

Nostalgia, 'kidults,' and personalization drive toy sales growth

Article

Key stat: US toy and hobby ecommerce sales are projected to reach \$94.66 billion this year, up 10.0% YoY, per our forecast. They'll reach \$151.75 billion by 2027.

Toy sales growth can be attributed to kids' shifting interests, the influence of online platforms, and expanding into older audiences. In our recent ["Behind the Numbers: Reimagining Retail"](#)

podcast episode, we dive into trends impacting toy retail sales and how marketers can reach new consumers.

1. Nostalgia is a marketing tool

- Brands can play into memories of cartoons and toys that Gen Z and millennial consumers enjoyed in their youth.
- Companies like Mattel have created movies and shows around their toy brands to engage a broader audience. The “Barbie” film reignited interest in the brand, and has even sparked a “weird Barbie” trend on TikTok, where people show off their botched dolls from childhood.

2. The emergence of “kidults”

- “**Kidults**,” defined by The NPD Group as consumers ages 12 years and older who buy toys or games for themselves, contribute to **one-fourth of all toy sales annually** at about \$9 billion, per NPD data. This trend is **consistent in Europe**, as sales of toys for kidults are outpacing sales to children.
- The TikTok account for the show “Teletubbies” fosters a connection with an older audience, even getting on board with viral video trends like “girl dinner,” where young women share their meals made up of snacks.

3. Kids shift attention from toys to games

- This presents an opportunity for toy brands to focus their attention on other audiences, and for games to become toy brands, said our analyst Sky Canaves. “You have phenomena like Pokémon. If they don’t have kids’ attention, how are they getting the attention of older kids, teens, and adults?”
- Similar to Pokémon, Squishmallows, the viral plush toys, have cultivated a strong fan base among older children, teens, and even adults after getting popular on TikTok.

4. Social media and influencers extend reach

- Social media platforms have become increasingly influential in determining toy trends, presenting new marketing avenues. For example, Ryan’s World is a YouTube empire revolving around toy reviews, showing the power of video content in promoting toys.

- Brands are working with influencers to reach wider audiences and generate excitement through user-generated content. For example, Mini Brands, the miniature collectibles toy company, has capitalized on TikTok influencer campaigns and viral trends like unboxing videos.

5. Immersive experiences and personalization drive engagement

- Lego has invested heavily in AR-enhanced store displays to create an interactive experience. It's also investing in the metaverse through a partnership with Epic Games.
- Build-A-Bear Workshop's new after-dark program is targeting the kidult audience by offering personalized bears for the older audience. "I think this is really about creating the one-on-one relationships with a product and with brands in ways that great toys have always done, by enabling creativity and self-expression," said Canaves.

[Listen to the full episode.](#)

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