

“One only has to shop the Universe of Imagination, within TRU, open an Argos catalogue, or visit any of the more pro-active independents out there to realise that science is one of the few categories that has shown significant growth over the last few years - the figures don't lie.” Lee Claves, Trends UK



Floam from The In Thing

again if placed back in the tub but hardens within hours if left out to dry

Floam is US giant Wal-Mart's number one non food item and is currently benefiting from extensive daily advertising on Nickelodeon here in the UK, with numerous other children's channels launching

recognised in the last couple of years that quality innovative arts/crafts and science kits sell," she adds. "However, their long lead times can still offer an opportunity for the independent retailer to sample new products first."

Nick Austin also feels independents play a strong role in this particular sector. "The arts and crafts segment is ideally suited to independent retailers due to the strong margins available and the need for dedicated space that major retailers cannot deliver," he says. "Many major retailers have given some of their space to private label but are slowly realising that they actually reduce their profit as unit sell-through declines and price points are lowered. We're starting to see private label being culled in favour of Crayola as we prove the point that the brand delivers more profit from a given space."

This provides some evidence of what the toy industry wants to hear in all categories, and increasingly it seems is - that strong brands really do sell better, whilst offering better margins for the retailers that support the trade, and this category, all year round. Both Vivid's Nick and Interplay's Nancy are positive for the future and committed to further product innovation, to keep the arts and crafts category as one of the key areas of the toy business.

reinvigorated by a brand which now offers all year round price points aligned with innovative product development. As important, we have now attracted some clever competition - always a sign that you are moving in the right direction - which can only make the category more attractive and, ultimately, stronger as a whole."

Trends is taking the NG brand onto TV for the first time this year, a sure sign of the strength and further potential of the range.

Further innovation is being brought by The In Thing, with its 'Floam' product. Made up of tiny 'microbeads' which bond together to make up a modelling compound with incredible colours and a texture that will fascinate kids for hours. Hundreds of tiny balls give it a stretchy quality, make it exceptionally lightweight, with a funky, squidgy, Floam-like feel. It can be used over and over

advertising campaigns over the coming months.

It already seems to be making an impression in the UK too, with two retailers mentioning the product in this month's Toy Talk column.

Nancy Davies of Interplay UK is of no doubt what the major issue facing the category is. "Compliance! The extensive demands to comply with increasing testing requirements is extremely time consuming, expensive and, at times, frustrating. The challenge is to be able to comply and still supply activity kits that achieve value and provide rewarding experiences." So

the message is that coming up with a new and leading product isn't quite as easy as falling off a log, but Nancy does believe the category still offers great opportunities, for both suppliers and retailers. "The major retailers have definitely

Rock Tumbler from Trends



Interplay