

Are You A Collector?

Kids love to collect stuff — and lots of people are trying to cash in. So whether you're already into collecting — or just thinking about it — check out this collectors' confidential report.

Aaron Bock, 15, may soon have to get a second bedroom to hold his "Star Wars" collection: "I collect pretty much everything 'Star Wars' — action figures, Pez containers, books, magazines, newspaper articles," he says. "My collection has actually outgrown the corner of my room where I keep it all."

Like Aaron, more than 13 million Americans are collectors. And in recent years, the number of collectibles has exploded — especially as kids have shown how eager they are to snatch up *Pokemon* cards, *Beanie Babies*, movie-related toys, and more.

Why do kids love to collect? Some experts think it's because they've just started learning to classify and group things. "Collecting gives kids a chance to practice those skills," says Lawrence Balter, a child psychologist.

But lots of kids just do it for fun. And toy makers like Nintendo are doing everything they can to build up excitement and cash in on the craze.

What's Hot Now?

Take this year's mania for *Pokemon* (short for "pocket monster"). Long before the first plushy Pikachu hit the shelves, Nintendo spent millions of dollars to get the Japanese fad going strong in the U.S.: They gave out free videos to 1 million kids. They showed the *Pokemon* cartoon at malls all over

the country. They even dropped 1,000 stuffed toys from a plane. The goal: Get kids fired up to collect all 151 characters.

It looks like that strategy worked.

"I first found out about it from TV," says Feliz Maldonado, 7. "I thought it was really funny how Pikachu was fighting. I wanted to collect the cards," she says. Now everybody she knows is collecting *Pokemon*: her brothers and all her friends, too.

Aaron Bock surrounded by just some of his "Star Wars" action figures, movies, books, and other collectibles.





Lauren Ayres has about 60 *Beanie Babies*. Here she displays how valuable they are — to play with!

For Fun or Money?

The recent furor over *Beanie Babies* may sound similar to *Pokemon* mania. But many kids who got into the *Beanie* craze also hoped to make money. "I have a book that tells the amount [for *Beanies*], and some of mine are worth \$200," says Lauren Ayres, 9. She believes her collection of 60 or so *Beanies* is worth \$12,000, according to the values listed in *Beanie* price guides.

However, even *Beanies* in perfect condition might not sell for those prices, experts warn. You'll only get the price listed in those guidebooks if you can find

someone willing to pay that price! And while some kids have sold *Beanies* for a profit, most of the cute stuffed animals aren't worth much more than the \$5 to \$7 kids originally paid.

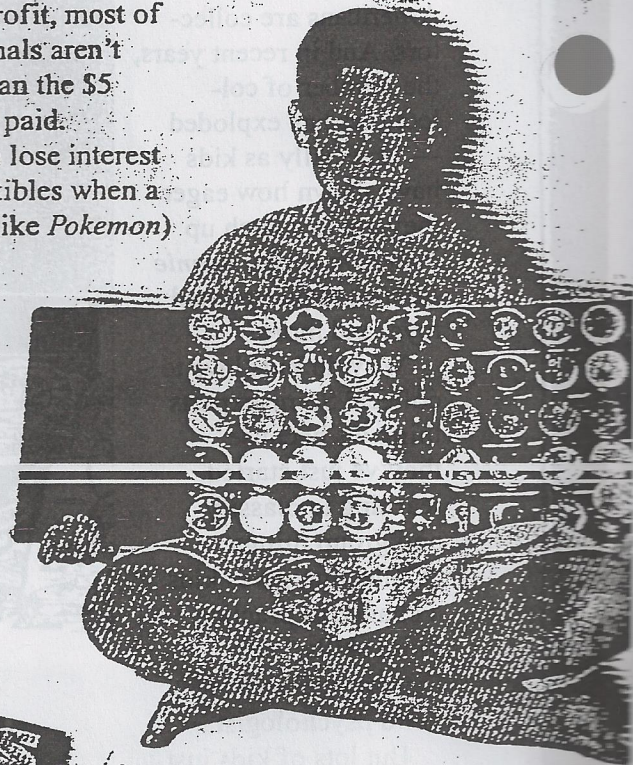
Plus, people often lose interest in yesterday's collectibles when a new collection fad (like *Pokemon*) takes over.

Just ask Marty Bock, 12. He was pulled into the *Pogs* fad of 1995. "Other people had them and if you had a ton of them, you were special or

something," Marty recalls.

Nowadays the cardboard disks are out of style. Marty has tried to sell off his collection three times, but he hasn't found a single buyer. "Nobody wants *Pogs*," he says. "I'm stuck with them."

Marty's brother, Aaron — the "Star Wars" collector — says kids should collect for love, not money. "True collectors are in it because they are huge fans, and they like all the stuff, and they like living the adventure. They aren't trying to retire off it," he



PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD HUTCHINGS

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Marty Bock tried to sell his collection of *Pogs*, but he couldn't find a buyer. He's happier collecting baseball cards for the love of the game.



Shannon Zebrick likes to watch her movies and listen to her CDs over and over again.

Anthony Lamont Baldwin Jr. created his own collection of twist-tie figures.



says. He plans to hold onto all his "Star Wars" stuff.

Shannon Zebrick, 14, feels the same way about her collection of movies. She is particularly fond of animation and has 30 to 40 Disney videos. "It's fun to go back and watch them again," she says. Shannon also collects porcelain dolls, magazines, and compact discs. Her advice to would-be collectors: Just hold on to the things *you* like.

Create Your Own

And keep in mind that collectibles don't have to be something you *buy*. In addition to her *Beanies*, Lauren has a collection of sharks' teeth. Her neighbor found one on a beach in Germany and gave it to her. A friend found some more in Florida and added to the collection.

Today, Lauren has a jar full of pointy dental specimens. "They're really neat to look at," she says. "And I like them because they were given to me as gifts."

The bottom line: A collection can be anything *you* want it to be. So look around and decide what *you* think is cool.

Most Creative Collection — So Far

Anthony Lamont Baldwin Jr., 10, collects scraps of trash. His room is clogged with about 200 twist ties, stacks of paper scraps, and 50 gum wrappers tucked away in his sock drawer. With a little imagination, he shapes these scraps into wire-and-paper sculptures. "I gave my mom this fox, and I made a little man for my aunt," he says. Grandma got a horse. "I think she liked it," Anthony says.

What do you collect?

Share your collection stories with ZILLIONS. We may feature some in an upcoming issue. Write to:

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