

Toy of the Century

At the start of the new millennium the LEGO brick was acclaimed “Toy of the Century” – first by Fortune Magazine and later by the British Association of Toy Retailers. Carpenter Ole Kirk Christiansen began making wooden toys in 1932. Since then the company has passed from father to son. Today the founder’s grandson, Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen – with his children – owns the LEGO Group, which in terms of sales is the world’s fifth-largest toy manufacturer:

1. Mattel
2. Hasbro
3. Bandai
4. MGA Entertainment
5. LEGO

The LEGO Group has itself grown through the various ages of play by passing on know-how and vision to the next generation – at the same time incorporating new technology in its products along the way. The company’s history shows that the scope of product development has been immense but that the product remains firmly founded on the classic LEGO brick.

How LEGO products have developed

In the first era construction and building fun were the central elements in play. In the second era LEGO products gained motion with the introduction of wheels, small motors and gears. Role play and themes formed the basis of the third era – and LEGO figures were born. A fourth era followed, with intelligence and behaviour becoming an integral part of LEGO products.



LEGO System of Play

The classic LEGO interlocking principle was developed almost 50 years ago. The many possible ways of combining LEGO components encouraged children to use their imagination and explore their own creative universe. In 1950 Godtfred Kirk Christiansen took over at the helm of the LEGO Group when his father, Ole Kirk Christiansen, stepped down. Five years later the LEGO Group introduced the revolutionary “LEGO System of Play” with the first “Play and Learn” concept, emphasising the importance of learning through play. Shortly afterwards the company passed yet another milestone. In 1958 it launched the LEGO brick with its new interlocking system.

1950s

Inventing the wheel

To Godtfred Kirk Christiansen this was just the start of the LEGO System. In 1962 he reinvented the wheel and began experimenting with motors – and in 1966 introduced the first LEGO train with its own rails and a 4.5v motor. Many more innovative ideas followed. The LEGO TECHNIC series, introduced in 1977, included parts such as gears, beams and gearboxes. The product range invited older children to build vehicles and other machines which were just as complex as their “real-life” counterparts.

Big bricks for little fingers

Another revolutionary development happened in the late 1960s: Instead of being aimed broadly at the target group “children”, LEGO products were tailored to age groups and stages of development. Godtfred Kirk Christiansen recognised that younger children could get much more fun from the LEGO system than had previously been possible – but that they needed different tools. LEGO DUPLO was launched with the aim of extending LEGO fun to the youngest. LEGO DUPLO bricks are twice as long, high and wide as ordinary LEGO bricks – and therefore easier for the youngest hands to manipulate.

1960s

LEGOLAND on the map

In 1968 the LEGO Group set up LEGOLAND® Park in Billund. The park was to prove the most famous and vibrant symbol of creativity and imagination – viewed from the child’s perspective. LEGOLAND offers adventures for children and fun and enjoyment for the whole family.

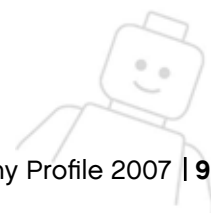
LEGO figure is born

The third era in LEGO history opened in 1974 with the first LEGO figures. The figures represented a whole new LEGO concept, with role play and personality becoming part of LEGO play.

System within a system

In 1978 Godtfred’s son, Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, introduced a business model which created a “system within the system” and gave the LEGO Group an objective in its product development: to an increasing degree, the different product ranges were to take account of the child’s needs and abilities at each stage in its life – continuously aiming for optimum stimulation of the child’s creativity and imagination. A year later – in 1979 – Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen was named president and CEO of the LEGO Group. A company and its traditions were placed in the hands of the third generation.

1970s



1980s

Expanding the universe

Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen added a new dimension to the LEGO system of play. LEGO figures were already established as popular characters, and the focus therefore switched to stories, themes and role play. On the continued principle of unlimited play, children were introduced to brand-new LEGO worlds on which they could build and expand their imagination. In 1979 the LEGO Group reached beyond the skies when it launched the LEGO Space series. Neil Armstrong may have been the first man on the Moon – but there was no doubt it was a LEGO figure that first visited an alien galaxy.

Partnership with science

In 1984, before digital development really took off, the LEGO Group entered a partnership with Media Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA. Research in technology and learning processes enabled the LEGO Group to spearhead development. By blending physical and virtual worlds into an integrated play universe, the company came up with new products. LEGO TECHNIC Computer Control was launched in 1986 as one of the partnership's first tangible results. LEGO products for the educational sector benefited substantially from this invention, which later paved the way for the first computer-controlled LEGO robots.

Many products in the 1990s

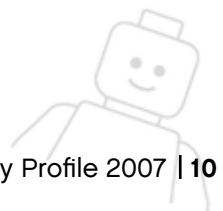
In the 1990s the LEGO Group launched a steady flow of new products. In 1994 the LEGO TECHNIC Supercar sparked the enthusiasm of young motoring fans all over the world. That was also the year LEGO BELVILLE™, a product for young girls, appeared with its nuclear family, horses and scenes from everyday life. LEGO BELVILLE also moved later into the classic world of the fairy tale with princesses, fairies and butterflies. In 1995 the LEGO Group launched products for the very youngest, including LEGO PRIMO, designed for children in the 0-2 age group.

During the 1990s the company opened two new LEGOLAND Parks outside Denmark: one in Windsor, Britain, in 1996, the other in California, USA, in 1999. The fourth park appeared on the map at Günzburg, Germany, in 2002.

1990s

Robot technology for children

The 1990s were also the decade in which the LEGO Group stepped firmly into its fourth era. Intelligence and behaviour became integral features of the LEGO product range. In 1998 the partnership with Massachusetts Institute of Technology produced amazing results. By integrating robot technology with the LEGO construction system, LEGO MINDSTORMS enabled children to create and programme intelligent LEGO models. FIRST LEGO League is a result of this work: a worldwide technology tournament in which schoolchildren compete with each other. Tournaments are held in collaboration with the US non-profit organisation "FIRST" (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). Children design their own robots, and at the same time they are required to participate in a series of scientific and mathematical/technical projects.



A new, updated version of the MINDSTORMS robot was launched in 2006. The new LEGO MINDSTORMS NXT enables consumers in just half an hour to build and programme a robot. The 2006 version of the robot is much more sophisticated than its eight years' older brother and can see, hear, speak, feel and move!

Storytelling

In 1998 the LEGO Group announced an exclusive licensing agreement with Lucasfilm Ltd. It gave the Group the right to develop, manufacture and market a new series of LEGO sets based on themes from the original Star Wars trilogy and the three new Star Wars movies.

The BIONICLE® universe made its appearance in 2001. It was the first time the LEGO Group had developed a complete story from scratch as the basis for a new product range. Through a combination of physical products and a detailed online universe, children are invited to tell how they see the story and the action developing. With the BIONICLE range the LEGO Group brought a brand-new category to the toy market: Construction, which is a combination of "construction toys" and "action figures". The knights of the Knights' Kingdom range were later added to the Construction category.

2000 →

