

WORLDS APART FLYING HIGH

A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE OF A TOY SME



MODEST BEGINNINGS

Founded in 1983 by Simon Birchenough and John Stewart as a product design consultancy, Worlds Apart soon branched out into making and selling its own range of kites. A passion for product design led the company to focus on designing and selling their own products, which now include pop-up play tents, 'Ready Beds' (inflatable sleepover mattresses with built-in sleeping bag and covers), role-play sets, collectable toys and ride-on toys.

Worlds Apart also use licences from third parties for some of their products.

Close links between design and manufacture are critical in ensuring the quality of Worlds Apart's toys.

The reaction to the company entering the US market in 2000 was phenomenal but it later decided to remain true to its roots and refocus on its core business of innovation and design in the UK. Since 2005, the company's growth has accelerated and it now has over 80 employees in its creative hub in Newquay, Cornwall, where it does everything from research and development, to ideation, prototyping, design and marketing. With around 300-350 products on the market each year – some are 'refreshed' versions of existing products and others are totally new – Worlds Apart's annual turnover now reaches around £30 million per annum.



SAFETY CONSCIOUS



Producing safe, high quality toys is of supreme importance for Worlds Apart. All of its products are made to meet strict safety criteria and are assessed throughout the product development process. However, complying with multiple and often changing legislation is a challenge for the company. Worlds Apart needs to sell globally to be cost-effective but finds the different rules and standards within and beyond Europe frustrating: more commonality across markets would help to reduce the burden of proving compliance with numerous sets of requirements.

It takes about 18 months for a product to evolve from the drawing board to manufacture and distribution and many assessments and tests are carried out during this time.

TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS

Its strong investment in relationships with suppliers has greatly contributed to Worlds Apart's success.

In the mid-1990s, Worlds Apart moved its manufacturing to Asia. Since then, the company's relationship with its first supplier – the Taiwanese owner of a kite factory – has gone from strength to strength and is hugely important for guaranteeing high quality products, and therefore ensuring Worlds Apart's success. The Taiwanese manufacturer, now operating in China, has grown exponentially alongside the company. In addition, strong relationships with retailers gives Worlds Apart a valuable insight into their customers' needs and expectations.



FRESH THINKING

A harmonised approach to combatting counterfeit products would help to prevent rogue companies from potentially damaging children's health and destroying legitimate businesses.

Innovation is the life blood of Worlds Apart, which has its own in-house research facilities that allow close interaction with children and parents at the earliest stages of the design and development process in order to create novel products that children find fun and parents approve of. Because of its huge investment in research and innovative design, Worlds Apart also puts a lot of resources behind protecting its intellectual property. While its products are frequently copied due to their popularity, the company finds it challenging to protect its intellectual property rights, particularly as the legal systems vary from country to country.

ACTIVE AND CREATIVE

Worlds Apart is convinced that active play and sleep are inextricably linked. The company therefore focuses on encouraging children to be as active as possible during the day, which leads to improved quality of sleep, for both children and parents! Worlds Apart aims to spark children's imaginations and creativity with its products, but also by sharing its story with school children and showing them how toys are designed in order to inspire budding entrepreneurs. Each year, four secondary school pupils also complete a two week placement to get an insider view of life in a toy company. Worlds Apart also participates in graduate placement programmes at Bournemouth, Falmouth and Sheffield Universities, through which it offers students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in product design and manufacture.



'Worlds Apart designs in the UK, manufactures in China and sells globally: we would therefore hugely benefit from mutual recognition of legislation and a harmonised approach to tackling fake toys.'

John Stewart, Founder Partner



The **UK** is the largest toy market in the EU with annual sales of over £3 billion (almost €4 billion – 2014). This represents more than 360 million toys. With around 530 toy companies operating in the UK, there is a solid base of toy manufacturers, most of which are SMEs. The main toy producing regions are the North West, East Midlands, Kent and the Thames Valley/Heathrow Airport area. Around 23,000 people work in the UK's toy sector. The UK toy market is very seasonal with more than one in three toys bought during the Christmas period.

The **European Union (EU)** is the largest toy market in the world (27% of global sales), meeting the diverse and evolving demands of its 79 million children. Over 99% of the almost 5,000 toy companies operating in Europe are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). With over 220,000 people working in the sector in the EU, toy companies play a key role in Europe's economic fabric. The toy industry is highly international and is one of the most dynamic business sectors in Europe: around 60% of toys on the market each year are newly developed. The sector is also highly seasonal, with consumers making the majority of purchases during the Christmas period.

The **British Toy & Hobby Association (BTHA)** was established in 1944 to represent the interests of British toy manufacturers and to raise standards of practice in the industry. Today it has around 140 members ranging from international toy giants to small family-run businesses that together account for over 90% of the UK toy market. The BTHA's membership is made up of manufacturers committed to making good quality toys in a responsible way. Every member signs a strict Code of Conduct annually to remain in membership and undergoes a safety assessment to join the BTHA. Fiesta Crafts is a member of the BTHA.

Toy Industries of Europe (TIE) is the trade association for the European toy industry. Members include companies and national associations from across Europe, including the BTHA.

