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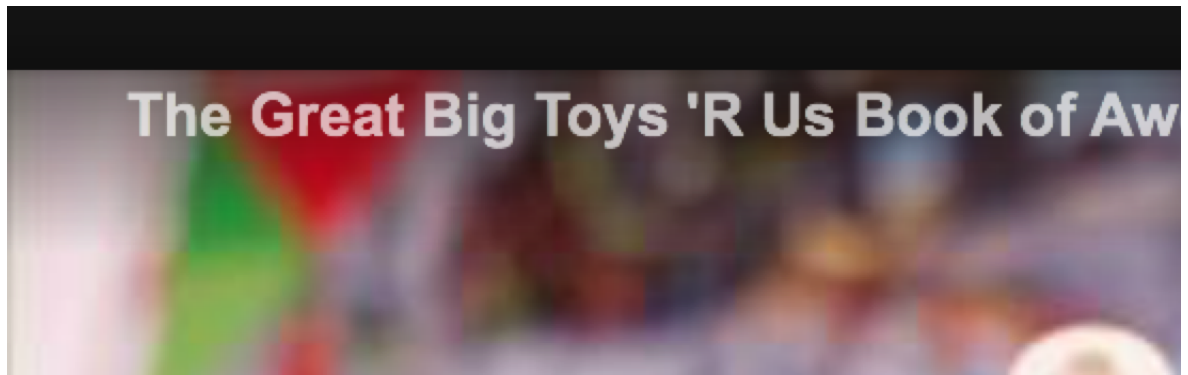
# Forget Playing With Toys: Kids Play With The Catalog

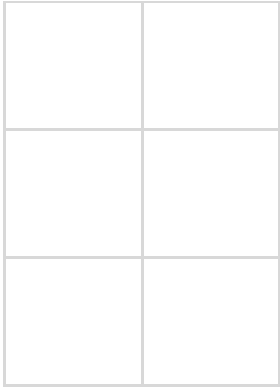
Toys 'R Us Holiday 'Big Book' Goes Interactive As Playthings Sale

By [Beth Snyder Bulik](#). Published on October 26, 2015.

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Get out your crayons and mobile phones. The Toys 'R Us holiday catalog drops this week. At 96 pages, "The Great Big Toys 'R Us Book of Awesome" is its biggest issue ever and includes interactive elements for the first time.

"The Big Book, as we call it internally, is done every year, but this is a significant revamp of the catalog. What we've done is add more pages, a lot more product authority, interactive virtual reality and lifestyle spreads," said Rich Lennox, Toys 'R Us chief marketing officer. "We felt over time, it had become a little bit too much of a sales promotional vehicle and it had lost some of its magic."

#### ADVERTISING

The magic added back in includes interactive elements that live on the content-driven lifestyle spread pages. Consumers who download the new Geoffrey Shuffle app to iPhone or Android devices can use it to hover over one of the eight special spreads to get a 3D pop-up shuffle game. It's played like a shell game, with Geoffrey and two other toys in wrapped boxes then mixed around for the player to guess where the iconic giraffe ends up.

## The Geoffrey Shuffle Tutorial



"We're looking for a way to make sure the Great Big Book of Awesome remains relevant and therefore it can't stay completely within a paper format," Mr. Lennox said.

The new Big Books will be mailed this week and will also be available in stores. A condensed 48-page version will be online at [toysrus.com](http://toysrus.com) and inserted in local newspapers on Oct. 31.

The 2015 catalog name and launch ties into the Toys 'R Us recently launched "Awwesome" TV, digital and print advertising campaign created by its ad agency BBDO. In previous years, the catalog had been called The Great Big Christmas Book and The Great Big Toys 'R Us Wish Finder.

Wil Boudreau, chief creative officer at BBDO, Atlanta, said the idea behind the catalog creative is to herald the arrival of the Big Book like a big movie premiere. Still to come is a catalog-specific TV, radio and online live action work that features kids reacting to Big Book. "The Christmas tradition of looking through pages and pages of toys for kids has never gone away. It's behavior that we know happens but we've never talked about before as something to look forward to. We wanted to create excitement and interest prior to it dropping, like a movie release," he said.



"There is a big appetite for this catalog among its target audience. Kids look forward to and expect the Big Book. It's something they build their wish list from," Mr. Lennox said.

The revamped book comes at a good time for toys. Toy sales were up 7.3% year-over-year as of mid-October, said Juli Lennett, senior VP of the NPD Group's toy division. She said NPD is sticking with its earlier annual growth prediction of 6.2%, which is about \$1 billion in extra sales, but said the momentum of "Star Wars" could send toy sales even higher for the year. Either way, the scenario is far better than any in recent history. Toy sales growth in 2014 was 3% and was flat-year-over

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year in 2013.

"This is the fastest growth we've seen in decades," Ms. Lennett said.

"I've been in the toy industry 11 years and some years you get a feeling; it's a general excitement in

the air about the toys on the shelf and it feels that way this year."

Along with almost anything "Star Wars," Ms. Lennett said the playthings creating that buzz this year include Shopkins, Paw Patrol, Lego, Disney Frozen, the relaunch of MGM's Bratz along with its Project Mc2 science and spy dolls, Spinmaster's Bunchems and LeapFrog's Android tablet called Epic.

Several of the Toys 'R Us Big Book feature pages coincide with those hits, including "Star Wars," Shopkins, Barbie, Lego, along with a toy pets page and another featuring toys that come to life.

Catalogs, and non-electronic toys for that matter, have escaped the death sentence prognosticated due to the rise in digital media and electronics; the Toys 'R Us' catalog bucks both trends.



The Great Big Toys 'R Us Book of Awesome Credit: Toys 'R Us

Like other modern catalogs, the Big Book has shifted strategies to stay relevant. More substantive content and lifestyle trends are key ingredients in today's catalogs.

"In the past, catalog's use for acquisition was greater than it is today," said Neil O'Keefe, senior VP of customer relationship management and member engagement at the DMA. "The shift in catalogs is to better engage existing customers and potentially some of your better customers. There is more strategic use as costs rise and the math changes."

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