



Buy and Sell Better with These Three Toy Trends

All of the toy categories mentioned here have special applications for children with special needs. Kids with cognitive delays can benefit greatly from toys that have **neuro-benefits**. Certain **collections** can also help kids with individual special needs develop certain skills, whether they are physical, social or communicative. **Manipulatives** are ideal for children who need a little help with their small-motor skills, or need to keep their hands busy. When you are buying your inventory and selling in your stores, keep these trends in mind.

by Ellen Metrick

ASTRA's Marketplace & Academy is coming up, and among the eight reasons to attend, says the association, are trend spotting and advice. They're right. The conference is a great opportunity to find out what's happening in the general toy marketplace. I plan on attending, and will be conducting a presentation entitled, "Connect Children with Special Needs to Toys and Games on Your Shelves."

Trend spotting is a big reason I attend ASTRA's Marketplace. In looking through my toy industry crystal ball, I see three trends to consider when you purchase inventory:

1. products with neuro-benefits,
2. products from collections and
3. manipulatives.

They're great trends to talk about with customers on your selling floor, especially the ones who ask, "What's new?" Here are some details you can share.

Neuro-Benefits ••••

More toy manufacturers are promoting the value of their products for helping children's brains develop social, emotional and intellectual skills. The logos and brand images of companies like Fat Brain Toys and Funnybones literally feature a graphic of the brain, further emphasizing their product position. Fortunately, the research on the benefits of play on brain development is substantial. In fact, some powerhouse organizations like the National Institute of Play, the Association of Childhood Education International and the American Academy of Pediatrics have made it their cause to disseminate the research on the neuro-benefits of play.

Here are four more manufacturers with products that have neuro-benefits.

1. SmartNoggin Toys' NogginStik

It helps develop eye tracking, face recognition and focus, starting at infancy. It can be used as a guide to assess a child, and as a tool for brain stimulation. It enhances visual tracking needed to reach, crawl, walk and read. smartenoggin.com



2. Marble Ball Tracks by HABA

Open-ended ball tracks help children learn through trial and error. In doing so, they are learning problem-solving skills, as well as developing eye tracking and controlling eye movements that directly relate to reading and comprehension. habausa.com

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The machine-washable **Magic Leaf picture book** is made of the highest quality organically farmed cotton. Sewn-on fabrics to tug on, peek-through windows and smiling faces make it easy for a parent to make up a story. Plus, the visuals are self-stimulating for solo play. habausa.com

