

Barbie gets hipper, trendier to fight the competition

Mattel is adding more makeup, lower jeans and an exposed midriff to appeal to older girls

BY ANNE D'INNOCENZIO
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NEW YORK — Forget pink ballgowns and feather boas. This Barbie's got attitude.

A new kind of Barbie doll has hit the stores — one with platform shoes, low-rise jeans, heavier makeup and an exposed navel. Called My Scene Barbie, the doll is Mattel's attempt to stop girls from growing out of Barbie too fast and too soon — and from defecting to Bratz, a line of funky, sultry-eyed dolls that have become must-haves for the 8-to-12 age group since their launch more than a year ago.

"I'm not into Barbies," said Alex Stallings, 7, of Baltimore,

who has five Bratz dolls. "Bratz are cool. I am into fashion."

Payton Anderson, 8, of Atlanta, said she has been over Barbies since she was 6, and now wants Bratz dolls. "Barbies are too babyish," said Payton, who has given her Barbies to her 5-year-old sister.

Bratz's five-character multi-ethnic assortment has supplanted Barbie as the nation's No. 1 best-selling fashion doll for six months in a row, according to NPD Inc.

Mattel said the new Barbie is an attempt to capitalize on the lucrative business for the age group known as tweens.

Over the past decade, girls have

been playing with Barbie at a younger age — her core fans are now 3 to 6, down from 7 to 10 — and outgrowing her sooner. Bratz dolls appeal to older girls who like

"Barbies are too babyish."

PAYTON ANDERSON
8-YEAR-OLD FAN OF BRATZ DOLLS

a teenage look rather than Barbie's princess fashions.

"The signs were out there for some time" that Barbie would need a change, said Jamie Cygielman, vice president of worldwide marketing for the Barbie brand. She said Mattel

started working on the My Scene concept about a year ago.

Isaac Larian, president and chief executive of Bratz's maker, MGA Entertainment, refers to My Scene Barbie as "a cheap knock-off" of Bratz.

"I'm flattered and disappointed," he said.

Bratz and My Scene sell for \$15 each. The Bratz dolls have more pronounced features, with poutier lips, sultrier eyes and a more curvaceous body. My Scene dolls have kept Barbie's slim shape, though the heads are bigger than those of traditional Barbies.

Major store chains all report strong sales of the multi-ethnic My Scene trio of dolls — Barbie,

Madison and Chelsea.

Still, Mattel, which gets an estimated \$2 billion in revenue from Barbie dolls alone, has some work to do to topple Bratz's position.

Bratz dolls, along with 100 licensed products from comforters to shoes, are expected to reach a total of \$1 billion in worldwide sales by the end of the year, Larian said. They went on the market in June 2001.

A video is due out next year, and the company is also negotiating with film studios to produce a live action movie based on the Bratz characters, Larian said.

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