

LEGO BRICKLINK

one year in

by the HispaBrick Magazine Staff

At the end of November 2019, LEGO Group announced the acquisition of BrickLink. A year later we wanted to know what the community is thinking about how that acquisition is working out. We put a survey on line and got some answers. Here's what the community had to say.

The LEGO Group acquires BrickLink, the world's largest online LEGO® fan community and marketplace to strengthen ties with adult fans

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See all assets



Acquisition will strengthen the LEGO Group's engagement with its growing community of adult fans.

BILLLUND, Denmark, November 26, 2019: The LEGO Group today announced it has

LEGO's 2019 announcement of the BrickLink acquisition. Source: lego.com

Introduction

The LEGO® Group acquired the BrickLink online marketplace in late 2019. For the most part we will assume most AFOLs are familiar with BrickLink, and this article is primarily directed at that audience. If you are not familiar with the BrickLink story, head on over to <https://www.bricklink.com/> and follow the "about us" link at the bottom of the page.

A year after the acquisition, we wondered how the BrickLink community was feeling about the current state of affairs. We decided to run a survey to see what we could find out.

We introduced our survey with the following:

A year ago with the BrickLink acquisition, LEGO stated that:

1. they wanted to strengthen the LEGO Group's engagement with its community of adult fans.
2. they plan to continue to support the active marketplace.
3. they have worked closely with the community for many years and look forward to deepening their collaboration.
4. BrickLink provides the LEGO Group with a unique opportunity to connect with adult fans through new channels and exciting experiences.

In BrickLink's press release at the time of acquisition they stated:

5. "...the direction is clear.
6. The LEGO Group shares our ambition to create

the best possible platform/experience for adult fans."

Our questions then followed those points.

Responses were collected by means of an online form into a database. We received something over 175 responses. On one hand we would have liked to get more. On the other hand it was quite a bit of information to sift through and it took days to get through it. On balance we do feel we did receive enough responses to make the undertaking worthwhile. There was some initial concern that we wouldn't get enough responses and we would end up in egg-faced embarrassment. Thankfully the community came through for us, and we appreciate every participant and every answer.

The tone of the data itself presented us with some challenges. We debated how and whether to present some of the comments. The responses were candid, often untempered and incendiary, and showed a passion for the marketplace.

After some degree of hand-wringing (and fortunately no neck-wringing) amongst the staff, multiple drafts and reviews, conversation and debate, we settled on what and how we would present the material.

In the data collection, there were some blanks, duplicates, and spam. Those were removed. We then crunched the numbers and did the best we could to make sense of the responses. Results were discussed by magazine staff members.

We decided to present quotes more-or-less

verbatim. For presentation purposes in the magazine, typos, misspellings, capitalization, and punctuation were in some instances fixed. Language has been altered in a very few instances for purposes of clarity. Some responses were quite lengthy; in some instances portions of those responses were selected out for presentation. We have done our best to not misrepresent anybody's meanings or intentions.

Some answers got... personal. Some colorful language, ungracious metaphors, and frankly pointed statements were aimed directly at BrickLink staff and LEGO. We decided not to print those. We can hear the groans of disappointment from some sections of the audience.

On the other hand, all the colorful language, ungracious metaphors, and frankly pointed statements we do feel are of value, and those along with the rest of the survey data—minus the respondents personal info—has been passed onto LEGO via the LEGO Ambassador Network.

With that said, on to the results!

Survey Results

1) Do you feel that your engagement with LEGO Group has strengthened due to the BrickLink acquisition? Yes/No.

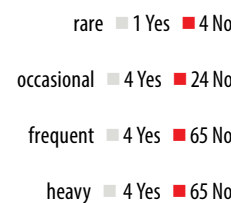
1 Overall 17 Yes 154 No



Years as BrickLink Member



BrickLink Usage Level



Relationship to BrickLink



2) In what ways have you seen LEGO Group providing additional direct support to the BrickLink marketplace?

The bulk of the responses stated that they had effectively seen no additional direct support from LEGO to BrickLink. There were six that didn't answer, thirteen mentions of the AFOL Designer Program/Failed Ideas project, and a few mentions of TLG using BL as an advertising platform and vice-versa.

Other things that came up, but which the magazine staff feels are probably BrickLink's doing and not due to LEGO support, are six mentions of legal/tax compliance and a few mentions of the platform becoming more stable.

There were several mentions of catalog restrictions and changes running the gamut of being pro, con, and indifferent to the fact. One respondent felt LEGO wasn't providing anything other than lip service in terms of support to BL.

