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Toys at Industry Show Vie for Buyers' Interest With Their TV Promotion Plans

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

NEW YORK—If Little Miss Echo is a big hit this Christmas, it won't necessarily be because of her long blond hair or her tape recorder voice, but rather because of healthy chunks of television advertising, an increasing trend among the nation's toy makers.

Retailers attending the 59th annual American Toy Fair here credit the industry's climbing sales in large part to increased promotion of toys on TV shows for children. In fact, many of the 12,000 buyers attending the fair are more interested in the amount of television advertising budgeted for the toy than in the toy itself.

"This is a nice toy, but will you advertise it in my area?" is a frequent question as a buyer points to a plaything among the animated, automated and complicated toys on display. If the answer is no, the buyer is more than likely to move on empty-handed.

U.S. toy makers spent roughly \$12 million on television promotions last year and plan to spend \$18 million this year, says Saul Robbins, president of Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., Inc., a trade group. Much of this \$18 million will be to sponsor children's TV shows. Mr. Robbins, who also is president of Remco Industries, Inc., says this rise will be reflected in sales. He indicated 1962 manufacturer sales will rise to around \$903 million from \$885 million last year. The 1961 figure was up from \$872 million in 1960.

Pre-sell on TV

One reason for the increased use of TV promotions is the rise of discounters, toy manufacturers say. "With more toys being sold on a self-service basis, we need TV to do the demonstrating that once was done by sales help in conventional department stores," Mr. Robbins says. He estimates that 60% of each year's toy sales now occur in the Christmas season, down from 80% five years ago. Reason: Many discount stores feature toys all year round.

With non-Christmas season sales rising, toy manufacturers are spreading their TV advertising over the full year. Remco says it will sponsor network TV shows 52 weeks this year, against 18 weeks in 1961. Milton Bradley Co., one of the nation's largest game makers, has budgeted a TV campaign costing three times what it spent last year.

Kenner Products Co., Cincinnati, plans to spend \$2 million this year, double last year's budget on TV. Like many manufacturers, Kenner sponsors a late afternoon children's show daily on network TV as well as Saturday morning segments of the Captain Kangaroo program on the CBS network. Companies claim these shows give them a pipeline to the children, who then put pressure on their parents to buy advertised items.

Children or Parents

But one company, Aurora Plastics Corp., says it prefers to reach the parents, by advertising in adult magazines.

Typical of the advertising by makers is American Doll & Toy Corp., of New York. It spent about \$700,000 last year advertising three dolls. "This year we'll almost double that, to about \$1.3 million," Herbert Brock, executive vice president, says.

American Doll & Toy plans to spend "at least as much" promoting a new item, its "Little Miss Echo" doll, this year as it did for all its products last year. Little Miss Echo contains a tape recorder, so that a child may "teach the doll to talk" by speaking into a microphone at its neck and playing back the recorded message. Retail price: \$36.

Toys next Christmas may have many such lifelike features, if the fair's exhibits are an indication. One doll contains an electronic mechanism that simulates a "beating heart." The doll comes with a stethoscope, for listening to the "heart."

Barking Bassett

Ideal Toy Corp. offers a toy bassett hound that barks, waddles realistically and catches a bone in his mouth. Odd Ogg is a combination frog and turtle that croaks pleasantly when a ball hits his right side but sticks out his tongue and razzes harshly if the ball hits the left side. Ideal Toy says toys are so complex today that parents need help repairing them. Ideal plans to set up a network of "service stations" to fix broken dogs, frogs and other items.

Another theme at the fair are toys intended for children "who want to be part of the grown-up world," according to a manufacturer. Ideal looks for high sales of its "Diners' Club" game. Players buy cars, houses, gifts and dine in fancy restaurants on credit. They receive replicas of Diners' Club cards. Wen-Mac Corp., a subsidiary of American Machine & Foundry Co., offers a flying model of Beech

Aircraft Corp.'s single-engine executive plane

For youths eager to drive the family car the next best thing is a table-top track and miniature racers. A spokesman for Aurora Plastics, which produces a Model Motoring Set, says, "Probably the biggest inducement for the teenager is the thrill of driving and racing his own model car while he's contemplating the day he can drive his father's."

Lionel Licenses

In the past two years table-top auto racing games, with remote control over the racers have been brought out by Louis Marx & Co. Ideal Toy; A.C. Gilbert Co., a subsidiary of Wrathar Corp., and Aurora Plastics. Last week Lionel Corp. announced a licensing agreement to manufacture and market an English line of toy auto racers in the U.S. Trying for more realism, A.C. Gilbert has added a section of scale roadway called "Chicane," based on actual two-lane racing courses that narrow down to one lane. The narrower roadway forces one car to let another go ahead, when both are neck-and-neck.

Newest in the trend toward scientific and educational toys are weather station kits. Revell, Inc., of Venice, Calif., and Lionel both offer boxes full of gadgets such as wind gauges. Prices range from \$4.98 to \$29.95.

American Doll & Toy says it has "the toy American comic-strip readers have been waiting for for 25 years." It's a Dick Tracy two-way wrist radio. The citizens band set transmits up to 700 feet, powered by a battery unit that attaches to a child's belt. Retail price is \$27.

Bayshore Industries, Inc., of Amsterdam, N.Y., offers an expanded line of rubber face masks, including likenesses of President and Mrs. Kennedy.