

trend spotting.....



by Lisa Orman

What We Saw at the Show

As many in the industry have observed since Toy Fair ended this year, most attendees seemed relieved that they made it through 2009 and excited to see what 2010 would bring. Exhibitors presented many innovations and genuinely new and exciting products at the show. Retailers seemed prepared to professionally evaluate their options, and had a positive outlook for the toy business. That's great, because it gives exhibitors the steam to power up their lineups post-Toy Fair and throughout the rest of the year.

Those of you who attended the New York City event have probably already reviewed your notes and perused your catalogs, looked over your open-to-buy budget and placed some follow-up orders with exhibitors. Memories of the new toys you saw there may be fading. For those of you who did not attend, some solid clues about what's on the horizon may be helpful. For both groups, before Toy Fair is too far behind us, it's a good time to reflect on some of the trends we saw and share some tips for a successful 2010.

Green's still growing

A trend that stood out is the still-gaining momentum of green toys, not just among existing players who created the category over the last decade, but new companies, too. The

Toy Industry Association made it easy for retailers to find those exhibitors by clustering about 20 together in the "Eco-Friendly" area. Aside from the many toys made from recycled materials, bamboo, soy or sustainable materials, non-traditional toy companies like Zebra Mix natural and organic baking kits broadened the category. In addition, many companies in the upper hall also included green introductions among their lineups for 2010, such as Kids Preferred's Greenzys licensed line of soy-based plush, which plants a tree through the Arbor Day Foundation for each toy sold.

Other companies introduced products that help kids learn about our planet, recycling, solar energy or other earth-friendly topics. One example is The Young Scientists Club, which introduced its *Magic School Bus Solar Energy to the Rescue* kit at Toy Fair. Young scientists explore the greenhouse effect, collect real carbon dioxide, recreate global warming in a bottle, use a solar panel to spin a fan, make a solar secret code, design solar spinners, watch solar energy inflate balloons, and more.

Finally, toy makers should be congratulated for vastly upgrading the design and look of eco-friendly toys. In past years, retailers and consumers had to choose between eco-friendly materials and good looks; now they can get both. Retailers should consider creating a Green Toys department within their stores. Make sure your employees are well educated on which toys are eco-friendly and why, and carry products for a wide range of ages. Consider signage to call attention to it, perhaps listing key brands or favorite items.