Rounding out this question are comments that the catalog additions/inventories now happen either slower or faster, the site is more reliable or less reliable, and the admin presence on the forum is either increased or decreased, depending on who is asked. Some quotes:

"I haven't noticed any changes except removal of third party parts."

"Keeping non LEGO items out. Some of them deserve to exist, but not on BrickLink."

"...new LEGO sets can only be listed once officially released...same goes for inventory. Some sets will probably never get inventories. Custom items are completely gone—a big loss to the AFOL community even if those were original designs printed on LEGO bricks etc., custom stickers..."

"LEGO people/channels being used for BL announcement."

"I haven't used the BrickLink marketplace enough to form an opinion."

"I see this as a liability, not support."

"I think a lot of it has been more like meddling than support. I had hoped for effective fixes of long known issues but that didn't happen."

"They [LEGO] appear to be using BrickLink as another marketing medium."

"They've all but shuttered the [volunteer associates] from saying anything of interest or use, and it's very clear [BrickLink has] no interest in supporting their sellers right now."

"Engagement/communication was non-existent from BrickLink before the Lego acquisition, so anything at all is better. I've heard that the larger BrickLink sellers get to have

private meetings with Lego, so smaller sellers get information via word-of-mouth. I guess that's better than nothing."

"...my request for help with a tax issue has gone unanswered going on a few weeks. Multiple outreaches have gone ignored."

3) Cite any examples of a deepening collaboration that you have had with LEGO Group due to the BrickLink acquisition.

Nine people provided no answers. A few responses that our questions are dumb. Again, the majority, by a lot, said they had no deepening collaboration with the LEGO Group. There was another smattering of AFOL Designer Program/Ideas comments. There were a number of responses to this question that had nothing to do with the question. There was, however, witness to intent:

"During AFOL events I have heard LEGO employees and management talk about and be excited about BrickLink. The fact that they are excited about it should say something. It's not just an acquisition to solve a problem."

There was the bottom line: "They get more of my money, in the form of BL fees."

"They now get more of my money."

"I buy a lot more black Technic "art" bricks instead of building them myself!"

There was disappointment: "More like cutting collaboration. Several sellers were forced off the platform due to LEGO changing the platform."

"More like weakening collaboration, since LEGO made it much harder to acquire custom-chromed pieces."

"Odd decisions, removing Brick Arms, withholding sets' parts lists... I am against this union."

"Frustration."

There was a single ray of apparent sunshine: "LEGO has allowed digital model submissions using BrickLink Studio in addition to LDD for some small contests."

4a) What unique opportunities have you found to connect with LEGO Group due to their acquisition of BrickLink?

Nine people didn't answer. We enjoyed some more responses that were about how dumb our questions are and another bunch of answers having to nothing to do with the question, and a couple more mentions of ADP/Ideas. The resounding bulk of the answers to this question was again "none" but this time in three different languages! Some highlights follow:

"I have not found any connections. Despite the promises, from my perspective other than seeing the LEGO name here and there in the footers, I still treat BrickLink and LEGO as two separate places where I buy sets and parts."

"The Christmas ornament build challenge, I guess? Honestly didn't know the LEGO group was behind anything on BrickLink."

"Well, there were a couple of times when I wanted to call them and ask how to use their new website, but I didn't bother."

4b) What exciting experiences have you had with LEGO Group due to their acquisition of BrickLink?

Nine non answers. Yep. Same nine respondents if you're keeping track. Again we got comment about the dumb question, same question, ADP/Ideas, and a heaping pile of "none".

This is what qualified as exciting experiences with LEGO Group:

"Can't buy third party parts there any more."

"...we haven't had any exciting experiences, because there was nothing that helped us feel the change. If nothing, we felt more neglected during the transition period."

"Happy to buy and sell everything I want."

"Hoping LEGO would give it back."

"I have not had any experiences with the LEGO group via BrickLink beyond the occasional forum threads. My own question in the AMA thread was not answered at all."

"I was really pissed I was not able to buy new bricks due to LEGO freezing the BrickLink catalog after acquisition."

"I was very excited to see that [the] manufacturer of new parts acquired [a] large part of [the] reselling market. Yay!" (Author's note: Trust us, this is sarcasm. This guy's whole sheet had the sarcasm turned up to 11. Maybe 12. Maybe higher.)

"I, like many others, was afraid that LEGO intended to squash BrickLink, so I guess the exciting news is that BrickLink is still operating."

"Just stress."

"Listening to the corporate speak of Julia..."

"Longer waiting times on servers responding. Really excited my anger."

"No good ones."

"To be honest, found it more difficult to deal with."

"Not able to get custom items."

"Not being able to find stuff in BL because LEGO is moving things out of categories. Next up will be the color changing mess."

