# Annoying Toys

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**Abstract**

Technology has made playtime more enjoyable than ever. However, technology has some rather annoying applications. Most of you have ever been to the toy section of your favorite department or discount store. Here is where technology has made playtime quite an annoying experience.

I am talking about the toys that are manufactured with functions that provide an enjoyable experience for the child, but is rather annoying to most of us, especially parents who let their kids play with the toys at the store.

It is not so much the noise in the department that is annoying, but some of the toys themselves...and that is what this page is about.

## 1 Barbie Dolls

The first thing that annoys me is, of course, the Barbie line of dolls. Sure, it has been a favorite of girls for more than 40 years. One variety that is on the market that I find amusing is the "Working Mother" Barbie. This doll comes with a CD-ROM containing Barbie templates (in Microsoft Word format, of course) to produce custom stationery with the Barbie decorum.

First of all, who in his/her right mind would want to send business correspondence with those templates? I can just see it now. Here is a parent who has a Linux-based PC running KOffice, mounts the Barbie CD to `/dev/cdrom`, loads the template into KWord, types some business correspondence to his/her client, then prints that correspondence on a LaserJet 1200 connected to a print server running CUPS.

This is not a pretty picture as far as a corporate image goes, but that is exactly what is intended with the CD-ROM contained with the doll.

*...and I can just imagine someone taking the Barbie CD-ROM to a Linux Users Group meeting.* ;-)

Second, some of these dolls produced over the years are now worth hundreds, maybe thousands of dollars today to collectors. That is more of an investment return than you get with Microsoft stock. Of course, you would find these dolls in antique stores, but then I have yet to see a Wall Street Barbie.

## 1.1 Jammin in Jamaica?

...and there was a full feature motion picture about the doll. What is that?! I'll tell you one thing, it is a cult film, not unlike the original *Blues Brothers* movie (of which I really enjoyed). There is a set of dolls and other toys with the Barbie logo on it based on one scene in the film, called Jammin' in Jamaica. This has got to be the stupidest marketing idea I have ever heard. But hey, if it sells, so be it. What would really make that scene better is to relocate the setting, and call it "Jammin' in Vegas"!. Now that is where the real action is. :-)

There was a Barbie doll that plugged into your PC through the serial port. (That was because USB had not been invented at the time the doll was produced) You could "program" how Barbie interacted. Thank goodness this is no longer in production. Imagine a version of the doll that hooked up through a USB port, and interacted with a Linux/UNIX machine through `/dev/barbie`.

Since this doll has its own speech synthesizer, you can control it by sending commands written in BCL (or Barbie Control Language), of which there would be a CUPS backend. Simply configure the Barbie by entering `http://localhost:631/` (the CUPS configuration screen) in your favorite browser and configure a print queue for the doll. Now send out a test page. Your doll will respond with:

> "Printer Test Page. Printed with CUPS 1.1.20 through GhostScript 7.3.0 at 600 x 600 printer resolution, serial number 42. Print job complete."

Then feed the Linux-HOWTO library and the Linux-FAQ listings to the doll, disconnect the doll, and give it to your kids. Hey, they will be able to fix any network problem in no time. :-)

# 2 Barney Character Toys

Another common character that many toys are manufactured is the Barney character. This purple dinosaur teaches children valuable lessons, but is very annoying at times. The Mozilla logo is also a dinosaur, and he means business.

Look at how many battery powered toys contain the Barney voice embedded into these chips. It is bad enough that we have to listen to that passing by the toy section. Imagine if the default sounds for the GNOME and KDE projects were Barney voices. We would quit using these desktops altogether.

If you start GNOME and hear "I love you. You love me.", you would want to press Control-Alt-Backspace right away to get rid of that annoying sound, or better yet, go into the GNOME Control Center and change those sounds immediately.

Better yet, run those sounds through TerminatorX, and give them just desserts.

At one time there was a Barney doll that interacted only when the TV show was on (through special encoding within the picture as the show was being produced). Take that same doll, and reprogram it to react to CNBC.

Barney would be a hit on Wall Street. Imagine getting stock quotations in Barney's voice.

"IBM at 98.30. Up plus 2.5 percent. Super-de-dooper."

Ever notice that toys available never teach our children about our economy and the stock market. Imagine if Fisher Price had one of those busy box toys that instead of making those annoying electronic sounds, it would read off quotes from the New York Stock Exchange. ;-)

# 3   Other Annoyances

Another really annoying character found in many toy departments is Elmo. Just the name itself is bad enough. When you hear that irritating voice play on some Fisher Price toys, the Chipmunks will start to sound much better, or better yet, a Bee Gees album played at 45 revolutions per minute on a turntable as opposed to the standard 33 1/3 revolutions per minute. :-)

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