



Seven Easy Ways to Rev Up Sales

As the only program of its kind, the Best Toys for Kids Award is intended to heighten consumer awareness of the value of creative, open-ended play and the role that independent, locally owned toy stores play in providing children quality playthings that promote happy, healthy, and productive childhoods. Here are seven easy ways to rev up sales with ASTRA's Best Toys for Kids list:

Showcase the toys on the list in a special display. Draw attention to the Best Toys by creating a special display that shoppers can identify quickly. If shoppers have heard about the list through your advertising, on your website, in newspaper articles, or through Mommy blogs, make it easy and obvious for them to find what they came for.

Use your "best toys" display as an active sales tool. Organize your Best Toys for Kids product area so it gives shoppers a framework for thinking about what they want in a toy. Consider signage that introduces the concept of different types of play and a "balanced toy box"—one that promotes learning through play in all major developmental areas (cognitive and language, imaginative, social and emotional, physical, and fine motor). Label the types of toys in a way that mirrors the organization of the store as a whole, so shoppers easily can find other toys in the same category. Use the display to start conversations with undecided shoppers.

Urge seasonal staff to master the Best Toys first—and thoroughly. Best Toys for Kids are a great base for building the confidence of your less experienced, temporary staff. It gives them an easy way to approach customers or to answer questions authoritatively. All staff can always feel good about recommending a Best Toys for Kids product.

Tell customers why you prefer ASTRA's Best Toys for Kids list over others—whether they ask or not. Specialty retailers are experts. It's a big part of your competitive positioning. You are the person in your community who knows probably more about toys than anyone else, so share your expertise and state succinctly why you prefer the list or lists you feature in your store. "What sells me on ASTRA's Best Toys for Kids list," says Nancy Stanek, owner of the Toys Etcetera stores in Chicago and Evanston, Illinois, "is that retailers who watch kids play in their stores six or seven days a week choose the toys. They talk with mothers and fathers and grandparents and teachers six or seven days a week. They know the specialty space backward and forward. They care about kids and about toys with high play values. I use this list because it's the most in touch with real kids and real families, and it's the most national."

Make Best Toys for Kids available for kids to play with. Nothing sells a toy like seeing a child fall in love with it. "These toys have proved to be engaging for kids in stores around the country or they wouldn't be on the list," Stanek says. "Chances are they will attract kids in your store, too. So put them out and let them sell themselves."

Do some local publicity about the list to help draw attention and traffic to your store. Reporters are always looking for good stories, and the holidays are no different. Stories about toys have a special appeal during the holiday season, and the "top tips" and "best lists" genre is always in style. As a toy expert, reach out to local journalists who cover family, entertainment, lifestyle, or educational issues. Offer to explain to the reporter why each of the Best Toys for Kids has outstanding play value. You'll get a mention of your store, positioning of yourself as a local toy expert, and traffic to the store to see the toys. ASTRA provides a template press release about its Best Toys for Kids list to its member retailers every year and other organizations may have something similar available about their lists.

Don't forget to put the Best Toys for Kids list on your website and in your newsletter! Whatever you are doing to reach out to your customer base this holiday season, suggests Stanek, include the Best Toys for Kids list. Busy as you are during the season, it's a quick and easy way to get concrete suggestions out there to your customers and prospects—and hopefully entice them into the store.