“Removing all custom-chromed pieces from the BrickLink was certainly exciting.”

“The overall aesthetics of the site have been improved. Navigation is improving and overall look-and-feel is a better experience.” (Author’s note: We don’t know what exactly this AFOL is experiencing because as far as we can tell the look and feel and the navigation is the same as it has been for about six years.)

“They [removed] all customized printed original LEGO parts and custom chromed parts. Sad story. These parts can make some MOCs a bit more unique.”

“They removed custom parts and sets. . . That’s ‘exciting’, but not in a positive way.”

5a) Cite an example of a clear direction that BrickLink moved in during the last year due to LEGO Group’s acquisition.

We’re not quite sure what to make of this set of answers. The answers are generally all over the place with a few exceptions, and select answers appear to be in keeping with the sense among some (or accusation by some) that BrickLink treats some members preferentially. We would think that there would be some sort of consensus of what a clear direction is if indeed there was a clear direction.

The following specific actions taken by the site, whether due to LEGO Group’s acquisition or not we don’t know, were mentioned:

Legal compliance, removal of various and sundry items from the catalog for various and sundry reasons, creation of rules, enforcement of rules, inconsistent enforcement of rules, the ADP/Ideas possibility, tax collection, “booting out ‘custom’ sellers”, color nomenclature, parts categories, payment processors, breaking of search functions, fixing of search functions, changing of search functions, “corporate things”, the surprise “fee collection” to “clear accounts” that has been unaddressed for seventeen years or something like that.

Changes to the buyer checkout process was cited. Some individuals consider this to be improvements, others not so much.

An influx of newbie buyers was categorized as being both good and bad.

Then there was daily maintenance, pushing XP, forcing a one-size-fits-all (US) paradigm onto the rest of the world, set inventory delays, third party links in and out, intellectual property “enforcement”, unwanted advertising, updating the Terms of Service, and chrome parts, chrome parts, chrome parts, and chrome parts. A lot

of people were very, very, very annoyed by the removal of chrome parts.

If the sum of these policies and procedures indicates a clear direction, we are hard pressed to define it. Some respondents note a direction:

“For me as a seller it only got worse and more labor intensive.”

“A direction away from sellers on the BrickLink platform: (“

“Away from usability for fans to connect and enjoy the product.”

“Bad.”

“Before LEGO acquired BrickLink, it just felt like a shopping website. Now with the contests and the Stud.io program and gallery, BrickLink feels a little more community-focused.”

“Hahaha. . . lack of support.”

“It moved in the direction of displaying a lot of ads that I’m not interested in.”

“It went in the terrible direction that many creators and sellers had their custom items ripped out of the database.”

“...my general impression is that LEGO isn’t interested in developing BrickLink, they’re just keeping it as it is.”

“Killing all things that [the] community made through [the] years? Because some corpo dude knows better?”

“Going down.”

5b) Do you think this is a good direction?

Go figure. Where question 5a was all over the place, 5b fairly neatly fell into distinct categories:

- 1 no answer
- 30 don’t know
- 80 no
- 28 yes
- 4 optimistic
- 3 skeptical
- 10 directionless, no change
- 5 indifferent
- 10 realize we are all impotent when it comes to the inevitability of government intervention

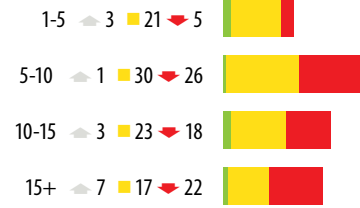
6a) Has the BrickLink platform improved/stayed about the same/gotten worse?

Now, saying that the platform has stayed about the same is not a resounding note of approval. The site has had poor performance for years, is riddled with bugs, inconsistencies, poor labeling, buried, incorrect, missing, and outdated information, intermittent performance issues, and is noted by some users as functionally the worst web site they visit regularly. Promised features are late or never come. Updates usually

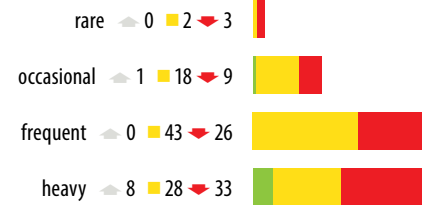
6a Overall 9 Improved 91 Same 71 Worse



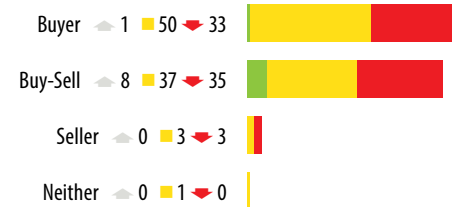
Years as BrickLink Member



BrickLink Usage Level



Relationship to BrickLink



break more things than they fix. Fixes to the problems aren’t addressed in a timely manner, if ever. The site relies on kludges discovered by enterprising members to resolve frequent, known, and admitted issues, particularly seller-side. Communication is reported as nil, haphazard, lazy, late, and a few other choice adjectives skewing negative. Staying the same is basically saying that the cancer that is riddling your body hasn’t gotten any worse. That’s harsh. But that is the reality of the situation.

