

Techie toys top of the list

DARTMOUTH FRANK DILLON

THE WORLD'S major toy manufacturers have anticipated a major slowdown in consumer spending this Christmas, but have tried to embed low-cost technology to produce innovative and inexpensive toys, according to a new study by the Centre for Digital Strategies at the Tuck School of Business in Dartmouth in the US.

The trend is mirrored by predictions on this side of the Atlantic by the Toy Retailers Association which represents UK and Irish stores. Toys under \$25 (€19) that mix basic fun with technology headed the list of "Tucks' Top Tech Toys for 2008". The rankings were compiled by six Tuck MBA students under the direction of Prof M Eric Johnson, the centre's director. Johnson follows the toy industry and has published numerous articles on successful strategies in this sector.

"Technology has become a key focus on competition in toys," says Johnson. "With the deepening recession, consumers are more cautious than ever. That means the most successful tech toys will be ones that use technology to create excitement, without significantly adding to the product cost."

The top-tech toys this year in the US are expected to include Move and Crawl Ball from Vtech at \$12.99 (€10), Munchkin's Mozart magic Cube \$19.96 (€15.50), Playskoll Honeybee Hop from Hasbro at \$18.99 (€14.75) and Abby & Emma Deluxe magnetic

Dress-Up from Melissa & Doug at \$17.80 (€13.80).

"Kids are going back to basics for their holiday toys, and manufacturers are responding," adds MBA student Kirstin Egenes.

The UK-based Toy Retailers Association, has compiled a list of predictions for the hottest toys in the British and Irish markets.

The top five Tech toys all have price points below €50. Chairman Gary Grant says that it had been a challenging year for business, but that manufacturer innovation had been a strong feature this year.

