

More Than a Pretty Face:

A Public Relations Plan for Mattel's

Barbie

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than seven decades, Mattel, Inc., has essentially dominated the toy industry. The last ten years, however, have proven challenging for the company as it contends with a swiftly shifting societal landscape for children. Playtime equals more screen time as young people—who happen to be “growing up” faster—look to digital games for a large portion of their entertainment. Furthermore, families are seeking to create more grounded and less acquisitive households for their children who are coming of age in perhaps the most diverse and interconnected period in history. To serve this ever-changing public, Mattel must continue to evolve the image of its core brands, especially Barbie. The company also must align itself with trends in its industry and use its resources to promote its products effectively in a dynamic world filled with competitors poised to take the top spot in toys.

While Barbie’s physical appearance has undergone several changes to reflect the multicultural world, public perception continues to slant toward viewing the doll as a symbol of materialism and vacuity. As Mattel continues to push Barbie’s “You Can Be Anything” narrative, it is imperative that the company seize the opportunity to engage in conversations with new, specific publics that offer the possibility of acting as ambassadors for the brand now and in the future as well as publics who may have once been advocates for Barbie but have since decided to choose other toys instead. These groups include elementary school teachers, millennial mothers, young girls, and grandparents. Proposed strategies and tactics to reach these key publics will focus first on real world involvement (i.e., within classrooms and at public events) and employ technology as an enhancement to encourage additional engagement online and to capitalize on influencers’ abilities to alter consumer behavior.

This public relations campaign—“More Than a Pretty Face”—which will be implemented between January and December 2018 (with some development occurring in fall 2017), will cast Barbie as a modern, relevant brand that reflects its core audiences’ values and encourages imaginative thinking in children. As a result, positive opinions of and trust in Mattel will increase, offering the company a more secure stance at the top of its industry.



(Barbie, n.d.a)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary2

Table of Contents3

Company Background5

 Public Attitudes and Opinion Leaders7

 Resources7

 The Product, Service, or Issue8

 Promotions8

 Market Share10

 Current Shoppers13

Situational Analysis14

 The Toy Industry.....15

 Competition.....17

 Mattel/Barbie SWOT Analysis19

Core Problem Statement20

Key Publics21

 Elementary School Teachers.....21

Millennial Mothers.....	22
Young Girls (Ages 3 – 12).....	24
Grandparents.....	25
Primary and Secondary Messages	26
Elementary School Teachers.....	26
Millennial Mothers.....	28
Young Girls (Ages 3 – 12).....	28
Grandparents.....	29
Campaign Goal	31
Campaign Objectives	32
Campaign Strategies and Tactics	33
Elementary School Teachers.....	35
Millennial Mothers.....	36
Young Girls (Ages 3 – 12).....	38
Grandparents.....	39
Calendar and Budget.....	41
Evaluation Plan	43
Summary.....	48
References.....	49

COMPANY BACKGROUND

Mattel, self-described as a “creations company that inspires the wonder of childhood,” continually seeks “to be the recognized leader in play, learning, and development worldwide” (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a). Over the course of the company’s more than 70-year history, its claim to the throne in the toy industry has been difficult to dispute. Founded by Harold Matson and Elliot Handler in 1945, and soon thereafter run by Handler and his wife, Ruth, Mattel has grown significantly over the course of seven decades and now has a global workforce of 32,000, “operates in 40 countries and territories and sells products in more than 150 nations” (Mattel, n.d.b). Early and major successes for the El Segundo, California-based company included Chatty Cathy, See ‘n Say, Hot Wheels, and of course, Barbie (Townsend, n.d.). Acquisitions, including the purchase of Fisher-Price, Tyco Toys, and Pleasant Company (American Girl), cemented Mattel’s reputation as the leader in the toy industry through the 1990s; however, financial misdeeds by the Handlers and their subsequent ouster in the 1970s, the acquisition and reselling of The Learning Company in 2000, a major recall in 2007, and this decade’s technology missteps have tarnished the brand and inhibited sales (Funding Universe, n.d.; Story & Barboza, 2007).



(Mattel, n.d.b)

Mattel's Portfolio of Brands

<i>Mattel Girls & Boys Brands</i>	Barbie, Monster High, Ever After High, Polly Pocket, DC Super Hero Girls, Hot Wheels, Matchbox, CARS, DC Comics WWE Wrestling, Minecraft, Max Steel, BOOMco, Toy Story
<i>Fisher-Price Brands</i>	Fisher-Price, Little People, BabyGear, Laugh & Learn, Imaginext, Thomas & Friends, Dora the Explorer, Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, Disney Jake and the Never Land Pirates, Power Wheels
<i>American Girl Brands</i>	Truly Me, Girl of the Year, BeForever, Bitty Baby, WellieWishers
<i>Construction and Arts & Crafts Brands</i>	MEGA BLOKS, RoseArt

In 2016, Mattel's three primary brands (Barbie, Hot Wheels, and Fisher-Price) grew globally for the first time in several years, and franchise partnerships with Warner Brothers (DC Comics), Disney, and NBCUniversal bolstered sales (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a). However, in the first quarter of 2017, sales dropped by 15%—a greater loss than expected—and Mattel's stock is down 40% since 2014 (La Monica, 2017). This recurring struggle for the company has resulted in a quick succession of CEOs in recent years. After Bryan Stockton's resignation in 2015, Christopher Sinclair served as interim CEO; former president of Google's Americas division, Margaret Georgiadis, took the helm in February. Georgiadis' vision for Mattel hinges on five tasks, most notably building more powerful brand franchises and establishing the company's Toy Box division as a major player in the industry (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a). According to the new CEO, Mattel's strengths—a "coveted and unrivaled portfolio of iconic consumer brands, POS momentum, a solid slate of licensed properties, a strong foothold in key emerging markets, and a

very talented and experienced leadership team”—give the company the foundation it requires to return to profitability and growth (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a).

Public Attitudes and Opinion Leaders

Georgiadis will play an integral role in restoring confidence within the company and in the public sphere. Her leadership will shape opinions of Mattel as it works to reestablish itself as a truly unrivaled and undisputed leader in toys. Public attitudes toward the organization currently skew negatively or neutrally as reflected in declining sales and online chatter about the company. Therefore, Mattel will need to be cognizant of and, in many ways, reactive to opinion leaders with a more direct effect on its consumers, including peer groups for parents (e.g., colleagues, family members), peer groups for children (e.g., school classmates, neighbors), and media (e.g., major news outlets such as *The New York Times* and specialty platforms like TTPM).

Mattel Leadership Team

					
Margaret Georgiadis CEO	Christopher A. Sinclair Executive Chairman	Richard Dickson COO	Kevin Farr CFO	Peter D. Gibbons Executive Vice President, Chief Supply Chain Officer	Robert Normile Executive Vice President, Chief Legal Officer and Secretary

Resources

Mattel’s workforce of 32,000 is spread across facilities around the world. The corporate headquarters in El Segundo, California, is approximately 390,000 square feet. The company

leases buildings in the city as well as nearly 20 more U.S. states and Canada; it owns facilities in New York and Wisconsin (American Girl) and maintains office and warehouse spaces in approximately 40 countries. For distribution, Mattel relies heavily on the retailers Walmart, Toys “R” Us, and Target, which account for “approximately 39% of worldwide consolidated net sales” for the company (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a).

