

Mega Cultural

The world faces a lot of challenges, and Mega Brands, Inc. — Lego's fiercest competitor — believes that we could well experience the next generation of children living in a world devoid of creativity.

That's why Mega has declared its mission — its *cultural movement* — to be "creativity to the rescue."

The company's flagship product is Mega Bloks, which are plastic, multicolored, building blocks. Mega

Working hand-in-hand with its senior management, we developed a corporate brand strategy that renamed the company Mega Brands, developed a new logo and brand strategy for the umbrella brand, as well as a complex web of different products.

The new umbrella strategy was rooted in Mega's well-known heritage in building blocks and profoundly leveraged it as a cognitive-development product. Our strategy was based on a deep cultural insight from mothers across the United States.

Parents today feel the magical imagination of childhood is under threat. (Just look at the hugely successful movie, *Little Miss Sunshine*). Free playtime is shrinking as children's lives are increasingly overscheduled and over structured.

Since 1980, unstructured children's activities have declined by 50%. At the same time, children are filling their remaining free time with hi-tech toys and mind-numbing videogames which parents feel are making their children grow up too fast.

Unstructured free play — the kind of play where children use their own imaginations with toys to play and create, is crucial to building a child's self-expression and creativity. If this decline in free-form playtime continues, we may have to imagine a future generation that

is less creative than ever before.

Mega therefore decided to champion the power of creativity in the fight against time-sucking videogames and other non-creative pursuits. Our goal was to create a cultural movement that is bigger than any advertising campaign and that is highly embraced by mothers of young children everywhere.

The idea behind a cultural movement is simple: Understand the prevailing tendencies in society and connect your brand to this culture. It's akin to placing a surfboard on a wave.

Lego's top competitor changes the game with a mom-inspired manifesto of creativity for kids.



Bloks are the company's "iMac" — *i.e.*, the volume product which gave life to the idea that Mega can and should champion imagination, free play and creativity.

With its recent acquisition of the Rose Art company brands, Mega also offers other products that feed into this brand idea — puzzles and games, pens and crayons. The power of this extraordinary story comes from the history of the company and the original toys that it made.

When we first started working with them, the company was known simply as Mega Bloks.

Movement

MEGA MOMS

We began by conducting a social-science study among mothers—“Mega Moms” as we called them. More of a creative research assignment than a traditional run-of-the-mill qualitative focus group, we probed the mothers’ sense of control over their families. The actual sessions were overseen by a cultural urbanologist who is directly involved with Montessori Schools.

The sessions were held in informal dinner settings at restaurants where mothers from communities were invited to share family stories, their work lives, the pressures of family and work, and their fears about what gets through the proverbial “gate” into their children’s lives.

What we discovered was a prevailing fear of a “lack of control” among the mothers who are the home’s guardians. We did not test whether our hypothesis was correct—we simply asked them to help us make it better and more relevant. They helped us pen what later became our cultural movement manifesto.

What we ended up with was something authentic, inspiring and profoundly relevant:

“Once upon a time, there was a creature named Creativity. When Creativity was very young, he was allowed to explore the farthest reaches of his imagination. Nobody told him what noise his train was supposed to make. So he made it sound like a cockatoo. Nobody told him his dragon was scary, so he had his over for pizza. And nobody told him what his tow truck was supposed to tow, so used his to tow the ocean.

“Then one day, when Creativity was all grown up, people throughout the land turned to him for inspiration in good times and bad. Government leaders and scientists depended on Creativity to guide them. Pulitzer Prize winning authors sought out Creativity for inspiration. All the world sought out Creativity to solve its most confounding problems. And that’s how Creativity saved the world.”

We inserted this manifesto into millions of packages worldwide in many different languages. We also developed an in-store look and feel that brought the entire brand movement to life in Wal-Mart and Toys-r-Us store shelves, integrating our graphics and manifesto into wall shelving. We also developed web content and advertising—both traditional, such as print—as well as innovative web and viral marketing.

KIDS GET IT

A pre-Christmas campaign featured a website entitled *KidsGetIt.com*, where kids interviewed the world’s smartest people at the United Nations building in New York, at Ivy League universities, and also legislators in Washington. Dressed up as ketchup and mustard containers, they asked these leaders questions about how to solve the world’s biggest problems.

The kids were met with a combination of complex answers and shoulder shrugs—further establishing the need for creativity in the world. Questions like “How are we going to stop nuclear war?” found no answers among the learned, select few interviewed. The kids, meanwhile, seemed to think that with a little creativity the problem could be solved rather easily.

The results of this campaign are not yet in since it is relatively new. However, it’s fair to say that the most important results are in—namely that the company staff at a recent internal meeting wholeheartedly rallied behind the new mission for the company.

It has also been embraced to an even greater degree by the very stores that previously were negotiating on a price and product platform. As parents themselves, Mega’s retailers felt compelled to join the movement. Because of this, Mega was able to initiate new business discussions with new customers.

Not coincidentally, Mega’s chief operating officer was recently selected as the pre-eminent marketer by *Strategy* magazine. That’s quite an achievement for a company that used to be thoroughly entrenched as a manufacturer of plastic-molded children’s toys.

Mega has used creativity to create a brand movement to generate not simply awareness for Mega the brand, but relevance and a highly emotional connection that is much bigger than the product experience by itself.

Mega’s movement for creativity has just begun. ■



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