



CUUSOO

LEGO® CUUSOO

Interview with Timothy Courtney

By HispaBrick Magazine®

Pictures by Timothy Courtney

HBM: What exactly is LEGO® CUUSOO?

TC: LEGO CUUSOO is a website where LEGO fans can submit their ideas for new LEGO products and collect votes to make their ideas become a reality. They can also vote for other users' ideas. It can be found at <http://lego.cuusoo.com>. Ideas that are supported by 10,000 votes have a chance of being selected to become part of the LEGO Group's product portfolio. Consumers who have their ideas chosen will earn 1% of the total net sales of the product.

HBM: What is its objective?

TC: LEGO CUUSOO aims to connect great LEGO product ideas with the people who want to buy them, and bring them to life. It's an "open innovation" initiative of the LEGO Group. From a business perspective, we're looking to create a

profitable product line of LEGO sets by fans and for fans. From a community perspective, this is an opportunity to engage LEGO fans of all types in getting behind ideas created by their fellow builders.

HBM: How did the idea of LEGO CUUSOO come about?

TC: The LEGO Group has been producing products that collaborate with fans for a decade now. LEGO CUUSOO came to be after Paal Smith-Meyer, head of New Business Group at LEGO, met the founder of CUUSOO System. The decision was made to test the CUUSOO crowdsourcing concept in Japan since it was a limited market, then based on that roll it out to a global audience.

HBM: What does CUUSOO mean? Where does the name come from?

TC: The word CUUSOO in Japanese translates loosely to English as "wish," or to "wish something into existence." So, LEGO CUUSOO allows you to share your LEGO wishes and attract people who also wish the LEGO Group would make a certain product idea.

HBM: Does this Project have an end date?

TC: There's no end date set for LEGO CUUSOO. We're learning as we grow and looking for the best way to open ourselves up to fan-created ideas and bring them to market.

HBM: How many people, departments etc. are involved in this Project?

TC: LEGO CUUSOO is a collaboration between New Business Group, the Community Engagement and Events team, and our partner company CUUSOO System.



Kohei Nishiyama, founder of CUUSOO System, checking out the Minecraft set for the first time at the LEGO offices in Billund, Denmark



HBM: Can you explain the process of a CUUSOO project from the end of voting till the finished product?

TC: Anyone over 18 can submit a project to LEGO® CUUSOO. It's best if you take some time up front to work on a quality presentation with good photographs and a well-written description. Once you submit your project, it is put into a queue where our moderators look it over to make sure your project follows our Guidelines and House Rules. Once approved, your project is published and other LEGO fans can support it. A project requires 10,000 supporters to qualify for the LEGO Review, a process where a team of LEGO employees from various functions examine the concept for brand fit, strategic fit, business case, model design, and potential conflicts with existing products or products in our pipeline before making a decision on whether or not to produce it. The review happens once per quarter and includes all projects that reach 10,000 supporters before the set deadline. Each project passes or fails review on its own merits. Since production slots are limited, we currently can choose one project per quarter to produce, with others that pass being reserved in a queue for future available slots. The review is completed with a final model design, so once a product is chosen it goes into production and to the markets. This process takes as little as six months but could be longer for larger and more complex sets.

HBM: Why have the rules concerning what can become a set if it reaches enough votes had to be changed? Shouldn't this have been clearer from the beginning?

TC: When we launched LEGO CUUSOO, we essentially opened our doors wide and allowed our fans to submit any suggestion. It was hard to imagine the wide range of project submissions we would receive. As we learned that projects were suggesting ideas and IPs that did not fit the LEGO Group's brand values, we needed to make adjustments to what we allowed. We've taken great care to build a framework that explains our decision criteria, however at the end of the day deciding what projects fit the LEGO brand and what does not is a subjective decision made by the LEGO Group and by people who take great care to interpret our guidelines. This goes for both what we allow on LEGO CUUSOO and what we release as main line products. Before LEGO CUUSOO, the process of deciding what does and doesn't fit our brand happened behind closed doors and away from the scrutiny of the outside world. It's a bold step to open ourselves up and then make our framework and these decisions in the open. While there is risk to exposing our decision process, and people might not always agree with us, we believe the benefits of the openness and the positive results that have come and are yet to come on LEGO

CUUSOO far outweigh these risks.

HBM: Are you worried there may be a certain disenchantment among AFOLS upon seeing that many projects that receive enough votes are not carried out?

