

# Pillars of the Community: Eurobricks

By HispaBrick Magazine

Pictures by Eurobricks



We inaugurate this new section where the protagonists will be those who are helping to build the AFOL world. And we begin with an interview with the team of Eurobricks.

**HispaBrick Magazine:** First of all, why Eurobricks?

**Mr. Bucket:** Retconned answer: Because LEGO® is from Europe!

Real answer: Because EB was never really aiming for much audience outside Europe when it first started.

**Mr. Hammer:** Fortunately, the internet is not Euro-centric, so some people from other countries caught wind and got their fingers in it and now we're more like Mondobricks. Our staff and our members have representatives from countries all over the World. I guess the "LEGO is from Europe" answer is somewhat justifiable, although it's from Scandinavia. I think it's fine to say it was founded by European LEGO fans and all Europeans think people from other parts of the world are idiots.

**HM:** How did the idea of EB come up and what was its original purpose?

**Mr. Croissant:** Eurobricks was at first an idea from two Europeans (Jipay and DoubleT) who didn't feel they had a place to talk about European LEGO issues. At that time in 2003, the main successful place to discuss LEGO sets was FBTB, and was clearly aimed at the American market. So there was clearly a gap to fill, and taking advantage of an internet project that had to be made by Jipay for his studies, Eurobricks started, quickly being joined by a strong team of motivated people.





**HM:** To what degree has that goal been fulfilled ?

**Mr. Bucket:** Er... dunno? I don't really think there were any lofty goals in the creation of EB aside from the desire to create a community. But as a vague answer, back in 2004 there were 74 members. Now we have 18266. At this exact moment 124 are logged in and 555 are lurking. Is the fact we're a lot bigger a good thing and a sign of fulfilment? Yes and no. We're less intimate than we were when we started and it's not possible for members to read every post anymore; when I joined I replied to everything! (I do miss that sometimes.) But I think that's the way communities work; they grow beyond the plans of the creators and in the end the original intentions are irrelevant. So I think we're a successful community, but EB really controls its own destiny these days, so I think the original goals (and any of mine) are pretty irrelevant now.

**Mr. Hammer:** I agree with that. The original goals of a no-rules community are long gone. I like the guys at FBTB, one of them is one of my best friends and I hang out with him and his wife and kids often. We actually work together at LEGOLAND. So, the original goal was achieved. Eurobricks was definitely more laid back than FBTB and there were no rules for a while, but that goal is gone and done with.

**HM:** A website/forum like Eurobricks must cost money. How is it funded?

**Mr. Bucket:** Actually it doesn't cost that much these days. Servers aren't as expensive as they used to be. It turns out that when we bought the space on this server it used to be held by a sex shop. Perusing the record revealed some surprising fetishes of some surprisingly famous people. Thus most of EB's funds come from hush money. The rest comes from the advertising panel on the bottom of most pages.

**Mr. Hammer:** This is why I need to learn more about programming. I had no idea about the sex shop. Can I see those fetish files?

**HM:** Where do you find the ideas for so many contests? And the prizes?

**Mr. Dino:** We gather ideas from all available sources: our members, LEGO events and new releases, and most importantly our Staff's multifaceted experiences. When an idea is proposed, it gets discussed and refined in the Staff forum until it becomes a well-defined plan. Thus a Contest or Theme Month is born. Prizes come from various sources as well: some are kindly offered by TLG itself (as happens with other communities, both on-line and in real life), some by friend sites (for example, custom items from BrickArms, BrickForge and BrickWarriors), and then there are those provided by Eurobricks with our funding. Winners in minor competitions are awarded less tangible rewards such as tags or titles.

**Mrs. Goat:** All the staff are so eclectic and different, we all sit there and come up with ideas, these get suggested and discussed. Someone shouts "Dooo eeeet" and we get it set up and running.

**HM:** EB holds several events a year. Tell us how an event is organized within a community with so many members and so scattered.

**Mr Bicornor:** Our official Eurobricks event is organized once a year in LEGOLAND Billund, Gunzburg or Windsor. It's like a big family gathering where friends from all over the globe meet and have great fun. Of course there are always special activities and surprises during our events and it's safe to say the events work addictive because once you've been there you always want to return. Next event is in on 10-12 May in Billund, so feel free to join if you like! Next to the official event there are a lot of mini-events where our staff and members meet.

