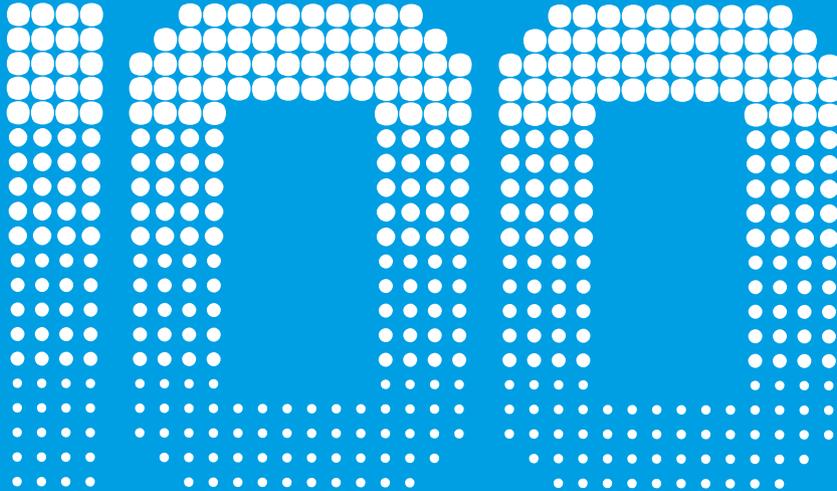


2020 EDITION

MOJO NATION



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

In association with



Stamford Bridge, London

play

creators festival

2020

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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.



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JOIN US **SEPTEMBER 8th...**

play creators conference

Tuesday, September 8th 2020 | 10am-4pm | Stamford Bridge, London

The *Play Creators Conference 2020* is a day set to inspire, enlighten and wow the industry's creative backbone. With a line-up of exciting speakers from across toys,

games, tech and the wider worlds of design. Our conference will unite the global toy and game inventor community and highlight the creative talent working within it.

For more information visit
www.playcreatorsconference.com

“A massive congratulations to all those who made this year’s list; all that’s great about this industry is intrinsically linked to your passion, skill and creativity.”



Hello, and welcome to the 2020 Edition of the Mojo Nation 100, in association with Hasbro. If this is your first time clutching one of these, the Mojo Nation 100 is a listing of 100 figures from the world of toy and game design that have enjoyed a brilliant last 12 months.

Whether an in-house design superstar, an inventor relations guru or an invention studio that’s shined, the cream of the crop of toy and game creation is within these pages – and as usual, it’s all been voted for by the design and inventor community.

Some of the biggest launches of the past 12 months are represented by their creators here; we have key figures that have worked on the likes of Mattel’s Creatable World, Learning Resources’ Coding Critters and Moose Toys’ Scruff-a-Luvs, as well as the design leads responsible for impressive innovations like LEGO’s Hidden Side, TOMY’s Rizmo and Hasbro’s D-O Interactive Droid.

The scope of game design talent within these pages is equally staggering; whether it’s a tabletop hit set in the world of bird watching, an AR-infused take on Pictionary or a frantic bank heist that literally showers players in gold, it’s been another knockout year for game inventors working across both the mass-market and tabletop sectors.

It’s also refreshing to see lots of new faces in the 100 this year. In fact, only 27 of those who made the 2019 edition of the Mojo Nation 100 are present again here; a testament to the rich and expansive pool of talent working in our industry today.

Before you rifle through the book to see who made it in this year, there’s plenty of brilliant opinion pieces and interviews to enjoy too. These include TinkerTini’s Trina McFarland unpicking the “Not Invented Here Syndrome”, PlayLenz’s Richard Heayes looking at how best to manage ideas and even an exclusive preview of mine and DeeJ Johnson’s new book, *The Snakes & Ladders of Creative Thinking*.

Before I leave you to it, I just want to say a huge thanks to our sponsors – Hasbro, The Marketing Store, Alpha Group, Wynne-Jones IP and Si digital. Each are truly passionate about supporting the inventor community and celebrating their triumphs, and we couldn’t publish this book without them.

A big thanks to everyone who got involved and nominated this year, and a massive congratulations to all those who made this year’s list; all that’s great about this industry is intrinsically linked to your passion, skill and creativity.



Billy Langsworthy,
Co-Founder, Mojo Nation

SUPPORTING INVENTORS AND DESIGNERS MAKE THEIR MARK ON THE INDUSTRY

Toy Fair

- 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 for members on issues including responsible marketing, counterfeit toys, intellectual property etc.



For more information visit www.btha.co.uk and for membership enquiries, please contact queries@btha.co.uk

“The BTHA is happy to be a supporter of Mojo Nation, this year’s Mojo 100 and the hundreds of inventors and designers that contribute to the inventive, innovative and exciting toy industry.”



Design and creativity is the lifeblood of the UK toy industry. Each year around 60,000 brand new product lines are introduced onto the market to ensure toys remain exciting and entertaining for children to enjoy playing with. This continuous innovation has helped to keep the UK toy industry competitive; the largest in Europe and fourth largest toy sector in the world.

In such a fast-paced, fashion-driven industry, toy companies are always looking ahead, and there is an endless list of iconic creations coming from our sector. This couldn't be achieved without the talented inventors and

designers, from a very strong toy design community, helping to ensure companies stay ahead of the game. The BTHA congratulates everyone who made it onto the Mojo 100.

Attracting the best creative talent into the industry is key for our sector. 2020 will be the tenth year the British Toy & Hobby Association (BTHA) have hosted an annual student design seminar at Toy Fair to introduce design students from British universities to the toy sector and encourage them to consider the toy industry as a career destination. Toy Fair is a fantastic backdrop in which to do this, with hundreds of exhibitors and thousands of innovative products all under one roof; key to inspiring the next generation of toy makers.

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

In these unprecedented times, the BTHA sees attracting talent, innovation and invention to the sector as of vital importance to ensure that the industry remains competitive. Mojo Nation plays an increasing role in nurturing that talent and the BTHA is happy to be a supporter of Mojo Nation, the Mojo Nation 100 and the hundreds of inventors and designers that contribute to the inventive, innovative and exciting toy industry.



Natasha Crookes,

Director of Communications & Public Affairs,
The British Toy & Hobby Association

Welcome to Fun City!

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FEBRUARY
22-25

“It’s all about ideas and passion. Talented inventors and designers are at the root of every great toy and game, and therefore at the heart of our industry’s ultimate success.”



It’s all about ideas and passion. Talented inventors and designers are at the root of every great toy and game and therefore at the heart of our industry’s ultimate success.

At The U.S. Toy Association, we deeply appreciate the vital work of the inventor community and strive to demonstrate our commitment through our world-renowned trade events, support for the FIT and OTIS college toy design departments and by providing creative professionals with the resources they need to transform their brightest ideas into best-selling toys and games.

As a global meeting spot for innovators, The Toy Association’s Toy Fair New York (22nd to 25th February 2020) continues its now 17-year dedication to programming for inventors and designers under the “Creative Factor” banner. For 2020, Creative Factor will have a bigger presence than ever before and we invite all creative professionals to join Creative Factor’s hub of excitement, education, discovery and networking!

Adding to this, CF@TF Inventor Day will again be held prior to Toy Fair’s opening, providing inventors and designers exclusive opportunities to directly pitch product concepts to potential toy manufacturing partners. Initial review and selection will be done by the Creative Factor Advisory Board, which deserves wide praise for their commitment to providing design talent with top-notch programming, opportunities, and support.

The Creative Factor activities occurring at Toy Fair New York are just one example of our treasured collaboration with Mojo Nation and activity both in the U.S. and abroad. From partnering on Mojo Nation’s opening night party during Distoy to the outstanding Play Creators Festival in London, to our constant communication and brainstorming, we look forward to deepening our collaboration with Mojo Nation in the years ahead.

And The Toy Association’s many webinars, research reports, white papers, and tools (found at ToyAssociation.org) are always there to help the creative community navigate an evolving retail landscape, explore innovations and trends, adapt to new technologies, and comply with global safety standards and regulations.

Thank you to all in the toy community who dedicate their days to providing generations of children with inspiring opportunities for skill-building play! I look forward to connecting with many of you at Toy Fair New York and throughout this year.



Steve Pasierb
President & CEO
The Toy Association

play creators awards 2020

Part of
play 2020
creators festival



The Play Creators Awards, held on **Tuesday 8th September**, celebrates those in the toy and game design community that have excelled over the last 12 months. 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 PCAs are all about shining a spotlight on the sector's top architects of play.

AWARD CATEGORIES

Toy Designer of the Year
Game Designer of the Year (Family Games)
Game Designer of the Year (Party Games)
R&D Team of the Year
Invention Studio/Design Agency of the Year
Toy Designer of the Year (Licensed Product)
Game Designer of the Year (Licensed Product)
Play Innovator of the Year
Rising Star Award
Design Icon Award

For sales and sponsorship opportunities
please contact adam@mojo-nation.com

To nominate, or for more information, visit www.playcreatorsawards.com

"Congrats to the 2020 Mojo 100 list. I can think of no better group to help lead the charge to putting smiles on people's faces, bringing people back together and providing life-long memories to our customers, friends, families and children."



As we enter 2020, I can't help but think about the many pundits and futurists who predicted that we would be zipping around in flying cars and eating our food in pill form by now.

The truth about predicting innovation is: in many ways we miss the mark and in other ways we far exceed our wildest imaginations.

Today we have cars that can drive for us and we carry devices in our pockets so powerful that at any other time in history, it would be considered sorcery! But instead of this progress unlocking ultimate happiness and freeing up time for friends, families and real connections, children (and adults) have become overscheduled, stressed and overexposed to a 24 hours news cycle.

Play is needed and more essential than ever. We, at Hasbro, are happy to support and celebrate the Mojo Nation 100 for your past accomplishments - and future efforts - to give children and adults alike the permission and means to play.

The Mojo 100 list gives us a moment to pause; it is part celebration and part call to action as each of us works to provide the solutions to today's "deficit of play". The great news is that people really need us and want the experiences that we all provide!

I thank Mojo Nation for cultivating this list, and for their hard work of advocating and supporting toy and game inventors, design agencies and all the companies that bring fun and compelling toys and games to life.

Congrats again to the 2020 Mojo Nation 100 list of the most influential figures working in toy and game design today. You all represent the best in our industry, your respective functions and companies, and in the industry as a whole.

I can think of no better group to help lead the charge to putting smiles on people's faces, bringing people back together, and providing experiences and life-long memories to our customers, friends, neighbours, families, children and complete strangers.

Here is to a happy and productive 2020!



Rich Mazel

Senior Director of Global Product Acquisitions
Hasbro

The 100: Breakdown

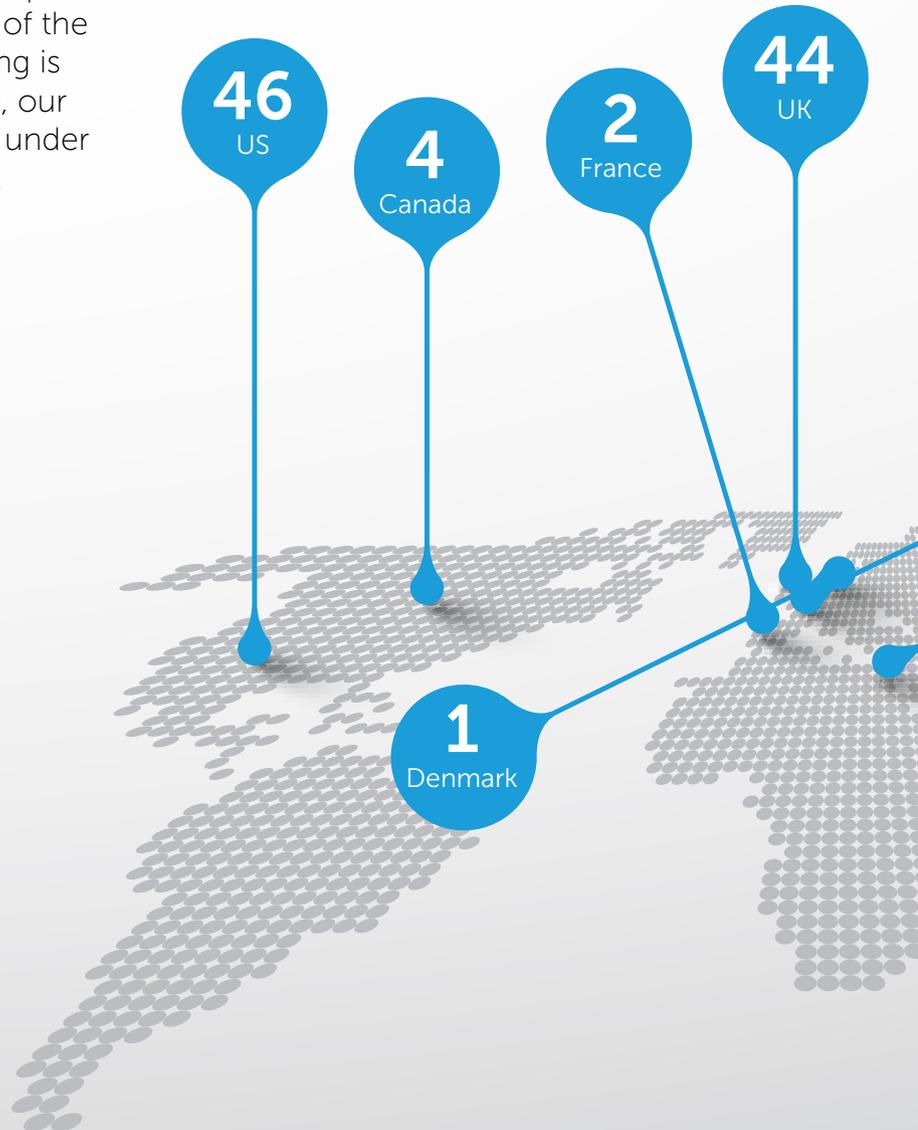
Boasting R&D legends, rising stars and top invention studios responsible for some of the sector's biggest hits, this year's 100 listing is yet more proof that creatively-speaking, our industry is in great health. So let's put it under the microscope and see what we find...

Territory-wise, and we're talking about where designers are based rather than nationality, the US and the UK lead the way this year. There is a boost for the US contingent, with 46 entries this year versus 41 last year, while designers based in Canada, France, Israel, Denmark and Spain also make the list.

Company-wise, Spin Master has the most employees in the 100 this year, with seven entries represented across the R&D, Design Champions and Rising Star categories. Also boasting personnel across those three categories are Hasbro and TOMY, who come in just behind Spin Master with six and four entries respectively. Of the other major toy companies, LEGO and Mattel also both feature with one entry each.

Delving further into the categories, Hasbro has the largest presence in the R&D section, while Spin Master leads the way when it comes to the Design Champions.

This year's listing also highlights how vast the array of talent is in the toy and game design world, as only 27 people from the 2019 Edition of the 100 have made it back into the 2020 list.



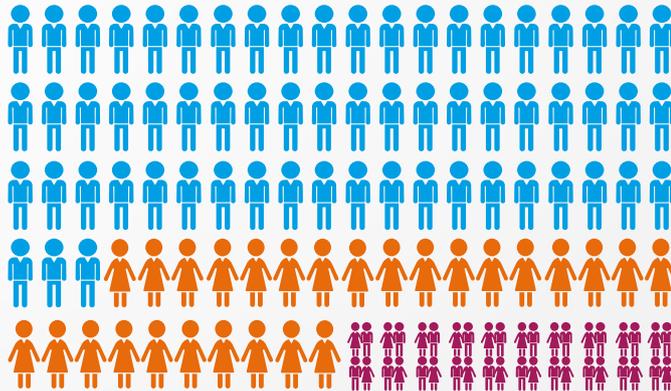
GENDER

10 Mixed Teams



63 Men

27 Women



1

Spain

2

Israel

COMPANIES REPRESENTED IN THE MOJO NATION 100

- Alpha Group
- Animoodles
- Bang Zoom
- Barry & Jason Games and Entertainment
- Bean
- Big Ideas
- Big Monster Toys
- Carterbench
- Catapult Concepts
- Collabsco
- Confident Games
- Creating Unique Toys
- Creative Kids
- Design Edge
- Disco Nifty
- Fun-damental Invention
- Fundamentally Children
- Funko
- FUSE London Ltd
- Galactic Sneeze
- Gallium Ventures
- Gamely Games
- Genie Toys
- Gibsons
- Goliath/Vivid
- Hands On Design
- Hasbro
- Headcase Media
- Heayes Design/PlayLenz
- IDEO
- Interplay UK
- Jazwares
- JMP Creative
- Learning Resources
- LEGO
- Making Things Studio
- Mattel
- Melbot
- Meo Mio
- Moose Toys UK
- Nextoy
- One Dear World
- Open 2 Design
- PGA Sculpting
- Playtime PR
- Power Kid Design & Development
- RandomMills
- Seven Towns
- Shenanigans Toys & Games
- So Sound
- Spin Master
- StudioPlay
- Tantrum Innovation
- The Affable Design Company
- The Marketing Store
- This is YARD
- TinkerTini
- TOMY
- Triclops Studio
- What Do You Meme?
- Wild & Wolf
- WowWee
- Wynne-Jones IP

Toy Design Time Machine

We dusted off the Mojo Time Machine (go with it...) to give the inventor community a chance to go back to their younger selves - before they were design stars - and pass on some pearls of wisdom. Here's what they had to say...