The BrickLink press release stated: “The LEGO Group shares our ambition to create the best possible platform/experience for adult fans.” The responses here suggest that BrickLink and LEGO are something less than ambitious and they’re creating something less than the best possible platform and experience for their claimed target audience. Users with longer relationships and greater usage levels skew more negative.

6b) If you feel the BrickLink platform has changed, in what ways?

To some degree the opinions on the state of the platform have more to do with how specific policies implemented over the last year coincide with one’s predilections. These opinions are expressed across the survey answers and not

limited to Q6b. Purists applauded the restriction of catalog contents and enforcement of rules while the more broad-minded decried the same.

The restrictive policies and enforcement of those policies clearly narrowed rather than broadened the community and in doing so immediately reduced statements about strengthening engagement with the community, continuing to support the active marketplace, and connecting with fans through new channels to a masculine bovine falsehood. We at the magazine don't have any position pro, con, or indifferent relative to the decision other than to say that the actions don't correlate with the messaging, and when that happens community trust erodes.

Specifically of note again here at 6b is the continued mention of the disappointing removal of chrome parts. Other themes expressed are removal of parts from the catalog, restrictions on what can be sold, lack of user support, continued absence of buyer tools... particularly irksome to some as this was something promised to be coming soon five or six years ago... "zillions" of bugs, broken links, dismay with some staff leaving, comments to policy changes causing some of the community to be pushed away, poor documentation of changes, comments about anybody complaining on the forum being blocked, banned, or having their shop closed, higher prices, shops leaving, lack of payment options, and lack of debugging of new code.

Again there are conflicting opinions on the same topics mentioned earlier: some say the site is more responsive, others say it is less responsive, more reliable, less reliable, admins are more present, admins are less present, admins are more helpful, admins quicker to react more harshly. We don't have any idea who is meant by the term "admins"... whether that means BL staffer Russell (it is extraordinarily rare that any other staff member posts to the forum) or if they mean the volunteer associate "admins". Clearly some part of the responding group believes that somebody is doing something more or less, more or less.

There is one call for merging LEGO, LEGO Ideas and BrickLink IDs to facilitate tracking collections, purchases, and "etc." There are also a couple notes about the dissonance between the written TOS and actual practices.

Concluding the overview, there are a number of mentions of the site being the same or no different. Correlating these mentions with the data at 6a we note that this perception is greater with less frequent users of the site.

And now, some quotes:

"The community feels more hostile, which is really impressive."

"Stuff getting removed, set parts lists delayed. It is slower and worse. Aside from that, prices are skyrocketing but this is not TLG fault I guess."

"While the general business remains about the same for buyers, some of the changes being made are having an impact on sellers and with announced changes regarding payment methods, tax collection, and incessant changes being made to store management, it has made the transition very rocky."

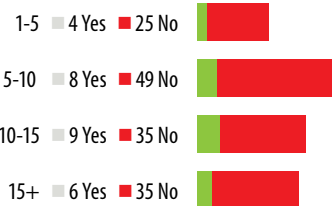
"All the changes have [done] is [to] make the buying process harder, frustrating, time consuming, and dysfunctional for buyers."

6c) Do you think the current state of the BrickLink platform is the best possible experience for AFOLs?

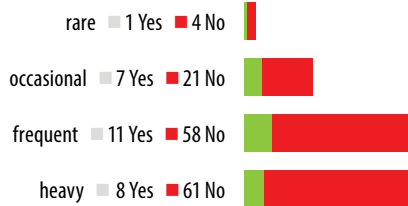
6c Overall 27 Yes 144 No



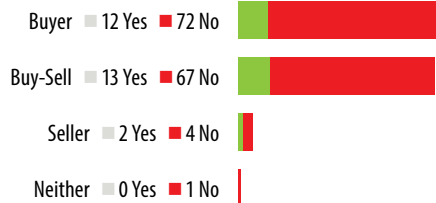
Years as BrickLink Member



BrickLink Usage Level



Relationship to BrickLink



This question. This question. Looking at the raw numbers on this question left us wondering to a degree just what exactly was going on. The numbers did not seem to reflect the positions of the earlier responses, basically indicating a three-fold increase in satisfaction with site performance. Then it occurred to us that perhaps the question wasn't worded correctly or wasn't

being interpreted correctly. A positive response to 6c was often in obvious conflict with opinions expressed elsewhere by the same respondent.

