



Working Towards a More Inclusive *and* Diverse TOY INDUSTRY

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I'm starting with our influencer database

During this time of social unrest and many of us becoming more aware of systemic racism in our society, I became aware that the group of vetter bloggers and influence my agency works with are mostly white.

I'm not OK with that.

This wasn't by design or by intention, but was the result of basing our decision on whether to work with them largely on the number of Followers, Likes and Comments their channels and posts had. Eyeballs people!

Of course, we looked at content quality too, but really only after they met the metrics. I've heard from plenty of families of color with an Instagram channel or blog, but we've turned most of them down because they fall way below our criteria.

KidStuff PR has been focusing on building awareness for toy and game companies, family health, wellness, safety, and entertainment services for 26 years. We have worked with mom bloggers for 16 years before they were "a thing"; and have worked with You Tubers for years.

Now, with a greater shift toward Instagram, we've built a team of IG influencers. We work with very small entrepreneurial toy businesses. Many are in the first months, or first year, of even existing. They are husbands and wives, sibling-owned or inventor-owned businesses. Many have invested their live savings, second-mortgaged their homes or run their business in addition to still having a full-time 'day job: Since they've gone so far to bring their idea or invention to life, we find that usually means they have created something amazing!

These small businesses don't have budgets to pay for sponsored posts, which has become the norm for bigger brands. We work on a product in exchange for a review basis. The number of eyeballs who see the posts about our clients does matter to them, but they have been extremely receptive to our initiative to make our team of influencers and bloggers more diverse and inclusive.

You may be asking yourself, why? Why are we making this change, and why now?

Much like the rest of the world, the toy industry is going through its own racial awakening. We wanted to understand why most influencers of color had smaller followings, so we analyzed our own business. We concluded that it's due in huge part to opportunity. So we decided to give families of color an opportunity to "play" with our brands and to educate our clients on the situation and the need to think beyond numbers. They readily agreed and understood the need.

We hope that doing so will provide a broader platform for their voices while promoting our clients' wonderful products, and to represent the beautiful rainbow of children who need wonderful playthings. We want our brands to give the message "We are for you. All of you. We care about you and what you need.

I recently received my Certified Play Expert credentials from ASTRA, and one thing that was hammered home during the course was the importance of play and different styles of play for all children and for their social, emotional and intelligence development.



Lack of play literally stunts children's growth. Our industry owes it to all children to offer its products to all children and their skin color or where they live, or their economic conditions should not be a factor.

And guess what? ASTRA members are uniquely positioned to act on this and further positive change more so than other industries and even more so than bigger toy and game companies that may be members of other trade associations. Why? Because ASTRA members tend to be entrepreneurial, small business, often the owner runs the business. They often don't have a board of directors to answer to, nor shareholders that might influence their decisions. All of this means that if ASTRA members choose to be anti-racist and actively make things better for people of color, they have the power to do so. I hope to see that power activated.

Our agency cares deeply about being anti-racist and we are trying to make a change for the good. We wrote and shared a statement about systemic racism on our website. We are encouraging our clients to do the same. ■