The idea of time travel is a beautiful thing. Go back to the Seventies and pip George Lucas to *Star Wars*; head to Fifties Memphis and catch Elvis Presley in his first live show (third on the bill no less); and then of course, there's the handy notion of predicting the lottery.

Well, we asked the design community what they would do if they could go back in time and speak to their younger selves, before they've embarked on a wonderful career in toy and game design.

Be it words of wisdom, encouragement or a casual 'brace yourself!', here's what some of the industry's top inventor talent would tell their younger selves...



Ken Gruhl,
Game Designer

"Get ready for way more rejection than you could imagine. The positive is that you start to secretly enjoy it, as it helps keep you in check and pushes you to become a better designer."



Rob Daviau,
Game Designer

"Trust your ideas; they are often good. Don't trust your execution; it is often messy. You will have to do approximately five times the number of iterations as you think you will."



David Snow,
Co-Founder, The Fantastic Factory

"Take up boxing at a young age; that way you'll learn to roll with the punches and know how to get back up off the canvas."



Adam Borton,
Owner, Creating Unique Toys

"Sometimes your concepts will get traction with companies that you least expect - so even though it doesn't seem like they would be interested (for various reasons such as category, focus/direction, size), show them anyway - they might just go for it."



Steve Fink, Owner, Bang Zoom

"It's everything you've dreamed it will be and more."



Elan Lee,
Co-Creator, Exploding Kittens

"Don't make entertaining games. Make games that make the people you're playing with entertaining."



Jon Vanderbeek,
VP, Sweet Spot

Studio, Inc
"Look at the long haul. Don't fall in

love with that one great item in your library at the moment; go after it for a decade and try to celebrate all of the small victories. An option, an advance and a licensing agreement are all great, but celebrate the connections you make and the opportunities you carve out in your network. Align yourself to be a useful cog in the business rather than expecting a big success. Give yourself decades for a big hit."



Matt Nuccio,
Owner,
Design Edge

"Understanding cost is the key to

creating good design at the right perceived value. If you can design with a cost in mind from the outset, your chances of getting that product to market has increased ten fold. Far too often I see great products at trade shows that are over-built and over-priced. The shame of it is that many of these products were brilliant ideas that simply were executed to the wrong retail price point."



Bob Driscoll,
Designer

"Don't be afraid to flesh out crazy game ideas. Sort

out helpful critiques from noisy criticism. Work with a great game designer like Mike Gray to learn about games and get a job at a place like Hasbro so you can make a living while you're learning."



Fi Murray,
Founder, Making Things Studio

"Don't worry about teachers saying that you put in too much effort on the coursework and you

should be revising for the exams instead. Your job will be so much more like coursework than exams. Fortunately, once you get to college, you'll be able to choose subjects that are coursework heavy, exam light!"



Stimulating Input

How often do people define having ideas as making connections? Even the mighty Steve Jobs once likened creativity to a dot-to-dot book. To make use of that analogy, though, the importance of positioning the dots themselves needs emphasis. Here's an exclusive preview of *The Snakes & Ladders of Creative Thinking*, a new book from **Deej Johnson** and **Billy Langsworthy**, looking at how using a stimulating input can ensure a more creative output...



To buy a copy of *The Snakes & Ladders of Creative Thinking*, head to **amazon**

STIMULATING INPUT

Many of the things we sense, and the thoughts that we have today, are exactly the same as those we had yesterday, the day before that, and the one before that! This is because our brains need to make countless near-automatic connections to spare us

overthinking. So things like out of which side of the bed to get, which sock to put on first, which way we go to work, etc., are mostly handled by pattern, habit and routine...

Indeed, when you think about it, you may realise that great chunks of your life are lived on a loop!

You don't have to choose between a red and blue pill just yet, though... Rather, just look for ways to break some routines, and you'll quickly start sensing things differently, having new experiences and shifting your perspective. Here are some ways to do it...

LOSE YOURSELF

Tempting though it might be to stay in your comfort zone, it's also beneficial to immerse yourself in subjects that don't interest you. Force yourself to watch a documentary on a subject about which you know nothing, or go to a

lecture that isn't your cup of tea! This approach can extend to visiting places... What if you spent time forcing connections at a pet store? Or a nautical supplier?! Don't limit yourself to retail environments, either...

What if you went to an unusual museum? Or an escape room? Immerse yourself in environments like these not because they're useful in themselves, but because they can help you develop an insatiable curiosity.

TRAVEL BROADENS THE MIND

It's not unusual for habitually-creative people to cite travelling as an inspiration. Many people – and a number of studies – suggest there's a strong connection between

international travel and creativity. At the very least, travelling clearly breaks your daily routine. It can also introduce you to new technology, culture, ideas, and ways of doing things.

DISRUPT YOURSELF

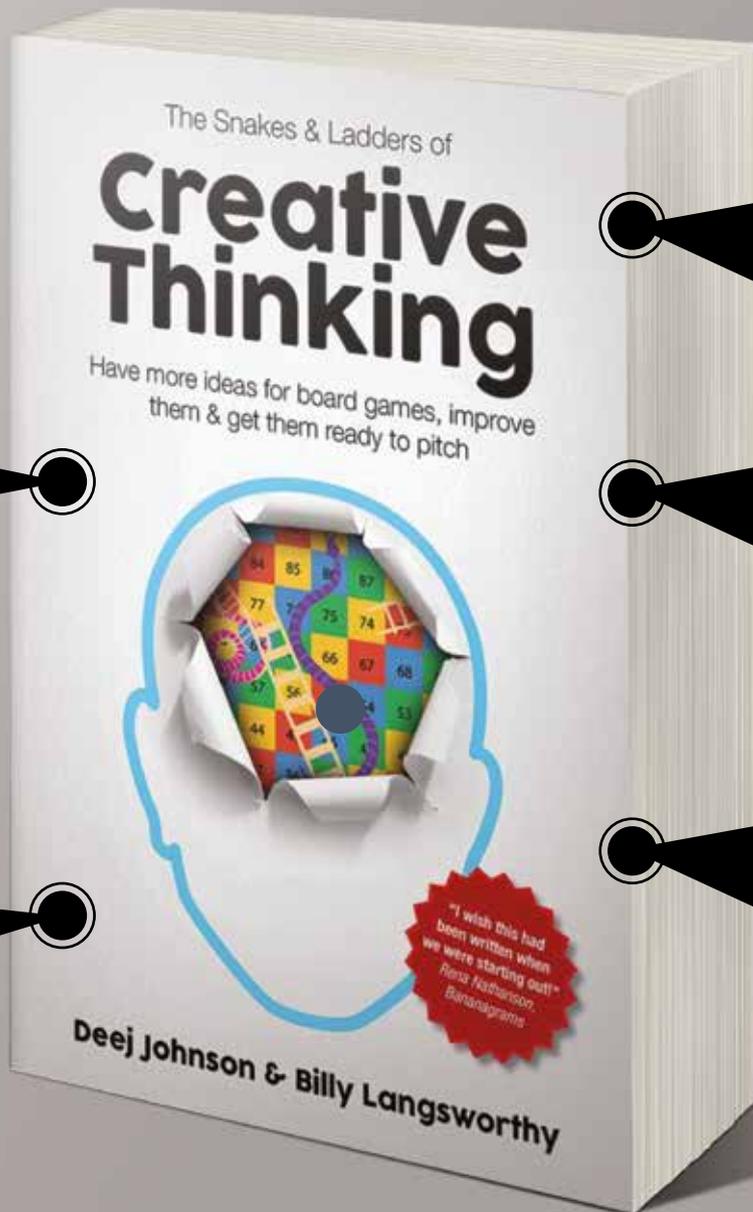
One of the fastest, easiest ways to create new perspectives is simply to do some very mundane things differently. Go to work a completely new way. Sleep 'the wrong way up' in bed. Get up an

hour earlier! Examine a tree stump up close. Eat dessert first, then a main, and end with a starter... Just look for ways to go about your daily activity that shake things up a little.

MINE THE COALFACE

It may well be that the single most important thing new toy-and-game inventors can do is to immerse themselves in the industry. This isn't to say that those outside the field can't have brilliant ideas. It is to say, though, that the chances of getting to market are much higher

if you're familiar with trends, mechanics and people in the trade. You can further immerse yourself in board-game clubs, cafés and playtest groups... Be sure to ask organisers and toy-shop owners what they find easy to explain, what they recommend, and what they can't shift for love nor money.



The Inventing Game

Don't Step In It, Peeing Pup, The Slow Motion Race; Hasbro is on a roll when it comes to launching great games from the inventor community. We caught up with the firm's director of global product acquisition for games, **Tanya Thompson**, to find out what makes for a great Hasbro game...

How did you get started in the world of toys and games?

I've always been passionate about play. I started my work life as a high school math (or as you say, maths) teacher and used games and puzzles in my classroom to inspire my students in this subject I love. I saw the benefits of play first-hand and started teaching other teachers how to do the same.

You see so many ideas from so many designers. What are you looking for when meeting inventors, and what makes for a great Hasbro game?

I'm looking for passion and creativity. I'm looking to be surprised with something magical that I've never seen before. And since I evaluate so many concepts each year, this isn't always easy to do.

At Hasbro, we know that games bring families and friends of all ages together for fun, meaningful social interactions. While content-driven games are popular for adults looking to have a laugh together, millennials are playing classic games, such as Jenga and Connect 4, in coffee shops and other social settings.

Entertainment properties, such as *Stranger Things*, have allowed us to introduce new versions of traditional games while making games like Dungeons & Dragons mainstream. Action games are also very popular for families who are looking for simple-to-understand games that allow them to spend quality face-to-face time together as they play.

Our goal is to consistently provide families and friends with gaming experiences that are not only fun to play with, but also fun to watch and share. We are constantly monitoring and analysing new trends to determine how we can incorporate them into the gaming aisle in the future.

Can you talk us through a recent game that has come from the inventor community and why it proved a good fit?

I've licensed a record number of games from inventors in the last couple of years. Don't Step In It has been a great success. Everyone can relate to not stepping in dog poop at the park, so it's simple to understand and a lot of fun to play. It also broke frame as you play with Play-Doh with your feet rather than your hands, which was something new on the market.

Do you experience 'love at first sight' with ideas, or do even great concepts often need more work to be considered for licensing?

It depends on the idea. Sometimes it's exactly right as it comes in, but more often there's a lot of development that happens between our external partner and our internal teams to bring it to market.

Why is the inventor community so important to Hasbro?

Outside innovation is extremely important to Hasbro and we take great pride in our legacy of working with professional inventors, as well as companies and consumers, to bring the world's best play experiences to life. You never know where the next big idea is going to come from!

What do you love best about your role at Hasbro?

I honestly feel I have the best job in the world. I love travelling the world to connect with inventors and innovators. I am honoured when they share their best creative ideas with me as a potential new Hasbro game. The creativity they bring is outstanding and I'm proud that I call many of them my friends.



Sponsored by



"I'm looking for passion, creativity and to be surprised with something magical that I've never seen before."





The Emotional Roots of “Not Invented Here Syndrome”

Having encountered “Not Invented Here Syndrome” throughout a career in inventor relations, TinkerTini’s **Trina McFarland** digs under the surface of this decision-making process; unpicking the complex set of emotions and behaviour behind it...

I’ve encountered “Not Invented Here Syndrome” throughout my career in the toy industry and especially, of course, in my role as Inventor Relations.

A less inexperienced me oversimplified NIHS, attributing the resistance and unwillingness to work with inventors as typical junior-level designer mentality; still needing their own accolades as they start their careers as professional creatives and prove themselves as “innovators”.

My go-to has always been design leadership; those were the folks seasoned enough to know that in the toy industry, day-in and day-out, year-after-year, eventually you need access to all the options. Those were the people with enough years under their belt to define success as being their ability to orchestrate and deliver by whatever means, with whatever resources available. Those have been my people; the ones that drag reluctant junior designers to the table of the ‘other’. I’ve seen it many times. That story made sense to me; the seasoned design executive teaching the hard lessons of “to get anywhere in life, you need others; like it or not”.

But now, I'm more seasoned and have encountered NIHS at more senior levels (even the highest level) and I had to revisit the story I had told myself earlier on. This was a more complicated story.

NIH "syndrome" was exactly that; a complex set of emotions and behaviours not reserved for passionate youth, but anyone, at any level. So, I wanted to pick it apart a bit more on an emotional level, because turning away options is irrational, regardless of how it's justified.

FEAR: Perhaps an outside option came into a company before and it didn't go well, or a strong personality was encountered; maybe both simultaneously. Things weren't managed properly so it left a bad taste for all. This is unfortunate but expected when an organisation is trying to engage but hasn't invested in or even acknowledged that "inventor relations" might actually be a unique skill-set that requires expertise and experience, along with the right personality type. And this isn't a promotional piece. Truly, if you want to engage, please invest in and hire people with experience in this role. If you ever want to gauge "Inventor Relations" competency, ask the inventors and make it safe for them to answer you honestly.

INSECURITY: This is a tough one to overcome and is based on both the self-worth of individuals and an organisation's overall emotional health. Are they confident enough in their own capabilities and culture as innovators to welcome others to the table? Can they be gracious hosts or will they get caught in a pointless exercise of self-adulation; devaluing others' work to prove how brilliant they are and how unnecessary it is to have outside options. I've seen it all over the years.

IGNORANCE: This covers a few areas. Ignorance about how engagement actually works, and the business model behind it.

Also, not seeing the investments that outside resources make to create those options, therefore devaluing it over their own (value source bias).

PRIDE: Again, does an individual or organisation have a healthy ego? Can they tolerate looking at options without value bias tied to pride? Can they remove the need for ego validation and evaluate options objectively?

JEALOUSY: Is there a misconception that inventors live in gold castles with royalty checks bursting out of every window? Are designers on salaried payroll a little jealous of the business model and of how inventors make their money on the back end? The potential for the upside? Maybe. But they don't see the 99 rejected concepts an inventor invested in for their one success. Believe me, inventors take their lumps. Some years are better than others. Some are painful.

GREED: Does the margin hit an item takes to make room for an inventor's royalty hurt the company in a real way? Consider it is possible for an internal item to be more costly without expertise to execute quickly and correctly. How much in internal resources did using outside expertise save? These types of macro viewpoints aren't always easy for people to get their heads around as they focus item-by-item, margin-by-margin.

So there you have it; my take on the emotional factors behind NIHS. Hopefully, nothing in there poked too hard at anyone. If it did, that's usually the one based in truth. Sorry about that.

Cheers to the industry I adore, and all of us in it, including our shortcomings.

May we have the wisdom to chuckle at ourselves, push to be better collaborators, play fair, value others and most importantly, rise together.

"I want to pick NIH Syndrome apart because turning away options is irrational, regardless of how it's justified."

Playing with Brands



With fresh additions to its successful *SpongeBob SquarePants* range on the way and a new *Subway Surfers* line launching this year, we caught up with **Darren Lee Phillipson**, VP of global product design at Alpha Group, to learn more about how the firm brings top brands to life in the toy aisle...



This year will see an exciting new line from you guys based on the hit *Subway Surfers* game. What was it about the brand that you felt would lend itself to a great new toy line?

We are thrilled and honoured to have been selected by SYBO to develop a toy line around *Subway Surfers*.

One of the main reasons we wanted to design toys for the brand is based on the fact that we are all huge fans of the game. After further discussions with SYBO, we also found out that there are many other fans of the game around the globe. In fact, the game has been downloaded over 2.5 billion times... that's more than a quarter of the population of the planet!

Obviously, this kind of penetration in the marketplace represents an exciting opportunity for Alpha Group to bring toy executions of the game to the *Subway Surfers* community. I also think the style and feel of the game offers something very unique to the toy space.