The Product, Service, or Issue

After her introduction in 1959, Barbie soon became the powerhouse brand for Mattel and a cultural icon. A long history of concern and controversy regarding the figure of the doll, which conveyed an unrealistic body image to children—as well as the lack of diversity in the product line—led to the development of three new body types (curvy, petite, and tall) and a range of skin tones, hairstyles, and eye colors for Barbie. This shift to inclusivity, however, came only after several consecutive years of declining sales (Halzack, 2016). Currently, Barbie, at an average price of \$10 for the new line, remains at the top in the doll market in spite of rising competition, but sales for the brand are trending downward.

Promotions

Mattel’s Barbie “You Can Be Anything” campaign launched in 2015. The effort targeted Generation Y parents with videos of little girls pretending to be professionals such as a college professor and a veterinarian in the real world settings for those jobs. “You Can Be Anything” extends into social media with a hashtag of the same name. According to Kristina Duncan, vice president for Barbie brand marketing communications, millennials are the target audience because “the relationship between parents and kids is different than 10 years ago, the connection is much stronger” and the demographic responds to brands championing values such as a girl or

woman's right to choices in everything, including careers (Madov, 2015). Mattel released a modern, gender role-subverting extension of the "You Can Be Anything" campaign, #DadsWhoPlayBarbie, in early 2017 (Nudd, 2017).

Beyond Barbie, Mattel's Fisher-Price brand launched its "Best Possible Start" campaign on January 1, 2015. The initial video captured the birth of New Year's babies around the world and the wishes the mothers had for their children in their first moments. #WishesForBaby, as the short film advertisement is named, was matched with paid media and engagement campaigns on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest (Guie, 2015). Meanwhile, the American Girl segment introduced its first boy doll in February 2017 and a 1940s Hawaiian girl doll this summer (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a). While these efforts fall squarely in the realm of products, promotionally, they all speak to the inclusivity and diversity that Mattel wants to project to earn brand equity.



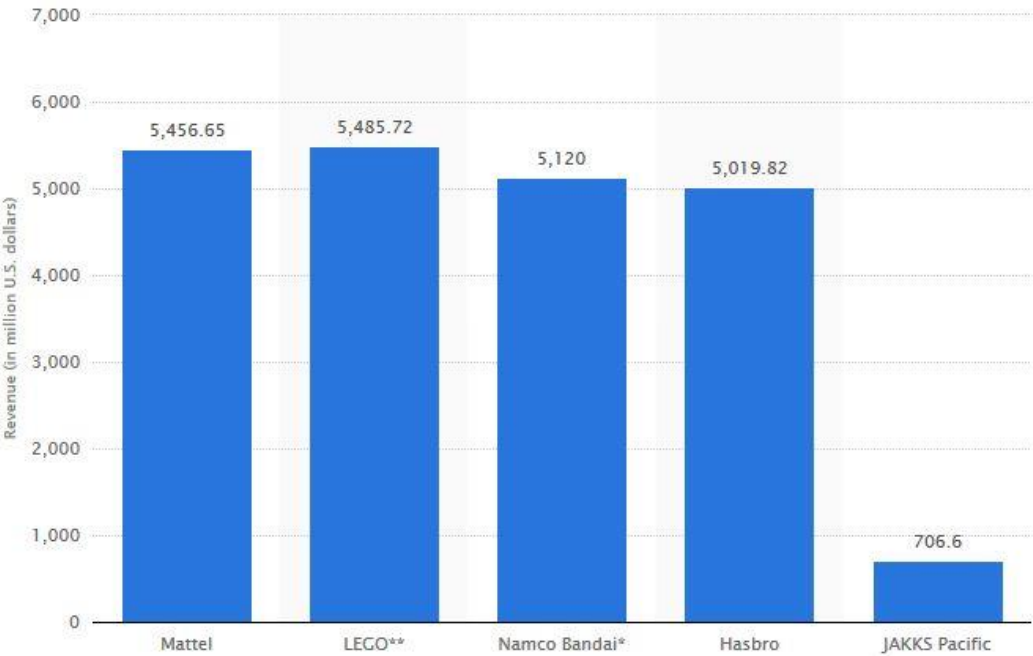
("You can be anything," n.d.)

Mattel's advertising and consumer promotions—including ads for TV and radio, magazines, newspapers, and digital media as well as sweepstakes, in-store displays, and events—vary throughout the year and peak during the holidays. “During 2016, 2015, and 2014, Mattel incurred expenses of \$634.9 million (11.6% of net sales), \$717.9 million (12.6% of net sales), and \$733.2 million (12.2% of net sales), respectively, for advertising and promotion” (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a).

Market Share

At \$5.46 billion in sales, Mattel is the leading toy company worldwide as of 2016; the company's North America segment generated \$3083.87 million in revenue in 2015 (Statista, 2017). While construction set manufacturer LEGO is Mattel's top competitor, Hasbro is likely the contender with the most momentum. By winning Disney Princess and *Frozen* licensing rights from Mattel, which had license for the Princess franchise for almost 20 years, Hasbro has diversified its product portfolio and reaped year-over-year growth since the acquisition in 2014 (Vena, 2017). Mattel, according to Vena (2017), estimated the Princess line loss at \$440 million. Results for 2016 showed that Mattel lost significantly in market share and posted a 7% loss in sales in North America, despite the 5% gain in sales for the toy industry as a whole.

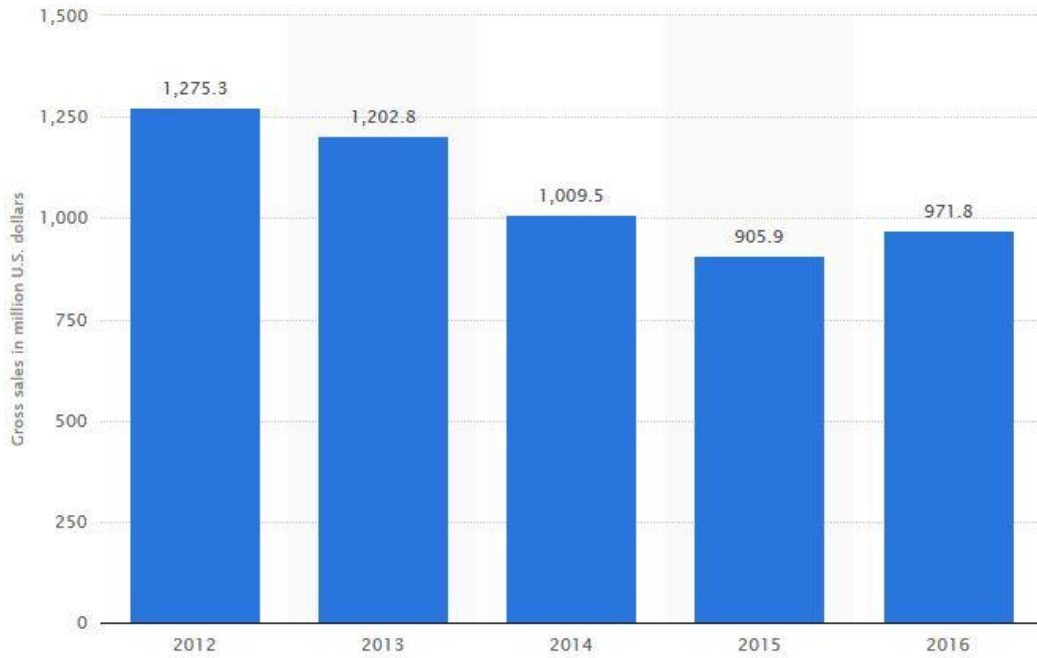
Worldwide revenue of major toy companies in 2016 (in million U.S. dollars)



(Statista, 2017a)

The top brands that narrowly pushed Mattel back to the top of the market were Hot Wheels, Matchbox, and Fisher-Price; flagship brand Barbie also played a key role due to the diversification of the doll lineup (Kell, 2017; Vena, 2017). However, Barbie’s market share specifically in the doll market is on the decline, with competition emerging from some of Mattel’s own brands like Monster High. Hasbro and MGA Entertainment on hot on Mattel’s heels with the Disney Princess Line as well as My Little Pony and Lalaloopsy, respectively (Halzack, 2016).

