

Toy story

If you're shopping for a child this holiday, read this.

Gene Del Vecchio knows what kids like. A nationally recognized expert on youth marketing, he's often asked what tops the list of must-have toys each holiday season. This year, it's a mix of new and old, says Del Vecchio, the author of the just-out book *The Blockbuster Toy! How to Invent the Next Big Thing* (PELICAN, \$24). Action figures, dolls, board games and videos remain top choices. Don't know which ones to buy? Look for products



from television shows (*Yu-Gi-Oh*) or recent movies (*The Hulk*).

Keep in mind:

Boys are more predictable. In Del Vecchio's pre-holiday online survey of 900 6- to 14-year-olds, 68% of boys said they would ask for electronic games for PlayStation, Game Boy, Xbox and Game Cube.

Girls are pickier. One-third want dolls, with the newer, edgier Bratz line (15%) slightly edging past the old mainstay, Barbie (14%). Twenty-three percent want board and electronic games.

Must-haves for both sexes include bikes, Legos and sports equipment.

Go logo-less

College students across the country are making a political statement by sporting "Black Power"



T-shirts (2FJS.com). They're not about race; instead, they advocate buying plain cups of Joe amid a sea of frothy \$4 brand-name cappuccinos. The message also is about reclaiming personal identity. Magazines such as *Real Simple*, which pushes homemade vs. store-bought items, are hot. Even designer labels are scaling back; one of Hogan's hottest handbags, the Bijoux, doesn't carry its signature (at \$800, you don't need to advertise!). "People are sick and tired of being told what to wear, eat, drink, drive and how to live," says Russell Barnett, co-founder of 2FJS.com (2 Focus Just Simplify). "It's easy to buy an image. Fill your closet with Gucci and Prada and you've defined yourself by their labels. But you can't put a price tag on purity." ❧

Contributing: Jennifer Vishnevsky, Rachel Weingarten