In terms of the line itself, can you talk us through a little of the development process behind it?

Subway Surfers is an exciting 'endless runner' game that taps into everything that is cool about urban culture: funky music, street art, skateboarding, sneakers and break dancing. I wanted to bring all of these creative elements into the toy line.

You will definitely see that we have developed a very distinctive style for our products and we have some extremely innovative packaging solutions.

***Subway Surfers* is an app game, and we're seeing more hit toy lines based on brands that come from 'non-traditional' mediums. Do you think this is a trend that'll continue?**

I think the trend of 'non-traditional' licensing will continue for many years to come. The landscape for how kids consume content has had a very rapid change over the last few years, and there is now a vast array of ways for kids to watch and interact with new IP.

Ten years ago, we only really had one streaming platform; now we have dozens. More and more consumers are "cutting the cord" completely and replacing cable with multiple SVOD options.

With the ever expanding popularity of platform and mobile gaming, the marketing dollars put behind some video game launches are starting to eclipse traditional theatrical movie launches. Children now have a different kind of role-model to look up to: the YouTube influencers, who are now the power-house celebrities of the future.

Quirky viral videos, indie cartoon characters, memes, high profile gamers, un-boxers and obscure apps; any of these can become the next big thing in the world of licensing.

"It is critical to both the consumer and the licensor that we don't take a label-slap approach to the toys."



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All of this means that, as a toy and entertainment company, Alpha Group now pays much more attention to the digital space. The challenge is to keep up with pace and try to catch the trend before it becomes a trend!

Does your approach to design change when working on an IP like *Subway Surfers*, versus when you're working on something original like TerraSect?

Yes, the approach does differ. I like to refer to the initial design process as breaking down the DNA of the IP. Before we put any pen to paper, we take time to truly understand the core values of the brand.

It is critical to both the consumer and the licensor that we don't take a label-slap approach to the toys. It is very important that we consider how to integrate the character presence in each product so that it feels balanced with the overall styling and features, and not just an afterthought.

In the case of the SpongeBob Giggle Blaster, you can see how we literally turned SpongeBob into a wacky silly string blaster. It took a lot of concept designs to come up with this final look.



Sticking with SpongeBob, you've had a great year with that brand and your Masterpiece Meme collection in particular has been getting lots of accolades and praise. With a new film hitting screens later this year, is there more to come from Alpha and SpongeBob?

Absolutely; there are lots more fantastic toys in the pipeline for *SpongeBob Squarepants*. Based on the overall reaction to the Masterpiece Memes, we have some really hilarious follow-up items such as Dabbing Squidward and Tired SpongeBob!

Also, the team are really excited about working on the toys for the new movie coming out next year: *Sponge on the Run*. If you have had a chance to watch the trailer, you'll get to see SpongeBob and Gary meet for the first time as kids. We are definitely having fun creating toys around this new look.



Be a Part of the Code of Conduct

It's time to get a grip on copycat toys and games. It's time to get everyone working together and move forward. It's time for an industry-wide meaningful 'Code of Conduct' that delivers on its promises. Wynne-Jones IP's **Victor Caddy** explains how you can get involved in this important new initiative...



Last Spring, the co-founder of Mojo Nation, Billy Langworthy, wrote an article which provoked industry discussion and took a great deal of research and insight to get factually correct.

He was writing on the subject of copycat toys and games. His article included many comments from the industry, including one from myself in my position as a trade mark and design attorney at Wynne-Jones IP.

We've worked alongside the team at Mojo for some time now and the issue of copycats is one that we see time and again across many industries, but it's particularly sensitive in this sector and has, we understand, been an issue of discontent for some time.

Following the article, we talked with Billy about doing something positive to address the issue; we wanted to help



bring the industry together and resolve part, if not all, of the problem for the good of designers, toy companies, creative agencies, buyers and retailers.

And so, the toy and game 'Code of Conduct' initiative was born.

As I've said many times, and to be absolutely clear, a copycat product in this sense is one that attempts to convince the consumer that it's a cheaper version of a specific, pre-existing, popular product. The idea behind a game or toy is typically un-protectable, and, by adopting a different name, a copycat manufacturer can easily make sure it avoids trade mark infringement.

This initiative will invite designers, invention agencies, toy and game companies, buyers and retailers to come together to outline a code of conduct designed to ensure original concepts are better protected. This means giving designers

It's time to get a grip on copycat toys and games.

It's time to get everyone working together and move forward.

It's time for an industry-wide meaningful 'Code of Conduct' that delivers on its promises.

and toy firms a platform to engage with retailers when copycat product appears on shelf, while also establishing best practices for retail buyers; ensuring they understand that while copycat product is often entirely legal, from an ethical standpoint, it robs inventors of royalties and toy firms of sales.

The initiative will also cover the issue of illegal copycat product and ranges that infringe IP rights and often do not comply with safety standards.

We knew that for the many individuals and businesses in this field, their very existence, let alone success, depends on creativity and innovation, but this is a difficult subject to tackle from a legal perspective because, usually, no law is being broken.

When we first announced it at the Toy and Game Design Conference back in September, it sparked a wave of interest amongst the community. People wanted to contribute to the discussion, have their voices heard and be part of the debate about what would constitute 'the Code'.

We have been delighted by the reception the initiative has received so far across almost all parts of the industry and we want to encourage as many people as possible in the coming months to help shape the framework of this important Code.

We are encouraging people from across the industry to meet with us in February at our London offices (or via video conference if outside the UK or unable to attend in person) for our first full round-table discussion, which will initially be a forum for attendees' opinions and thinking.

Following this, we will scope out the finer objectives, priorities and parameters for 'the Code' before an attorney at Wynne-Jones (who, in its role as an independent law firm specialising in IP, is expert in handling issues such as this) will draft the official Code and then lobby individuals and companies for their long-term support in adhering to the final Code of Conduct.

Once established, we hope to have a body which ensures the on-going adherence and management of the Code and its guidelines for the toy and game industry.

If you would like to help shape the Code of Conduct and be part of the discussions please get in touch with myself or Kirsty Barr using our contact details below. This is your Code of Conduct and your chance to help bring about change.

"We wanted to help the toy and games industry create a Code of Conduct that makes the issue fairer and more transparent, thereby bringing good to the industry as a whole."

**Victor Caddy ,
Wynne-Jones IP**

Victor Caddy: victor.caddy@wynne-jones.com

Kirsty Barr: kirsty.barr@wynne-jones.com

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States of Play

The Toy Association's Executive Vice President of Global Market Events, **Marian Bossard**, explains how the organisation is engaging with the inventor community via its Creative Factor initiative, and why the US has such a strong pool of design talent...



Why is the inventor community an important audience for The Toy Association, and how do you currently engage with this crowd?

The inventor community is an important audience for the Toy Association because our members, whether they make or sell toys, are keenly aware of consumer appetite for new play and entertainment experiences. In our role of providing service and opportunity to the industry, it is essential that we elevate awareness of the incredible talent represented by veteran designers and inventors as well as the "I've got this crazy idea" contingent.

You'll be pleased to hear that this year's Mojo 100 list is dominated by folks based in the States - narrowly beating the

UK! Why do you think the States is such a hotbed of creative toy design talent?

Well that's pretty impressive! I'd be bluffing some deep insight with any suggestion of understanding as to why that is the case this year, but the proverb "necessity is the mother of invention" still works (although I actually like another version - "The true creator is necessity, who is the mother of our invention" - because it has the word creator in it).

Humans can nicely track advancements that have kept us healthier and made day-to-day living significantly easier; many of the basic needs have been met. But the human appetite for play is real and it will never be satisfied.

We, along with so many countries, are living in very stressful times. We have so much, yet we feel anxious about the future. Maybe - just maybe - the need for play and relaxation is greater



“The need for play and relaxation is greater than most of us living today have ever known, and wouldn't it be wonderful if innovators and inventors are the ones to save the day?”.

than most of us living today have ever known, and wouldn't it be wonderful if the creatives, inventors and innovators are the ones to save the day?

The US also boasts some of the world's top toy invention and design courses. How important is it that we encourage new designers and inventors to choose our industry as the one to forge a career in?

It's very important! With a global focus we would be well-served to create opportunity for new designers to find their way to the play trade. Technology has propelled collaboration, and creative thinking is open sourced. We need the inevitable discipline of toy design, but we need to go further upstream to ensure that children are provided with play-filled lives in environments that inspire and encourage creative expression.

Speaking of creative expression, your Creative Factor programme has gone from strength to strength. What can visitors expect from Creative Factor this year?

When Brett Klisch called the Toy Association and told us that our annual event was missing the “creative factor”, we sat up, listened and took action. At that time we were strictly an association whose focus was on the manufacturing segment of the industry, so introducing magnet learning and networking opportunities for inventors already attending Toy Fair was exciting and fun; but it pretty much stayed under the radar for more than a decade.

Now in its 18th year, Creative Factor (as the initiative came to be known) has evolved alongside consumer interests which fuel the way the toy industry does business. What this means is that this year, more than ever before, we will explore in greater depth the product journey from concept to consumer.

There is still great need for the basics - we'll never abandon 101 level conversations about sourcing and production options - but what are the tech touchpoints that impact the way ideas come to life? What's changed about the way toys and youth product is

marketed, promoted and sold? How must retail adapt to deliver to contemporary consumer interests and experiential expectation and who is stepping out in front to get it right?

Readers will want to check in regularly to our website to see who, what and when. The why will be obvious.

Is the Creative Factor arm of Toy Fair something you'd be looking to bolster in the future?

Like it or not, the industry is on call 365 days a year. Rational or otherwise, consumer appetite for new and now requires a different level of engagement and more responsive delivery of product.

We definitely see an even more steadily active role for the Toy Association to facilitate the relationship between the creative community and the rest of the industry. We want to create more opportunities for these engagements well beyond the dates of our go-to-market events.

From a design and creativity standpoint, do you think the industry is in a good place currently?

Of course! Have you seen the impressive Mojo 100 nominees from the U.S? Seriously, this is the most wonderful industry and just when you think you've seen it all, something completely new comes along to wow you. But, there can never be enough new and there can never be enough innovation. Change is constant and picking up speed, but I believe this will all feel perfectly normal and that today's children, native to the speed of change, will innately create at a similar pace.

Finally, how do the folks at The Toy Association fuel their creativity?

Well, you know the need for a play-filled environment that inspires and encourages creative expression mentioned above? The same goes for the workplace. Here, Creative Factor's “crazy ideas welcome” tagline is given oxygen every day.

Beyond the Product: 360° Thinking for IP



Making Things' **Fi Murray** looks at how broad thinking can help transform one killer invention into a hot new brand spanning multiple product categories...

Creators and inventors - both in-house or external - can have the best seat in the house at the start of a concept.

They are also often best primed to think beyond the 'product'; they are the storytellers and they hold the stimulus and insights that formed the vision.

And while an idea's conception is a thrill, sometimes the best time to start ideating is around other creative touch-points that surround your concept.

This could include things like packaging, in-store, content and marketing disruption ideas. These touch-points can help take what could have been a singular concept down the path of forming a new brand, a multi-sku range... an IP.

The first 'business' hurdle for concepts can be pulling a collection of adults (not kids) into the vision. One way to do this is to make sure that everyone who is likely to be a stakeholder in the concept going forward has something to get excited about; something to see the potential in.

A benefit of thinking beyond the product is that it gives teams across the business a head-start. In-house development teams can be rammed with the 'now' work; the season is somehow already upon them and it can be tough to think about another project in the future and craft every detail from scratch.

Most critically, thinking beyond a product can function as a springboard and get a whole heap of exciting energy flowing.

Those who've been on the inside, know how much hard work goes in to incubating and converting inventor submissions into commercial products and brands; it's graft and really is the 'messy middle' as Adobe's Scott Belsky states (as a quick aside: his books are incredible reads for anyone in the business of design, marketing and project management).

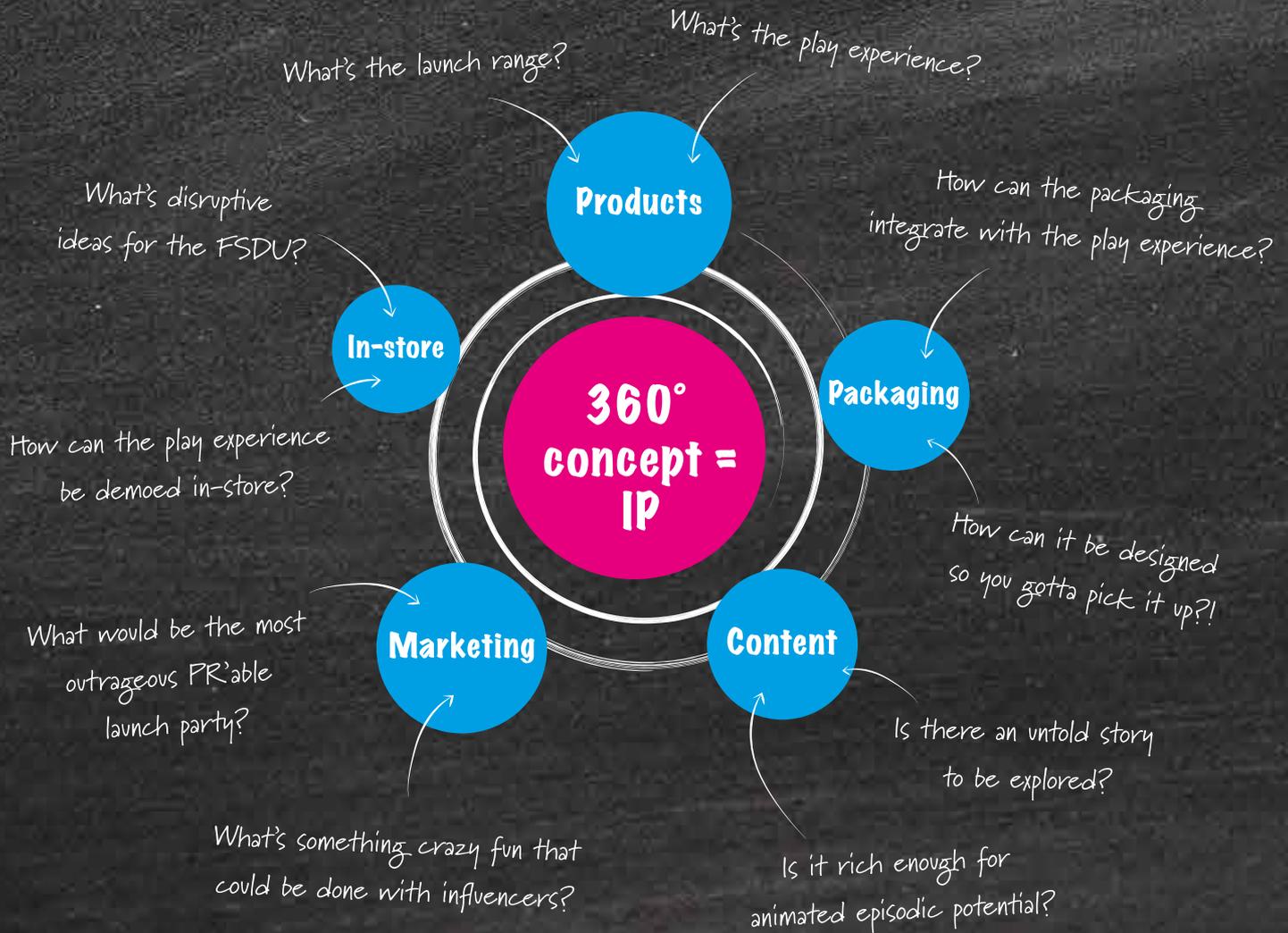
Not every idea will need this broad thinking - specifically, I'm mostly talking new brand creating stuff; ideas that are so rich in theming or play experience or content that you can't stop thinking of ideas for everything!

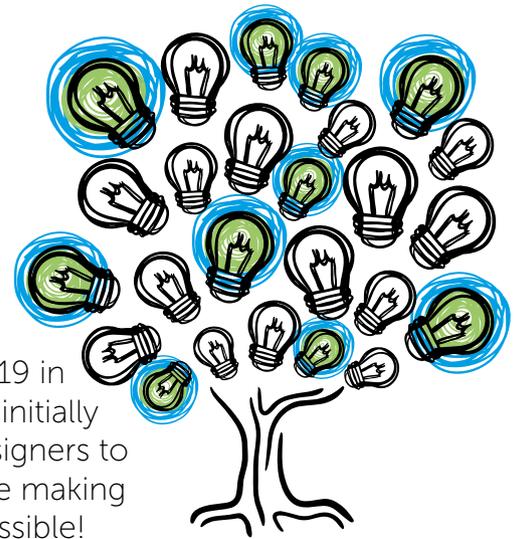
But set the expectation that the majority of what you've conceived for the other touch-points might never come to fruition (for a million and one reasons that arise when converting ideas to commercial products and brands).