We were riffing on point six of the BrickLink premise: "The LEGO Group shares our ambition to create the best possible platform/experience for adult fans," basically asking if the community felt that the site as it is with the bugs, warts, pimples, communication issues, treatment of members, and everything else was the best possible experience.

We wondered if the question was interpreted as "is the classic interface preferred to the proposed XP interface." So we went back to the yes respondents who graciously said they were open to us following up on their submissions and whose other responses had shown some indication that there was room for improvement elsewhere in their survey.

We did not follow up with the "yes" respondents who indicated that they were infrequent users or they had a specific focus on Studio or otherwise left answers empty.

A number of the follow up emails were not answered. The answers that did come back were all similar and reflected what respondents felt were some key points. In general the response was that the question had been interpreted differently. The original responses seemed to hinge on the word "possible" being construed as "available". Respondents felt that here was definitely some room for improvement in the current site. There was noted dissatisfaction with the current functional state of the site. There was definite fear that any tinkering with the site would only result in worse performance. There was general agreement that the basic classic site design was an interface that they felt was useful and usable and didn't want to see any changes to that. There was general consensus that there was not a "better site" for AFOLs.

"I would prefer if they leave Bricklink untouched because I am worried they will break the site worse than its current state."

"In Question 6c, technically, there is always room for improvement in any platform, so sure, I should have responded 'No'—however, looking back, I must have interpreted the question as: 'is the current BrickLink platform the best possible experience for AFOL's available'. I don't know of any other site that is better for the AFOL, thus my answer of 'Yes'."

While we are displaying the chart with the original 27 Yes responses, the actual number is probably closer to that of 6a.

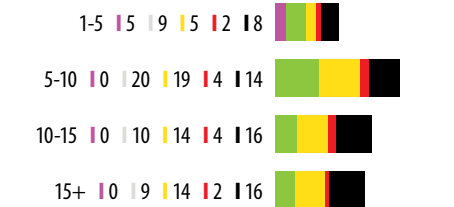
Recently there was a video communication about BrickLink's future plans.

7) What is your general feeling about the messaging in that communication?

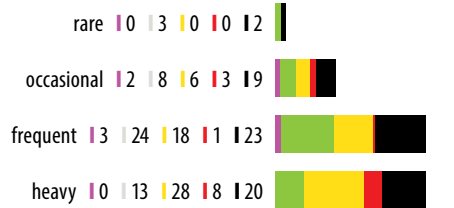
- a. I'm very excited about this plan.
- b. This is new information and I'm cautiously optimistic for the future of BrickLink.
- c. I've heard this before and BrickLink hasn't delivered on promises in the past; I'm skeptical.
- d. This is a terrible plan.
- e. Is there a plan here?



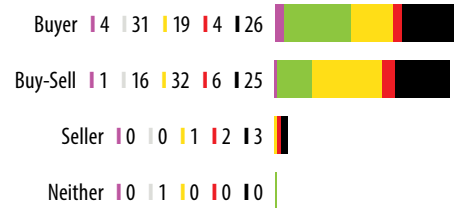
Years as BrickLink Member



BrickLink Usage Level



Relationship to BrickLink



Survey says. . .the only people excited about this plan are new users who have never experienced a BrickLink not built by the current management, and even at that we are looking at only one in six. If this new user market is the target demographic for the future, it looks like it is going to be a very long hill to climb to success.

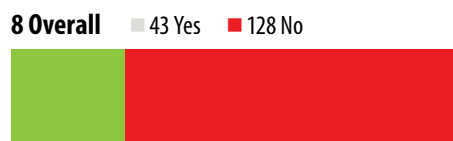
Two of the five people excited about the plan are specifically oriented towards the ADP offering. The other three state that they hope that BrickLink "stays the same" but fixes bugs.

In the optimistic group, there are five-and-one-half comments about XP. Two say that the move to XP should happen only if it has all the features

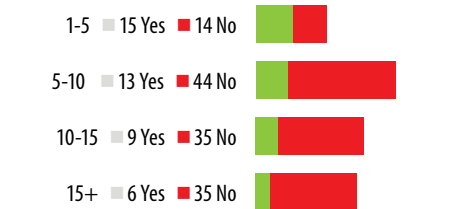
of the current site, two say forget XP, one says trash everything and rebuild from the ground up, and the half is extremely interested in and only interested in seeing an app and the mobile site developed.

