

Toy Industry Newsletter

March 2011



I. Jobs Available

VP of International Sales – East Coast - This is a new position with a well-established, successful, stable and massively profitable US company. This company only hires the best and the interview process is long and rigorous so the weak need not apply. The company is looking for someone to handle all international sales. The company has been very successful in the UK and would like to target Western Europe, in particular France, Germany and Spain. The company is also interested in making inroads into Latin and South America as well as Asia. This company has the product to make that happen, what they need is a powerhouse in International Sales to lead the initiative.

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What they don't need, and won't accept, is someone whose only experience is hiring distributors and doing "hotel room" sales/sales management; they could do that themselves. They want an experienced leader who will personally get out into the field; someone hands-on. Expect significant travel. Location is "confidential" (East Coast) so email me direct for more information. The position pays **any amount necessary**.

Plush Consultant – Start-up company with unique plush item AND FUNDING is looking for a "Plush EXPERT". Said expert must be able to identify manufacturers for the product as well as be aware of current materials and technologies within the plush industry. A plush jack-of-all-trades is best suited for this 45-day NON-exclusive assignment. Work from home. Some travel may be required.

Compliance Manager – Chicago. As Compliance Manager you will design and implement the programs, policies and practices that ensure compliance with all applicable regulatory requirements. You will lead the company in the development of testing protocols and set internal standards for local and international employees. Although that sounds as boring as watching paint dry you will be paid \$80,000 per year and have medical and dental insurance so you can finally get those braces for your kids.

QA Manager – San Diego, CA. 100 year-old company, stable and profitable, is looking for a jack-of-all-trades; detail-orientated QA Manager. If quality of life (San Diego) and quality of work (nice/kind boss and high-morale co-workers) mean anything to you then this job is for you. Quality of life and \$95,000 await this lucky person.

[Please email David](#) if you or someone you know might be appropriate for any position.



II. Management Theory – Disruptive-thinking by David E. Fitzgibbons, CPC

When I began my career in recruiting almost 20 years ago there weren't any college courses on recruiting, nor were there books to learn from or mentoring programs. The traditional path was to start at a firm, at the lowest level, and to grind out an existence doing the legwork (read as "*all the actual recruiting*") for a senior recruiter who earned all the accolades and all the money. There wasn't a chance on earth that was going to be me.

"Disruptive-thinking" is a process by which you identify how an industry thinks and performs then you "disrupt" the industry by doing something completely different. Products, processes and industries provide an "expectation"; do "this" and you'll get "that".



Disruptive-thinkers are looking to produce an "expectation gap". When I started my firm I decided to recruit \$100,000 per year talent (i.e. executive level talent) whereas the industry norm said you can't start a firm and recruit at the top, you have to start a firm and recruit at the bottom. The disruptive-thinker catches the competition by surprise and takes the industry in a new direction. They challenge conventional wisdom and turn it upside down sending the competition scrambling to catch up.

Red Bull energy drink did just that in a mature and oligopolistic market: soft drinks. Conventional wisdom states that soda's are inexpensive, taste good and are aspirationally marketed; meaning, if you want to be a cool skater – "*Do the Dew, Drink Mountain Dew*". Red Bull disrupted the industry by bringing to market a soda that is expensive, tastes bad and is advertised as functional; meaning, if you want energy, drink Red Bull. Red Bull followed the disruptive-thinkers model precisely; they thought what others weren't thinking, they did what others weren't doing, they caught the competition by surprise, sent the industry in a new direction and left the competition without comparable product to compete with.

Clients often come to my firm and ask if we can supply them with freelance graphic designers. They invariably ask for a designer that designs "cute" or "cool" artwork and then asks for portfolio images to review. You can spend endless hours submitting images for review and maybe never send over the right ones. Providing freelance talent to companies is additionally burdensome due to the paperwork/billing involved and the tracking of the artist's hours/projects worked; it is an onerous process on all parties involved.