Each touch-point certainly doesn't require equal thinking at this stage either and to balance the risk, it can be kept at iGEN level. Top-line, conceptual, conversation pieces, filled with caveats; just enough to get people talking, excited and energised to ideate and evolve it forwards.

Think of it as getting everyone to the same start line and fuelled up so they can't wait to hit the throttle!

"These touch-points can help take what could have been a singular concept down the path of forming a new brand, a multi-SKU range... an IP."





Sustainability at The Marketing Store

Pamela Stathaki joined The Marketing Store (TMS) in August 2019 in the new and important role of Head of Sustainability. Her focus initially is to work with TMS' researchers, developers, engineers and designers to find the right sustainable solution for the firm's toys; all the while making sure the toys are safe, fun and as environmentally friendly as possible!



Hi Pamela. So first off, can you talk us through your history in the sustainability space, and what your current role as Head of Sustainability with The Marketing Store entails?

I have always been interested in sustainability from a young age, in the broader sense as I have always loved spending time in nature. However, from a professional perspective my first real pull came to me when I was studying Chemical Engineering and later during my post-grad Environmental Management degree through courses which focused on environmental engineering and renewable energy.

The technical understanding of such a complex topic intrigued me and I wanted to be part of a solution rather than adding to the problem, so I decided to specialise in Environmental Sustainability. I started my career as an Environmental Engineer at Dyson's Research, Design and Development department with a focus on Life Cycle Assessment and integrating Sustainable thinking in the design process. I moved on to Ernst & Young as a Sustainability consultant where I provided sustainability assurance and advisory support for FTSE 350 companies.

My role before moving to The Marketing Store was at GlaxoSmithKline in the Environmental Sustainability Centre of Excellence where I focused on supplier engagement to drive carbon reduction and also led deforestation-free activities in

order to meet GSK's responsible sourcing targets for palm oil and paper packaging.

Recently, I have been really excited about the appetite to drive innovative change by focusing on sustainability solutions. At TMS, our target group is families and children so we have an additional responsibility to think about the future world we will be creating with the choices we make today.

You've worked across multiple industries and sectors; are there any sustainability challenges that are unique to the toy space?

That's a good question. I'm not sure about unique, but there are many certainly similar challenges. For example, there is an overall lack of consumer awareness, an issue with perception vs reality and as a rule, sustainable solutions tend to be much more expensive. It comes down to "who is willing to pay for it?" and I think that's a discussion being had in a lot of places at the moment.

More specifically, the toy industry is a very fast-paced industry which makes it difficult to trial sustainable solutions, so we have an extensive supplier engagement program in place with our vendors to make sure our research, technology and processes are industry-leading.

At TMS, we have a real sense of urgency to make changes, especially with the lead times we work with on our toy production.

The last year has seen issues of eco-friendliness and sustainability hit the mainstream, what with the Extinction Rebellion protests

“We have challenged the way our team designs toys by integrating sustainable design thinking.”

and Greta Thunberg’s US tour. Are you seeing consumers taking issues of sustainability into greater account when deciding what to buy and where from?

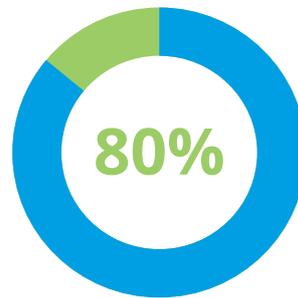
Yes and I’m really excited this is finally happening, I’ve been waiting a long time for this. We are seeing people ask for changes – specifically, we see people go into supermarkets, remove the single-use plastic packaging from products and hand it back. If that’s not the public starting to take a stand then I don’t know what is! Certainly, in the UK we are seeing people go back to a more traditional way of shopping – bringing their own bags or containers, visiting the butchers, fishmongers etc so they are closer to the supply chain and reduce waste.

Can you share how The Marketing Store has been forging a path for sustainability over the last 12 months?

We have certainly been on a journey of discovery and are taking a holistic approach to understand our products’ impact from concept to end of life. We have challenged the way our team designs the toys by integrating sustainable design thinking. Packaging has been a priority as we implement renewable or recyclable materials across all our products. For example, simplifying the material mix within our toys, minimising the use of higher impact components, as well as adhering to best practices such as reviewing regrind percentages and wall thickness.

Alongside a design approach, we are researching new plant-based biomaterials for both packaging and the product itself to support a circular economy. We are also working with our supplier partners to set ambitious targets, for example CO2e measurement and reporting and zero waste to landfill.

And finally, we are looking internally at how we can make a difference within our office globally. For example in London we have moved to 100% renewable energy, have eliminated single-use plastics and many other initiatives.



80% of a product’s environmental impact is determined at the design phase

Looking ahead, is there more to come from you guys in terms of bringing in further sustainability initiatives, and are there any green goals you can share with us?

We are making progress, but at this point we haven’t been able to implement all of our ideas as a lot of them are still in the research phase as we understand the scientific opportunity. In the future we are hoping to slowly implement them and it’s important to note all our decisions will be science-based. This is a very emotive subject and media has definitely presented it as such, so we need to make sure our work is backed up by hard and proven data because we have incredibly high standards to meet and failure is not an option for what we do!

Away from issues of materials, do you feel designers – both TMS’ own designers and those elsewhere in the toy space – have a part to play in making this space greener through the sorts of products they create, as great toys that are played with for years could be seen as a form of sustainable design?

Yes. I think the main thing to remember is that 80% of products’ environmental impact is determined at the design phase. There is a huge opportunity for designers to think differently and design in a more sustainable way.

Ultimately, we want to make a product that will be used and enjoyed by kids and families, in the most truly sustainable way!

Digital Transformation

Si digital's **Tom O'Malley** talks digital transformation and how it can give superpowers to toy and entertainment companies...



Digital transformation. That big, long scary word that not everyone completely understands fully. It's become a bit of a catch-all term to describe how digital technologies are helping improve business operations. Digital transformation comes in many forms. This could be using new web or cloud technologies or integrating machine learning. It can sound a little overwhelming.

What's a basic example of digital transformation then? Do you remember writing documents in Microsoft Word? Some still do. Saving changes as you go, to your computer or server. If you wanted to share the document with a team member, you'd send a link from the server and await feedback. Someone would try to open your document, at which point you would need to exit the file so they could view it. Frustration!

Then along came cloud-based software such as Google Docs. You start writing, it saves automatically...Woah! You need feedback, so ping your colleague a link and boom, there they are in the file with you, collaborating and leaving their thoughts. You've had to leave work early but need to finish off the document on the train. Your phone comes out and off you go again, writing on the fly!

Cloud-based software has completely changed business workflows around the world. It's made life easier, more

collaborative, less stressful and more efficient. That's the aim of digital transformation.

How Si digital has helped toy companies with digital transformation

We've had great success collaborating with toy companies as an external agency; working with IT and marketing teams to produce bespoke digital software and products.

We're not talking 'IT systems' that look archaic here. We're talking modern user interfaces that are as sleek as Instagram and as easy to use as Amazon. What's a good example of this? Think about how you currently show future seasons' products to retailers? What does that process look like?

We worked with a toy company who created a printed catalogue every season to share with buyers. This would take their internal team weeks to produce and the information would quickly go out of date. Retailers then sent their orders back to the toy company for processing. This would be in the shape of Excel docs, emails, order forms... File format frenzy.

This way of working was inflexible. It was chaotic; costing time, resources and not to mention all the trees. How could digital solve this problem?

Using web technologies and the cloud. That's how. This company needed a system that functioned like B2B e-commerce and a customisable catalogue in one. It would display photos, play videos/TVCs and list all relevant product



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Si digital

“We’ve had great success collaborating with toy firms as an external agency to create bespoke digital software and products. And we’re not talking ‘IT systems’ that look archaic here; we’re talking modern user interfaces that are as sleek as Instagram and as easy to use as Amazon.”

info; all neatly categorised by brand and by type. Sales and marketing teams could customise the catalogue, so buyers only saw product relevant to their categories. Buyers then gained access by logging in. They could self-serve by adding product and categories to their basket. It was simple, easy to use and efficient.

Additionally, sales teams no longer had to walk around trade shows taking notes. iPad in hand, they could curate orders there and then with the buyer live on screen. Patchy internet at Toy Fair wasn't a problem - it had an offline mode!

How can Si digital help my organisation?

Digital transformation comes in many shapes and sizes. Alongside our interactive websites, digital products and famous ping pong app, we've created inventor portals, online retailer catalogues and asset libraries. These have all helped teams become more productive by utilising cloud and web technologies. Being efficient and staying on top of workloads can often feel like a superpower!

We'd like to talk to you about productivity. What tools do you use? What workflows currently frustrate you across the organisation? Thinking about these answers can help us identify ways to help you innovate.

If you would like a free of charge workshop, please get in touch by emailing hello@sidigital.co.



Studio Session

Every year, the inventor community grows with R&D stars leaving toy firms to launch their own design consultancies and invention studios. We caught up with three designers who have done exactly that in the last 12 months – Fab Design’s **James Yuen**, Bean’s **Sally Jacobs** and Pumpkin Project’s **Valeria Miglioli** – to find out more about their exciting new ventures...



You’ve each spent years working in-house at toy companies. How did your time with these firms shape your approach to design, and has it changed over the years?

James Yuen, Fab Design: In my 24 years

working in Hasbro as a principal designer, I had the privilege to work with every design development team and create concepts for all categories. Hasbro has a very well established and robust process for innovation and product design and development. It really helped me to master many aspects of both hands-on design and managerial skills; and at the same time, know the importance of staying creative at all levels. I am definitely bringing all of these quality design principles and processes into Fab, and will continue to fully utilise all that I learnt for my new adventures.



Sally Jacobs, Bean: Well, my six-week placement at Hasbro turned into 13 years working there on the likes of Play-Doh, Playskool, Micro Machines and My Little Pony! I worked with some amazingly talented people and those years at Hasbro gave me an invaluable

experience into the world of toys and games.

My approach to design has changed over the years too; having children has been a big factor in this. Watching them and their friends play inspires me to think differently and to really focus my design work on the experience they get out of playing with toys and games.

Photo: Jane Looker



Valeria Miglioli, Pumpkin Projects: When working at Fiesta Crafts, I was in charge of all aspects of product development; not only the design of the products. I managed the research, analysis and idea generation, sourced, liaised and negotiated with manufacturers and also dealt with

all the safety aspects. The knowledge I gained about the whole process involved in bringing an idea to production has been invaluable in shaping how I design products.

Learning how things are made and the possibilities (and limitations) of mass production have certainly changed the way I approach the design of products. Over the years I have realised that coming up with ideas is probably the easiest part of my job, but being able to translate these into viable products takes a lot of work and skill.

Moving onto your exciting new ventures, what can you tell us about them, and what sorts of projects are you looking to collaborate with toy companies on?

SJ: I actually started Bean up in 2009 and ran it for five years before working at OOBA. Bean was initially a concept development consultancy and I worked on some fab projects with a variety of toy companies, mainly in Girls and Creative Play. After nearly six years working at OOBA, I have decided to re-launch Bean; however this time around I am focusing on the inventing side of the business.

During my time at OOBA, I learnt an enormous amount about the invention side of toys and games market. I also discovered a

love for the games business and everything to do with games! I am excited to get back into drawing and making things and bringing my ideas to life - but that is not to say that I would turn down the opportunity to work on consultancy projects along the way!

I work from a little office pod in my garden and it can be lonely, so I am keen to collaborate with other inventors on ideas and have some fun! I have already been on the road brainstorming with colleagues and it has been fun and rewarding.

VM: Pumpkin Projects is my very own toy design consultancy, born from the desire to utilise my expertise and skills for meaningful and considered designs. Although I spent many happy years with Fiesta, it was time for me to move on and start working on more diverse projects and with a variety of companies that share my ethos: to design toys to enrich, stimulate, educate and solve problems.

I believe a switch to the way we buy and use products is happening and toy design should aim for a more responsible approach. I want to explore the use of a different perspective to design; one that cares about how things are made and why, one that values individuals and resources and one that is dedicated to the longevity of the toy market for the next generation of children.

JY: With Fab Design, I am simply continuing what I do best, creating 'fab' ideas and concepts – from providing services such as cool-hunting and trend/product research, toy and game concept ideation and entertainment design to character design for animation. I have recently set up a small CAD team in Hong Kong, so I can now also produce CAD turnarounds and WL/LL models!

Finally, how do you each fuel your creativity?

VM: Without a doubt, a huge source of inspiration comes from playing with my children and seeing how they play with

their friends. It still amazes me how children can use their imagination and creativity in ways adults can't even begin to comprehend.

JY: My ideas come from all aspects of life; from walking down to my local corner shop to get a pint of milk and ending up spending hours chatting with strangers about some random topics to visiting global events like Comic-Con dressed up as my favourite character. There are always amazing things to explore and get inspired by around me!

SJ: Watching my children play and grow inspires me, and in my head I am still a child: I love kids' films, playing games and making things. Getting away from my desk and being out and active are also major factors in keeping creative. Ideas come to you in the weirdest places, so it is important for me to keep exploring, experimenting and adventuring.





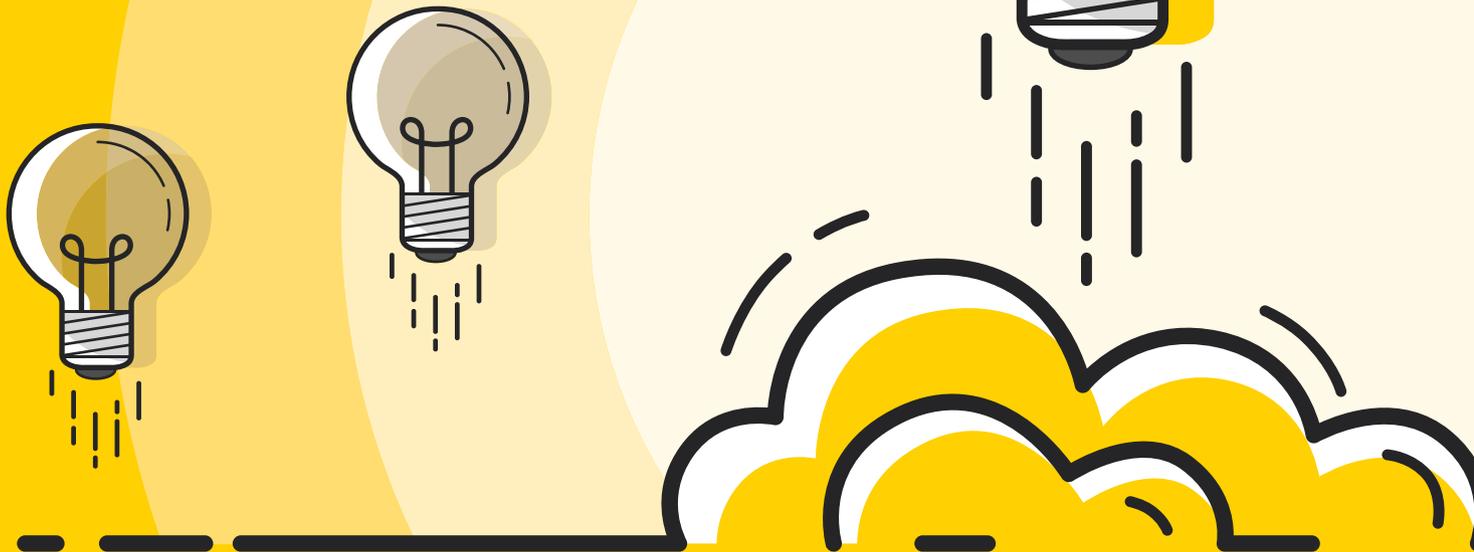
Some of the stuffed suits you'll be pitching to at Hasbro

And these were the serious-looking photos. Fact is, Hasbro's a big company with a smart, playful, fun-lovin' acquisitions team that wants to meet with you. They don't bite, promise (uh, unless that's part of the game play).

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING
YOUR BEST IDEAS!**



“To stand the best chance of getting any idea to market, it’s best to adopt a professional attitude and learn how to manage the ideas that you create.”



Here's an Idea...

