

Value, family and escapism: Top trends driving toy retail this festive season

By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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The Christmas period marks the busiest period for toy retailers. Each year, Toys R Us deep dives into consumer trends locally and abroad to compile its list of top toys for the season in an effort to make gift shopping easier.



Catherine Jacoby, marketing manager at Toys R Us. Source: Supplied

This year's [Toys R Us Top Toy List](#) highlights 22 hero products curated by the retailer's buyers to showcase toy trends inspired by popular culture that stimulate imagination and growth and encourage interactive play across several age groups.

The list includes some exclusive items to Toys R Us, including Caylee Beach Villa, Peppa Pigs Clever Car, Muscle Remote Control Car, 4WD Drift Remote Control Car, Reggies Police Car SUV Ride On and a full range of Squishmallows Hugmees.

With many shoppers tightening their purse strings to keep up with the cost of living, the retailer strategically placed a focus on value this year to cater to a range of budgets, and top toys are priced from R200 up to R4,500 for premium products.

“ Out at [@canal_walk](#) this morning with [@ToysRUs_ZA](#) (and Geoffrey the giraffe) for the launch of this year's Toys R Us Top Toys list. [#ToysRUs2022](#) [pic.twitter.com/MLPmLclX5](#)— Bizcommunity Retail (@Biz_Retail) [October 20, 2022](#) ”

Power of play

Toys R Us South Africa marketing manager Catherine Jacoby comments that toys that allow for family play remain a dominant trend, while screen-free toys top the wish lists of parents who want to encourage hands-on play and skill-building among their kids. Sensory and educational toys that help develop children through play are also at the forefront.



Source: Supplied

But toys are not just for kids, and can provide adults with a means to mentally escape into a world of play. A retro revival is being driven by consumers in older age groups, and collectibles are becoming increasingly popular, with beloved characters from the past delivering a sense of nostalgia.

Another significant trend highlighted for this festive season is unboxing, which adds an element of surprise. Jacoby explains, “It’s all about the full experience from packaging to unboxing and then the replay experience.”

Jacoby chatted with *Bizcommunity* to further unpack the trends Toys R Us is witnessing in the post-pandemic retail environment and what the company's recent 'Coolest Toy Store' win in the [Sunday Times GenNext Awards](#) means to the brand.

■ **Catherine, what is the selection process that goes into choosing the products that appear on the Toys R Us Top Toys List?**

Our buyers spend months sourcing, testing and looking at the upswing in trends both locally and globally. The list is carefully curated as we look at key consumer drivers for both parents and children and what socio-economic factors are driving their purchasing behaviours.

Of course, the selection is also based on popularity among themes and current popular characters or film franchises. Toys are selected that engage children in play that is both fun and beneficial to their social, cognitive and physical development –

and for adults, provide a much-needed escape from the stress of day-to-day life.

■ ***Do you find that the Top Toy List drives shopper behaviour and sales?***

Our aim is to make festive shopping and gifting easy for the whole family. Annually our catalogue is received with much anticipation and many of the toys bought over the festive season are driven by this catalogue ([Geoffrey's Big Book of Toys](#)). The top toys list effectively provides a comprehensive guide to what the hottest trends and toys are – which we already know based on research will make the list of many children.

The festive season is our busiest time of year, and majority of our sales as a specialised toy retailer are driven over this period. We offer consumers something that other retailers don't: exclusive products, expert guidance and a clear focus on play and joy and most importantly value with our price points to suit all budgets.

■ ***What would you say are the key differences between this year's top toy trends versus those that emerged during the pandemic? Do you think some pandemic-driven trends are here to stay?***

Absolutely!

“ Social consciousness, post-pandemic living, nostalgia and consumers looking for value have all impacted this year's toy trends. Some of these trends have remained in our post-pandemic world. ”

Something that has remained from last year's trends is family, with board games, puzzles and outdoor games all featuring amongst consumers' wish lists. Roleplay, sensory and educational play has also seen a surge following the pandemic with parents investing more in toys that teach their kids through the power of play.

A key difference this year is the rise in the growing 'kidult' trend which was fuelled by the pandemic, with more adults than ever turning to toys to bring joy and levity into their lives. Toys and games have been a means of escapism for adults and offer a way to reconnect with their own inner child with toys like Funko Pop.

Consumers looking for more value and products across categories to suit different budgets are more prominent now than ever.



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■ ***Toys R Us was recently named 'Coolest Toy Store' in the Sunday Times GenNext Awards. Congrats on the win! How has the retailer worked to capture the hearts of young South Africans?***

We're thrilled to have won this award again, we continuously strive to make everyone feel like a kid when they enter a Toys R Us store and to receive this accolade from the youth of South Africa is a testament to the fact we're doing something right.

We believe we provide a joyful store experience and always ensure we have the latest toy trends and exclusive products on offer. There's something for everyone with a price point to match any budget.

Understanding what the youth are looking for and communicating with them is a juggle.

“ Remaining relevant to the youth while always focusing on them and bringing joy to them while showing up in the

spaces and platforms that they engage with is a big part of our success. ”

Bringing joy and uplifting the youth of our country through the power of play and toys that not only provide developmental benefits but pure happiness is where we will continue to see a loyal youth following.



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■ ***In a constrained economic climate that's seeing shoppers tighten their purse strings, how does Toys R Us aim to attract feet into stores (physical and online) considering that toys could be perceived as a "non-essential" or "luxury" purchase?***

Toys are hugely important to a child's emotional and physical development and it's our duty to educate our nation on the benefits of play and ensure that all children have the opportunity to play.

We ensure that we have something for everyone as we all deserve the right to learn through play. Imaginative play, fine and gross motor skill development, cognitive learning and to learn about empathy. What a privilege it is as a brand to bring joy and play such an important part in raising the happy children of our country.

“ Value has played a big part of our business – it should be a mandate for all business in South Africa. Consumers are looking for value across all retail categories. ”

Yes, we are a destination store but our offering is so much more. With our variety of expert shop-in-shop options specifically within the science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics categories we are able to offer exclusive items that harness the power of play.

All parents want their children to grow up with a lifelong love for learning and fun. One of the best ways to foster this is to encourage a child's natural curiosity by learning through play.

In fact, according to Unicef, play is an essential strategy for learning, the early formative years really matter. Scientific research over the past 30 years has taught us that the most important period of human development is from birth to eight years old, so while toys may be seen as 'non-essential' or 'luxury' items there are a number of products available that offer both value and function in both parents and children's lives.

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