With disruptive-thinking I changed all of that with the invention of www.CuteOrCool.com. Cute or Cool is a web-based repository of designers categorized by the artist's skills and design style: "cute", "cool" or both. Gone is the process where I blindly send over images based the client's wants – it is replaced by the client going to the website and reviewing who THEY want to hire. Making the process even more streamlined was an innovation in costing. Instead of billing by the hour, again – an onerous task on all parties, I charge a onetime flat-fee that is fiscally advantageous to the hiring company. Gone is the burden of tracking hours worked/projects finished. The side benefit of CuteOrCool is that it forces my indolent competition to scurry around and try to figure out how to compete with us. Of course, if the competition ever does get close to us we will already be onto the next evolution of disruptive-thinking.

As shown by Red Bull and CuteOrCool.com, disruptive-thinking can be applied to a product or service and its effectiveness can be game changing.



III. Ask Dave

Dear Dave: Everything my company makes is manufactured in China. I spend at least 6 weeks per year in China and my employer is looking for me to spend even more time there. China is quickly becoming the dominant country not only with regards to toys but everything from military power to world finance. My question is, should I learn Mandarin and more importantly should I teach my child Mandarin?

Dave Says: The short answer to both questions is no. Here is the long answer. The world's de facto language, and language of business, will continue to be English. A little history is in order here. We didn't force the world to speak English, the British did when they colonized the better part of the world (think English speaking in Hong Kong and you'll clearly see the effect of colonization). Additionally, English was "lucky" in so far as it came of age, and pervasive distribution, during an age of print, widespread literacy and a rapidly expanding media. English also has something over every other language spoken (or spoken/read languages such as Chinese, Japanese, etc)...it is painfully simple. English is even easier to learn than Spanish, a language that burdens the student with complicated conjugations.



I remember a story told me years ago about doing business in China. It involved an exuberant young executive who had been studying Mandarin. When the young executive arrived in China he endeavored to communicate with his counter-part in Chinese. The Chinese counter-part raised his hand in the stop sign motion and said in perfect English, *"We can think faster in English than you can speak it so don't bother with Chinese and we'll all get through this meeting a lot faster"*. Based on incestuous business practices and a near constant desire for secrecy you can be assured the Chinese themselves have no desire for you, or your child, to learn Mandarin. Work instead on perfecting your English – yes I am serious about that and concentrate more on writing skills. As someone who reads a tremendous amount of other people's business writing I can assure you we are far, far behind in that language skill.

Dear Dave: I recently joined LinkedIn and currently have 50 connections. Strange thing is that every one of those 50 is connected to you via LinkedIn. Is this an indication of how bad it really is out there – I mean, everyone connecting with a recruiter?

Dave Says: There is no connection between the economy and the number of people connected to any recruiter. LinkedIn is a professional networking site and the reasons for connecting ("linking" in the parlance of LinkedIn) to someone are numerous and varied. People network out of self-interest and if you allow me to paraphrase economist Adam Smith they do so...[in a desire] to achieve...economic prosperity. Networking via LinkedIn allows for greater access to information, and people, which in turn leads to the sharing of idea. I know numerous people who are currently employed who reach out to those they are connected to for the exchange of ideas and/or the opportunity to synergize their businesses. LinkedIn also provides a viable platform from which to recruit and since *today's hired is tomorrow's fired* it will serve you well to be connected to as many recruiters as you can.



IV. Business for Sale (or Investment)

Absolutely amazing opportunity for the person who wants to invest in, or acquire a business. A very small company, new to the industry, went to Toy Fair (first time) this year. What took them by surprise is the amount of orders that they wrote – far more than they expected and far more than they can handle. They were the hit of the show, and of course how could they not be with three blockbuster patented products; beautiful and unique products that everybody wants to get in their stores. These items are infant/toddler and aren't seasonal so they can sell all year. You name a retailer and they'll likely be able to show you an order from them – just an order they can't fill. The company does have some inventory but not enough to cover orders - all product is being manufactured in China.

This opportunity is appropriately sized for a single investor, perhaps someone who wants to partner with the owner and share the risk/reward. Ideally the investor will bring some toy industry acumen to the party and help the company grow to even greater heights!

Please [email David E. Fitzgibbons, CPC](mailto:David.E.Fitzgibbons@CPC.com) if you are interested in investing in or acquiring this business.