Heayes Design's **Richard Heayes** shines a spotlight on the importance of ideas management, and why the old saying "if you love something, let it go" can be especially apt when it comes to ideation...



The world is not short of ideas.

It's estimated we each have between 40,000 and 70,000 thoughts a day - and it only takes a few of those to translate into things, or muster themselves into actual ideas, for there to be billions of ideas around the world every 24 hours.

How then, with your one-off toy idea, are you ever going to make it?

A long, long time ago, in a studio far, far away (well - Suffolk), I learnt that to get any one idea away, you need to support it with a legion of others...

This legion is there for a variety of reasons. First, to bolster your desperate need for creative credibility, and to sanity-check the others.

Second, for sacrifice, as you flip the A2 portfolio (I did say a long, long time ago) only to be met with the glistening blade of a quick "No!"

But most of all, the legion is there to take your focus away from any single one idea.

As the general, you need to support your legion. That means you look out for, and nurture, the best. You put them through a rigorous assessment and you care for them, but be careful not to love them, as any could fall in battle.

As a leader of your ideas, it's up to you treat them with respect, but you must learn to develop a professional relationship with them.

Ideas are often snapping at your mind, needing attention, and before you know it you're often spending vast amounts of time and money on them. They keep you up all night, they become jealous of competing ideas, and defensive if anyone dares say a negative word against them...

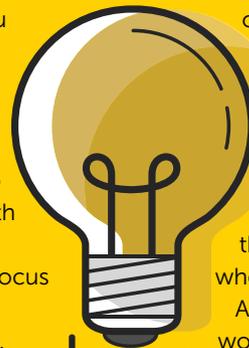
To stand the best chance of getting any idea to market, it's best to adopt a professional attitude and learn how to manage the ideas you create. I often feel that my ideas are like stray dogs who really want a permanent home. I find them

wandering in my mind, but even while I look after and care for them, I know that the purpose is to set them free - not to adopt them for myself.

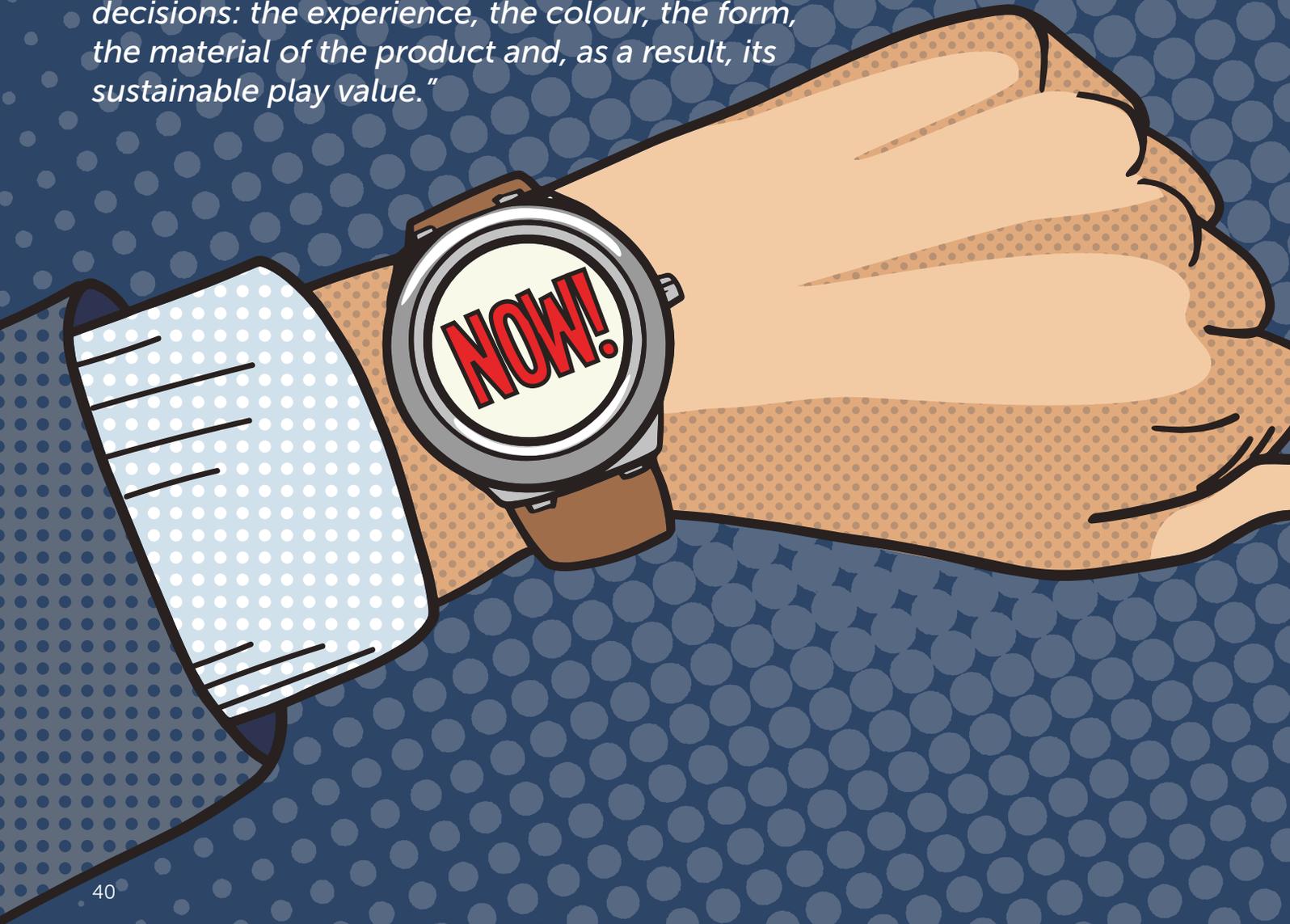
However, there are opportunities today that mean adopting some of the ideas does make sense, so getting to market through direct to consumer channels can be appealing. But the same rules apply, and too often ideas are put through Kickstarter and other crowdfunding platforms when really they should have been kept in the portfolio.

Always put yourself on the other side of the table... How would other people talk about your idea? What are best and the worst parts of it? It's never an easy process, but there are methodologies out there to help you.

Idea management is just as important as idea creation, whether that be in toys, tech or any other industry. The two support each other and should lead to more success, across more projects, by helping you make the right decisions at the right time.



"Designing within an extremely short time frame is the poison of "good design". It leaves almost no time to explore some of the most important decisions: the experience, the colour, the form, the material of the product and, as a result, its sustainable play value."



Patience is a Virtue

Play futurist **Yesim Kunter** questions why some toy companies still don't have patience when it comes to the design process, and looks at the impact that rushed ideation can have...



I have a problem; my problem is design!

Specifically the process of design not being taken seriously when we design for children.

We are conditioned beings. Hannah Arendt states in her book, *The Human Condition*:

"Whatever enters the human world of its own accord, or is drawn into it by human effort, becomes part of the human condition." The things we come into contact with shape our ways of living, and the toy industry has a lot of responsibility in the way we shape societies.

Play is making connections with ourselves and others and our surroundings. So what happens when we are conditioned beings? How does "design" take on the most important role in our own existence by creating experiences, connections and reflecting identities?

I've lived and worked in many countries. What I love about being in a foreign place is that even before you make a conversation with a single person, the environment whispers clues about its identity to you! This is exactly same experience for children. We - as toy designers, manufacturers, and service providers - are the 'world whisperers' for children; providing clues to shape their own perceptions.

Design is a fundamental tool in the creation of identity. Toys are the reflections of cultures, time and space. Due to the usage of media, children today have a higher awareness of their world than the previous generations, and because of this, "good design" is more important than ever before!

Picasso once said "every child is an artist" and designers should not take children's sense of design lightly! They are the best judges of our products; within minutes of a play session

you will see if your product is creating magic or not. And this is the reason I'm critically questioning how it is that we still don't have patience when it comes to the design process?

Most of the time, designers are given very little time to think, reflect and process.

Designing within an extremely short time frame is the poison of "good design". There is almost no time left to explore the most important decisions; the experience, the colour, the form, the material of the product and, as a result, its sustainable play value! This is excruciatingly painful for me as we end up cheating children's imaginations by missing details that will make the whole play experience unforgettable.

Think of your favourite toy; why do you even still remember it? What type of qualities was it associated with? What made it so special?

I still remember my Picnic Basket by Fisher-Price; its colour, proportions, the handle and the way I could fit all my other favourite toys inside of it. I still remember the whole experience of having it.

Like the Fisher-Price Picnic Basket, there are some brands, product and services that have established their 'Golden Ratio of Play' by blending the emotions and the rational qualities of their products. Emotions provide curiosity, surprise, deep learning and wonder by any sensorial design such as colour, texture, sound and form. Rational is where the functionality of the product adds longevity to the play experience.

We, as designers, need time and space to think, explore and reflect on our design process. We want to be given the time to create the 'Golden Ratio of Play' and provide life-long memories.



MOJO NATION 100: RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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KIM CULMONE,

SVP, Global Head of Design, Barbie and Fashion Dolls, Mattel

Mattel's Kim Culmone is tasked with developing the creative strategy and direct product design for the Barbie brand and all Mattel-owned IP fashion dolls. 2019 was yet another standout year for Culmone, as she led the team behind Creatable World, a new line of gender-inclusive dolls and one of the most celebrated toy lines of the year. Culmone and the team worked alongside a dedicated team of experts, parents, physicians and kids to create the range, which consists of six different doll kits that are available in a variety of skin tones. As one nominator puts it: 'Kim has continually pushed the boundaries of what's expected in the doll space and this has never been more apparent than with the successful launch of Creatable World; a doll line free of labels.'



MATT BLAND,

Product Designer, TOMY

Product designer Matt Bland has been with TOMY since 2014, and has established himself as an real asset to the team, working on many of the firm's hit licensed products. 'His ability to create amazing toy experiences in all categories from pre-school to A&C to vehicles is amazing,' said one of his admirers, adding: 'Cool, calm and collected, he has handled the enormity of TOMY's Ricky Zoom product range without a flinch'. And if that's not all; his colleagues and business partners also describe him as 'one of the nicest people in world to work with'.



CHRISTIAN CASTRO,

Lead Product Designer, What Do You Meme, LLC

Christian Castro is Lead Product Designer at What Do You Meme, LLC, and has designed the product and packaging for the firm's entire portfolio, including the top selling adult party game, What Do You Meme. 2019 was a standout year for Castro and his team; he created the company's first ever family party game, Doubles, won a TAGIE Award for his work on New Phone, Who Dis? and at one point, three of the top five best-selling grown-up toys on Amazon were designed by him (New Phone, Who Dis?, Buzzed and What Do You Meme?).



DARREN LEE PHILLIPSON,

Vice President of Global Product Design and Content Development, Alpha Group

Darren Lee Phillipson heads up global product design at Alpha Group, and his team had a great year with the SpongeBob brand in 2019, having enjoyed a very successful launch for its SpongeBob Squarepants Meme figures. Elsewhere, its Super Wings line of toys has now generated over \$1bn in sales revenue (this includes selling more than 25 million units of its 5" Transforming Figures). 2019 also saw Alpha nominated for two TOTY awards (RC TerraSect for Best Vehicle of the Year and the Massive Monster Mayhem Bash Weapons for Best Rookie of the Year), while the team is up for a 2020 TOTY for Grrrumball. Looking ahead, the future looks equally bright, as the firm has been awarded the Master Global Toy Rights for both Chuggington and Subway Surfers, with product landing for both later this year. As one nominator puts it: 'Darren is a seasoned toy industry executive with a difference; his creativity and infectious enthusiasm inspire the people around him and infuse the toys created under his direction with an essence of fun and discovery.'

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EMILY CHARLES,
Product Development
Manager, Gibsons

As product development manager at Gibsons, Emily Charles is both hugely creative and exceptionally organised, a rare but winning combination in getting the right product to market.

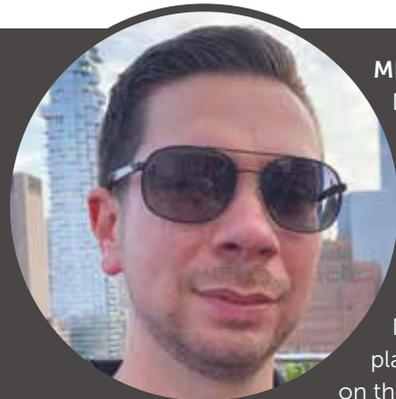
Despite only returning from maternity leave in early 2019, Charles pulled together more products for launch in 2020 than was believed possible, and has signed a raft of new and exciting licenses in the games and puzzle categories. 'She brings passion and infectious enthusiasm with her wherever she goes, as well as an enviable memory for games rules,' said one nominator, and her hard work has seen Gibsons scoop two Gift of the Year Awards in the last 12 months.



WARREN JACOBS,
Product Development Manager,
Interplay UK

Warren Jacobs has been the driving force behind a raft of Interplay UK's most successful products and brands, and has been deemed

integral to the smooth transition of product after the firm's acquisition by PlayMonster back in 2018. He is constantly striving to create quality products and experiences for kids and pushes for excellence and innovation in everything he does. Some of the success stories that he has been involved with in the last 12 months include Interplay's Face Paintoos range and the award-winning Fairy Light Garden from the firm's hit My Fairy Garden line. 'Warren is one of the most passionate, dedicated and hardworking people I have had the pleasure of working with in the toy industry,' said one of his many fans, adding: 'He's also one of the nicest!'



MIKE BISOGNO,
Design Director, Spin
Master Games

Mike Bisogno is a Design Director on the Spin Master Games team based in New York. Bisogno played an integral role on the design team at

Cardinal Industries before the firm's merger with Spin Master, and during his time there he masterfully lead his team to develop hundreds of new toys and games each year; from thousand piece puzzles to board games that provide endless fun for the whole family.



VINCENT IMAOKA,
Global Product Acquisitions, Story Brands,
Hasbro

Having previously acted as the 'Japanese Tech Liason' between Japanese inventors and Hasbro while working at Dream Link Entertainment, 2017 saw Vincent Imaoka join Hasbro as part of its Global Product

Acquisitions team. Since joining the team, Imaoka has worked alongside the inventor community to unearth great new concepts for the company's Story Brands, which boasts the likes of Transformers, Power Rangers, My Little Pony, Star Wars and more. 'The thing that sets Vincent apart from many in the industry is his passion for toys and brands as a fan,' stated one nominator, adding: 'He understands what children and fans of toys are looking for and taps into that during pitches.'

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JAMES WING,
European Project Manager, TOMY

James Wing has been in the toy industry for over 15 years, having worked his way up the ranks at Vivid from junior engineer to R&D manager before joining TOMY in 2018 as the firm's European project manager. Since joining TOMY, Wing has been a vital pillar in managing R&D, engineering departments and several key projects, and as one nominator stated: 'Boasting both a creative and engineering brain, James creates commercial play experiences through ingenious problem-solving and is also a bit of a guru for costing too; ask him anything and he'll know how many cents!'



RICH WALTON,
Senior Graphic Designer, Wild & Wolf

Rich Walton is a senior graphic designer (and games night champion) on the Ridley's Games team at Wild & Wolf. A highly gifted illustrator, Walton imparts a flair for the creative and distils his wicked sense of humour into Ridley's games, including his designs for Ridley's Jigsaw Puzzles like last year's Donut Lover's Jigsaw and comical pop culture puns and references in Selfish: The Space Edition and Selfish: The Zombie Edition. 'Rich is instrumental in bringing Ridley's Games to life,' said one of his fans, adding: "He was instrumental in making Avocado Smash and Smashing Pumpkins the award-winning best-sellers they are.'



SYDNEY WISEMAN,
Brand Manager, WowWee

Perhaps best known in recent years as the creator of the smash-hit Fingerlings brand, Sydney Wiseman is Brand Manager for all WowWee's Girl and Lifestyle Brands – or as she puts it 'head of all things pink, purple and/or glittery'. This past year has seen Wiseman invent another knockout item in the form of WowWee's Lucky Fortune line of blind collectible charm bracelets. Each bracelet is encased in a plastic fortune cookie and comes complete with a paper fortune, lucky numbers, and collectors guide, which converts into a classic fortune telling game. The line launched with over 100 charms to collect and trade, and enjoyed incredible early sales across Canada, the UK, Australia and the US. As one nominator puts it: 'Sydney has helped kick-start a new era in blind bag collectibles'.



