

Mattel scraps plan for digital assistant for kids

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Mattel, whose CEO Margaret Georgiadis is seen at a 2017 conference, has scrapped plans to sell a connected speaker powered by artificial intelligence for children

US toy giant Mattel said Thursday it was cancelling its plan to deliver an artificial intelligence-infused digital speaker for children, following complaints from privacy groups and lawmakers.

The device called Aristotle was announced in January during the Consumer Electronics Show as a kid-friendly alternative to digital assistants such as Amazon's Alexa-powered speakers and Google Home, and which could also be used as a baby monitor.

But several activist groups and at least two US lawmakers said Aristotle threatened to undermine privacy and could open up children to marketers, hackers and other threats.

Mattel said in an email to AFP that its new chief technical officer Sven Gerjets, who joined the company in July, "conducted an extensive review of the Aristotle product and decided that it did not fully align with Mattel's new technology strategy."

"The decision was then made not to bring Aristotle to the marketplace as part of an ongoing effort to deliver the best possible connected product experience to the consumer," the statement said.

Last month, US Senator Ed Markey and Representative Joe Barton sent a letter to Mattel chief executive Margaret Georgiadis warning of [privacy issues](#) with the device.

The lawmakers said Aristotle was capable of "transmitting personal and sensitive information" about children to Mattel, and raised privacy fears because it could "build an in-depth profile of children and their family."

Meanwhile the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood sent a letter and 15,000 petition signatures asking Mattel to scrap Aristotle.

"Aristotle would inject corporate surveillance and marketing into the most intimate and important moments of young children's lives," said the group's executive director Josh Golin.

The dust-up was the latest over toys and devices for children which are connected to the internet cloud.

Last year, the US Federal Trade Commission said it would require toymakers to respect a law protecting children's online privacy, and the FBI warned that devices such as Mattel's "Hello Barbie" could "put the [privacy](#) and safety of [children](#) at risk due to the large amount of personal information that may be unwittingly disclosed."

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