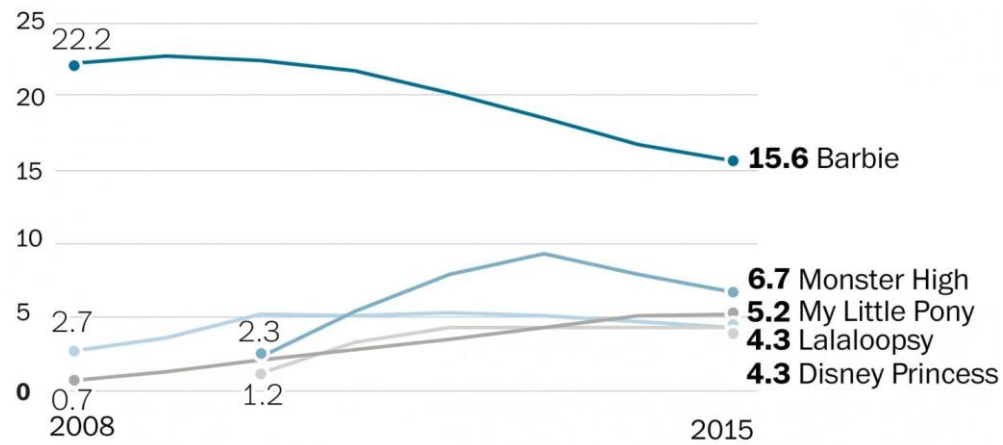
Gross sales of Mattel's Barbie brand worldwide from 2012 to 2016 (in million U.S. dollars)



(Statista, 2017b)

Barbie's shrinking market share

Barbie's share of the global dolls and accessories market has been declining every year since 2009, according to data from research firm Euromonitor.



Data in percentages

Source: Euromonitor

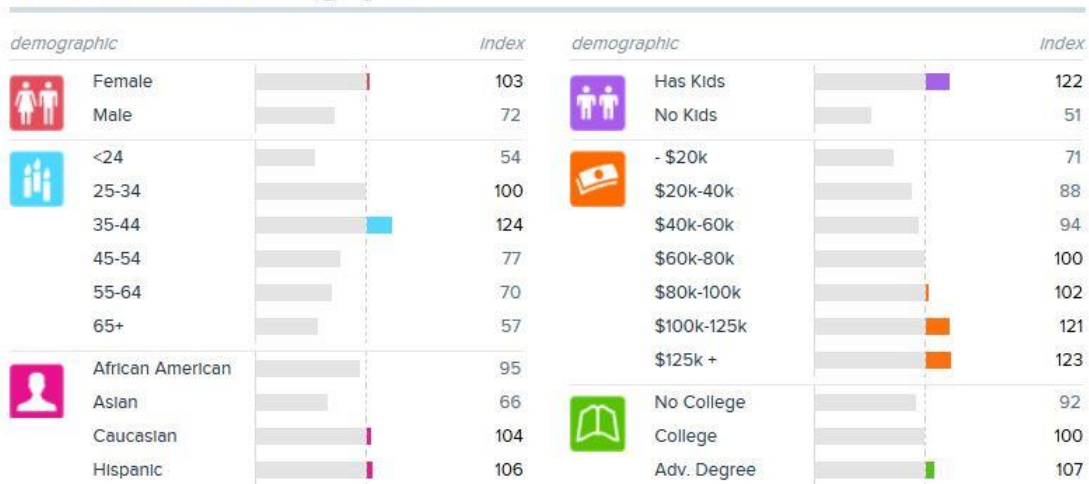
THE WASHINGTON POST

(Halzack, 2016)

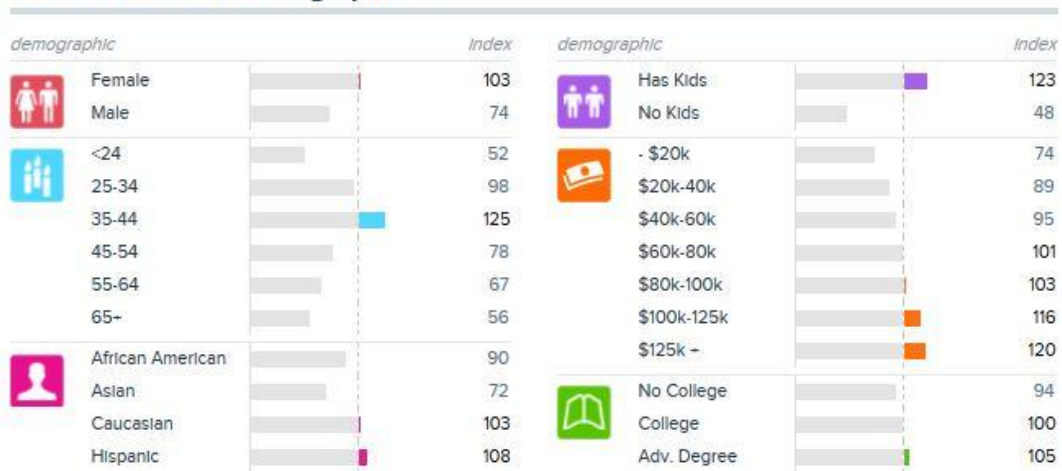
Current Shoppers

Consumer insights company InfoScout (n.d.a) has determined that Hispanics and Caucasians purchase the Barbie brand the most and that the greatest number of Barbie buyers are college-educated individuals who make \$60,000 or more annually. Those findings are in keeping with the company’s insights for Mattel at large. These customers also are highly likely to purchase the Crayola brand on the same store trips during which they purchase Barbie or other Mattel products (InfoScout, n.d.a; InfoScout, n.d.b).

Barbie Consumer Demographics



Mattel Consumer Demographics



(InfoScout, n.d.a)

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Recent societal trends, such as “shorter life cycles for individual toy products and [...] the phenomenon of ‘children getting older younger’ resulting from children outgrowing toys at younger ages” (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a), have adversely affected Mattel and the toy industry at large. Perhaps even more significantly, as the United States—and the world as a whole—has become more diverse, Mattel’s star brand, Barbie, until the 21st century had “remained for the most part white, blue-eyed and blond,” as stated by John Silver, editor-in-chief of TTPM (Li, 2015). An additional troubling issue is the fact that dolls meant to represent other ethnicities and nationalities that Mattel released as early as the 1960s were created with the same unrealistic body shape associated with Barbie. By not locking step with the pace of the changing face of the population until 2015, Mattel’s current efforts appear “ridiculously late” (Jamieson, 2016) in a world where (a) research has shown that children who play with toys that look like them build confidence and leadership skills while children who play with dolls unlike them learn compassion and (b) the demand for diverse representation in sectors ranging from science to politics to entertainment is perhaps louder and more fervent than ever before (Kielburger & Kielburger, 2017).

