

# Play all Year

by **Sharon  
Adler**  
EDITED BY  
CAROLINE WALTERS

## KEY TRENDS FROM THE 120th New York Toy Show FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2026

In February 2026, the 120th New York Toy Show brought together more than 10,000 attendees from around the globe, reinforcing the strength and scale of the toy industry—now a \$45.6 billion market.

While toys are often associated with the holiday season, the show made one thing clear: play is a year-round business, with fresh opportunities emerging across categories as we move into spring and summer.



**SHARON ADLER'S** knowledge of merchandising spans over 30 years, including 8 years with Associated Merchandising Corporation (AMC), the preeminent overseas sourcing and product development arm servicing top leading department stores in the U.S. and Europe.

Adler spent seven years sourcing and developing product for 2 leading seasonal wholesalers, the Director of Product Development for Santa's World (Kurt Adler) and Department 56 Inc. After leaving Department 56 in 2002, Sharon joined Li Fung, the world's largest global sourcing company, as Director of Trend and Color overseeing the art department and all products of home merchandise. She attended seminars and trade shows globally and produced color and trend reports for major wholesalers and retailers in all categories of home furnishings. Sharon is currently consulting in trend, color, product development and global sourcing in the home furnishings industry.

## *A Market Driven by Classics — and Collectors*

Two categories continue to dominate the landscape: games and puzzles, which led the market last year at \$3.9 billion, followed by plush at \$1.9 billion. These enduring segments are evolving, fueled in part by a growing adult audience. Consumers aged 18 and older now account for one-fifth of U.S. toy sales, reshaping how retailers merchandise and position products.

Items such as construction kits, collectible cards, and character-driven figures are increasingly designed to appeal to both kids and adults. This crossover creates strong opportunities for retailers to build multi-generational assortments that tap into nostalgia while offering newness.

## *Celebrating America: 250 Years of Inspiration*

A major theme emerging at this year's show is the upcoming 250th anniversary of the United States. Toy manufacturers are embracing the celebration with a wide range of themed products across price points.

Games and puzzles are leading the charge, including collectible editions of classic board games and elevated offerings such as coffee table-style game sets featuring American landmarks and patriotic design elements. For younger audiences, iconic toys and plush characters are being reimagined with red, white, and blue appeal.

Collectibility is also key within this theme, with items like bobblehead figures and historically inspired chess sets—featuring Red Coats and Blue Coats—adding both play value and display appeal.

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## *Play Meets Real Life: Miniature and Experiential Toys*

Licensing continues to be a powerful driver, especially in categories that mirror real-life activities. One standout trend is the rise of miniature, functional toys inspired by cooking, baking, and gardening.

Children are increasingly drawn to hands-on experiences they see in everyday life, and brands are responding with scaled-down versions of recognizable tools—such as working miniature kitchen appliances designed with safety features. These items bridge imaginative play and real-world learning, making them highly giftable and experiential.



## *Social-Driven Play: Slime and Sensory Fun*

Social media continues to influence product development, particularly in sensory play. Slime remains a standout category, with new assortments shaped like familiar foods—donuts, ice cream cones, pizzas, and more.

These visually engaging products are designed to “bounce back” and maintain their shape, making them ideal for the short-form video content that drives trends on platforms like TikTok and YouTube. For retailers, these items offer strong impulse appeal and are perfect for eye-catching displays.





## *Anniversaries and Fandom: Pokémon at 30*

Anniversaries remain a powerful merchandising opportunity, and one of the biggest in 2026 is the 30th anniversary of Pokémon. Special collections featuring fan-favorite characters Mew and Mewtwo will roll out across multiple categories, including cards, plush, and games.

With additional product launches and events planned for October, this milestone offers a long runway for retailers to build excitement and drive repeat traffic throughout the year.

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