

# Toy Fair's Lower Level Evolves to Must-Stop Shop

BY LISA ORMAN, KIDSTUFF PR



Remember how the lower level of New York Toy Fair at the Jacob Javits Center was “the basement” for cast-offs and companies who couldn’t afford the rent upstairs, or didn’t have the clout in the lottery system to get a booth in prime space?

Those days are gone. Today’s lower level is full of vendors who epitomize the term *specialty*, such as Plan Toys, Fat Brain Toys, Skip Hop, and more. My PR agency has always had clients on both levels, so I have watched this evolution with great interest. Instead of being a mess of poor to high-quality companies in one big space categorized simply as Games and Specialty, now there are numerous categories that make it easier for buyers to find booths that fit their needs.

“We used to joke about the lower level, saying it’s where the ‘I’ve got 5,000 units of my new game in my garage, wanna try it out?’ people lived,” says Tom Rushton, vice-president of sales, Revenew. “I love walking through now, and I see all of my buyers down there. With all the competition from not just

the blockbuster bestsellers but toys and games that genuinely set our retailers apart from Walmart and TRU, downstairs has become the place to treasure hunt for that breakout, unique item. It’s the first place I saw Happy Salmon from North Star Games, Crabs Adjust Humidity from Vampire Squid Cards, and all the licensed collectible figures from The Loyal Subjects. Walk to the other side and there’s Funko. Being downstairs is now a badge of honor, a true destination at Toy Fair.”

I agree, and so do my clients who have had booths on the lower level for years. “I think the first level is better in many ways for the smaller companies as they receive more visibility,” says Esther Novis, president of The Young Scientists Club. “We were upstairs many years ago, and it was always hard when we were placed next to large booths that were walled in. I also think buyers come downstairs to search for new and special items and it is less corporate-oriented.”

Another client, Robert Leuchtner, president of Magicforest, an importer of European toys, has the added perspective of being a buyer in the past. “Indeed, the lower floor did have a less than sterling appeal,” Leuchtner says. “As a buyer 15–20 years ago, I remember saving the downstairs for the last day. You would blast through looking for that quirky new brand or product. An unintended consequence of the multi-year renovation at Javits was to cause a shakeup, both upstairs and downstairs. Now, we enjoy being downstairs as the upstairs tends to be dominated by the really large booths.”

Haywire Group agrees: “The lower level of Javits has definitely seen an increase in traffic

## Level 1 Toy Fair Product Zones

- Games
- Educational
- Children’s Books & Music Toys
- Action Figures
- Launch Pad (new)
- Pop Stop
- Outdoor
- Modern Design
- Infant Preschool

over the last several years of Toy Fair. I agree with Robert Leuchtner that it began with the renovations at Javits, causing some companies to move to the lower level and their customers seeking them out and increasing foot traffic,” said Tami Murphy, marketing manager. “I think two other things were happening simultaneously—small manufacturers, who have always exhibited in the lower level, were seeing growth in their businesses [with] a larger customer base seeking them out at Toy Fair, and the growth of new exhibitors and innovative entrepreneurs seeing the value of the Toy Fair expense to expose the industry to their product.”

I hope to see continued growth and innovation in the lower level at Javits.

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