SCOTT CLARK,
Director of Development,
iPlay, Hasbro

Scott Clark has been at Hasbro for over 20 years; joining the firm back in 1999 as a game designer before working his way up the ranks to become director of development for Hasbro's iPlay division. In this role, Clark leads his team to pioneer new playing fields for Hasbro, applying innovative use of technologies and partnerships to deliver magical play experiences. Recent highlights for Clark over the past year include brilliant work on Hasbro's D-O Interactive Droid and Nerf Laser Ops Pro.

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PHIL SAGE,

Senior Director, Design and Development, iPlay, Hasbro

A much loved figure in the world of toy and game design, Hasbro's Phil Sage is a passionate champion of both his own design colleagues and the wider inventor community. As senior director of design and development at iPlay, Sage leads the innovation process and commercialisation of award-winning consumer products and tech-focused initiatives within Hasbro. Some recent success stories for Sage and his team include Nerf Laser Ops Pro, Star Wars Lightsaber Academy Interactive Battle Lightsaber and the D-O Interactive Droid, which has been nominated for a TOTY Award in the Vehicle of the Year category and cracked This Morning's Top Toys for Christmas list back in December.



BRYAN DAVIS,

Creative Design Manager, Jazwares

Bryan Davis joined Jazwares back in 2018 after spending ten years with Fisher-Price as an integral part of the Thomas team, bringing innovation and excitement to that much loved brand. Now at Jazwares as a creative design manager, Davis retains that same energy and drive for a set of new and exciting properties. 'We've worked with Bryan for many years and he's always been an awesome manager,' said one admirer, adding: 'He has great ideas and is able to communicate them through an awesome sketch style.'



TANYA THOMPSON,

Director, Global Product Acquisition, Games, Hasbro

With a recent roster of inventor items that boasts the likes of Peeing Pup, Plumber Pants and The Slow Motion Race, as well as the growing Don't Step In It portfolio (now boasting Unicorn and Reindeer editions), it's been another successful year for Tanya Thompson, Hasbro's director of global product acquisition for games. A popular figure within the designer community, one nominator stated: 'Tanya is a true games guru and an absolute legend in the inventing world.'



SVEN ROBIN KAHL,
Senior Design Manager,
The LEGO Group

Sven Robin Kahl is a senior design manager at LEGO, and the creative lead for IPs and Play-Themes. Recent lines that have been launched under Kahl's leadership include LEGO sets for Jurassic World:

Fallen Kingdom and Overwatch, but perhaps his biggest project of the last 12 months was LEGO Hidden Side, the firm's new augmented reality-infused brand. Made up of a series of eight "haunted" building sets, Hidden Side sees kids build a range of spooky models, before taking to an app to uncover the hidden ghosts and mysteries lurking within. Overseeing the design and development of the physical toys, and working closely with the digital team, Kahl was instrumental in making this new launch one of LEGO's biggest success stories of 2019.



ASSHETON LE PAGE,
Senior Product Designer,
Vivid/Goliath

One of the longest-serving design stars at Vivid, Assheton Le Page is a senior product designer at the company and has worked on a plethora of hit brands and lines over the years. Le Page started his career at model making firm Atom, and it appears he's not lost his touch, as one nominator stated: 'Assheton is absolutely fantastic at looking at a design and knowing how to make the model work.' Another added: 'Always up for getting involved in charity initiatives for The Toy Trust, Assheton has retained the same inspiring level of passion and enthusiasm for toy design as he had when just starting out.'



DEIRDRE CROSS,
Director of Product Development,
Funko Games

In March 2019, acclaimed games development studio Forrest-Pruzan Creative was acquired by Funko and became Funko Games. Already one of the most respected creatives in the games space - thanks to her team's work on hits like Disney Villainous and Jaws: The Board Game - Deirdre Cross, director of product development at Funko Games, has enjoyed further success in the past 12 months as her team developed the Funkoverse. Featuring brands like Rick & Morty, Harry Potter, DC Comics and The Golden Girls, the Funkoverse sees the classic Funko Pop figures translated into a tactical miniatures game. Having won a TOTY in 2019 for Villainous, Cross and her team are nominated for again this year for both Funkoverse and Villainous: Evil Comes Prepared.



TODD JONES,
Senior Design Manager, Spin Master

A graduate of Industrial Design from Art Center College of Design, Todd Jones has experience working with Walt Disney Imagineering R&D, LEGO Concept Lab and Spin Master, where he has been one of the firm's R&D stars for a close to a decade. Key to some of the company's most successful pre-school lines, 2019 saw Jones promoted from design manager to senior design manager, and as one of his fans puts it: 'We've worked with Todd on a variety of pre-school brands with Spin Master, and he's always been a pleasure to work with and boasts a really well thought out approach to design innovation.'

DESIGN AGENCIES & INVENTION STUDIOS

DESIGN AGENCIES & INVENTION STUDIOS

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FI MURRAY,

Founder, Making Things Studio

In its first year, Fi Murray's Making Things Studio has idea generated, designed, co-developed, invented and consulted for some of the best in the biz. 'Pushing traditional inventing forward by combining it with strategic innovation, disruption and brand building, Making Thing's blue sky creativity is endless but it's Fi's talent for delving deep into the DNA of brands that produces the magic,' said one nominator.

DOMINIC YARD, Director, This Is YARD

This Is YARD is a small and agile studio working across a variety of categories, bringing fresh concepts and executing high end working models and presentations. 2019 was another strong year for YARD with four new items hitting the market including Monster Jam Ship It Flip It Container and Tech Deck Sk8 Container Pro with Spin Master, as well as fruitful collaborations with StudioPlay on Fisher-Price's Thomas & Friends: Track Master Dragon Escape Set and Goliath's Freeze Fall.



BANG ZOOM DESIGN

Steve Fink, Owner, Bang Zoom; Mike Hoeting, Owner, Bang Zoom; Neil Hamilton, Owner, Bang Zoom; Steve Casino, Toy Inventor, Bang Zoom

Cincinnati-based product development company Bang Zoom Design are one of the leading invention studios working in the toy business today. Recent success stories over the last 12 months include the customisable Lotta Looks doll line from Mattel, Mr Potato Head Movin' Lips and Yellies with Hasbro and Far Out Toys' Pulp Heroes. 'The guys at Bang Zoom are working at the height of their powers,' said one nominator.



JIM MCCAFFERTY,
President & CEO,
JMP Creative

JMP Creative is a highly versatile invention powerhouse regarded by toy companies throughout the world as a market-leading invention resource. Led by Jim McCafferty, JMP has created products achieving Toy-of-the-Year status in multiple countries and developed concepts resulting in over a billion units of product to reach the marketplace. Over the past year, McCafferty and the JMP team placed successful inventions for numerous toy companies and brands, including Asmodee's Dobble 360, Crayola's Glitter Dots, Moose Toys' Mighty Beanz Slammer Time Race Track and Hasbro's Zoops.



SEVEN TOWNS

Founded back in 1963, the invention studio Seven Towns has showed no signs of slowing down in recent times, and has in fact enjoyed some of its most successful years of product placement. Recent launches for the firm includes Too Red Fred and the TOTY-nominated Orangutwang with PlayMonster, Tech Deck Dudes: From Skate to Crate and Bendy Bunchems with Spin Master, TOMY's Pile Up Pirates and Asmodee's Picture Show.



SUZANNE ROBINSON,
Creative & Commercial
Director, Carterbench

Based in the North West of England, Carterbench has been a mainstay of the toy invention community for over 25 years. Within this time, the firm has worked across all categories of toys and games, licensing product with all the major toy companies. Mattel launched Carterbench's UNO Flip game last year, and it was met with great acclaim. As one nominator put it: 'UNO Flip embodies everything that Carterbench strives to deliver with all of their creations: Feature driven innovation that can stand the test of time.'



FUSE LONDON LTD

FUSE London Ltd is an ultra-creative design and invention hub and this past year, the firm's feet have hardly touched the ground. FUSE won a TOTY award and a Play Creators Award for Spin Master's Cool Maker KumiKreator, while other recent success stories from the team includes Fisher-Prices' Rescue Heroes Transforming Fire Truck, Mattel's Polly Pocket Hidden Hideouts range and Jakks Pacific's Megaman Playset. All this, plus FUSE also found the time to appear on a toy-themed episode of *The Apprentice*.



RICHARD HEAYES,
Creative Director,
Heayes Design/
PlayLenz

2019 has been a busy year for Richard Heayes; he's developed over 15 exciting new games with Tactic Games as well as worked on a new line for Cartamundi and Disney. Direct sourcing with colleagues in China has seen more turnkey projects delivered to clients, and the PlayLenz arm of his business continues to license new concepts. As one nominator puts it: "Yes he's got a gazillion brilliant, innovative games under his belt, but more than that, he's a thoroughly nice chap who's generous with his time, insight and creativity and who regularly champions the work of others in the community."



SIMON SKELTON & RUTH ELLIOTT,
Co-Founders,
Big Ideas

Ruth Elliott and Simon Skelton are the duo behind Big Ideas. Both have worked in the toy business for most of their careers, and the firm's reputation for 'big ideas' has led to their broad client list and a wealth of innovative products on the market. One recent highlight was Sambro's Disney Frozen 2 Elsa's Magic Powers game, launched alongside the smash-hit Disney sequel. "Simon and Ruth are brilliant to work with" said one nominator, adding: "Big Ideas boast a high standard of creativity along with a wicked sense of humour."



ROB AMES & LUC HUDSON,
Co-Founders,
Triclops Studio

Rob Ames and Luc Hudson of Triclops

Studio are, as one nominator puts it, "toy masterminds". The two have established Triclops as a leading creative powerhouse, and recent success stories include licensing Pups in Cups to Golden Bear in 2019 and joining FUSE London in a toy-themed episode of BBC One's *The Apprentice*. As one fan puts it: 'They are wonderful to work with and have no trouble getting under the skin of a brief - I can't recommend their thinking highly enough.'

MOJO NATION 100: DESIGN AGENCIES

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ADAM BORTON,
Founder,
Creating Unique Toys Ltd

2019 was a milestone year for Creating Unique Toys' Adam Borton as he relocated from the UK to California to be close to some of the industry's big hitters. Alongside the sustained success of Flushin Frenzy

(licensed to Mattel), last year also saw Borton's Oops Scoops launch with Yulu. The stacking game sees players to pile ice cream scoops onto each other at near-impossible angles, and it earned Borton a 'Game Designer of the Year' nomination at the inaugural Play Creators Awards.



CASEY NORMAN,
Managing Director,
Genie Toys

Founded by Casey Norman back in 1997, Genie Toys works with the world's major toy companies, helping them bring new concepts to market. Innovating and inventing for over 20 years,

Genie has created a huge variety of products in different categories and licensed them worldwide. Recent success stories for Genie includes WowWee's Untamed Snakes, Far Out's slime-game Snot Nose, Zuru's Hamsters in a House play-set and Mattel's Polly Pocket Stretch Fashions.



GARY PYPER,
Founder, Fun-damental
Invention

From a secret underground hideout (somewhere in the Home Counties) Gary Pyper and his mercenary team spend days and long nights tinkering and fettling random bits of stuff

into toys and games for the biggest companies in the world. With a multitude of best-selling games and toys under his belt during his time with Seven Towns, 2019 saw Pyper leave the firm to set up Fun-damental Invention. With many concepts already signed for 2020, it's looking to be a roller coaster of a ride for Fun-damental, and as one nominator put it: 'Gary's a creative powerhouse and Fun-damental is already one of the brightest invention studios around.'



**JOHN KIELY &
KEITH
KRISTIANSSEN,**
Founders,
RandomMills

Founded by John Kiely and Keith Kristiansen, RandomMills is a product design company that has created for categories spanning toys, games, home

goods, hardware and even the medical space. Over the last 12 months, the firm has licensed five great new items in the toy and game space, including CraZart's Flying Pigs game and Zing's Zax – a smart adaptation of the current axe throwing craze that swaps out the blade for safe foam suction cups.

ERRUMBALL



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE MOJO NATION 100

Alpha Group is actively expanding our portfolio of products.
If you are interested in partnering with us on a new toy or IP concept,
please contact Trina McFarland:

Trina@tinkertini.net

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IDEO

The IDEO Play Lab offers play-centered consultancy, app design and toy invention, and their team of inventors have been delivering award-winning toys for over 20 years. Recent hits include a trio from Mattel with the innovative Hot Wheels id, the AR-infused Pictionary Air and the pink paradise on wheels that is the Barbie 3-in-one DreamCamper. Elsewhere, 2019 saw IDEO's Plumber Pants launch with Hasbro and its Paw Patrol Flip & Fly range of 2-in-1 vehicles take off with Spin Master.



GIL ZALAYET,

Creative Director, StudioPlay

Gil Zalayer's StudioPlay specialises in concept and product development. Since launching back in 2010, the firm has been responsible for a raft of great products, with recent success stories including Goliath's Freeze Fall and Fisher-Price's Track Master Dragon Escape set (both collaborations with This Is YARD), as well as Fisher-Price's RC Imaginext Batmobile – a collaboration with Ryan Kratz that won the duo a TAGIE award in 2019.



SO SOUND

So Sound has had a great year creatively across each department, and won the Design Agency/Invention Studio of the Year Award at last year's Play Creators Awards. The firm's audio team has worked on numerous products, bringing them to life with voices, sounds and music. This includes work on Moose's Really Rad Robots MiBro and Little Live Pets Rainglow Unicorn Vet Set, as well as TOMY's Toomies line. Highlights on the invention side includes the development of a new innovative technology which perfectly marries physical and digital play and enables a video game-like experience with toys. Elsewhere, Tweet Beats – a collaboration with Tricky - received praise and recognition from the toy inventing community. 2019 also saw So Sound debut a new video production arm of the business that has already created some great new content for TOMY's Ritzzy Rollerz brand.



ROBERT FUHRER, Owner,
Nextoy;
ALEX FUHRER, Business
Development, Nextoy

Nextoy hit the toy and game invention placement grand slam again this past year, with products licensed to the 'big 4' of Hasbro, Mattel, Goliath and Spin Master, plus a raft of other smaller companies. These include Octopus Shootout and Gifeez with Spin Master, Tyrannosaurus Rocks and I Don't Gif a _____ with Hasbro, Gator Golf with Goliath and Puglicious with Mattel. 'Robert and Alex always manage to identify the next trending animal before it's even trending!' said one nominator, adding: 'Nextoy are simply world class.'

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MARIA SARMIENTO & ADRIANA MOLINA,
Founders,
Hands On
Design

Hands On Design is the Miami-based invention studio, founded by Maria Sarmiento and Adriana Molina. This year sees Hands On celebrate its 20th anniversary, and in that time the firm has invented successful toys and games across multiple categories, including Mattel's Barbie Breakfast Play-Set with Stacie, Pictionary Frame and Spin Master's Rusty Rivets Lab.



PAUL VON MOHR,
Managing Partner,
Meo Mio

Paul von Mohr is managing partner at Meo Mio, a youth consumer product development and licensing company. One of his earliest success stories came in the form of Pound Puppies, where he worked with inventor Mike Bowling to expand the brand and develop new ideas for the IP. Since then, he has worked with lots of designers on a plethora of winning concepts. Kent Displays, creators of the Boogie Board, utilised Meo Mio's creative services to expand its presence in the youth category. This collaboration led to a successful program for the past three years with Spin Master, using the Boogie Board tech with its Etch A Sketch Freestyle product and internal brands.



WESTLEY CIARAMELLA & KEITH MILLMAN, Owners,
Catapult Concepts

Catapult Concepts is an invention studio owned and operated by Westley Ciaramella and Keith Millman. In 2019, the firm licensed Noisy Neighbors, Spin-Off and Pic Flip to Mattel, as well as Hiding Hedgehogs and Build it Blueprints to Fat Brain Toys. At Toy Fair 2020, the firm will have key drivers with a range of partners including Alpha, Far Out Toys and Sharper Image, as well as TV driver items with Mattel.

MATT BURTONWOOD,
Director, Open 2 Design;
BEN WILLIAMS,
Designer, Open 2 Design



Open 2 Design's Matt Burtonwood and Ben Williams had a great 2019. The firm's Rubik's Cage launched via University Games last year and won the firm the Game Designer of the Year (Licensed Product) award at the Play Creators Awards; a night that also saw Open 2 Design's Ben Williams win the Rising Star award. 'Open 2 Design is a pleasure to work with and their concepts and ideas never fail to impress,' said one of the studio's admirers.



