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**Who Is America's Largest Toy Store? 6-8-05**  
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Liars figure and figures lie. With the right spin, you can make numbers say anything you want. Or can you? Are there some numbers that pretty much stand on their own and aren't altered by "spin"?

I've often wondered how many times people hear our claim that Toy House is America's Largest Toy Store and immediately dismiss it as pure hype, just another spin on numbers.

Some of you probably say quite sarcastically, "Here in Jackson? America's Largest? Yeah right."

Jackson couldn't possibly have the largest of anything in America – not the largest prison, not the largest man-made waterfall, definitely not the largest toy store. Well, okay, maybe two out of three, but doesn't every city have a store like Toy House?

Of course, determining the largest toy store does depend on how you measure. You could use total sales as a barometer, or total number of stores (Wal-Mart wins on both of those accounts). Or you could use total square footage of a single store (the Toys 'R Us Geoffrey format wins that at about 80,000 square feet.) Size and sales, however, can be misleading.

Everyone likes to talk about how Wal-Mart replaced Toys 'R Us as the leader in toy sales. No one mentions that Wal-Mart has over 3000 stores compared to Toys 'R Us at 680 (and shrinking). No one talks about how it takes over 4 times as many Wal-Mart's to match a single Toys 'R Us.

No, size and sales can be very misleading.

But if you ask the question, "What would I expect from America's Largest Toy Store?" you get a different answer and a different way to measure.

Shouldn't America's Largest Toy Store have America's Largest Selection of toys? What good is having a store twice as spacious as the next with nothing in it? And isn't sales volume just dependent on market potential? To be America's Largest Toy Store you must have America's Largest Selection of toys. It's that simple.

And that, my friends, is where Toy House is number one. The Toy House carries over 30,000 different toys from over 550 different manufacturers. Both of those numbers are the largest in America. And hence, that is why we say Toy House is America's Largest Toy Store.

But what do those numbers really mean? How can I put 30,000 different toys into perspective for you?

Based on published reports of inventories from a variety of sources, here's the scorecard:

Top Independent Toy Stores by Selection

Toy House – 30,000 toys

Doll Hospital & Toy Soldier Shop, Berkeley, Michigan – 25,000 toys

Johnny's Toys, Cincinnati, Ohio – 22,000 toys
Rocky Mountain Toys, Denver, Colorado – 16,000 toys
FAO Schwarz, New York/Las Vegas – 8,000 to 10,000 toys

Top Chain Stores

Toys R Us Geoffrey Stores – 15,000 toys
Toys R Us Regular Stores – 9,000 to 12,000 toys
Wal-Mart – 4,500 toys
Target – 4,500 toys
K-Mart – 4,000 toys
KayBee Toys – 4,000 toys

But that still doesn't tell the whole story. Quantity of toys is only half of the equation. Quality is the other half.

Now, I could boast that we *only* carry quality toys, but again, where would that leave us? Some of you might believe me; others might not. And pretty much every store boasts of having quality merchandise.

So, instead let's take a look at what we do and don't carry. I'll start with the don'ts.

It would be very easy for a store to stock up on tons of cheap little impulse items to make their counts higher. But that's not the Toy House Way. Yes, we do carry some impulse items, but not at the expense of our regular goods. In fact, impulse items only take up an extremely small portion of our store right by the cash registers and make up only a small part of our toy count. And you won't find any candy aisles padding our stats, either.

Another way to load up a toy store's shelves is with every version of every video game for every gaming system on the market. Not Toy House. We've left that whole category to the chain toy retailers, the electronic stores and the department stores. You want that stuff? There are plenty of places to buy it, just not here.

You also won't find piles of products with the latest blockbuster hit movie slapped on it. We don't believe that just because it says Spiderman, Harry Potter, or Madagascar on it that it automatically becomes a great toy. Great toys don't need movies to sell them. Occasionally, when a great toy crosses over with a popular and longstanding movie theme, we'll bring it in (Harry Potter or Star Wars Lego, for example). But for the most part our buyers are looking at the toys, not the licenses.

You also won't see a lot of the heavily TV-advertised toys. There are a couple of reasons for that. First, the only companies that can afford national TV advertising for their toys are typically the larger companies who only want to do business with major chain stores, not local independents. Some of those TV toys just aren't available for us to buy.

The other more important thing to know about TV-advertised toys is that 30-second commercials can be very misleading. Let's face it. Every toy is fun for about 30 seconds. But many of the novelties passed off as toys on TV are not much fun for any longer than that. Giggling kids can be very persuasive, but the giggling usually stops around the third or fourth time they play with that toy.

As a child growing up in the toy industry, I was taught that the better the toy, the less likely it would ever need a TV advertising campaign. Only the toys that couldn't sell on their own merit got on the television. That still rings true today.

Interestingly enough, well over half of all the toys carried by the major chain stores fall into one of the above categories – impulse, video game, movie license or TV-advertised. Yet, those same categories are, at best, 5% of our entire collection.

So what do we carry?

We have some simple rules that our buyers follow.

- Is the toy interactive (does it involve the child in the play)?
- Is the toy open-ended (are there many different ways to play)?
- Does the toy encourage creativity and imagination?
- Is the toy made with quality parts and construction?
- Does the manufacturer stand behind the product?
- Is the toy a good value (does the cost measure up to the amount of play value)?

When a toy measures up well against that test, we bring it in.

That is why we carry such a large selection of blocks, wooden trains, dolls & dollhouses, games, puzzles, dress-up clothes, puppets, science kits, craft activities, building sets, models, outdoor toys and the like.

With over fifty years of experience, we know what makes a great toy. And our buyers scout the market looking for as many great toys as we can find.

So far, we've found 30,000 of them, quite a lot more than our competition.

They may not be the "hottest" toys getting all the attention because of the hype from TV ads, the media blitz from Hollywood, or the appeal of the video game industry, but I can promise you that they will be toys your kids will play with long after the hype of the other toys has died down.

And that is where you find the true value in toys.

One thing that I hear quite often is that Toy House is over-priced. A lot of that misconception comes from the fact that we carry so many more "expensive" items than our competitors. In reality, we probably stock more items over \$50 than many stores have at any price. And we definitely sell more \$100 toys than anyone else. That is one of the downsides of having such a large selection.

But I wouldn't necessarily call those toys expensive.

You see, the true cost of a toy is not what you pay. The true cost is what you pay per hour of use. For example, a \$1 toy such as a Styrofoam airplane that your child flies for ten minutes before it gets stepped on, crumpled, or stuck in a tree actually costs \$6 per hour of use. But a \$50 wooden train set that gets used an hour a day for almost two months only costs \$1 per hour. At that rate it would take \$300 worth of planes to equal one \$50 train set. Which is the more expensive toy?

Yes, we carry more “expensive” toys, but only the ones that have longstanding value and low true costs.

But let’s get back to the original claim of being America’s Largest Toy Store. There are a number of stores that might try to make that claim. It all depends on what you choose to define “largest”. Is it size, sales or selection?

The better question is, what serves the customer best? The answer then becomes simple – selection. And we’ve got the largest selection of toys in the country.

Spin it any way you want, but some numbers don’t lie. Are we America’s Largest Toy Store? You bet we are! And now you have the numbers to prove it – 30,000 of them!

That, my friends, is the Toy House Way!

Happy Shopping!

-Phil Wrzesinski