in the UK and the Australian Little Live and engineering teams to bring the innovative Magic Mixies to market. "Ross brings a freshness and enthusiasm to any project and his bulletproof positive attitude makes him a joy to work with," said one nominator.



**KAT PRESS,**  
Games Designer,  
Professor Puzzle

Kat made the move into games design via a short spell in product development, and in just a couple of years has already got some great games under her belt. From Ridley's House of Plants to Professor Puzzle's Rainbow Go! and Froth It Like it's Hot, Kat brings a commercial eye, a great sense of humour and an immense understanding of game mechanics to every project she works on. "She has demonstrated that you can take a non-traditional route into game design if you work hard and come with a willingness to learn," said one fan.



**JEREMY SHANK,**  
Product Designer,  
TOMY

Jeremy Shank is based in TOMY's vehicles team and, over the last few years, has continued to grow into an amazing designer. "He has a true passion for what he does and it's completely reflected in the high quality of work that he produces," said one nominator. They added: "He's a great partner and collaborator with his team, open to new ways of thinking. He challenges the norm and pushes on a daily basis to keep developing his already-amazing skill set."



**COURTNEY COUTU,**  
Creative Manager, Global Design &  
Development, Hasbro

2021 was a standout year for Hasbro's Courtney Coutu, as the Creative Manager took charge of several refreshes for some of the company's biggest brands. Courtney updated all the characters in the classic pre-school game Candy Land to a more inclusive and diverse collection, ensuring everyone can see someone – or themselves – reflected in the game. This strategy was echoed in a Guess Who character refresh. Sticking with the Guess Who brand, Courtney also led work on the socially conscious story-driven Guess Who Hometown Helpers game, where she created a diverse character group of critically important front-line workers. The game was launched in support of the No Kid Hungry program, building on Hasbro's commitment to helping children and families most in need during the pandemic.





**BRENNAN HUNT,**  
Product Designer,  
TOMY

Brennan Hunt joined TOMY in early 2021. Despite having only been with the company a relatively short time, colleagues have seen “an explosion” in his abilities. Brennan is part of the team responsible for driving huge growth in TOMY’s Boys and Girls categories and has been described as, “A truly passionate creative.” As one nominator puts it, “He has knowledge of pretty much everything in pop culture and attacks briefs in a unique and different way.” They add: “He’s a natural collaborator and communicator – he has a big future ahead of him.”



**MATT EDMONDSON  
& LAURENCE  
EMMETT,**  
Co-Founders,  
Format Games

During the first lockdown, Radio 1 DJ Matt Edmondson teamed up with his brother-in-law, Laurence Emmett, to launch Format Games. What began as a means of getting their first title – Ansagrams – into the world soon evolved as the firm launched two more games in Egg Slam and So Wrong It’s Right. Last year also saw Format Games listed in John Lewis, and sign a global distribution deal with Asmodee. With more games due for release this year, the future looks bright for Format Games.



**NICHOLAS TRAGNARK,**  
Manager Hasbro SPARK Inventor Relations,  
Pre-school & Fashion Brands, Hasbro

Nicholas – or Tragnark as he’s more commonly known – has been an outstanding addition to the Hasbro SPARK Inventor Relations team. Tragnark boasts a wealth of experience in trends, technology and innovation from his dynamic career spanning multiple categories of storytelling and play. “Tragnark’s energy, responsiveness and creativity have already had a huge impact on taking in a higher volume of inventor concepts and making the connections to drive them forward,” said one fan of his work. They added: “He is helping to redefine the role and scope of inventor relations for the future and is sure to be a major player in the community for years to come.”



**MARTIN HORSTMAN,** CEO, BitOGenius Inc & **ALYSHA HORSTMAN,** Chief Creative Officer, BitOGenius Inc

2021 was a big year for BitOGenius. Martin and Alysha Horstman launched Pixicade, a toy that turns your drawing into a playable video game. The product was ten years in development and, upon debuting last year, it won a Toy of the Year award in the Netherlands. It’s also in the running for a TOTY 2022 award in the Creative Toy of the Year category. Expansion plans are underway, with product extensions in the pipeline.

# LOOKING TO UNEARTH YOUR NEXT HIT PRODUCT?

## MOJO PITCH

September, 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.



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





**MATT JORDAN,**  
Senior Product Designer,  
TOMY

TOMY's Matt Jordan earned himself a promotion in 2021 to Senior Product Designer. He continues to transfer his skills and knowledge base to any variant of toy, while shining especially bright within the pre-school segment. "Whether a dinosaur, a vehicle, a licensed character, a playset or pretty much anything else, Matt's ability to come up with thought-provoking ideation and products is second to none," said one fan of his work. They added: "His positive and fun attitude make him a TOMY superstar and I can see Matt developing into a future creative leader."



**BRIAN THORNBUR,**  
Inventor Relations Associate,  
Jazwares

Having previously interned at Hasbro and run his own design company, Lemon Lime Toys & Games, last year saw Brian Thornber join Jazwares. According to one nominator: "He has quickly taken to supporting the large and growing portfolio of Boys Action properties and new Pets business with an infusion of outside innovation from the creative community."



**MARJORIE SPITALNIK,**  
Founder & CEO,  
Little Rebels

Marjorie Spitalnik is the Founder and CEO of Little Rebels, a line of plush dolls centred around inspirational women like Amelia Earhart, Malala Yousafzai and Mary Jackson. Over the past 12 months, Marjorie was able to raise money to produce Little Rebels' first batch of dolls, building on a TAGIE Award win and TOTY Award nomination in 2020. This year looks to be just as fruitful, as the brand has secured a raft of new retail locations, including museums.



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