A public retreat from materialism and disingenuousness in favor of an embrace of minimalism and authenticity—brought on, in part, by the coming of age of Generation Y—has also taken away from Mattel’s bottom line. According to Halzack (2016), “researchers found that when people thought of Barbie, they thought about the pink convertible, the Dreamhouse and the closet full of tiny, plastic stilettos. They thought of a character whose life was more ‘Real Housewives’ than real world.” This is problematic during a time in which young parents want to give “their children toys that have purpose and meaning” (Halzack, 2016). With the effects of the

“I think the biggest challenge for the toy industry as a whole is figuring out how to combine traditional retail distribution and manufacturing with a technology startup mindset.”

- Robb Fujioka, senior vice president,
chief products officer at Mattel



(Yuan, 2017)

Great Recession still fresh in mind, it is unlikely that the largest generation, Millennials, will quickly switch from seeking experiences and fewer items that bring greater value back to the mass accumulation of “stuff” (Berridge, 2014; Saiidi, 2016).

An additional environmental challenge for Mattel is technology. Mobile games on computers, video consoles connected to televisions, smartphones, and tablets have captured children’s attention, making extended periods of playtime with non-digital toys virtually obsolete. Research from Mattel, as cited by Lin (2014), indicates the amount of screen-free playtime as stagnant at 30 minutes per day from 2011 to 2014. Bridging the online-offline gap requires creativity, but many of Mattel’s efforts to innovate have not been rewarded in sales or the court of public opinion; for example, its interactive Hello Barbie has not yet become a hit with consumers (Kavilanz & Wattles, 2017; Lau & Mehlsen, 2015). However, as the technology industry is only poised to grow at an exponential rate with improvements in artificial intelligence, robotics, augmented reality, 3-D printing, and more (Sallomi, n.d.), Mattel must find its footing to compete within its own industry. Paradoxically, this may mean stepping away from technology and returning to the basics that hoisted the company to prominence in the first place.

The Toy Industry

According to The Toy Association (n.d.a), market research company The NPD Group estimated that the market size of the toy industry was approximately \$26.5 billion in 2016. Dolls represented \$2.88 billion of that amount, an increase of 10% from 2015. Outdoor and sports toys

claimed the highest portion of the market at \$3.73 billion. The data showed an overall 5% increase in U.S. toy sales from 2015. In the first half of 2017, sports and outdoor toys have remained flat in sales; however, dolls have risen by 6% in a year over year comparison. Construction sets, action figures, and crafts—the lowest performers of 2016—have continued to fall in sales, coming in at -10, -10, and -3% respectively in the first six months of 2017.

The toy industry, which generates \$10 billion in tax revenue annually, has a total U.S. economic impact of \$80.25 billion each year. An estimated 3 billion toys, with an average price of \$10, generates approximately \$26 billion in annual U.S. sales. Approximately 504,344 full-time jobs in the U.S. are supported by the industry, generating more than \$25 billion in wages, and small businesses comprise nearly 98% of toy manufacturers, wholesalers, and distributors in the nation (The Toy Association, n.d.b; The Toy Association, n.d.c).

Like for top toy company, Mattel, one of the greatest challenges facing the *entire* industry is adapting to advances in technology. Ted Trautman, writing for *The New Yorker*, gives a textbook example of how digital innovation is changing the toy industry's landscape:

“As traditional toy companies fiercely protect their territory—the tactile, the messy, the outdoors—some of the products they've been selling for decades are reimaged in digital form. For instance, Hasbro's line of board games includes both Scrabble and Words with Friends: a seventy-five-year-old classic and a cardboard-and-tiles version of the iPhone app that ripped it off.” (Trautman, 2014)

Yet, for toy brands, relying solely on adding more and more technology has not proven to be a successful strategy. Over-innovating, according to business analyst Michael McQueen—as cited by Killalea, 2016—led to struggles and a costly pursuit of innovation for LEGO during the

rise of the digital age in the early 2000s: “LEGO saw this threat and started to compete in the video game market. [...] The company began to over innovate, it began to over produce and this affected its core business” (Killalea, 2016). Ultimately, simplifying to a back-to-blocks approach saved the brand.



The image is a promotional poster for a LEGO Ninjago event. At the top left is the red LEGO logo. To its right is the title "THE NINJAGO MOVIE" in a stylized font, with "THE" and "MOVIE" in gold and "NINJAGO" in red. Below the title, the text "MAKE & TAKE EVENT" is written in a serif font, followed by "SATURDAY, OCT 7TH" and "4:00 PM". To the right of the text is a small image of a green and red LEGO Ninjago vehicle. At the bottom left, there is a date "OCT 7" in red, followed by the event title "LEGO Ninjago Make & Take Activity" and the location "Sat 4 PM · Barnes & Noble · Mishawaka, IN". Below the location, it says "Film · 221 people". On the bottom right, there is a button with a star icon and the text "Interested".

OCT 7 **LEGO Ninjago Make & Take Activity**
Sat 4 PM · Barnes & Noble · Mishawaka, IN
Film · 221 people

★ Interested

(LEGO, n.d.)

Competition

Mattel’s competitors in the North American segment include LEGO, Hasbro, Just Play Products, MGA Entertainment, VTech, and other large toy companies; a bevy of smaller toy companies; and electronics and video game manufacturers. Competition is intensified by the fact that only a few retailers “account for a large portion of all toy sales, allocate the shelf space from which toys are viewed, and have direct contact with parents and children through in-store

purchases, coupons, and print advertisements” (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a). Online giant Amazon, which does not produce its own toys and therefore has limited overhead and lower costs, also poses a major threat.

LEGO, which temporarily overtook Mattel as the largest toy company three years ago, is Mattel’s strongest competitor. The latter topped LEGO with \$5.46 billion in sales in 2016; at \$5.38 billion, LEGO’s growth decelerated from 25% in 2015 to 6%, and sales in the U.S. were flat year over year (DuVall, 2017; Monaghan, 2017). Mattel’s worldwide workforce dwarfs that of LEGO by 13,500 employees. However, like Mattel, some of LEGO’s recent troubles seem tied to discord at the top of the hierarchy; after 15 years with the organization but just eight months as the top executive, Bali Padda was replaced as CEO by Niels Christiansen (DuVall, 2017).

While LEGO’s internal structure may be suffering some, the brand is succeeding in several ways in the area of public relations, including tactics aimed specifically at one of Mattel’s key publics: young girls. For example, LEGO has a series of YouTube mini movies for its DC Super Hero Girls toys, and the winner of its LEGO Friends Designer competition is a girl who has been featured in the brand’s social media videos. More broadly, the company also has launched its own social networking app, LEGO Life, using only earned media for content that stresses safety to appeal to parents (Bradley, 2017). Additionally, the brand spends quite a bit of PR energy on building relationships with publics interested in its toy-inspired feature films such as *The Ninjago Movie*, which has its own associated events and videos (LEGO, n.d.). LEGO even partnered with the TV show *American Ninja Warrior* for Ninjago to attract new consumers (LEGO, 2015). Despite the success of these various tactics, an overarching public relations campaign or message tying these efforts together for LEGO is not apparent.

