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PATCH PRODUCTS BECOMES PLAYMONSTER AS COMPANY EVOLVES

In the early 1970s, brothers Fran and Bryce Patch launched Patch Press, a commercial printing company that grew by printing products for others. By the mid-1980s, Patch Press evolved into Patch Products with its own line of children's puzzles. In the 1990s, the success of the puzzles led the company to try its hand at board games. Patch signed the license for TriBond and later launched Blurt and Mad Gab. Since that time the company introduced many top games such as Malarky, Buzzword, and others. As the 2000s approached, the company ventured into licensed games as well as acquisitions, bringing Patch into completely new product categories.

Patch acquired Smethport and its Lauri brand in 2008. But 2013 marked an even bigger year for Patch. It became the exclusive specialty distributor for Perplexus and launched its infant and preschool line called Mirari. Then, in fall 2014, the Patch family sold the company to Topspin Partners, a private equity firm. In addition, private equity firm, Balance Point Capital Partners made a separate investment in Patch.

change for the company. The new name communicates that PlayMonster is bringing "high-quality, sustainable time-proven play" to people of all ages, he says. It does this with product offerings spanning birth to adults.

Since partnering with private equity firms, PlayMonster has larger budgets to communicate its message to consumers whether it is through TV advertising, digital marketing, or print advertising. That means marketing its brand message of high-quality play for all ages in addition to specific products.

In 2015, PlayMonster advertised ChronoBomb on TV. It was the first time the company utilized TV advertising and the game was a top seller for any retailer that carried it, according to Wann. In 2016, the company will advertise four product lines on TV. ChronoBomb will continue on TV. My Fairy Garden, which is a new introduction, will be TV-promoted. There are two more lines, which will be announced at Toy Fair, that will be TV-promoted.

"The PlayMonster character will appear in all ads," says Wann. "We think there is also the opportunity to animate him with a voice and personality in our advertising."

PlayMonster tripled its sales in the past five years as it evolved from a game company into a multi-faceted toy and game company, according to Wann. Now it's poised for further growth with the My Fairy Garden line, the recent acquisition of Roominate (see sidebar), its extensive introductions at Toy Fair, and its new company-branded messaging. This is the start of a year that may not only be Big on Fun but big on sales.

—Nancy Lombardi



PLAYMONSTER ACQUIRES ROOMINATE

PlayMonster (formerly Patch Products) announced in early January that it acquired Roominate, which is a line of building sets designed for girls in order to bridge the gender gap in STEM. Roominate currently consists of 12 sets, some of which are designed for ages 6 and up and others for ages 8 and up.

Children can build interactive sets such as a school bus, amusement park, and more that come to life through the use of things such as motors and lights. An app allows kids to remotely control motors and lights, and get design ideas from other users.

The Roominate founders will remain involved and play a vital role in the future of the brand, according to PlayMonster.

Now, as part of the company's next iteration, Patch Products becomes PlayMonster with the tagline Big on Fun. "Our product line has changed enough that we felt it was time to have another evolution to the company's lifecycle," says Bob Wann, CEO of PlayMonster.

He says that after extensive successful testing with consumers of all ages across North America, the PlayMonster name, new character, and tagline becomes effective at the start of Toy Fair (February 13). That's when the company's new name and brand image will make its way into the market through traditional media, social media channels (as PlayMonsterFun), the company's website, and over the next few months, across all of its packaging.

But Wann explains this is not just a name