The heavier users certainly don't see a plan, think it is a terrible plan or are skeptical. There is very little support among the sellers. We think it is safe to say that this messaging is not met with great enthusiasm by the membership. While it might not be a lead balloon, it isn't going to get off the ground easily.

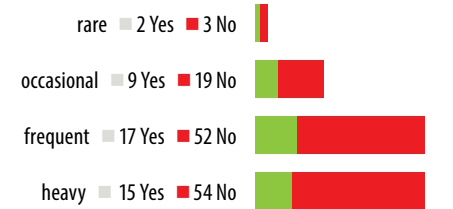
8) Do you think this plan for the BrickLink platform will result in the best possible experience for AFOLs?



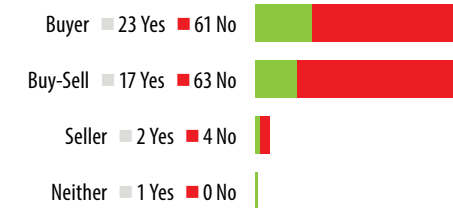
Years as BrickLink Member



BrickLink Usage Level



Relationship to BrickLink



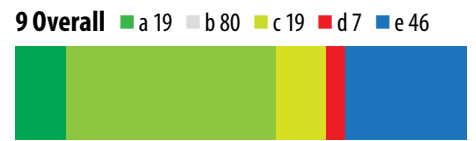
It's nice to see that the results here closely echo what we found in Q7, although strictly speaking at Q7 we have a total of 53 enthusiastic or optimistic, that would-be equivalent number here is only 43.

9) If you could prioritize one aspect of site development at BrickLink, what would it be?

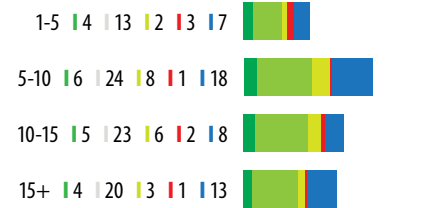
- a. Make the site more mobile friendly.
- b. Fix the existing but broken site functionality. Test code updates before deploying; make sure updates don't

break any existing functionality.

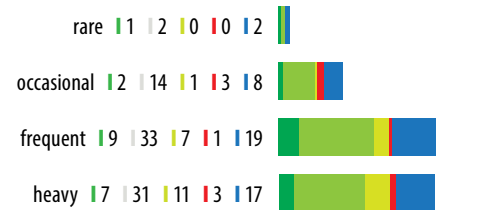
- c. Create a suite of seller tools.
- d. Forget the legacy site, focus completely on XP.
- e. other



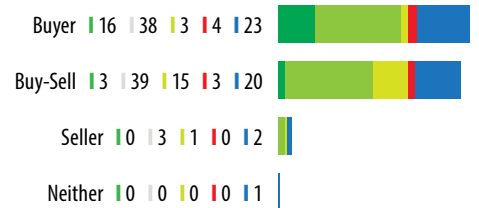
Years as BrickLink Member



BrickLink Usage Level



Relationship to BrickLink



What is clear here is that the majority of users simply want the existing functionality fixed. What is not apparent from the chart is that of the 46 "other" responses we have a dozen calls for a combination of a and b, or b and c, or a, b, and c. Taken together, 75% of the respondents prioritize fixing the core functionality of the site. The general theme of "BrickLink is okay as it is, just fix the broken bits," reverberates throughout the survey. To be fair, just fixing the broken bits is probably technically a less cost-effective solution. . .and far more fear-fraught and troublesome. . .than rewriting the entirety of the underlying code, but that is a technical consideration and not the general thrust of the expressed sentiment here. The priority is to get the existing functionality and feature set stabilized and working as intended. There are three mentions either explicitly or effectively stating the site should be overhauled from scratch but keeping all the features.

Additionally, there are 14 calls for interface and/or functional updates related to the catalog

to improve discovery, three calls for the return of custom items to the catalog, two people want LEGO to divest itself of the site, one wants documentation, one wants delivery on all the past promises, one person says that the priority should be to focus on the core audience, one wants Canadian Tax implemented, and one wants a robust customer service department.

10) If you could offer LEGO Group one single piece of advice regarding BrickLink's future, what would that be?

As one might expect there are a number of me-centric responses here, and for certain they conflict with other me-centric responses (focus on mobile/don't focus on mobile, allow custom parts/remove more parts, yes MOCs/no MOCs, let BL sell new parts/don't let BL sell new parts). Also some respondents feel that "one piece of advice" is a paragraph containing twenty pieces of advice. Others feel one piece of advice is a general comment or statement. Okay then. I guess it depends on how you define "piece" or how well you pay attention to the question.