Mattel/Barbie SWOT Analysis

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation as leader in toys • Ample resources (workforce, facilities, international presence) • Licenses and partnerships • Social media presence (particularly Barbie on Facebook—in terms of number following—and @BarbieStyle on Instagram) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership shifts, specifically at the CEO level • Loss of market share • Trending decline in sales of Barbie dolls from 2012-2015 • Reliance on three primary retailers • Social media presence (particularly @Barbie on Twitter and Barbie on Facebook, where there is an obvious lack of engagement compared to top competitor, LEGO) • Website not balanced between a product focus and engagement (particularly compared to LEGO)
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing number of millennial parents with nostalgia for Mattel toys • Advances in technology • Outdoor play prospects for existing brands such as Barbie • Trend for decreased interest in construction sets • Involvement in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitors, namely LEGO, Hasbro, MGA Entertainment • Advances in technology • Fluctuating toy preferences • Potential economic decline • Association to celebrity entertainers • Potential recalls

CORE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mattel's efforts to make its products more technology-driven and reflective of a diverse society—specifically for the Barbie brand—have not resulted in significantly increased trust in or stable sales for the company, risking the potential long-term loss of its top position in the toy market.

KEY PUBLICS

In recent years, toy industry leader Mattel has struggled to remain relevant as the world diversifies, becomes more technology-dependent, and matures children more quickly (Mattel, Inc., n.d.a). Its powerhouse brand Barbie experienced three years of annual sales declines until Mattel introduced a new line of the dolls with a wider range of body types, skin tones, hairstyles, and eye colors in 2016 (Statista, 2017b; Blumenthal, 2016). While sales for Barbie increased by 7% last year, due to increased competition, the trend for market share for the brand is a declining one (Peck, 2017; Halzack, 2016). Mattel must make efforts to capitalize on this current but minimal—and perhaps fleeting—revived interest in both Barbie and other dolls in order to remain at the top of its industry (The Toy Association, n.d.a).

It also is important for Mattel to seize the opportunity to act as a moral corporate leader to educate and inspire young people. The company’s “You Can Be Anything” campaign for Barbie, which launched in 2015, makes it clear that Mattel has these aims for children, particularly girls. Key publics Mattel can reach with a new and/or extended public relations campaign include:

Elementary School Teachers

As those who often spend more time with children than parents, this public is one well-positioned to influence the two groups outlined above. If these teachers see value in Barbie’s brand, they may be open to incorporating it into their curriculum. They may also reach out to parents about methods of continuing the messaging at home. This level of access makes this group what Wilson and Ogden (2015) describe as an “intervening public.” While they would not

typically be considered a key public for such a campaign, these teachers are necessary to convince parents and children of Barbie's improved role model status.

Self-interests: Performing well in the classroom, educating students

Relationship: Brand familiarity from own childhood and/or as parents

Opinion Leaders: School leadership, peers (other teachers), parents, students, children

Channels: Social media, television/streaming media, school/places of employment, stores, conferences, family/social engagements



Millennial Mothers

Older members of this public are just finding their footing in the professional world and beginning to settle down into family life. Barbie is a relic from their own childhood that they can share with their children. However, to feel motivated to do so, these mothers must feel that Barbie aligns with their values and that the toy has “purpose and meaning” (Halzack, 2016).

Unlike previous generations, a majority of members of this public identify their children as their best friends; this group also is more likely to continue involvement in their own hobbies as adults and parents, meaning there is a likelihood for them to engage in these activities with their children (Castillo, 2017). Millennial mothers, who are competitive and “aim for perfection” (Fromm, 2016), also often seek authentic advice in various areas of their lives—including parenting—and they welcome this guidance from, and will actively support, brands that “understand how to talk to them” (Castillo, 2017; Fromm, 2016). This public also has an acute awareness of the financial pressures of raising children stemming from its experiences during and after The Great Recession (TD Ameritrade, 2017). For these reasons, Mattel has multiple avenues for reaching this group that is critically important to its success as a company but must remain cognizant of cost and intervening publics. Without buy-in from this public, which makes up 83% of new moms (Lynn, 2016), the Barbie brand is unlikely to maintain relevance or improved sales performance.

Self-interests: Providing love, encouragement, education and appropriate entertainment for children; health consciousness; fitting in with peers and other families; avoiding the “fear of missing out”

Relationship: Deeply familiar with Mattel; likely played with Barbie dolls and feels nostalgic

Opinion Leaders: Peers (specifically other mothers), their parents, figures from media (i.e., celebrities)

Channels: Social media and blogs, television/streaming media, places of employment, stores, family/social engagements



(Madov, 2015)

Young Girls (Ages 3 – 12)

This public is the core group to engage with the Barbie brand. Though they are likely incognizant of it, the images presented to them at this age play a significant role in their development as teenagers and adults. More important for members of this public, especially for those who are 7 and older, is the possession of the trendiest toys that allow them to fit in (Sohn, 2017). This often means something tech-heavy; however, the success of the fidget spinner indicates that other items can capture attention. Like with many other purchases within a family, for any toy, children have significant influence over their parents' decisions to buy or not to buy it (YouGov, n.d.). Mattel must present Barbie in a way that is fresh, interesting, and inspiring because buy-in from this public ensures that the company has a consumer for its product in the

present and increases the likelihood of brand longevity when these children become adults and parents in the future.

Self-interests: Having fun, being considered cool by peers (approximately ages 7-12)

Relationship: Most likely to play with Barbie or otherwise engage with the Barbie brand

Opinion Leaders: Peers, parents, teachers, celebrities

Channels: Social media, television/streaming media, school, stores

Grandparents

“Grandparents spend an average of \$2,383 each year to benefit their grandkids,” and 58% of these grandparents are purchasing toys (Emling, 2017). This breaks down to “one of every four toys, four of every ten children’s books, and one of every five video games,” according to Grandparents.com (n.d.b). Furthermore, 6.3 million U.S. households are multigenerational, 72% of grandparents regularly take care of their grandchildren, and 13% of those grandparents are primary caregivers for them (Grandparents.com, n.d.a). Therefore, grandparents represent a public that spends on toys and is likely willing to spend on Mattel and Barbie. This group has a significant role in the development of children and can influence their views of Barbie.

Furthermore, playing with their grandchildren can assist them in maintaining mental sharpness.

Self-interests: Involvement with grandchildren, independence, care-giving, mission-oriented

Relationship: Brand familiarity from own childhood and/or as parents and now grandparents

Opinion Leaders: Adult children, grandchildren, peers, news media (television or online)

Channels: Television, social media, places of employment, stores, family/social engagements

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MESSAGES

According to Wilson and Ogden (2015), primary messages are those that identify what key publics should “understand, believe, or do” and secondary messages provide supporting evidence and justification. These messages should be public-specific. For this campaign, messages will address (a) the millennial mother’s need to view Barbie as values-based rather than materialistic, (b) a young girl’s need to be confident and compassionate on the quest for boundless accomplishment, (c) an elementary teacher’s role in educating children in key life skills, and (d) a grandparent’s role in both providing toys for and playing with their grandchildren. The key publics’ acceptance of these messages will lead them to act accordingly on behalf of the Barbie brand in the form of making purchases (mothers and grandparents), asking for as well as playing with the toy (girls), and educating children about Barbie and playing with the doll alongside those children (teachers, mothers, grandparents).