**Mr. Dino:** Basically, there is a brainstorming session, where ideas are proposed and discussed, based on the interest shown by our members toward new and old lines, building styles and celebrations or events (i.e., Christmas Raffle). Some do spring from sheer need for something to do or a clash of neurons in some Staffer's mind. When the theme is chosen, our graphic experts start working on some promo images and banners, at times even dedicated full-site skins (i.e., Theme Months). Once everything is ready (including prizes), an announcement is made and the event gets live!

**HM:** What is your relationship with TLG?

**Mr. Bucket:** Quite good actually. To continue the "relationship" analogy I think we're like step-siblings. Getting away from the analogy, TLG communicates with us via the community managers and we've helped them promote new lines such as Hero Factory and DC. I'm very happy with how things are in this area and aside from being offered a job 'cos I'm cool I don't think we could want much more.

**Mr. Hammer:** Are we more like estranged lovers reconciled? The LEGO Group's Community Development Team itself has been changing and growing over the last few years. Right around the time we got our first ambassador, we changed our news policy and that new relationship has benefited us ever since. We hope the promotion is benefiting them as well. I admit the staff gets



pretty geeked out when they ask if we're interested in donated prizes. We are definitely a fan community first, but their community team has come to respect that, which is excellent. They certainly don't need to, but they've come forward in such a friendly manner, we're always happy to help them out.

**HM:** Have you had problems with TLG due to the news leaks?

**Mr. Bucket:** Not to my knowledge. Sure from time to time some news and photos get posted on here that TLG request us to remove, but we're no different to any of the other LEGO® sites. Thus there's no problem.

**Mr. Hammer:** News leak problems. Hmmmm, that doesn't ring a bell. I don't remember any and according to my files we've never been sued or anything...

**HM:** As a community, what would you ask LEGO about the fans?

**Mr. Bucket:** I think it'd be great if TLG shared more of the inside info. For example it'd make a lot of people happy if a really clear answer in regard to issues like future plans, the Legends line and monorails. But I don't think this really is possible. They are a company afterall and they do have some quite aggressive competitors. Telling "us" means they'll also be telling "them". As for things like prizes I think TLG are quite happy to sponsor contests, and we've been given sets for prizes and reviews, so aside from "more of the same" I'm quite happy there as well.

What I suppose I'd like most of all is a single on-line site with a single price. I realise that due to the need to work with distributors all around the world this is probably never going to happen, but I like to dream sometimes!

**Mr. Hammer:** Well, they answer those Legends/monorail questions at the cons pretty openly. The reps they send to the events are pretty open about new ideas and about The LEGO Group's past decisions. I suppose I would wonder how much they listen to the fans. Are these goofy petitions actually looked at? I make fun of "sig-campaigns" all of the time, but did the "I want 1x3 tiles" in people's signatures have any influence at all? We've heard that we've given them exciting ideas when they ask for ideas about new themes or about new products. Which ones? How do they develop? I think we know we wouldn't get paid for them, it'd just be neat to know if somebody's idea planted a seed that grew into a theme or product that TLG wouldn't have come up with otherwise.

**HM:** What do you think about the LEGO Ambassador program?

**Mr. Bucket:** I think it's an excellent idea, and that it's wonderful that TLG recognise the value of AFOLs as important customers. Do I have anything bad to say about it? Not really. It's not a perfect situation, and it could be better, but the simple fact is that adults are a smaller section of target audience than kids. I think this will change in time and adults could become a bigger segment, but for now it's a very good start. As a whole TLG make me feel like they care. For example I went to BrickExpo in Sydney a few months back and Jamie Berard came down to represent TLG. He then spoke about the design processes, answered a few of my inane questions and brought down a pre-release set. To me this is also part of the Ambassador program so yeah, I like it.