BIG MONSTER TOYS

One of the most respected toy design firms around, the team at Big Monster Toys dedicates their time to entertaining, delighting, and educating children and adults alike with the most innovative toys and games in the industry. 2019 was another stellar year for the BMT team, with launches across a wide range of categories, including Jakks Pacific's Slap Ninja, Moose Toys' Cozy Dozys, Mattel's Hackin' Packin' Alpaca and Fisher-Price's Imaginext Mega Shark Bite.



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DON ULLMAN & BOB DRISCOLL,
Toy and Game Inventors

Don Ullman and Bob Driscoll are both independent toy and game designers who have collaborated on some of the biggest mass market launches of recent years. In the past year alone, the two have collaborated on PlayMonster's Kiss My Bass, Cardinal's FRIENDS: Wheel of Mayhem and MegaBleu's Heist (known as Bank Attack in the UK). A co-design with Rob Daviau and Steve Butcher, Heist has gone down a storm since debuting last year. The team won Game Designer of the Year for it at the inaugural Play Creators Awards, it's in the running for a TOTY award and was named a must-have game on ITV's How to Spend it Well at Christmas. The game was even the subject of a event in London – Bank Attack Live – that brought the game to life in the form of an escape room experience.



SALLY JACOBS,
Founder, Bean

A much-loved figure in the inventor community, Sally Jacobs has launched an exciting new venture this year in the form of Bean, a brand new invention studio. As well as being one of the industry's freshest sources for toy and game concepts, Bean is also on hand to provide expert consultancy services, with clients sure to benefit from Jacob's vast experience in the industry, having previously worked at Hasbro and Ooba Games. As one nominator puts it: 'Sally is one of the best in the business and her move back into solo inventing with Bean is one that will have a long list of toy and game firms cheering at the prospect of working with her.'



DARYL ANDREWS,
Inventor and Designer

Daryl Andrews is a freelance Canadian inventor and designer who has worked on over 45 games with 15 different publishers, including Sagrada and Bosk with Floodgate Games, Kodama 3D with Indie Boards and Cards and Pressman Toy's The Oregon Trail Game: Journey to Willamette Valley. 2019 saw Andrews make the leap from the hobby world to mass-market games as the designer behind Spin Master's Sinister Six.



JOSEPH WHEWAY,
Creative Director,
HeadcaseMedia

Having spent four years working as a product designer with Golden Bear, 2014 saw Joseph Wheway go it alone in setting up his own design agency, HeadcaseMedia. Based in the Midlands, HeadcaseMedia has a wealth of experience in branding, marketing and product design, and has worked on a raft of exciting play products for firms including ITV, Disney and Nickelodeon. Recent years have seen Wheway work in the games space on Gibsons' Zoinkers, as well as in toys on concept design and 3D CAD for many of Golden Bear's successful pre-school brands.

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KENNY KIERNAN,
Illustrator

Kenny Kiernan is a self-taught artist, specialising in toy and game illustration, packaging art, and character design. He has created work for the likes of Hasbro, LEGO, Disney, Marvel, DC and Scholastic, and is an increasingly vital ally for toy

and game inventors; providing concept art for some of the industry's biggest invention houses and design studios.

'Kenny's work speaks for itself through the stunning visuals he creates,' stated one nominator, adding: 'He's also a genuinely lovely guy and a pleasure to work with.'



EDMUND BARNETT-WARD,
Director, The Affable Design Company

Edmund Barnett-Ward is a superb sculptor who has been working in the toy, game, collectables and hobby industry for over 20 years. His firm, The Affable Design Company, offers a wide range of design, concept, digital sculpture and model making services, and Barnett-Ward has worked on ranges for iconic brands including Monopoly, Star Wars, Harry Potter, Marvel and DC. One of The Affable Design Company's biggest projects in recent times is handling the Doctor Who Figure line – a range spanning over 360 figures, with its latest contributions being showcasing in a recent exclusive B&M line from Character Options. 'Ed is one of the most professional people I've ever dealt with in my time in toys and games and deserves all the recognition he can get,' said one admirer, adding: 'His is a talent that can fly under the radar sometimes but he has brought nothing short of perfection to every job I've seen him tackle.'



BRETT J. GILBERT,
Game Designer

Brett J. Gilbert is one of the UK's most prolific freelance board game designers, and having created several tabletop hits, he is now also designing games in the mass-market space. 2019 saw two games launch from Gilbert based on much-loved IP; card game Rubik's Match with University Games and The Gruffalo: Games from the Deep Dark Wood, published by Yay Games and co-designed with Andrew Harman and Tony Boydell. In the hobby space, last year was equally busy, as Essen 2019 saw three of Gilbert's games enjoy successful launches: Lookout's Mandala, White Goblin's Maya and Chocolate Factory from Alley Cat Games.

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KIM VANDENBROUCKE,

Game Inventor, Brainy Chick Inc

Games designer Kim Vandenbroucke has an expansive portfolio that spans everything from dexterity games about balancing food on your head to pre-school titles designed to help youngsters learn their colours through play. 2019 saw Vandenbroucke win the Emerging Innovator Award at Hasbro's annual Innovator Expo, following the successful launch of her game, Peeing Pup. Other recent success stories for Vandenbroucke include ThinkFun's Heads Talk Tails Walk and Pick Me Up Piggy from MindWare, both of which scooped Parent's Choice awards last year.



NIR DORON & GILAD PODGOR,

Toy & Game Inventors

Nir Doron and Gilad Podgor met six years ago while on the renowned Toy Design course at Israel's Shenkar College of Engineering and Design. Podgor found that his cute, chunky (and often wheeled) designs made him a natural fit for the world of toys, while Doron was looking for some fresh inspiration alongside his career as a creative video director. Together the two have enjoyed several successes in the toy space, the most recent of which is Candylocks for Spin Master; a new line of scented dolls that each boast 15-inches of super soft cotton candy inspired hair. Each doll is a hidden surprise, and kids can create braids, buns, twists and ponytails thanks to the unique texture of the hair.



WILFRIED FORT & MARIE FORT,

Game Designers

Based in France, Wilfried and Marie Fort are a husband and wife design duo specialising in kids' games. 2019 was a standout year for the Forts; their game Mr Wolf, published by Blue Orange, won the As d'Or Child (Game of the Year – Child) – France's biggest board game prize – while their Valley of the Vikings, published by HABA, scooped the industry's most prestigious accolade in kids' games: the Kinderspiel des Jahres. Other recent successful launches for the pair includes Blue Orange's Oh My Gold, Asmodee's Jungle Speed Kids and HABA's Snail Sprint.



ERIN DEIGHTON,

Design Consultant and Educator

Erin Deighton is an independent design consultant and play expert, specialising in trends, insights and disruptive idea generation and facilitation within the toy and games industry. He is also an educator, lecturing on product design at Ravensbourne University and inspiring foundation students in Art and Design at Loughborough University. 'A creative and philosophical powerhouse, Erin always brings fresh perspective and new ways of looking at things to any ideation event,' said one nominator, adding: 'His knowledge of the industry and consumer psychology guarantees we come away from any session with concepts we'd never have come up with on our own.'

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KEN GRUHL,
Game Designer

Game designer Ken Gruhl is likely best known as one of the designers behind smash-hit, Happy Salmon, but 2019 saw a raft of his game concepts hit the market. There was Foodies from CMON, which sees players take on the role of food court managers vying to attract the most customers, as well as ThinkFun's Mystic Market, a fast-paced card game where players buy and sell magical potion-making ingredients. Gruhl also landed The Furglars with Bananagrams, It's Getting Dicey with Spin Master and also saw his Monster Match game make the Kinderspiel des Jahres recommended list.



ELIZABETH HARGRAVE,
Game Designer

It takes some designers a lifetime to create a genre-cracking, smash-hit tabletop game, but Elizabeth Hargrave did it with her first attempt in Wingspan. Published by Stonemaier Games, more than 5,000 copies of the game sold in a week during Wingspan's pre-order period in January 2019, and it's now on its third print run, with over 30,000 copies of the game in English, and 14,000 in foreign-language editions. Diverting from the fantasy/sci-fi themes so prevalent in the tabletop space, Wingspan sees players step into the shoes of bird enthusiasts – researchers, bird watchers, ornithologists, collectors – each seeking to discover and attract the best birds to their network of wildlife preserves. One nominator stated: 'Wingspan has been a breath of fresh air for the tabletop space, and with that and Tussie-Mussie, Elizabeth has already marked herself out as one of the sector's most exciting new talents.'



HELEN DAVIES,
Graphic Designer, Porridge Design

Helen Davies is a freelance graphic designer based in Edinburgh, who has close ties with Gibsons – a firm which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019. There aren't many Gibsons design projects that don't pass through Davies, be it style guides, websites, trade catalogues, centenary branding and perhaps most importantly, award-winning products such as the Gibsons Jigsaw calendar and Sweet Memories gift puzzles. 'Helen's creativity and knowledge of the Gibsons brand knows no ends,' stated one nominator.



PAUL GILLINGHAM,
Owner, Paul Gillingham Associates

Paul Gillingham Associates' team of sculptors and model makers have been established for over 30 years, and boast a reputation for producing sculpting of the highest quality, at all scales, for all types of manufacturing process. Gillingham and his skilled team have created a vast range of work, from concept sculpts through to finished patterns for many of the industry's most successful toy lines. 'I can't even quantify how many projects, brands and creations these guys would have had their hands in – literally', stated one nominator, adding: 'What they do is phenomenal; a dying art and one that this industry relies so heavily on.'



SARA FARBER & BRYAN WILSON,
Co-Founders, Galactic Sneeze

Sara Farber and Bryan Wilson are the team behind Galactic Sneeze, a Brooklyn-based creative studio known for their self-published party games like Schmovie and Spank the Yeti. 2019 proved to be a milestone year for the firm as it entered the world of licensing, with a trio of their games hitting shelves around the globe with Kikkerland: Goat Yoga, Maskarades and Clock Block. 'The guys have a real talent for creating very funny, easy-to-grasp party games that look as good as they are fun to play,' said one nominator.



LUDOVIC ROUDY & BRUNO SAUTTER,
Game Designers, Serious Poulp

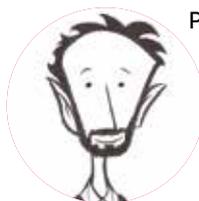
Ludovic Roudy and Bruno Sautter are the games design duo known as Serious Poulp. Since teaming up in 2010, the two have created titles including Steam Torpedo, 8 Masters' Revenge and The 7th Continent. 2019 was a major year for Roudy and Sautter as their party game, Just One, scooped the biggest award in board games - the Spiel des Jahres. A member of the awards jury stated: 'The game is ingenious because of its simplicity; it develops a tremendous pull and the barrier to entry is so low that anyone can easily overcome it.'

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PHIL HARVEY,
Illustrator

Freelance illustrator Phil Harvey is something of a secret weapon for several toy firms. He boasts incredible skills across character artwork, packaging illustrations and visuals for concept presentations, and has recently provided support for Moose Toys UK projects including Scruff-a-Luvs and Team Gem. 'He's just so bloomin' talented with a pen in his hand, visualising concepts and creating characters and worlds,' said one nominator. Another added: 'Phil is an absolute legend and a talent to be reckoned with.'



ANDREW HARMAN,
Chief Creator, YAY Games

Andrew Harman is the award-winning independent designer and publisher behind YAY Games. Having created waves in the hobby market with Ominoos and released five games in as many years, 2019 saw Harman look to raise the bar in licensed games for families. Believing passionately that there is so much that can be done in the family space with the right IP, he steered a team of top UK designers to bring a set of Gruffalo-inspired games to market in November, called The Gruffalo: Games from the Deep, Dark Wood.



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DOUG MORRISON,
Managing Director, So Sound

'Captain.' 'Leader.' 'Legend.' Just some of the words used to describe So Sound MD Doug Morrison. A staple of the toy industry since the mid Eighties, Morrison ran Radicle Technology before launching So Sound in 2003. One nominator stated: 'Doug played a major role in creating the localisation team at Fisher-Price back in the day, and if you look at what So Sound is now achieving across invention, audio, electronics and even video production, I can only imagine the millions of smiles he has made possible'. Another adds: 'He deserves every plaudit going.'



TRINA MCFARLAND,
Owner and General Manager,
TinkerTini

Trina McFarland's TinkerTini is a firm dedicated to making inventor relations accessible to small to medium sized toy companies and licensors. Since debuting in 2018, TinkerTini has welcomed a client base spanning the likes of Universal, Alpha Group and Funrise, and 2019 saw McFarland launch several new and vital resources for the inventor community. One, the TinkerList, is an online database listing (and celebrating) toys and games that have come from the inventor community and gone to market, while last year also saw McFarland debut the TinkerBoard, an online platform that gives inventors access to resources such as illustrators, sculptors and model makers. As one nominator stated: 'There's no doubt about it; the world of toy and game invention is lucky to have Trina and TinkerTini.'



**CORMAC LANGAN, LEE GICAS, KRISTIAN OTT MILBO, MING TANG,
MITZI DE CASTRO, GEOFF SMYRK AND PETER GRINSELL;**
UK Product Team, The Marketing Store

The Marketing Store's EU and APMEA product team consists of seven people who conceptualise and design Happy Meal toys for every McDonald's Happy Meal market outside of the US. Over the past 12 months, the team has continued to adapt and take on new challenges regarding the controversial topic of new materials being used; rethinking the firm's positioning on using plastic for toys. As one nominator stated: 'The team is being pushed to design bigger and better toys for Happy Meal in terms of function and aesthetic, using the most sustainably friendly materials possible'. 2019 highlights include December's Asterix 60th Anniversary line in France, Germany and Austria (which required a massive 60 figurines for a five-week window), a successful non-licensed Halloween range in the form of Magnet Monsters and Ugly Dollz, a line boasting an AR element which debuted across multiple markets.



HEATHER DELANEY,
Founder and Managing Director, Gallium Ventures

Specialising in areas spanning crowdfunding and product development to PR and growth hacking, Gallium Ventures' Heather Delaney has helped a raft of clients in the toy and games space in recent years. For Robo Wunderkind - an Austria-based company that creates robots that teach kids how to code - Delaney championed the brand internationally, while also advising on product development, planning the product strategy and managing a Kickstarter campaign. Elsewhere, 2019 also saw Delaney plan both the product strategy and launch for Smartibot, the world's first A.I. enabled cardboard robot.



MATT NUCCIO,
President, Design Edge

For over a decade, Design Edge's Matt Nuccio has volunteered his time to help advocate and educate inventors both in and outside of the toy industry. He currently sits on the advisors board of the Chicago Toy and Game Group and has been a key member of the Toy Association's Creative Factor panel, helping aspiring inventors bring their concepts to market. In 2019, he was honoured by the United States National Security Agency (NSA) as an "American Innovator" and also represented the entire toy industry at last year's "Emerging Innovators Summit" in Melbourne, Australia.

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DOUGAL GRIMES,
Senior Director, Global Games Inventor Relations, Spin Master

A much loved figure in the inventor community, 2019 saw Dougal Grimes depart Hasbro to join Spin Master, heading up Inventor Relations at Spin Master Games. Tasked with working with designers from around the globe to source great games and bring them to market, Grimes has been deemed 'one of the industry's most passionate champions of inventors and ideas,' while another stated: 'Dougal has done a great job in helping to develop the inventor community and put a greater spotlight on them and the work they do.'



AMANDA GUMMER,
MD and Founder, Fundamentally Children

Dr Amanda Gummer's Fundamentally Children is dedicated to helping children develop skills through play. She provides independent expert advice on a range of topics (including play, toys, apps, children's tech, e-safety, child development, special needs and other parenting issues) and has proved to be a vital resource for designers looking to ensure their toys and games are of real value to a child's play diet. 2019 saw the firm celebrate its fifth birthday; a milestone marked with an initiative devised by Fundamentally Children researcher Anna Taylor where the company gave £5k worth of its services away totally free of charge to one lucky winner. Last year also saw Gummer deliver a keynote speech at Cologne's Great Kids Summit, serve as an industry mentor at the WIT Empowerment Day in Dallas and take part in the State of Play panel at Mojo Nation's own Toy and Game Design Conference.

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MARISSA LOUIE,
CEO and Chief Designer, Animoodles

Marissa Louie is CEO and chief designer at Animoodles; a plush brand whose two lines to date has driven \$500k in retail revenue in just over one year on the market. In the wider design community, Louie is active in Women in Toys, mentoring many women in the industry and regularly speaking at panels and conferences. She has also built one of the most popular Facebook groups for designers in Designers Guild (boasting over 20,000 members from across more than 100 countries). Here she gives career and design advice on a daily basis to designers of all levels from multiple industries, including toys and games.