Elementary School Teachers Primary Messages

- Barbie shows children how to work in a variety of professions and how to work for good in the world.
- Playing with Barbie dolls in the classroom can help children develop social skills.
- Dolls in the classroom provide some students access to toys they do not have at home and can further assist in teaching skills they may not otherwise acquire.

Secondary Messages

- Diverse toys promote the development of confidence and compassionate leadership (Kielburger & Kielburger, 2017), qualities that children can acquire in the classroom now and take to boardrooms later.

- The best toys prompt “problem solving, social interaction, and creative expression in both boys and girls” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.), and Barbie—when incorporated properly into a curriculum—is a toy that fits this criteria.
- Research has shown that dolls that are given names, histories, and character traits by teachers can be powerful in classroom storytelling; these “persona dolls” assist children in problem-solving, emotions management, conflict resolution (Whitney, 1999).



(Sprankles, 2015)

Millennial Mothers Primary Messages

- Barbie is more than a “material girl.”
- Barbie can be a fun and educational part of family time.
- Together with Ken and Friends, the Barbie brand represents a spectrum of diversity appropriate for gender-neutral or gender norm-specific play.
- Now that Barbie is more representative of our diverse world, the company she keeps and the goals she accomplishes are more important than the “stuff” she owns.
- With Barbie, Mattel helps you provide meaningful playtime options at low prices.
- Barbie represents the messages about body image, confidence, and endless possibilities that we all want to convey to our children.

Secondary Messages

- Barbie has introduced children to more than 150 careers since her introduction in 1959, serving as an aspirational figure for young people, especially girls (Barbie, n.d.b).
- With the addition of the new Ken line, the 40 Barbie Fashionistas dolls now come with 11 skin tones, seven body types, and 28 hairstyles (Barbie, n.d.a).
- Half of millennial parents choose gender-neutral toys (Ball, 2015), but buying Barbie brand dolls allows children to ascribe or not to ascribe gender and other attributes as they see fit, allowing for more imaginative and compassionate play.
- All of Barbie’s individual Fashionistas dolls, regardless of size or gender, are \$9.99 (Mattel, n.d.a).

Young Girls (Ages 3 – 12) Primary Messages

- Barbie makes a difference in the world, and so can you.

- More kids play with Barbie than other dolls, online and in real life.
- You can choose to be more than one thing when you grow up.

“ My whole philosophy of Barbie was that, through the doll, the little girl could be anything she wanted to be. Barbie always represented the fact that a woman has choices. ”


Barbie Creator

(Barbie, n.d.c)

Secondary Messages

- Barbie is the most popular fashion doll ever created (Barbie, n.d.b).
- Barbie has more than 265,000 followers on Twitter, over 1 million followers on Instagram, and more than 13.8 million fans on Facebook (Barbie, n.d.b)
- Barbie has had more than 150 jobs (Barbie, n.d.b).
- Barbie gives back to the community; she supports medical research for children and arts education in schools (Mattel, Inc., n.d.b).
- In 2010, Barbie partnered with The White House Project, the Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work Foundation, and the members of her own “10 Women to Watch in 2010”

list to create a mentoring program, advance women in leadership positions, and expose children to the working world (Mattel, Inc., n.d.c).

Grandparents Primary Messages

- When you buy Barbie for your grandchild, you invest in her (or his) future as a goal-oriented and socially responsible adult.
- Grandparents play a critical role in the lives of their grandchildren.
- Spending time with your grandchildren can help you improve or maintain your health.

Secondary Messages

- Spending time with your grandchildren increases their emotional and social intelligence (Albernaz, 2015); by role-playing with Barbie dolls with your grandchildren during playtime, you help them contextualize this intelligence and project it onto the real world.
- The diversity of the Barbie line helps your grandchildren understand their roles in a world vastly different than the ones in which you and your children matured.
- Grandparents who spend at least one day per week helping with childcare are less likely to develop cognitive issues such as Alzheimer's disease (Firger, 2014).

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The primary aim of the public relations campaign is to **increase positive opinions** of and **trust** in Mattel (particularly Barbie) as a modern, relevant brand worthy of purchase because it reflects its core audiences' values and encourages imaginative thinking in children.

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

- Increase face-to-face engagement with the Barbie brand by 40% within campaign year (January 1 – December 31, 2018).
- Boost online engagement with Barbie brand by 20% within campaign year.
- Influence 15% more key public consumers to purchase Barbie toys within stores in key urban or suburban areas within campaign year.
- Increase positive attitudes toward the Barbie brand and “You Can Be Anything” by 30% within key publics (and, by extension, the U.S. audience at large) by end of campaign year.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Mattel's efforts to make Barbie more representative of modern society make it clear that the company viewed physical image as a core cause of seven years of bad luck in the form of market share loss and plummeting sales (Halzack, 2016). Other factors, including the rise of technology, of course, also have played major roles. While attempts to digitize the brand (e.g., Hello Barbie) have faltered, the Fashionistas line of 2016—with its range of skin tones, body types, hairstyles and colors—has buoyed Barbie since its overhaul. Tied with the 2015 “You Can Be Anything” campaign, it would appear that the brand had been resuscitated, and it had—but only for roughly 21 months. Sales and shares are down (La Monica, 2017; Garcia, 2017). Ads for the campaign are no longer running. Once again, Barbie is fading into irrelevancy.

This decline, however, is not inevitable. To avoid it, Mattel must cultivate a positive view of Barbie; consumers need to see the brand—perhaps for the first time—as relevant, altruistic, educational, encouraging of imaginative thinking in young people, and therefore, worthy of purchase. In other words, the time to prevent negative impressions has passed; now it is time to overcome the existing undesired narrative and hold a steady position above and beyond it. The company should strive to resolve concerns about Barbie; to remain visible, progressive, and interesting for those who purchase and drive purchases of the brand; and to place the brand in locations that offer the opportunity for building longevity and loyalty.

Mattel can hit the targets for these aims by focusing on four key publics: millennial mothers, children (girls), elementary school teachers, and grandparents. Each will require a distinct strategy based on the group’s beliefs about Barbie, their role in making purchases of the dolls, and their wishes for the brand. For example, because millennial mothers are influenced by



(Peppers, 2013)

their peers, celebrities, Internet advice, their parents, and nostalgia and prefer to give their children toys with meaning and purpose, Mattel must use its digital platforms to present Barbie as a modern, relevant, and meaningful toy with crowdsourced approval while allowing these mothers to be happily reminded of their own childhood (Halzack, 2016; Van

Hoven, 2014). The children of these millennials, specifically young girls, will have the most “pester power” when it comes to potential purchases of Barbie brand toys (Hutchison, 2016). Parents with children under 13, according to Hutchison (2016), “feel more pressured to buy what their kid suggests than other parents”; therefore, if children are convinced that Barbie is cool, relevant, and helpful, it will affect sales. And like for parents, Mattel must offer children opportunities for regular group reinforcement of the good qualities of Barbie via technology-enhanced methods.

