

Lesson 1333

Toymakers Aim More Products at Older People

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FILE - A Scrabble game with larger tiles is displayed at the 2023 Toy Fair, in New York's Javits Center, Monday, Oct. 2, 2023. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

Toymakers are developing new games – and changing old ones – to target a different group: people over 65 years old.

Toy producers suggest the products could help older people increase their brain skills as well as reduce loneliness. However, some experts have raised doubts about their claims.

Toymaker Hasbro signed a deal with Ageless Innovation — which designs toys with older people in mind — to come out with new versions of games such as Scrabble, Trivial Pursuit and Life. The products offer larger letters that are easier to see and bigger game pieces.

The new versions of Life and Trivial Pursuit also have developed their content so that younger and older people alike can play. For example, the answer to a question in Trivial Pursuit about exercise can be Jack LaLanne or Zumba, depending on the player's age.

Jack LaLanne was a famous health and exercise person for a large part of the 20th century. Zumba has become a more popular exercise in recent times.

Educational Insights, which produces educational toys for young children, is including images of older people in its marketing efforts. The move came after the company noticed last year that its toys like Kanoodle and BrainBolt were popular with older customers in online reviews. Next year, Educational Insights will release a new BrainBolt Boost that has bigger buttons and is more simplified.



FILE - A "Trivial Pursuit Generations" game is displayed at the 2023 Toy Fair, in New York's Javits Center, Monday, Oct. 2, 2023. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

Changes in behavior

The new products come as the pandemic has changed toy-buying behaviors in the United States. Long before the pandemic, many adults purchased Legos or collectible items to connect with their inner child.

But the pandemic not only increased the **trend**, it also increased feelings of loneliness among adults when they were in lockdown. Many toy companies found adults using animals and robotic pets as companions.

Market research company Circana reports that toy sales are increasingly targeted toward adult buyers. About 5 percent of the total U.S. toy sales are for males ages 35 and over, up 13 percent since last year. About 4 percent of total U.S. toy sales are for females ages 35 and over, up 9 percent since last year.

While Circana does not examine sales data for the over -65 group, it estimated grandparents who bought a toy for their grandchild have big spending power. These grandparents made up 19 percent, or \$7.8 billion, of total toy sales in the 12 months that ended in September. And grandparents spent on average 7 percent more per toy than the total market during the fourth quarter of 2022, the highest amount spent across all buyer groups.

Can new games help?

Ben Swartz, 92, lives with his 85-year-old wife in a retirement community in Des Moines, Iowa. Swartz ran 14 toy stores in the 1970s. He has noticed some of the new offerings from the toy industry, and he approves of the moves.

Swartz plays games five days a week, including bridge and poker with his friends. He said the games help his mind, otherwise, he said, he would worry that his “mind would start to go a little bit **stale**.”

Still, while some scientists welcome toymakers paying attention to older buyers, they also warn of these products’ **limitations**.

Neil Charness and Walter Boot, both of Florida State University, worked together to test the idea that brain games like crossword puzzles help **preserve** mental abilities such as reasoning or thinking, also known as cognitive function.

They found that people get better in the specific skills of the game if they play over and over again. But the games do not translate to the cognitive skills needed for everyday living activities, such as job performance or maintaining independent living, they said.

The researchers also said that there is limited evidence to date that playing games can greatly reduce loneliness.

I’m John Russell.

Anne D’Innocenzio reported on this story for the Associated Press. John Russell adapted it for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

trend – *n.* a general direction of change

stale – *adj.* not as strong, effective, or energetic as before

limitation – *n.* something that controls how much of something is possible or allowed

preserve – *v.* to keep (something) in its original state or in good condition