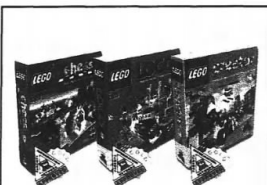


FAST FORWARD

E-mail Martin Skegg and Michael Oliveira-Salac inspect the tiny tools of global communication. Photographs by Phil Ward



Games: Lego Media

The yo-yo has recently made a comeback. Action Man and Barbie are still bestsellers. So fears that the market for computer games would cause the death of simple, non-electronic pastimes have been somewhat exaggerated – just as claims that TV or video would remove the public desire to go to the cinema have been out of step. History suggests that new formats will be embraced without extinguishing other forms of entertainment.

Millions of kids worldwide have played with Lego and, as it became more complex, with increasingly sophisticated bricks and figures available, so the audience grew. But with the company's avowed aim to become the best-known brand among families with children by the year 2005, the toy giant saw that bricks and theme parks just weren't enough. So, after one earlier and disastrous step into the video games market with Lego Island, the company has now launched a multitude of new titles.

Now you can play Lego Chess, build your own world with electronic bricks in Lego Creator, and, in Lego Loco, construct a train set on your computer screen.

The creating ethos at the heart of Lego is essential to these games, and, canny, each title includes an exclusive limited-edition model to add to your traditional Lego collection.

Lego is even planning to dip its toe into the traditionally tough market of software for girls, with Lego Friends, a simple but enchanting game where you can take part in sleepovers with your friends and assemble a song and dance performance for your band, Tuff Stuff. A basic music editor lets you create the song and dance of your choice, perfectly harmonised across vocals and four instruments, even adding special lighting effects for the school hall concert. The title, to be launched this autumn, will appeal to girls aged six to 10 and – with nary an American accent in sight – their parents.

Before that, there are the joys of Lego Racers to look forward to, a cartoony driving game where you construct the driver and the car. Build the car too heavily at the back and you'll be doing wheelies round the track; make it more aerodynamic and it'll go faster.

Throughout the range, the commitment to the core concepts of building and creativity has given the games a coherence and accessibility. They also contain wit and an attention to detail which will make them winners. David Phelan, Lego Chess and Lego Loco £18.99. Lego Creator £24.99. For further information contact 0161-800 7200.



One of the features of our (post)modern age is the abundance of information. So much information is released, stored and shared that people are spending more of their time just sorting what is relevant. Recently a US general claimed that national security was threatened not by terrorists or spies, but by the military releasing too much information. Ovation Communications (0800 376 8603; www.vivao.com) has introduced Vivao, a service which looks after all your messages in one universal mailbox. E-mail can be accessed, deleted or even read back to you over a phone. There are now more products than ever which manage information – capturing it, storing it and letting you share it with the rest of the world.

1. JVC HC-E100 Portable E-mail No modem required. Currently only available in America, this allows you to send and receive e-mail through phone handsets. A built-in keyboard means you can type in your e-mail message, and then it's just a case of dialling the access number on a phone and holding the microphone arm up to the receiver. It can receive e-mail from any Internet e-mail account, but is limited to 4,000 characters and cannot open attachment documents. Visit www.jvc.com for further information.

2. Casiopeia E105 The new version of the palm-size touch-screen PC, running the latest edition of Windows CE. The E105 has a colour screen with multimedia applications capable of playing music and movie files. It can interact with your PC or laptop, and use a mobile phone to send e-mails. £500. For stockists call Casio on 0181-450 9131.

3. Nokia 7110 GSM Media phone Apart from being a phone, the Nokia 7110 also has a 1,000 name address book, stores 500 messages, a dictionary, and a calendar with 660 available notes. Plus, it can access text information available on the Internet, including e-mail and e-commerce. Available from September. For information call Nokia on 0171-437 4380.

4. Olympus D1000 What looks and acts like a voice memo recorder turns out to be a device to send your voice as an e-mail message. Used in conjunction with IBM's ViaVoice Transcription, it allows your messages to be stored on a PC either as text or as voice files. They can then be e-mailed as sound or text. A 4MB card in the D1000 will hold up to 70 minutes of voice messages. £300. For stockists call Olympus on 0800 072 0070.

5. HP Capshare 910 For those who can't always get to a fax machine, the Capshare can capture

and store paper documents by swiping it over a page. Up to 50 A4-size pages can be stored in black and white, and a thumbnail of the image can be viewed on the LCD panel. The images can be shared with other devices, such as printers and digital cameras, and when hooked up to a laptop, the data can be e-mailed internationally. £400. For stockists call Hewlett Packard on 0990 474747.

6. Sagem PhoneFax 440i The Sagem is an all-in-one e-mail and fax device that also includes a digital answering machine and copier facility. The idea is that you can send faxes around the world via e-mail for the price of the local call (so as with e-mail, you just pay to dial your Internet provider), though this only works if the receiver has similar equipment or a PC with e-mail capability. There is also a keyboard for sending e-mails direct. £449 (+p&p). Contact Innovations on 0870 908 7002.

7. Timex Motorola Beepwear Soon to be hitting the UK, this watch is also a pager which receives word messages on an alphanumeric display. The Beepwear can also receive news and sports updates, and be used as an organiser storing names and phone numbers. Also included is a service that alerts you when your mailbox receives e-mail messages. Visit www.beepwear.com for further information.