VALERIE VACANTE,
Founder and Managing Partner, Collabsco

Valerie Vacante is founder of Collabsco, a strategy and innovation firm based in Austin, Texas. 2019 saw Vacante evolve Collabsco's Connected Play Landscape to cover over 250 companies and emerging technology experiences, while also serving as a strategic advisor to Rocket Impact and Pressure Games, both of whom aim to get kids active. Elsewhere, Vacante consulted on Taming Gaming, a book about educating families on the power of positive gaming and play, and served both on the SXSW Innovation Advisory Board and as a CES KAPi Awards Judge.

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AZHELLE WADE,
VP of Brand and Product, Creative Kids

Azhelle Wade has worked in the toy business for ten years, and before joining Creative Kids, she was global product development and design manager for Toys R Us' Babies R Us arm. In her current role as VP of brand and product at Creative Kids, Wade has created style guides, outlined design processes, increased margins and doubled SKU count, all while maintaining the design integrity she's established throughout her career. Recent highlights at Creative Kids for Wade include completing a full product re-haul on the multi-million dollar B Me girls' arts and crafts brand, creating the new Craft Vibes Only line (debuting later this year) and joining Women In Toys' New York chapter.



PHIL ALBRITTON,
Founder and Creator,
Power Kid Design

Phil Albritton runs Power Kid Design, a firm that invents, develops and markets products for mass and specialty retail. Albritton is a key champion of the inventor community through his weekly Power Kid Podcast, which presents in-depth interviews and conversations with some of the biggest names and rising stars in the toy, game and family entertainment industries. 'Shining a spotlight on the design and inventor community, Phil's Power Kid Podcast has become essential listening and an important flag-waver for the industry's creative backbone,' said one nominator, adding: "Fun, passionate and informative; it's essential listening for our industry."

MOJO NATION 100: DESIGN CHAMPIONS

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TAL SCHRIEBER,

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

Tal Schrieber started her career as a toy inventor, before moving into education as a teacher of design. Today, she handles business development and inventor relations for Spin Master in Israel and heads up the prestigious Toy Invention Program at the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design in Tel Aviv. The success of this one-year program – run in collaboration with Spin Master – has resulted in bringing exciting new talent into the industry, including Nir Doran and Gilad Podgor, the designers behind Spin Master’s recent Candylocks doll line. ‘Tal is doing an incredible job at bringing a new wave of design talent into the industry, and has helped to cultivate an incredible pool of inventor talent in Israel’ said one nominator.



RICH MAZEL,

Senior Director, Global Product Acquisition, Hasbro

One of the most passionate supporters of the inventor community around, Rich Mazel is Senior Director for Global Product Acquisition at Hasbro. Equally encouraging of both the professional inventor pool and first-timers, as well as creatives from other industries that are dipping a toe in the toy space, Mazel sees concepts from inventors at events across the world and has spoken on subjects of design, creativity and invention at numerous conferences. ‘I love Rich’s enthusiasm for creativity and innovation,’ said one nominator, adding: ‘He’s not a gate keeper, in fact he’s the opposite; passionately welcoming and encouraging new talent into the gate.’



JOHN DUDLEY, RON VAN HARPEN, TOM BROSSEAU & STEVE NOVAK

US Product Team, The Marketing Store

The Marketing Store’s US product team works with some of the biggest licences in the world, including IP from the likes of Disney, Pixar and Universal Studios. The two standout programs from the past year have been the acclaimed Happy Meal toys for Toy Story 4 and Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker. ‘The creative, design and production excellence clearly displayed by the team has been second to none,’ stated one nominator.



BEN RATHBONE,

VP Design, Games, Spin Master

Spin Master’s Ben Rathbone is synonymous with the toy and games design world, as one nominator puts it, ‘he’s an industry legend’. Rathbone boasts over 30 years of experience in the business and is an incredibly popular figure within the inventor community, having spent decades heading up design at Hasbro before joining Spin Master in 2017, where he has fast become an integral part of the success enjoyed by the firm’s games division in recent years. ‘Even after so many years in the industry, his passion and excitement shines bright,’ added one of his fans.



VICTOR CADDY,
Trade Mark Attorney & Partner,
Wynne-Jones IP

Wynne-Jones IP's Victor Caddy has over twenty-five years experience as a specialist trade mark and design attorney, during which time he has developed many long-standing and close relationships with clients, in many cases becoming a trusted "virtual" member of their teams. 2019 saw Caddy contribute to an article looking at the issue of copycat product in the toy and games space, and following that, last year decided to launch a Code of Conduct and create a new forum made up of retail buyers, designers, and heads of R&D aimed at curbing the problem.

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LESLEY SINGLETON,
Founder and MD, Playtime PR

Lesley Singleton is founder and MD of Playtime PR, and the co-creator of Board Game Club, a monthly grown-up games night. A much loved personality in the industry, Singleton has carved out a reputation for integrity, great passion and unerring intuition, giving valuable advice to inventors of all experience-levels, as well as providing them with a platform to shine at Board Game Club. As one nominator puts it: 'With a smart set up and well-chosen team

backing her up, Lesley Singleton is one of the hardest-working people in toys and games,' while another adds: 'There simply isn't another PR in the business that does more for game inventors.'



ALPESH PATEL,
VP. Global Toy Design, TOMY

Alpesh Patel is VP of Global Toy Design at TOMY, and 2019 saw him pick up the Design Icon award at the inaugural Play Creators Awards. Known for his infectious and inspiring passion for design, last year saw Patel's team debut a raft of impressive new launches, including collectable girls' brand Ritzy Rollers and the innovative 'evolving toy' Rizmo. 'Al is a visionary who understands how to make great product like very, very few in the industry,' said one nominator.

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JEREMY POSNER,
President & CEO, Shenanigans
Toys and Games

Having worked at two of the industry's top invention houses in Rehkemper Invention & Design and Big Monster Toys, 2017 saw Jeremy Posner launch his own firm in the form of Shenanigans Toys and Games. Since then, Posner has brought to market dexterity games like Blue Orange's Bears in Barrels, party games like Mattel's Sell Yourself Short and a line of pixel crafting kits called Jixelz with Fat Brain Toys. As one nominator puts it: 'He's very funny, very creative, does his own modelling and cranks out a lot of concepts – I think he's going to be in the next class of great decades-long inventors'.



JACQUES PRIESTNER,
Product Designer, Seven Towns

Having interned at Bang Creations and worked at TOMY as a product designer, 2016 saw Jacques Priestner join the esteemed London-based invention group Seven Towns. His appointment came at an exciting period for the firm, with new products getting placed and new staff being recruited following some recent retirements. 'Jacques has risen to every challenge put to him over the last three years and has enjoyed real success with his own creations coming to market this year,' said one nominator.



LIZ GANRUDE,
Lead Industrial Designer, Learning Resources

Liz Ganrude is one of the rising stars in toy design. Working with a staff of just one junior designer and without big R&D budgets or third-party design firm support, her product designs were nominated for three prestigious 2019 Toy of the Year awards, with Botley the Coding Robot winning Innovative Toy of the Year. 'Liz has shown herself to be adept at designing everything from unique infant development toys to complex robotics to action-packed STEM lab toys,' stated one fan, adding: 'No matter what category of toy she is designing for, Liz infuses each of her creations with an eye toward creativity, innovation, and hands-on learning.'



MITZI DE CASTRO,
EU Product Team, The Marketing Store

Mitzi De Castro started at The Marketing Store two years ago straight out of university and is one of the firm's junior product design superstars. 'She is an incredibly hard worker and is determined, a fast learner and a great team player', stated one admirer, adding: 'Mitzi has a 'can do' attitude and always goes the extra mile.' She has led some stand-out programs this past year, including the Happy Meal success stories Ugly Dollz and Magnet Monsters, both of which were met with a positive reception and have been incredibly successful in the market.

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ROB SCHUYLER,
DiscoNifty

DiscoNifty was founded in 2016 in Toronto. With a laser like focus on product innovation, DiscoNifty has created TwistyPetz, Boxy Girls, Funlockets, Rescue Runts and Shimmer Stars. DiscoNifty has also designed, launched and

marketed SuperDeker, a mega-hit in the hockey space. Expect a lot more innovation from this company in 2020 as they expand into new categories and take on new challenges.



TJ MORRISON,
Toy and Games Invention, So Sound

TJ Morrison leads So Sound's design and invention team, and over the last few years has built the firm into one of the most exciting new invention houses on the scene. 2019 saw So Sound win the Design Agency/ Invention Studio of the Year award at

Mojo Nation's Play Creators Awards, as well as get a nomination for Emerging Innovator at Hasbro's own Innovator awards. Other highlights from the last 12 months includes So Sound winning the W.I.T.T.Y prize at the 2019 Toy Inventors Dinner to launching So Sound's newest venture, a video content production arm. 'With TJ's leadership, So Sound has secured itself as one of the toy industry's leading design agencies, and him and his team are only going to continue to achieve more and more in the future,' stated one nominator.



ALEX FUHRER,
Business Development,
Nextoy

Heading up business development at the renowned invention studio Nextoy, Alex Fuhrer is responsible for liaising between creative forces and the firm's

customers – a line-up spanning heavy hitters like Hasbro, Mattel, Spin Master and Goliath. 'Alex is one of the most talented inventors around,' said one of his fans, adding: 'He also manages to capture the latest trends and turn them into successful games, and even boasts fantastic connections with the Far East, having recently interned in Tokyo.'



MATT JORDAN,
Product Designer, TOMY

Having graduated in automotive design, Matt Jordan has proved to be a perfect fit at TOMY, where he has taken lead of designing vehicular toys for the firm's pre-school and pre-cool brands in Europe. 'Matt is relatively new at TOMY but has made a huge

impact on what we do,' stated one nominator, adding: 'His energy, passion and enthusiasm in everything he does translates into beautiful, well thought out design.'



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

Barry McLaughlin and Jason Lautenschleger are the creative minds behind Barry & Jason Games and Entertainment, and the last 12 months have been a roaring success for the duo. 2019 saw Barry and Jason launch an innovative travel game called Dr. Biscuits' Radical Road Trip that was a finalist for the 2019 Toy of the Year awards, and the firm created a party game for Crazy Aaron's Thinking Putty called The Ultimate Putty Challenge. 2019 also saw them take on some behind the scenes creative work for the guys at Wicked Cool Toys, while the company has even started working in the licensing space, creating games based on Bill & Ted and Anchorman.



IVAN EXPOSITO & DAVID MONTERO,
Co-Founders, Melbot

Melbot is an entertainment start-up founded in 2017 by David Montero and

Ivan Expósito. Both had experience working for top tier agencies in the industrial design and video games sectors, but set up Melbot in a bid to blend the digital and physical worlds of play. With studios in Valencia and Barcelona, and a staff of 11, Christmas 2018 saw Melbot debut its first game, Melbits World, where users play as a range of pixies tasked with protecting the digital world from evil viruses. The next step for Melbot was an expansion into the toy space last year with Melbits POD, a physical toy that allows kids to incubate and hatch their own digital Melbits, and the firm looks set to continue designing toys that use tech to create magic.



NICK METZLER,
Incubation and New Business Specialist
– Games, Spin Master

Nick Metzler is a talented designer at the helm of many of Spin Master Games' new wave of hits. A two-time winner of the Chicago Toy and Game Fair's Young Inventor Challenge, Metzler successfully brought the world of Marvel to the tabletop in 2018 with Hail Hydra, and gave Black Panther the board game treatment last year with Wakanda Forever. Elsewhere, he created the Alexa-infused party game Good Question, and continues to be one of the brightest young talents working at Spin Master today.



OLLIE HOBBS,
Toy & Game Inventor, So Sound

The youngest member of the So Sound team at just 19, Ollie Hobbs has been an integral figure in the development of some of the firm's recent successes, including Tweet Beats with Identity Games and a top secret project centered around an innovative new technology. A talented 3D modeller, Vector illustrator and video editor, his varied skill set is what makes Hobbs such an asset to the team. 'His fresh approach at looking at concepts is extremely valuable,' said one of his fans, adding: 'He always goes above and beyond on any task he's given and is a vital member of So Sound's invention team'.

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HAZEL REYNOLDS,
CEO, Gamely Games

Hazel Reynolds has grown Gamely Games from an initial homemade Christmas gift for her

12-year-old sister into a thriving small games company that was named Amazon Small Business of the Year in 2019. With a goal of bringing people together to laugh and spend quality time with each other, she has taken the lead in creating five original, hilarious and super-inclusive party games, which have sold over 100,000 copies. In addition to this, the company gives away 10% of its profits to good causes and minimises packaging on the games to make them as green as possible. 'She is not just an endless well of creative ideas, but has also put in the hard work to test and develop these nuggets into much loved games that people rave about,' said one nominator.



GRANT BRENNECKE,
US Product Design Team,
The Marketing Store

Grant Brennecke is a senior design engineer in The Marketing Store's Chicago team and has been with the company since 2015. He designs and engineers toys for McDonald's Happy Meal and, according to one nominator, 'is always looking to find creative ways to deliver new and fresh ideas', adding 'his design excellence, innovation, passion and energy – specifically on the Toy Story 4 program – was outstanding.'



STEVE MOORE,
Founder & Creative Director, Tantrum Innovation

Founded in July 2019, Tantrum Innovation is a new invention company based in California's Silicon Valley. Its founder and creative director, Steve Moore, has over 14 years of experience in the toy and games industry, having worked at the likes of FUSE London and IDEO, and brought to market over 50 ideas with major toy companies including Mattel, Hasbro, Spin Master and Fisher-Price. 'Steve is a creative powerhouse and Tantrum already looks like one of the most exciting new invention companies on the scene,' stated one nominator.



WINNIE MAK,
Founder, One Dear World

London-based mum Winnie Mak launched One Dear World in 2017, with a vision to help all children grow up with a secure self-image, appreciating themselves as they are and learning to respect others. Her strong values for a brighter future for our world, both socially and environmentally, shine through all of her products - with diverse fair trade dolls and charity donations with every sale. 2019 saw Mak launch a crowdfunding campaign to release six new inclusive disability dolls, which have been tested with children and awarded a Recommended stamp by the Good Toy Guide.

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ROSS MONKS,
Junior Designer,
Moose Toys UK

Ross Monks joined Moose Toys UK in 2018 as a graduate and has spent the year creating a line of GoGlow Pals plush night lights, as well as range of accessories for the firm's smash-hit Scruff-a-Luvs brand. 'He brings an amazing energy to the team and punches well above his weight,' said one of Monks' nominators, adding: 'His passion for toys shines through in his work and his can-do attitude and positive outlook bolster the tight UK team perfectly.'

VINA ARRIAGA,
Toy Inventor,
FUSE London



Vina Arriaga's passion, determination and enterprise has taken her far from home in Mexico, on a rapid and global, design-fueled career mission. Via TEC de Monterey and Edinburgh Napier University, and study spells in Spain and Italy, she has settled at FUSE in West London, adding toy invention to a CV that includes packaging design and teaching in Product Design. At the heart of her passion is a sense of wonder, and with the current Zeitgeist of kids creating content around the 'unboxing' of their toys, that is a incredibly important quality for an inventor to have.



CERI PRICE & NATALIE PODD,
Directors,
Confident Games

Ceri Price and Natalie Podd are the first-time inventors behind Confident? This new party game sees players ask and answer curious questions... Instead of giving a specific answer, though, you all have to give a range. If the right answer is in your range, you win points. Since launching last year, Confident? has had its second edition go to press, as well as two expansion packs. And as one nominator says: "It's not just that Confident? is an outstanding debut game, it's that the inventors are lovely, whip-smart people with tremendous integrity."



ANNALEE ROBBINS,
Design Associate,
Spin Master

Having interned at Spin Master straight out of Humber College back in 2018, last year saw Annalee Robbins

join the firm full time as one of its most promising new in-house designers. While interning, Robbins worked on a concept that looks set to be one of Spin's most exciting launches come Fall 2020, and as one nominator stated: 'Annalee is an exciting young talent, and everyone at Spin Master is looking forward to seeing more of her creativity and fresh point of view'.



MELISSA HERSHEY,
Senior Mechanical
Engineer, Hasbro

Melissa Hershey is something of an engineering guru within Hasbro's Integrated Play team. Working across all stages of development, from concept to shelf,

Hershey has played a vital role in the development behind the firm's animatronic, electronic and connected products. Recent success stories for Hershey includes items within Hasbro's Furreal brand, as well as the Star Wars D-O Interactive Droid – one of the most technically challenging products that Hasbro has ever launched.

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