

RobotGalaxy Taps Underserved Market — Boys

By Chelan David

SEAATTLE — While there are a number of entertainment retailers targeting young girls — such as American Girl and Club Libby Lu — boys have been largely ignored. **RobotGalaxy** is aiming to tap into this underserved market by providing boys ages 12 and under the opportunity to assemble, program and activate their own robots.

Oliver Mitchell, founder and chairman of RobotGalaxy and a father of five, came up with the idea after experiencing frustration in finding suitable activities for his young son at the mall. “My girls had plenty of options in the mall, but there was nothing there for my son. He would tag along with his sisters and go nuts,” he recalls.

Mitchell pitched his idea for a build-your-own-robot store to retail veteran Ken Pilot, former president of Gap Brands and father of three. Pilot is now CEO of RobotGalaxy.

The retail concept is built upon a comic book series by Rob Kurtz, which was launched in conjunction with the opening of RobotGalaxy’s first two stores. Children can choose and cus-

tomize their favorite characters from the comic book, which is available exclusively at RobotGalaxy.

Customers personalize their robots by selecting from a range of motorized parts, accessories, decals, rover vehicles and programmable features including sound, lights and speech. In all, says Mitchell, there are “over 1,000 different robot combinations.” The robots are assembled with a proprietary interlocking screw/joint system and range in cost from \$27 to \$80.

The two RobotGalaxy stores — one in Freehold, N.J., and the other in West Nyack, N.Y. — are designed to incorporate the look and feel of Kurtz’s comic book series. Los Angeles-based retail architect Richard Altuna, who has done work for Gap, Pottery Barn and Sprint retail locations, designed the stores. Mitchell says he hopes to open 70 locations across the country

over the next five years.

Large murals depicting scenes from the comic book decorate the walls. “The artwork plays an integral part in the store experience as the graphics are literally the backdrop for the robot characters and their varied parts,” he says. “This helps enhance the personalities and attributes of the robots.”

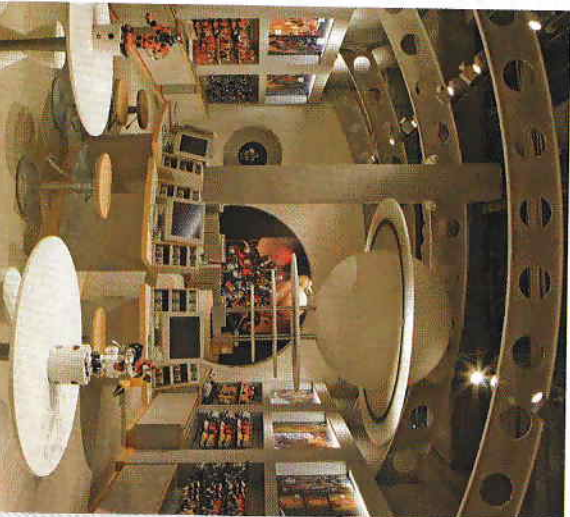
In comparison to other retailers actively targeting youngsters, RobotGalaxy’s signage and displays are understated. A large sphere representing the 7th Ring of Saturn — also known as the life source of the Universe in the series — hangs from the ceiling. Robot parts are neatly organized on shelving displays and on each table display stands a completed robot. As Mitchell puts it, “We believe that the product should be in the foreground.” The minimalist look serves another important purpose as well: With

the release of new comic books and characters, the stores will change their theme regularly. In essence, the stores’ graphics and color schemes are driven by the comic book artwork.

“This strategy allows us the flexibility to surprise the customer with dramatic seasonal change,” says Mitchell.

RobotGalaxy has worked closely with its New York-based PR firm **London Misher** on a number of marketing initiatives including approaching consumer magazines — they were mentioned in gift guides for *Reader’s Digest* and *Cookie Magazine* — and utilizing billboards at its mall locations.

Pilot has been pleased with customer reaction and notes that during the holiday rush they experienced a large lift in gift-card sales. “Parents want to give the experience to their kids rather than just buy the robot,” he says. ■



RobotGalaxy stores use imagery from the exclusive comic books of the same name and allow shoppers to customize