WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE TOY AISLE AND WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

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THE PROBLEM

The toy aisle is no longer just toys, it's competing formats engineered for attention.

Whether it's a blind box, a playset, or even slime, toys are made for making content with. I walked the toy aisle to track current trends.

I compared my findings with the iron triangle of manufacturing (fast, cheap, good) to see where toys were leaning. My findings were split.

THE EXPERIMENT

I grouped toys by play pattern and not brand to find overarching trends. The trends that repeated most: miniaturization of old hits, the rise of 2-in-1 and even 3-in-1 toys, the diversity of doll hair as a value signal, and the adult life mimicry in toddler toys.

The blind-box, however, proved to be the new king of the toy aisle.

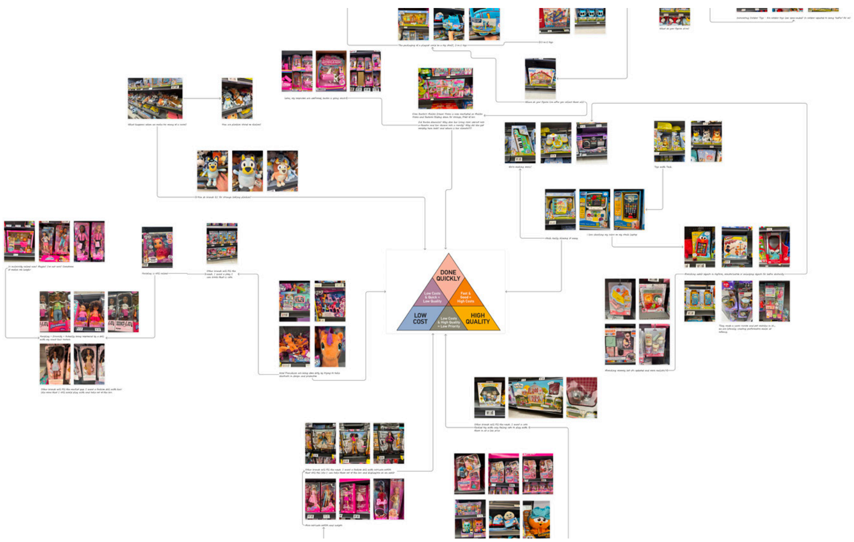
Is baby excited to check their inbox?

How many experiences must be in one toy?

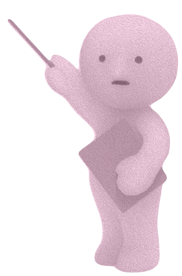
It seems as though the popularity of a toy lies in how much dopamine can be produced in the opening experience.

Where then does this leave the product's replayabili ty ? If the unknown is what delights, how does it work after first play?

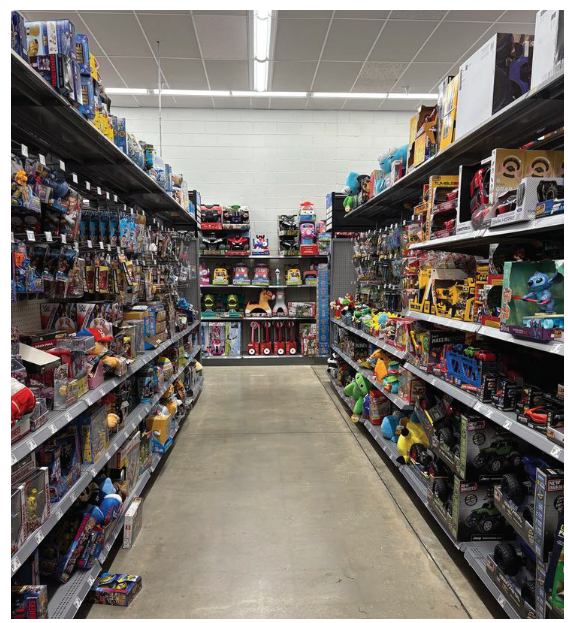
THE INSIGHT



It seems the toy aisle is split between making packaging that sells itself more than the product inside or high quality toys not for kids, but for collectors.



As we lose the middle ground, simple toys that kids love, I see three dominant forces: miniature worlds, intricate collectible series, and “real life” play. Kids want to emulate what they see others doing and kidult toy



buyers are increasingly driven to buy for the surprise value and aesthetics over the toy’s play experience.

THE OPPORTUNITY

We must decide whether to cash in on the trends and make more blind boxes or take a chance in supporting imagination and create products that surprise customers with rich stories and depth. We have an opportunity to design toys that are open ended and go beyond a single experience.

The future of play shouldn't be a gamble, but an investment in creativity. We must design for the playroom, not the landfill.

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