The third group, elementary school teachers, comprise the public that spends the greatest amount of daily active time with the key public that engages most with the brand: children (girls). If teachers are convinced of the value of adding Barbie-focused curriculum in classrooms,

they will be able to influence their students (and subsequently, parents) to view Barbie as a role model and to see value in learning about and playing with the doll. In order to persuade teachers, Mattel will need to take Barbie to the places where these professionals already meet to discuss their work so that the brand can be integrated into their thinking about classroom learning.

Finally, grandparents increasingly are taking care of children, spending more than \$2,000 on them annually; this includes buying a large number of toys (Emling, 2017). Furthermore, those “who live with their grandchildren are more racially and ethnically diverse than the U.S. population overall” (Krogstad, 2015). Therefore, grandparents represent a public that is likely willing to spend on Mattel and Barbie, particularly now that the Fashionistas line also is more diverse. This group has a significant role in the development of children and can influence their views of Barbie, but participating in playtime also has positive benefits for the grandparents.

Collectively, the strategies and tactics are efforts to capitalize on crowd psychology and social influence, the persuasion of repetition, the sentimental value of the past, and the importance of education (Mann, 1986; Association for Psychological Science, 2016; Friedman, 2016; Greenstone, Harris, Li, Looney, & Patashnik, 2012). The following will be implemented during a campaign year of January – December 2018, with some pre-work occurring in fall 2017:

Elementary School Teachers

Strategy: Partner with education organizations and schools to incorporate Barbie in elementary classroom learning related to goal-setting, altruism, and creative expression.

Tactic One: Secure presentation slots for Mattel’s curriculum and learning designers to share Barbie-focused lesson plans with elementary educators at the National Association for the

Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Institute in summer 2018 and the 2018 NAEYC annual conference.

Tactic Two: Launch a mini-site about what young students can learn by playing with Barbie and Friends, including, but not limited to:

- Fact sheet on the importance of play in early childhood and the role of “persona dolls” (Whitney, 1999)
- Backgrounder on Barbie and her accomplishments (e.g., 150+ careers) as well as the philanthropic extensions of the brand
- Video of Barbie-centric curriculum being taught in an elementary school classroom
- Videos from the “You Can Be Anything” campaign

Tactic Three: Meet with teachers and principals at elementary schools in underserved communities to secure time for Barbie-focused curriculum in their classrooms. During these meetings, the mini-site, videos, programs of study, the Fashionistas line, and a model for hosting in-classroom “networking” for students will be presented.

Millennial Mothers

Strategy: Change this key public’s perception of Barbie from “material girl” to role model by joining forces with influencers on millennial consumer behavior.

Tactic One: Partner with celebrities (and their children) for a video series to expand the “You Can Be Anything” campaign. Potential partners include a mix of celebrities (i.e., actors and musicians), online influencers, and those who work behind the scenes in major industries:

- **Shonda Rhimes**, television writer and producer, author; mother of three
- **Sarah Michelle Gellar and Freddie Prinze Jr.**, actors; parents of two
- **Daphne Oz**, television personality, author; mother of (soon-to-be) three
- **Curtis Sittenfeld**, novelist; mother of two
- **Tom Riles**, comedian, parenting blogger, social media influencer; father of three
- **Chrissy Tiegen and John Legend**, model and television personality / musician, producer, actor; parents of one
- **Denene Millner**, author, parenting blogger; mother of two
- **Chelsea Clinton**, author, former news correspondent; mother of two
- **Massy Arias**, personal trainer, social media influencer; mother of one
- **Beyonce**, musician; mother of three
- **Meg Resnikoff and Elle Walker**, creators of “What’s Up Moms,” the #1 YouTube channel for parenting (Forbes, 2017); both mothers of three

The content will be cross-posted on and/or repurposed for the Mattel and Barbie websites, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Tactic Two: Partner with “mommy blogs” for posts on Barbie’s changing image and ability to play a significant role in the education and encouragement of children, particularly girls. The content should provide examples of how parents can include Barbie in playtime to cultivate confidence, empathy, and altruism in their children.

Tactic Three: During the second half of the campaign year (July – December 2018), solicit user-generated content with a cross-platform hashtag (e.g., #BecauseOfBarbie) to encourage members

of this key public to reflect on and share their childhood experiences with Barbie and how those affected what they currently do. The hashtag will be incorporated into in-store displays.

Young Girls (Ages 3 – 12), *but inclusive of all children*

Strategy: Create opportunities for repeated youth engagement with the Barbie brand outside of home and school to make the dolls and their accessories toys of choice for children.

Tactic One: Host and/or sponsor Barbie & Friends “networking” events for children (aged 7-12) at libraries, toy stores, malls, shopping centers, etc., in major cities and locations where the brand is not performing well. In addition to giving children the chance to play with their Barbie toys and one another in a group setting that promotes diversity and collaboration, the events will explore topics such as current academic and extracurricular goals, college and careers (“What do you want to be/do when you grow up?”), community involvement, and opportunities (e.g., travel) via age-appropriate dialogue. This will be a transition from previous Barbie events that centered fashion.



(Internationale Globale Marques Inc., n.d.)

Tactic Two: Add in-store “You Can Be Anything” digital displays and motion-activated interactive kiosks in select Walmart, Target, and Toys ‘R’ Us locations to encourage children’s engagement with and desire to purchase Barbie merchandise as well as to drive messages regarding careers and other opportunities.

Grandparents

Strategy: Place brand content in locations grandparents are more likely to access to influence them to purchase Barbie dolls and accessories for their grandchildren.

Tactic One: Pitch feature stories on Barbie’s changing image and influence on children to AARP and GRAND magazines. Key themes for the pieces will include the Barbie’s visual

diversification, the brand’s ability to positively encourage young people, and the value of play and engagement with children for maintaining mental acuity as one ages.

Tactic Two: Develop a brochure on the value of exercise and “brain games” in efforts to stay healthy and deliver them for

placement in community gyms, family wellness centers, and doctor’s offices in select locations. The brochure will feature a section on Barbie, role playing, and engaging with (grand)children. The content also will focus on unconventional methods of staying active including physical but low-impact volunteering efforts such as picking up litter.



(Burress, 2014)

CALENDAR AND BUDGET

In a time when something as simple as the fidget spinner can drive the toy market, it is more important than ever to innovate via a return to the basics and the core values that sustain brands in this industry. For Mattel, and specifically for Barbie, this means returning to Ruth Handler’s vision of a doll that can inspire girls to be anything they want to be. The brand must cultivate true leadership in the areas of creativity, community, and the classroom. To do so, Mattel should create conversations around Barbie where individuals with the power to reinvigorate the brand live, work, and play. The company also should appeal to the interests of and employ the influences on these groups that are principal to its success. The outlined public relations plan will rebuild connections with three key publics—millennial mothers, children (particularly young girls), and grandparents—and cultivate a new, specific relationship with elementary school teachers. These efforts will poise Mattel’s Barbie brand for a continued resurgence (initiated by the Fashionistas launch and the “You Can Be Anything” campaign) and longevity without a high level of spending during a precarious period for the business.