2011 CuteorCool.com Design Contest – Win an Apple Nano!

It is time for the 2011 CuteOrCool.com Design Contest where you can win an 8GB Apple Nano 6th Generation (latest model). You may recall Hannah Barrel won the 2010 contest with her interpretation of the Chinese New Year. Well, now it is your turn to win an Apple Nano!

Our logo, which we call "Puzzle Man" (because he is a man standing on a puzzle piece) is very precocious and always getting into things. In fact, PuzzleMan has been so many places and done so many things he even has his own webpage, [The Adventures Of PuzzleMan](http://TheAdventuresOfPuzzleMan.com). For this contest we would like to see your interpretation of PuzzleMan being "cute" or "cool" while getting into a fun or funny situation. PuzzleMan can be slaying a dragon with a phone or flying in outer space, just make sure that PuzzleMan is the focal point of the art!



2011 CuteorCool.com Design Contest - continued

You can submit as many entries as you like to searchgroup@mindspring.com c/o "PuzzleMan Contest". The contest runs until April 30th. All entries must be emailed prior to midnight EST on March 30th, 2011. Winning design will be announced no later than May 30th, 2011.

V. Hamster Power

Clearly the power of the hamster cannot be understated; s/he is very powerful. Legend has it that noted industry veteran and President of **Cepia, Russell Hornsby**, was pondering the loss of the family's pet hamster (it was eaten by the family cat) when Russell went to the internet in search of a new hamster. What he quickly learned was hamsters were huge on Youtube and other social media sites. What seemed like an innocuous family pet was a star on the internet. People love playing with their hamsters, they put leashes on their hamsters and take them for walks, they have them play the piano and one person even built a [Lego elevator for their pet to ride on](#). Out of an internet search an idea was born and Zhu Zhu pets became an instant sensation.

Hamster Power - *continued*

[**Editors note:** Based on YouTube research, Legos and hamsters seem to spend a lot of time interacting together; perhaps that is something for Lego's Product Development people to think about.]

Following closely on Cepia's success one can't help but notice how **Kia's** rapping hamsters have attacked the airwaves. Since introducing the hamsters Kia's US sales have increased 15% and sales have outpaced rivals **General Motors, Toyota** and **Honda** all while Kia's quality rating has plummeted to 25th on **J.D. Powers And Associates** latest quality survey.



Clearly hamsters have star power and the ability to sell product; frankly they should be called ham**stars** as that is more befitting their unique abilities. Every dog has his day so perhaps the sun is soon to set on the hamstar and the Zhu Zhu Pet will be no more. I imagine that Kia might even move on to a rapping cougar or beat-boxing wildebeest. As for me, and Russell's house cat, I think the hamstar still has more to offer. Maybe **McDonalds** will use hamsters in a Happy Meal ad and cross-promote the ad with a live hamster in the box nibbling away at the food; or maybe that just sounds too gross to work. Either way, I expect to see more animals leveraged for success in the toy industry and on Madison Avenue.



Did you know: That the Geico gecko was chosen during the Screen Actors Guild strike when live actors were unavailable for the work? They say timing is everything in life; even if you are a lizard.

VI. News you can use - No Response After A Job Interview...why?

Job seekers are sending out résumés and getting absolutely no response from the employer — not even an automated one. It's easier to forgive someone for not responding if they are being slammed with hundreds of applications. But there really is no excuse for failing to notify applicants about the outcome after they are among the few to be chosen for an interview. Or is there?

Time passes much differently for a job seeker than for a hiring manager.

As I could not find anyone who would admit to doing this (or rather, not doing it), I was left to speculate on possible reasons for this phenomenon. I was reminded of something that Barbara Pachter, an author and workplace expert, told me about the search process: that time passes much differently for a job seeker than for a hiring manager.

Say you go on an interview and it's the only one you've had all month. Most of your hopes may be invested in that single job. You wake up every morning thinking, "Are they going to call today?" The hiring manager, meanwhile, is at work with all kinds of tasks to perform and may not be thinking of you at all — or even focusing on the position you applied for. He or she may be scheduling interviews across an entire month, or even two. So if you haven't heard from the employer in, say, two months, you may interpret that as a non-response, whereas it may be taking longer than that to make a decision.