Distilling the responses down into general themes, there are three that stand out. The top suggestion, 36 instances, is that there be focus on the core market platform. This is expressed in three general sentiments: 1) blatantly saying focus on the core platform, 2) if it ain't broke, don't fix it, and 3) fix what is broken and test thoroughly before making it live and make sure the fix doesn't break other things. The ancillary note to this is to not get distracted by shiny things and new ideas, leaves blowing on the wind, and well, anything else.

Second, 30 instances, is to remove the rails, leave the platform alone, don't meddle, hands off, and we trust you get the general sentiment here. The subset to this suggestion at 13 instances is to allow the return of custom items to the platform. This group of suggestions seems to be basically asking for openness and inclusion versus exclusion and less heavy-handedness with what can be offered on the platform.

Third, 19 instances, is the suggestion that LEGO listen to and work with the community. Grow the platform from the bottom up instead from the top down. Generally this group suggests that LEGO pay attention to the top two suggestions and some other suggestions to follow.

After the top three, there is a step down to a second tier of suggestions. Leading the second tier with nine suggestions is to improve the code/UI/UX. Piggybacking on that sentiment are other

similar but more focused requests for mobile support, improving search, facilitating user-side input and output of information, and more robust API and third-party support. Rounding out the family here is a number of requests for a better buyer checkout experience, better seller tools, better shipping tables, additional payment options, and to maintain and retain a complete transactional history. Many of these improvements necessarily have database structure and content implications. Taken together this group of requests tallies about 35 total. It could be reasonably argued that all these things are part of core functionality.

While we're here in the UX neighborhood, there were a few requests for building a social network and a place to keep personal inventories and MOCs and other things. We guess maybe they haven't discovered rebrickable.com or any number of other websites that already provide these features and are well maintained. Or haven't been fortunate enough for somebody on the forum to tell them that they can inventory their things on BrickLink by opening a store and...uh...not opening it.

The next two areas of suggestion each have nine responses. First, and emphatically so, is that LEGO divest itself of BrickLink and return BrickLink to the community, or a private entity, or somebody else. Second is that LEGO get some better people, more people, with appropriate skills, into the areas of development and customer service. This echoes the never-ending chorus of BrickLink having exceptionally poor communication skills.

The last areas of suggestion receiving multiple specific focus is that Studio keep getting some developmental focus and that LEGO pay attention to and support the sellers. Both of these items are addressed in the December Julia-Marvin video. The former we expect to happen, the latter we haven't seen happen so far, although there have been many calls for this for a very long time.

Another area with several loosely related strings is that LEGO more actively promote BrickLink, use BrickLink as an outlet for special promotions, exclusives, a back-door (or front door) source for bulk bricks (at a discount, of course), special bricks, reissuing retired parts, and other fantastic and magical things.

To conclude, there are individual calls for not giving big stores preferential treatment over small stores, becoming less US-centric, maintaining an adult focus (18+ for participation), and creating multi-language support. Quotes follow:

"They really need some customer service staff who are more responsive and have thicker skin. Ignoring user complaints should not be a valid option."

"Bring in a professional customer relations manager and staff. BrickLink is a site originally built by amateurs...but it can no longer make do with amateur customer relations. Response times to support tickets are too long. Users who voice their frustrations openly are silenced and ignored. It is an unprofessional way to treat customers."

"The promises about upgrades to the site, sellers tools and everything else we have been promised for years need to be addressed."

"For EXPERIENCED LEGO MANAGEMENT to engage. The current carry-over management team does not appear to be business savvy and their unchecked, capricious, dictatorial, and retaliatory demeanor—which has existed for years—is going to continue to cause BrickLink to limp along until they force every seller to leave the platform and seek out other venues."

"Get over your distaste for resellers and embrace them. Like it or not, the community is all of us, not just the builders that make your product shine."

"Take seller's concerns much more seriously, and ACTUALLY listen, rather than paying lip service and claiming you're going to listen. Invest in improvements that sellers actually want!"

"Much of what has been said about BL development has proved to be hot air. The trust that LEGO will do the right thing with BL is completely broken."

"Stop, take a breath and realise what you have. Then consider how to make it better."

"BrickLink is absolutely central to the AFOL community—perhaps the second most important thing to AFOLs behind TLG itself. It does not need to exist in a petrified state, but changes should be approached cautiously because the community depends on this site. Several years ago at Brickworld Chicago, when BL was sold to Jay Kim, there was a public acknowledgement that 'All of this'—the convention, the amazing displays, and the amazing community that was built on this hobby—all of this is made possible by BrickLink. This is Dan Jezek's legacy. I would encourage all involved in BL, especially the executive management, to experience the events and the community at Brickworld and Skaerbaek, etc. and to keep this in mind."

