

Consumer Complaints: When Santa Brings a Dud - Hatchimals

Article By:

Product Liability and Mass Torts

Most holiday seasons, an “it” toy stands at the top of children’s wish lists. With this instant rise in popularity frequently comes a corresponding rise in consumer complaints. Years ago, the consumer complaints might get some media attention—but that attention usually focused on the consumer competition to acquire the demand-exceeds-supply product.

Now, people turn to social media to detail in words, pictures, and video any perceived problem with their much-hyped purchase. This contributes to a manufacturer’s nightmare, trying to quickly determine which complaints are just disappointed expectation and which might actually be a consumer safety issue. Can manufacturers likewise use social media to help calm the storm?

This year, children wanted Hatchimals and the complaints quickly followed.

Like most years, Christmas 2016 brought a new “it” toy. Hatchimals were created by Spin Master, a Canadian company, and released in October 2016. Spin Master, a 20-year-old company, is no stranger to hit toys. It has also created other popular toys, including *Air Hogs* remote control cars, *Moon Sand*, and *Bakugan* action figures.

Big box retailers and toy review sites hyped Hatchimals as the holiday must-have toy. By early December, they were scarce. Although the toy retails for \$59.99, Hatchimals were selling on eBay for over \$200 in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Nobody wants a disappointed child on Christmas morning, even if that means paying three times the price.

But the highly anticipated Hatchimals resulted in sad children and angry parents when the toys did not do what the children expected upon arrival.

Here is what a Hatchimal is supposed to do: It starts as a brightly colored egg, then hatches into a robotic bird-like creature after 10-40 minutes. Children assist in the hatching process by holding, rubbing, and tapping their eggs. Once hatched, the creatures learn to walk, talk, and play games. Though Hatchimals initially speak gibberish, they learn words and phrases by mimicking those around them.

For many, the toy did not live up to its promises on Christmas morning. Some Hatchimals failed to

ever start cracking out of their shells. Others started the pecking process, but then stopped mid-way through. Still others stopped working immediately after hatching.

A social media storm

Parents communicated their anger quickly. They flocked to social media and Spin Master, angrily telling Spin Master that their “child[ren] cried on Christmas morning.” Some asked the company for help because their children had attempted to hatch the creature for hours. Parents flooded You-Tube, Facebook, and Twitter with videos of their sad children and unresponsive Hatchimals.

Spin Master used social media in response. It released a statement on Christmas Day on its Facebook page. In the days following, the company told customers it “more than doubled” its customer care team, and extended hours to help parents. Spin Master also added troubleshooting tips to its website and a how-to video to assist customers in hatching the toy.

As of now, no legal action has been taken

Spin Master’s public statement explained that “global demand exceeded [its] most aggressive projections.” It addressed consumer complaints quickly with customer support and apologies. As of now, it looks like this response may have helped stave off lawsuits. One Canadian consumer has threatened a class action lawsuit, but nothing has been filed.

Consumer response to the failed toy provides a telling lesson to other manufacturers: With the megaphone of social media, angry customers have an endless platform to voice their complaints. That same platform lets manufacturers respond to those complaints quickly and possibly avert legal action.

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