Another possible reason for not receiving a response: hiring for the position may have been put on hold for economic reasons. Now, it would be polite to let applicants know that, but that's not how things always work in the real world. Other reasons: the hiring manager has left the company; has trouble delivering bad news (i.e., you didn't get the job); has no manners or just plain forgot. Whatever the reason, you have a right to find out what happened.

When you are at the interview, be sure to ask when a decision is likely to be made. Send a thank you note so you stay on their radar. If you don't hear anything by the specified time, wait a week or so and e-mail or phone the person who interviewed you. Be brief and polite, of course. Don't let on that you've been on the edge of your seat every day for a month wondering if you got the job.

I recommended calling once and then letting it go after talking to the person. But after an interview, I think you have a right to be more persistent (without being a pest), to the extent of one or two more calls or e-mails. If you still don't hear anything, then you wouldn't want to work there anyway, right?

After an interview, keep networking and applying with the same energy and frequency as before. This is a lesson to job seekers never to pin their hopes on one position.

VII. Book Analysis – Flotsametrics and the Floating World by Curtis Ebbesmeyer



On January 10, 1992 a hurricane hit the container ship *Ever Laurel*. As the ship listed from side to side she tossed over her rails an 8x10x40 container carrying 28,800 bathtub toys made by **The First Years**. A flotilla of yellow ducks, red beavers, blue turtles and green frogs entered the North Pacific Gyre, a large system of rotating ocean currents and one of five major oceanic gyres, and thus began the toys near 20 year journey covering half the globe and as many miles as 1.5 times around the earth.

Author Curtis Ebbesmeyer and colleague Jim Ingraham spent years studying the travel of the bath toys which have become a cultural phenomenon of late. The toys continue to wash ashore every three years, albeit in different locations around the globe, while Ebbesmeyer and Ingraham use computer modeling and regression analysis to determine where they will land next. Thanks to *The First Years* giving the scientists the key location data of the toy spill they were able to identify the interworking of ocean currents, notably the fact that the gyre - and sub gyres within - act akin to "planetary gears" churning water in preprogrammed directions throughout the ocean.

If flotsam (floating debris) isn't of interest to you, you might enjoy some of the other fascinating sea stories like the one involving a Dutch beachcomber from yonder back with the surname Boon.

Boon was a blacksmith on the Dutch Island of Texel; an island with a long tradition of ship wrecks and washed ashore bounty. One day Boon found a two hundred liter barrel on the beach. He rolled the barrel into a hidden spot in the dunes and removed its cork. From it flowed pure alcohol and so Boon would trek into the dunes whenever his liquor jug ran dry till not a drop came out of that barrel. When the barrel had no more to offer, Boon took an axe and cracked it open and found a monkey preserved in pure alcohol! This was likely a zoological specimen lost off a ship. Wherever it came from nothing was more fun to Boon than a barrel full of monkey. Messages in bottles, monkeys in barrels, toys, 79,000 Nike shoes, hockey pads and severed feet all becoming flotsam make this book an interesting read for those with a cursory interest in science and a passion for reading about interesting things no one else have ever heard of.

FLOTSAMETRICS AND THE FLOATING WORLD BY CURTIS EBBESMEYER & ERIC SCIGLIANO ISBN: 978-0-06-155841-2

VIII. Innovation Alert



I love to cookout but I hate to track down and find all the tools I need to use. Luckily, our Contributing Editor, **Peter Wachtel**, has designed a solution to our problems, **The Spa-Tong-Fork-Ula**. This five-in-one multi-tool for the grill easily handles all your cooking needs and without having to carry around – and clean – numerous other utensils. Sadly this design only exists on paper but it is innovative and therefore worthy of being showcased.

Peter has published yet another amazing book, **The Wonderful World of Wonders!**

A Humorous Collection of Unique Learning Rhymes for Kids! Good luck to you Peter!

If you are looking for full-time or freelance **Graphic Designers** visit www.CuteOrCool.com