**Mr. Puppy:** It's a great idea and the program itself has been up & running for some years now in different ways. As a start for a relationship between groups rather than individual persons it serves a whole lot of purposes that have been either neglected or not working well in the past. Things such as information about upcoming sets, requests for general as well as specific information about ideas, quality, handling of questions from fans and lots and lots of other topics now have a working channel. The program changes over time which reflects the adult community as a whole also changing, so it hasn't had one specific form which is well thought of. Some things might start within/through the program but later becomes a thing of its own – the possibilities are basically endless like the ways to put bricks together.

**HM:** Can you give us some statistics on Eurobricks, first post date, number of members, average daily topics and posts,... ?

**Mr. Bucket:** Here's some stats collected in mid October 2011:

Birth: December 17th 2003  
Members: 18.070





Active members (logged in past year): 10.280

Number of posts per day: about 800-900

Total Posts: 1.1 million

Number of created topics per day: 37

**HM:** What do you think attracts so many LEGO® fans to Eurobricks?

**Mrs. Goat:** The many themes and activities covered by the forum. With the ever popular Star Wars and the “Evergreen themes” right down to those one wave wonders. Besides that there is the very active Minifig Customisation Workshop, the stellar Reviewers Academy producing high class set reviews and the games run in Wargames and Mafia attracting a wide range of LEGO fans.

**Mr. Hammer:** I think it's all of our news leaks... But, we have a Reviewers Academy pumping out quality reviews and a dedicated forum for each theme. Our contests get a lot of attention and we've been branching out in real life. We are more and more represented at events all over the World, so that is boosting exposure. We have a nice community that is efficiently staffed and moderated to create a good environment for fun, creativity and serious discussion. We do our best to keep the discussion topics focused. We had a problem for a while with them being unreadable with kids coming into new product topics with their “Kewl11111!!!eleven!!11!!11” bullshit, but we built a little moderator army to help combat that. The first posts of all of our news topics are always updated with the latest pictures, so people don't have to dig through pages of responses to find them and our moderators pay close attention to how the discussions are progressing. I think our moderators and regulators pay great attention to indexing our forums and keeping things organized, making information easy to find and that really makes our community easy for people to jump in and become active members.

**HM:** How many moderators are in EB and how are they chosen? How does moderation work and how do you distribute the work?

**Mr. Bucket:** We have about 25 “real” staff members, but some groups (such as LEGO Ambassadors) have moderation abilities over a single forum but are not staff as such. Picking staff is a complex thing. To me it's a combination of;

1. Interest in the core subject, which for the most part is obviously LEGO.
2. The right personality; people who lack patience, empathy, can't work in a team, or are just plain gits are not suitable.
3. Expression and communication. This is a forum, so if you can't make posts that are understandable they you aren't going to get a role.
4. Interest. Working on a site like EB is a lot of work, and not all of it is fun. Many know this and don't want to become staff 'cos they're smart!
5. Time. Not much point becoming staff if you have to care for 24 kids and 5 children.
6. Fudge. It's not always possible to give reasons why!

As for distribution... well my preference is that we don't. Sometimes we have to, but ultimately we're all volunteers. If work needs to be done and you have the time, then people tend to do it.

**Mr. Hammer:** There's a lot of “Who has time to post this news” or “Does anybody have time to run a theme month?” type posts from time to time, but we are all dedicated and give what time we can and make the most of it. This can cause some burnout, but we are open about this and can usually cover those who need a break.

**HM:** What plans/goals do you have for the future of the community?

**Mr. Bucket:** Well, speaking for myself, my main EB goal is to finish off the Set Index. I'm hoping to make life as a staffer easier by having review and set indexing a simpler process, and at the same time make it easier for members to find reviews. Hopefully this year... But overall I just want EB to keep following the path it's on... maybe in a few years we'll be ready to expand into J-pop, but not right now.

**Mr. Hammer:** Our goals and plans seem to all be inline with keeping up the good relationship with TLG, continuing to offer fun contests and Theme Months and providing a structured yet fun forum for people to discuss their hobby and display new ideas and creations. It's become second nature and all of our staff members are dedicated to that ideal. It's evident in every forum the care and hard work our staff members put in. I guess our goal is to keep the staff happy and therefore the members. It's not about increasing the quantity of our membership, but the quality of our members' experience here.

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