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4 STEM TOYS MAKING LEARNING FUN FOR GEN Z

RETAILERS AND TOY BRANDS HAVE BET BIG ON THE STEM TOY TREND, CREATING A SLEW OF NEW TECH AND SCIENCE PLAYTHINGS THAT MERGE PLAYING AND LEARNING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION...

STEM toys are ruling the play industry. [We noticed the trend in 2015](#), when we began to see the emergence of playthings blurring the lines between playing and learning to make it easier for younger children to grasp the concepts behind coding, and prep them for a tech-filled future. Computer programs, sites, and games being used as tools to teach the basics of the coding process to kids have become more common to make learning feel like playing. For Gen Z, physical playthings are also being created to [embrace](#) technology, and emphasize its inquisitive, educational, and engaging possibilities. The STEM play trend continues to expand, with no signs of turning back.

In 2016, we saw DIY tech kits like SmartLab's [Motorblox Robot Lab](#) kits to [Lightup Toy](#)'s connected Edison, Tesla, and Euclid kits, teaching kids to build their own moving toys and tech become a major theme in play. This year, Amazon's summer toy list [was filled](#) with STEM-play, with top companies offering everything from the 4m Water Rocket Kit to the Explore Crystals Science Kit and, of course, toys to teach kids how to code. [The 2017 Toy Fair](#) also showcased [the hot trend](#), with playthings that promote science, technology, engineering, and math education being embraced by retailers. Amazon recently rolled out a STEM club which sends kids monthly surprise boxes with new toys that are aimed at developing skills, and Toys "R" Us considers the area a "crucial area for investment," and plans to expand its offerings. As the trend continues to grow, the variety and creativity of the STEM toys available has expanded as well. From coding to electric lessons, video gaming to hands on analog play, the range of STEM toys available is massive. Here are four new playthings that show just how far things have come:

Nintendo Switch x FUZE Code Studio

One of the [coolest tech products](#), Nintendo Switch, [is teaming up](#) with FUZE Code Studio to take on coding. The on-the-go video game console continues to [redefine gaming](#), pulling "double duty" as a programming tool when paired with FUZE's package set. The program will introduce kids to complicated coding languages like C++ and Python, and let them use what they learn to create their own apps and games. Graphics and audio assets come as part of the package so games can be created directly from what's included, but users can also add in their own assets for a more personalized creation. FUZE BASIC is currently available to test across Linux, Raspberry Pi, BBC Micro:bit, and Windows computers, but the console-compatible version doesn't roll out until the second quarter of 2018.

Tech Will Save Us: Electro Dough

Tech Will Save Us [is taking](#) STEAM back to basics, teaching kids about electricity with their conductive dough. While many tech toys are focused on making coding kids' second language, their Dough Universe Kits use Electro Dough and circuit boards to show how electricity works using three different kits that teach three different concepts. Together, the Squishy Sounds Kit,

Bright Creatures Kit, and Electro Machines Kit teach how electricity can create sound, light, and movement by letting kids create musical instruments, LED-lit creatures, and moving machines. Their creations will then interact with a tablet app filled with stories and challenges that help kids connect the dots between their dough and the concept making it move, light up, or make sounds: electricity. A Kickstarter campaign for the kits is live now through July 5th.

Sony Toio

Sony is making STEM toys fun again. The brand's new "[post-coding, crafting](#)" console Toio features just two, tiny cubes and a controller. The controller is used to make the cubes move in different patterns, and the cubes can be crafted to resemble anything out of the player's imagination. Code them to move next to each other and put a pair of pants on them to make half a human walking, or put a simple piece of paper over two and you have an inch worm. Using paper or snap on Legos, kids can create just about anything, even engineering their creations to have "craft fights." A line off Sony's project page, "Moving hands. Thinking crazy. Coincidental discovery," might make it clear that the learning here is a bit more turnkey than literally writing in code. Instead, Sony, which Ypulse respondents called [one of the most innovative brands](#), is teaching kids the concept behind coding: how the patterns and changes they make, move their quirky creations forward.

Jubilite

Brainy Yak Labs [wants to make sure](#) girls get their fair share of STEAM toys in the toy aisle, too. Started by two MIT professors hoping to add creativity to teaching toys, their first product, Jubilite, mixes crafting with assembly and electrical skills to get kids to build a "dance party lamp" from start to switching on. An instruction booklet outlines the steps and calls out technical lingo children can add to their vocabulary, all while teaching them about the pieces they're putting together and the functions they each serve. Once the lamp is technically put together, the decoration phase starts—letting kids personalize their creation with glitter and markers and take the lamp from desk to dancefloor. Combining crafting and construction lets Brainy Yak Labs truly embody STEAM, the often-overlooked "A" and all.

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