TC: From the start of this great adventure, we've realized that we won't be able to make everyone happy. We're focusing on the opportunities we have to deliver and make fans happy, like we've seen happen with the LEGO Minecraft Micro World set.

HBM: Have you considered selling CUUSOO products in the same way as regular themes? Will they ever be available in LEGO stores or at TRU etc.?

TC: For the time being, CUUSOO products will be available on the LEGO Shop online, from online retail partners, and in select LEGO Brand Retail stores. We're currently working on how we distribute and sell these products more widely.

HBM: In case you have this data: what country/region proposes more projects?

TC: Half of our user base is from the United States, followed by the UK, Japan, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and other primarily European countries.

HBM: Has any participant in CUUSOO ended up working for LEGO?

TC: We have not hired anyone as a LEGO designer from their work on LEGO CUUSOO, but that doesn't mean it couldn't happen in the future!

HBM: Have you considered the possibility of carrying out a project you especially like even though it has not received sufficient votes?



LEGO Model Designer Steen Sig Andersen poses with one of the first production copies of LEGO Minecraft Micro World

TC: We haven't considered anything specifically, because LEGO® CUUSOO is about both presenting a good concept and connecting it with a passionate audience who wants to purchase the product.

HBM: Is there any project that you like especially because of the theme, construction etc.

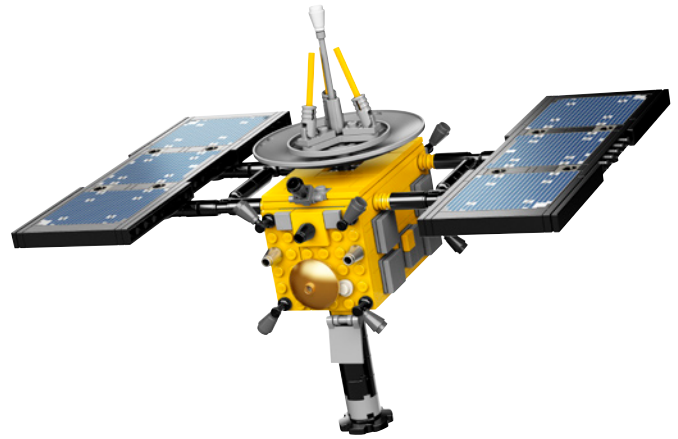
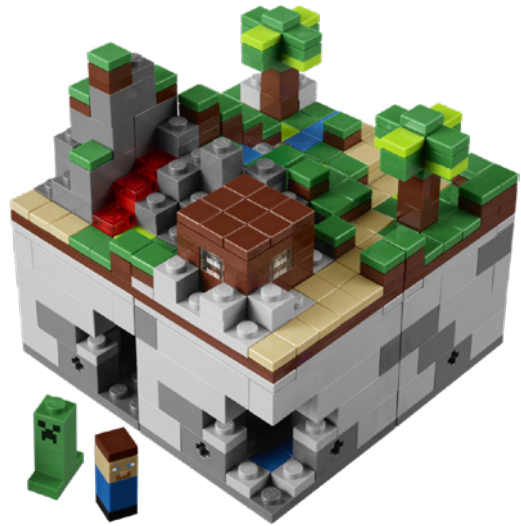
TC: I love anything related to airplanes. My current favorite airplane on CUUSOO is Ssorg's DC-3. It's so well rendered in bricks, and it looks built in a style that would work as a UCS model. If I saw it on a store shelf, I would not be able to resist it. <http://lego.cuusoo.com/ideas/view/17534>. Also, I think that Hidaka's Piano project is overlooked too much. It's a great model and concept and could really do well. It was one of the first projects on CUUSOO from when we opened the site for public beta. Who doesn't want a minifig scale piano? <http://lego.cuusoo.com/ideas/view/167>

HBM: What do you think of crowdfunding as applied to making LEGO projects?

TC: I think crowdfunding would open up a lot more possibilities for bringing fan-inspired products to life.

Thanks for your interest in an interview and keep up the great work!

Timothy Courtney
Sr. Consultant NBG
Community Business



Members of the LEGO Concept Lab and New Business Group teams celebrate the Minecraft project crossing 10,000 supporters in December 2011. This was the first project to reach 10,000 supporters since the global Open Beta, and it reached that level in a record 48 hours