

CONNECTICUT VALLEY SPECTATOR

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Tuck grad students list top toys for 2008 Magnets, Barbie among the favorites

By Mike Peterson
Editor

HANOVER — High-tech, low-cost and lasting fun can come together this holiday season, according to the Center for Digital Strategies' annual survey of tech toys.

The Tuck School of Business graduate students released their 2008 list of top toys at a reception this past week, where adults enjoyed a buffet and smaller guests avidly tested the toys on the list.

Unlike the "hot toy" lists seen on national television this time of year, this list is not compiled by those who receive pay from toymakers to recommend their products but as a long-range research project that takes up a good part of the year.

"I worked on it last year, and then we started up again in the spring of this year," said Kate Reiling, a second-year grad student with an interest in entrepreneurship and board games.

After some strategizing and planning by email throughout the summer, the group geared up in the fall, she said.

"We look at industry trade journals, we read blogs where people talk about toys and then we research Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Amazon and independent toy stores," Reiling said.

The list of toys is organized by age group, but information on various toys is shared in the group depending on specific interests.

"The group members really come from all over," she said. "We have a couple of marketing and public relations people, someone in nonprofit

business, someone who has been working with e-retailing at Amazon, and we try to find people who are interested in the overall subject, of course."

The toys evaluated are not always brand-new, Reiling explained, but can be classic toys that have been updated and improved.

One obvious example of an updated toy is the Magnext Deluxe, a building toy that uses small, powerful magnets to connect its pieces. When the toy was first released, the magnets could be removed from the blocks and there were several serious injuries and one death from children who swallowed the magnets, which then attached within their digestive systems.

The company has redesigned the toy to imbed the magnets within the blocks, removing the hazard while preserving the intended fun and creativity.

"It was a good solution to a serious problem, and now they've expanded the line to include a rollercoaster and other things, so that it becomes a platform almost like Legos," Reiling said.

One of the favorites among the young visitors at the reception was based on a toy older than their parents: Barbie. The Barbie iDesign Ultimate Stylist, though intended for ages eight to 12, had a small squad of much younger children fascinated by their ability to use the toy to swipe cards through a reader and then switch outfits on the characters shown on the computer screen.

Laptop computer, of course, sold separately.

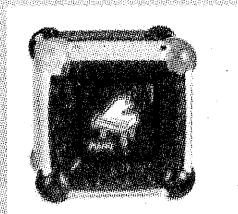
Mozart Magic Cube (Munchkin)

6 to 24 months

\$19.96

The Munchkin Mozart Magic Cube is a great way to introduce babies and toddlers to classical music. It is solidly made with rounded corners and edges that will allow children of various ages to access the various instruments. By simply pressing on the large colorful buttons, instruments light up and can be played individually or in any combination to produce quality music melodies. Three AA batteries are required and included with the toy.

Bottom line: Good, solid toy with realistic musical sounds



Playskool Honeybee Hop (Hasbro)

3 and up

\$18.99

Just click the button on top of the beehive, the music starts playing and the bee starts 'flying' round and round. Kids will chase, hop, jump, dance, and run around by themselves or with a friend. In addition, the toy allows for two different speed settings (one click for normal speed, two for faster), making it fun for kids of all ages, and allowing your child to continue the fun as they develop more coordination skills.

Bottom line: At \$18.99, this interactive toy will keep kids of all ages entertained and active.



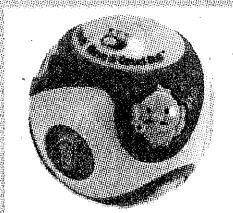
Move and Crawl (Vtech)

6 to 24 months (for crawlers)

\$12.99

The Vtech Move and Crawl is very colorful and provides good tactile sensations with its variety of raised buttons. Along with musical melodies, toddlers will be stimulated and entertained by the flashing color buttons and cute animal shapes. Additionally, the Move and Crawl will move by itself, providing kids with hours of entertainment. Three AA batteries are required, but are included.

Bottom line: Inexpensive toy that gets kids moving and keeps them engaged.



Abby & Emma Deluxe Magnetic Dress-Up (Melissa & Doug)

36 months to 6 years

\$17.80



This wooden magnetic toy is simple enough for small children to have no problem dressing the dolls, but there are so many outfits to choose from that even older children will spend hours having fun. Several variations of the magnetic dress-up kits are available, so you can purchase one specific to your child's interests.

Magnex Deluxe (Mega Bloks)

6 years plus

\$15.77



After playing for ten minutes we were hooked. The magnets are built inside the plastic parts (an innovative solution to last year's troubles when little kids swallowed the magnetic parts). You build by clicking the plastic parts together using the ball (see below) as the connector.

Our kit included a few 'get you started' building ideas whose pictures didn't always match the actual pieces we had (which was kind of annoying). It is really fun to dream up new things to create; it's sturdy and allows you to build quickly. Many people may quickly want to buy more sets to make more elaborate creations.

Bottom line: A great new way to be creative to use your imagination, but it is an expensive commitment to really be able to fully enjoy all the toy has to offer.

Barbie iDesign Ultimate Stylist (Mattel)

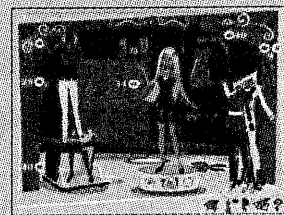
8 to 12 years

\$19.99

Barbie 'dress-up' on the computer, with some cool add-ons to enhance the fun.

The Barbie iDesign CD and swi-
peable cards (includes USB card reader) are a creative way to play on the computer. From designing outfits and running a fashion show to creating printable magazine covers and playing games, this toy has lots to do and is easy to get started. When away from the computer cards can be layered to create fashions, alone or with friends.

Bottom line: Lets kids be creative in the Barbie world, but may not appeal to kids without a strong interest in fashion/design.



Mijam Stage Mic (Blue Box)

10 years and up

\$12.99

Mijam Stage Mic allows you to plug in and sing along with your iPod or MP3. You can connect it to your Mac or PC computer for recording and podcasting.



Zero Gravity Micro (AirHogs)

8 to 12 years

\$24.99

This new toy definitely has the wow factor. You can drive the mini remote control racecar on walls, ceilings, floors or practically any other flat surface. It even has working headlights that look great in the dark and let you know when the car needs to be recharged. It also comes in a number of different car styles so you can buy more than one and race them with your friends.

Bottom line: This is a unique new spin on the classic remote control car that you are going to want to play with immediately and show off to your friends and family!

