

US toys in 2010 are 'green,' high-tech... and cheap

February 16 2010, by Luis Torres de la Llosa



Various types of Hexbugs by Innovation First, Inc. on display at the annual Toy Fair, February 14, 2010 in New York. Hexbugs are described as micro robotic creatures that are self-powered and motorized.

US toy makers are coming out of a long recession tunnel this year, hoping to ride the recovery wave with new lines of classic, "green" and high-tech toys, and a sales pitch centered on affordability.

The American International Toy Fair 2010, underway in New York until Wednesday, is sounding out market tendencies after a disastrous 2008 and an encouraging upswing in 2009 that promises further improvements this year in a multi-billion-dollar industry.

Toy manufacturers have hit the fair with exhibits ranging from classic erector sets by Lego and Playmobil to spanking new offers like a Twitter

collar for pets and the perennial doll favorite Barbie, who this year is decked out as a television anchorwoman.

Santa Claus will have toys for all tastes next Christmas, but above all he will be concerned with keeping the price tag down, even at the expense of quality.

Labeled toy of the year by the Toy Industry Association (TIA), the cuddly Zhu Zhu pet hamster robots from Cepia are still top of the list for young kids -- and parents -- for under 10 dollars.

"The trend this year is affordability. You will see a lot of green products under 25 dollars, also active games for the body or the minds, and affordable high tech," TIA spokeswoman Reyne Rice told AFP.

"Parents are looking for toys or games they can play with their children, and not necessarily with too much technology," said Playmobil USA Marketing Manager Michelle Winfrey.

The toy industry is worth 75 billion dollars in annual sales worldwide, with more than one-quarter, or 21 billion, in the United States alone, according to TIA figures.

This year's environmentally friendly exhibits include toys made of wood and innovative offers like a 20-dollar caterpillar farm that, with all the supplied proper care, turns into a butterfly factory in only three weeks.

Giant toy maker Mattel is hitting the high-tech market in mid-2010 with "Puppy Tweet," a Twitter-enabled dog collar for around 30 dollars that broadcasts your pet's actions on micro-blogging site Twitter.

Another wallet-friendly smart toy starting at 10 dollars is "Hexbug," micro-robotic creatures resembling cockroaches, spiders or crabs that

respond to touch, sound and even light and are capable of navigating mazes or their own nano habitat set.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Rubik's Cube, Techno Source offers "Rubik's Touch" for easy solving of the puzzle with just a swipe of the finger, and "Rubik's Slide" -- coming out in the third quarter of this year -- with light-and-sound effects for 18 dollars.

"It is easy to understand, it has a physical aspect and it is addictive," said Techno Source assistant marketing manager Amy Bogin.

Barbie 2010 has also gone high-tech with its 50-dollar "Video Girl," sporting a small video camera that can send everything the blond doll sees onto a computer screen.

Toy giant Mattel surveyed its Barbie followers to determine what the doll's 125th profession should be. By majority consent, Barbie this year is a reporter and star news anchorwoman on television.

And steering away from her traditional pink outfits, the new Barbie comes with a choice of 12 predominantly black wardrobes.

The toy fair has some 100,000 products on show for its 32,000 visitors at the Javits convention center. The list, of course, also includes sophisticated and expensive [toys](#).

"Beamz," is a laser beam musical instrument for 200 dollars apt for children of all ages, including dad.

A notch above is "Bioloid," a 1,200-dollar robot from South Korea's Robotis that is billed as the first educational robot kit based around "smart serially controlled servos." It can be programmed and made to move in astonishingly realistic fashion.

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