

Before you read

Can you name some companies that make children's toys and games? What kind of toys are the companies famous for?

Now read the article and answer the questions that follow.

Building blocks of success

FT Correspondent

As Christmas approaches, toy companies are expecting their busiest time of year. One of the most famous brands in this sector is Lego, the Danish toy brick group. The company is expecting good sales figures in the next few months, which is a relief to its directors.

In 1998, Lego announced its first ever loss. The company had diversified a great deal in the 1990s but eventually realised that it had moved into areas in which it didn't have the know-how to succeed. So it withdrew some of its manufacturing lines, such as clothing, bags and accessories. Then, it began

developing original characters to build with Lego products, landscapes for them to inhabit and background stories.

This led directly to the Bionicle range, now Lego Company's bestselling line. Each Bionicle kit invites children to create a robot character out of packaged components. Last month, *Bionicle - Mask of Light*, an animated film by Miramax, was released on DVD. Products like this have helped Lego back into profit.

But what about Lego's famous bricks? Senior vice-president Francesco Ciccolella says they're still important. He explains, 'it's vital to maintain the core product' and says that Lego will remain true to its

brand image of family values. To prove this, he points to the recent relaunch of Lego's classic range of products. The company wants to encourage children to 'play well' in a world of violent action games. 'Obviously we're not a charity, but profit is a nice side-effect of doing things right. We will never compromise our values for the bottom line.'

From the *Financial Times*

Reading Comprehension

Decide if the following statements are True or False

- 1 Christmas is the most important time of year for toy makers.
- 2 Lego Company is based in Denmark.
- 3 The company was more successful five years ago.
- 4 In the 1990s, Lego's new types of product were not successful.
- 5 Bionicle toys are based upon characters in an animated film.
- 6 Francesco Ciccolella would prefer to concentrate on making Bionicle toys.
- 7 Lego is making a new effort to sell its traditional products.
- 8 Lego will produce any kind of toy if it makes money.

Vocabulary 1

Match one word from (a) with one from (b) to form word partnerships.

Check your answers in the text, and then use them to complete the sentences. You may need to change the grammatical forms of the words to fit the sentences.

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| (a) | (b) |
| bestselling | line |
| packaged | range |
| core | a loss |
| classic | line |
| bottom | components |
| to announce | figures |
| sales | product |

- 1 A company's _____ is the main product that it sells.
- 2 When a company tells everyone it has lost money it _____.
- 3 The _____ is one type of products that has the highest sales.
- 4 A company's _____ are the total number of products that it has sold.
- 5 Lego toys contain _____. These are parts that are contained inside the boxes.
- 6 A _____ is usually a traditional and high-quality range of products.
- 7 The _____ is the figure that shows the total profit or loss.

Vocabulary 2

Try to complete these sentences using words from the text.

- 1 To d_____y means to increase the range of products that you make.
- 2 When you w_____w a product, you stop making it.
- 3 If you have the k____-____w, this means you have enough knowledge to do something successfully.
- 4 E_____y is another word that means 'finally'.
- 5 When something is v_____, it is very important.

Discussion

Do children in your country play the same games that you did when you were growing up?

Do you think that it is better for children to play with toys like Lego than 'violent action games'?

KEY

Reading Comprehension

- 1 True
- 2 True
- 3 False
- 4 True
- 5 False
- 6 False
- 7 True
- 8 False

Vocabulary 1

- 1 core product
- 2 announces a loss
- 3 bestselling line
- 4 sales figures
- 5 packaged components
- 6 classic range
- 7 bottom line

Vocabulary 2

- 1 diversify
- 2 withdraw
- 3 know-how
- 4 eventually
- 5 vital