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National Toy Fair No Fun For 15,000 Nervous Adults

By WARD CANNEL

NEW YORK — (NEA)—With bathing suits and parasols on display in department store windows, it is time once again for the annual National Toy Fair—when 15,000 nervous adults descend on New York to jockey for position under next December's Christmas trees.

And according to veterans of this yearly war, it is no child's play.

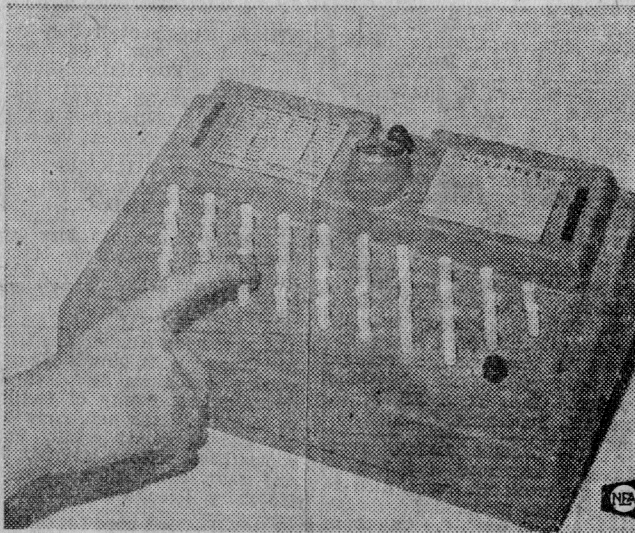
Of the 2,000 manufacturers showing their wares, only about 600 are the core of the toy industry. Most of the others are in-and-outers, trying it once or twice and getting out, finally, to lick their wounds.

"But even this high mortality rate is not discouraging to outsiders," one manufacturer's representative said. "The fascination of toys seems to be as irresistible to the grown-ups as it does to the kids."

And so, to cite a few typical examples, a furniture maker will decide to use his slack season to make wooden toys. Or a plastic utensil plant will take a fling at molded toys. Or a garment maker will try dolls' accessories.

But it doesn't stop at the corporate level. Homebodies who could be using their spare time constructively by collecting stamps or building bomb shelters are staying up late to invent games.

The Bradley Co., biggest manufacturer of games, reports the receipt of 3,000 unsolicited game ideas, models and blueprints each year. The reason: you get a five per cent royalty on all sales. The problem: only about six new games are bought annually.



TOY TRANSMITTER of Morse code is one item to be unveiled for buyers at the National Toy Fair.

But it is this odds-against-you lure which opens each toy fair with new faces, and closes it with raised eyebrows and sagging jaws. For the toy market is wildly competitive—\$1.6 billion split up so many ways that no member has more than 10 per cent of the sales.

And so, if the fight is fierce for the marketplace regulars, it is unbelievable for the newcomers. To wit:

Outside of trade names and a few gimmicks, few new toys are copyrighted or patented.

Inter-industry spying is available, ready and professional. For a mere one thousand dollars you can get the competition's line well in advance—and adjust your line and prices accordingly.

Even after the fair opens, there are specialists who can copy a model and have a mock-up to

show buyers within 48 hours.

Distribution is a tremendous headache. If your plant is in the East, transportation costs make it unprofitable to sell in the West. And its hard to open a Western plant because capital is shy a-

bout going into such a highly competitive field. In this climate, it is not surprising that the casual observer has trouble gaining entrance to toy showrooms before the fair opens. At the venerable A. C. Gilbert Co., a top spokesman (a former F.B.I. man) explained:

"We got badly burned some years ago when we didn't take this kind of precaution. The competition had enough time to see our stuff and go home to retool before the fair."

To put a frosty icing on this cake of woe, there is no real way to assay the consumer market. You can usually count certain bread-and-butter items—building blocks, a few wheel toys, a few well-known games.

But who could have predicted the hula-hoop? So the rule of thumb is generally: "Stick close to the news." Consequently this year's fair has science and space written all over it.

"We could have done pretty well with a game called 'Payola,'" one marketer said. "But we couldn't invent one in time."