As the PR team will work diligently to partner with influencers and celebrities who have a personal affinity toward the brand, the costs for implementing the plan are expected to be nominal, with most funds beyond those potential contracts going toward items such as travel, kiosk equipment, video development, and collateral design. To align with the purpose to motivate and support young girls in their vision for who they can be and what they can do with their lives, the team will seek out inventive, small woman-led agencies and professional, independent female artists to produce any new visuals (e.g., graphic design, video interviews) outside of BBDO’s work for the existing campaign held over from 2015-2016. Bloggers, who will provide another layer of influence for the mothers targeted by the plan, will be compensated

at a flat rate. Brand ambassadors, hired or contracted on a temporary basis, also will be paid a flat stipend. Many of the efforts, such as website copywriting and social media, will be handled in-house at no additional cost beyond the salaries of the marketing and communications team members involved in the plan. Analysis of the success of the plan's events, social media posts, and news releases/pitches will be conducted with complimentary or currently contracted services to the company (i.e., Eventbrite and Salesforce, respectively). Collectively, these factors support a fundamental aim of the plan: to effectively raise the positive profile of Mattel's Barbie through smart, on-brand strategies and tactics without incurring hefty expenses to keep up with trends and technologies that have proven not always to have the expected return on investment.

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-Quote-

Projected total cost, with influencer and celebrity contracts for videos:

\$1,651,497

Projected total cost, without influencer and celebrity contracts for videos:

\$651,497

► Please see attachment for complete budget and calendar ◀

EVALUATION PLAN

The proposed PR plan seeks to use new methods to reinvigorate the best parts of what Mattel began with its campaign efforts for Barbie before and after the launch of the more diverse Fashionistas line in 2016. This will involve new video content, social media pushes, organization and celebrity partnerships, media features, social gatherings, critical ventures into schools, and more to present Barbie as a role model not solely concerned with beauty, fashion, and possessions. To gauge the success of this effort, Mattel can implement a variety of output, outtake, and outcome measurements (Reed College of Media, West Virginia University, 2017). The following are the objectives-based methods recommended to evaluate success in increasing positive opinions of and trust in Barbie as a modern, relevant brand worthy of purchase because it reflects its core audiences' values and encourages imaginative thinking in children.

Objective One: Increase face-to-face engagement with the Barbie brand by 40% within campaign year (January 1 – December 31, 2018).

Event Measurement

- Determine current average attendance rate for the previous year (2017) of Barbie events.
- Use Eventbrite to
 - create registration pages for local/national Barbie & Friends networking events.
 - track how many people view and register to attend events.
 - collect custom data from registrants to survey opinions of the brand and “You Can Be Anything” content.
 - check in attendees via app and track how many viewers/registrants actually attend to compute conversion rate.

- send follow-up survey to measure change in beliefs and behaviors during attendee journey, from registration to post-event.
- Calculate new average attendance rate of Barbie events for 2018.
- Quantify and qualify sentiment from registration data and post-event surveys.
- Total sales from current events (if applicable) and compare to sales at networking events to show increase.

Attitude and Preference Measurement

- Survey shoppers in-person at store displays and interactive kiosks in select stores to measure intent to buy, opinions of the brand, and knowledge of campaign efforts.

Objective Two: Boost online engagement with Barbie brand by 20% within campaign year.

Cyberspace Analysis

- Use Salesforce to track the number of mentions and shares, best performing content, top social platforms, geographical distribution, and gender breakdown.
- Use Google Analytics to track acquisitions, visitor count, session length, content downloads, bounce rate, return visit rate, etc., on teachers' mini site and Barbie website.
- Track YouTube, Facebook video engagement (reach, number of views, minutes viewed, average watch time, unique viewers, top audiences, number/type of shares and reactions).

Objective Three: Influence 15% more key public consumers to purchase Barbie toys within stores in key urban or suburban areas within campaign year.

Behavior Measurement

- Survey shoppers purchasing Barbie products at the register via cashier inquiry, digital screen, or receipt (with incentivized survey participation) to determine if they interacted with a kiosk during a shopping trip. Count the number of those who interacted with a kiosk who also made a relevant purchase.

Objective Four: Increase positive attitudes toward the Barbie brand and “You Can Be Anything” by 30% within key publics (and, by extension, the U.S. audience at large) by end of campaign year.

Recall and Retention Measurement

- Implement elementary school pre-test comprised of open-ended questions before the introduction of Barbie-focused curriculum to set baseline on students’ current beliefs and practices, including what they believe is possible in their futures and what they think of the brand.
- Implement post-test at the end of lessons and close of school years to establish how the lessons changed student opinions or presented them with new choices that resonated.
- Assessment will be conducted with teacher/curriculum specialist-developed rubrics.

Behavior Measurement

- Quantify number of teachers who create Barbie-focused lesson plans, integrate them into their classrooms and report back with positive results (compared to number of teachers who committed to do so but did not or those who did not report).

Cyberspace Analysis

- Use Salesforce to analyze the sentiment of responses on social media by tracking keywords and hashtags (#BecauseOfBarbie, #YouCanBeAnything).
- Use Meltwater to monitor story pick-ups and to analyze the sentiment of responses in news media.

Media Content Analysis / Behavior Measurement

- Quantify number of outlets—blogs, magazines, newspapers, TV shows, etc.—that run stories on new Barbie initiatives as the apparent result of pitches, events, or brand-produced content using Meltwater.

Justification for Recommended Measurement Tools

Eventbrite, a user-friendly, familiar, and designed-for-mobile platform suited for the plan's adult key publics, provides free service for free events and a wide range of amenities not found in a single tool from other companies (i.e., app check-in, ticket scanning). One of the most important features is its "robust reporting engine," making this recognized industry leader unparalleled in moving beyond event planning and into event evaluation (Horne, 2015).

Salesforce, the client's current customer relationship management platform, offers superior integration of services such as email marketing and social listening, publishing, and engagement with drag-and-drop ease. It is recommended to move forward with Salesforce to avoid the need to use multiple platforms to accomplish what this highly-recommended company does with one at a 23% return on investment rate (Salesforce, n.d.).

Google Analytics is the gold standard for measuring the actions of website visitors. The company has the infrastructure to dissect and examine data at a far greater speed than smaller businesses. With Google Analytics, the public relations team can evaluate a deeper level of information and garner more significant insights to make revisions to the PR plan as needed—all at no cost.

YouTube Analytics, is a part of the Google product family and provides the most thorough look into the performance of videos published on the platform at no cost. The Barbie brand already has a presence on YouTube and conducting measurement and evaluation there will make it easier to compare and contrast future content against current videos.

Facebook Insights provides a segmented look into a brand's audience and audience behaviors on pages that cannot be efficiently—and perhaps, accurately—replicated by another service on its own. Barbie's following on this platform numbers in the millions, and measuring the actions of such a large, diverse group will require excellent real-time reporting; Facebook offers this, and the reports can be downloaded in Microsoft Excel formats for easy interpretation and inclusion in other company evaluation documents.

Meltwater offers services for monitoring social media and news media. Due to the recommended continued use of Salesforce for the company, analysis of news media mentions will be the primary use of Meltwater for Mattel and the Barbie brand. This platform offers keyword automation so that all mentions can be gathered and delivered to key team members, offering flexibility and speed in information delivery. This will be especially useful in times of crisis, if they arise.

SUMMARY

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