



Modest Moxie Girlz tackle Bratz 'tramps'

NEW YORK — MGA Entertainment is going to need to muster all the moxie it has for its latest launch. MGA is rolling out a new line of dolls called Moxie Girlz as Mattel plans to take over MGA's former marquee product, the saucy Bratz dolls, following a four-year legal struggle.

With more modest apparel and figures than Bratz, you can think of Moxie Girlz as Bratz lite, and MGA is banking on the line to keep it afloat.

MGA Entertainment began developing Moxie Girlz, targeted at girls ages 6 to 10, last year. The line was inspired by the recession and the changes in families' lifestyles that came up in focus group discussions, said Paula Garcia, vice president of product design and development.

"We wanted to make the doll a reflection of the consumer herself, not lavish, expensive, material things," she said.

Early sales of Moxie Girlz, which started appearing in some Target and Wal-Mart stores last month and will be available across the US from August

15, have been "very good," MGA chief executive Isaac Larian said.

The dolls have a subtler look than the pouty-lipped Bratz, who have drawn fire for their skimpy clothing. And the new look is key, said BMO Capital Markets analyst Gerrick Johnson.

"I think they're adorable," Johnson said. "Barbie looks like a model, Bratz look like tramps and Moxie Girlz look like girls."

The success of the line is crucial to Los Angeles-based MGA. A US District Court ordered MGA to transition the Bratz doll line to Barbie maker Mattel by spring, concluding a lawsuit in which California-based Mattel alleged Bratz designer Carter Bryant developed the concept while at Mattel. A jury last year awarded Mattel US\$100 million (\$151 million) in damages for copyright infringement and breach of contract. MGA is appealing, and a mediator is working with the parties.

Though MGA also makes Little Tikes, Rescue Pets and Lil Angelz, among other toys, Bratz was by far its

biggest seller. Johnson estimates sales of Bratz peaked in 2005 at US\$750 million and have fallen since, perhaps below US\$200 million in 2009. The privately held company does not publish its revenue.

Moxie Girlz come in several different styles: "Jammaz" — in pajamas — come with a guitar and a microphone; "Art-titude" come with shoes and a bike you can draw on and "Magic Hair" come with two sets of hair. They cost US\$17.99 to US\$29.99 each.

The toy industry's doll segment has been in decline for a few years as more girls find entertainment online and in tech gadgets. Doll sales overall fell 10 per cent to US\$2.68 billion in 2008, according to market research firm NPD Group. Sales of Barbie, the segment's leader, slipped 15 per cent in the second quarter compared with a year earlier.

Besides Moxie Girlz, new entries include Liv dolls, introduced by Spin Master. They look similar to Moxie Girlz and sell for US\$19.99. — AP



PROMISING: Early sales of the Moxie Girlz have gone well. PICTURE / AP