"If you're going to backdoor Ideas designs into BrickLink for sale, make sure the designers are taken care of."

"If [LEGO] want to control BrickLink, they need to provide it with the support needed, and integrate it into the LEGO system. If they don't want to do that, they shouldn't own it."

"Make your presence known and engage with users or hire a team to augment the existing site admins."

"Make it more welcoming to be on, last twelve months I've felt it's not enjoyable to be on, that's my feeling and opinion."

"Listen to the users rather than the BrickLink management who are not LEGO people."

11) Any other comments

There were some interesting comments, some directed at the magazine for coming up with the survey, others directed at LEGO and BrickLink. Some comments continued to offer advice.

Some expressed hope and well wishes for the BrickLink platform. Themes reiterated from the advice question were to fix the existing site, focus on the adult part of AFOL, taxes/sales history retention, various catalog related issues, Studio, the US-centric focus/lack of non-English support, returning custom parts to the marketplace, and better communication. On to some comments:

"BrickLink has so much potential! When Dan passed and the family sold out to Jay, that was the day BrickLink also began to die. While the current managers may have a passion for LEGO they are not businessmen and Jay seemed to have ulterior motives that never materialized for the AFOL community. If Julia's message bears real fruit, we may keep BrickLink alive for many years and honor Dan's dream. Despite my outlook, I hope that this all changes; but until management kills BrickLink and buries it, I will continue to be there every day."

"At the very least make it crash less."

"I am saddened to realize through these questions how depressingly unsupported I feel by BL and LEGO."

"I understand that BL might otherwise have gone away—leaving us with Brick Owl as the marketplace. Frankly, there is a lot of legacy with BL, some good, some bad. (I'm BrickBay member #77. . .). When BL was sold by Dan's family, I think an opportunity to make a consortium purchase was missed, and it got sold for over the odds on what it costs to run. The transfer to Lego means that taxes are a huge problem, because issues which fly under the radar for a \$10 million/year company are a huge issue for TLG. Issues of IP & "custom" also immediately on BL's sale to TLG came to the fore, with the removal of BrickArms

and other custom elements meaning that the community is more divided than united by the actions. I am not a large seller (about 300 sales in 20 years), but I've been there from the start. I find myself using BL less now than I had in the past."

"... the marketplace is getting worse for me as a seller and for my buyers. I'm there since 2012 and opened my shop in 2020 and I'm worried about BrickLink's future."

"I've never quite understood the constant talk about 'community' in relation to BrickLink. It's just a place to buy and sell and look for information."

"The more involved LEGO Group gets with BrickLink, the less it has felt like a market leading site. They should make the site we all came to love work the best it can, then focus on adding new things."

"Usually, I would say: if it ain't broken don't fix it. But it is too late for that. It already has been negatively changed."

"It is a shame that this survey is necessary; had Lego stuck to their original promises I, and I suspect most other users, would have been a lot more positive."

"What LEGO is doing with BL made me trust them even less than before. They have shown themselves as untrustworthy, greedy, un-empathetic and liars."



After the Q and A

How dumb is our survey?

Okay. We will confess to the survey being dumb. To a degree at least. For sure.

We decided to focus on the specific statements made by LEGO and BrickLink at the time of acquisition. We will grant you that LEGO's statement reads like, and probably is, boilerplate marketing speak.

So, one by one we took the statements and slapped them into question form. This was a conscious decision because we wanted to specifically weigh those statements against the community's perceptions.

We received some feedback that indicated that there were some other questions that the community would really have preferred to see but we avoided those kinds of questions because we felt they were simply going to lead to the airing of grievances and BrickLink bashing and

were not related to the acquisition and how the relationship of LEGO and BrickLink was meeting the then-stated goals or intents.

This is how dumb we are, sez the crowd:

"Only a dumb survey makes questions like this one required."

"You should have made a petition and not a survey."

"Ask the same question over and over, wording it differently, had to be a millennial doin' the questions."

DunDunDUNNNNN! Thanks for playing. Sorry on that count. A sexagenarian and some other somewhat youngergerenarians, but no millennials. At least you now know that we put *maximum effort* into them, right?

Some people just want to share their feelings, because, well, why not?

There were any number of responses that had nothing to do with the question. We present some of those here to communicate to LEGO what the community thinks of the kind of job BrickLink is doing to further the stated goals of the acquisition.

"BrickLink has rolled out new user interfaces that are suspect. When searching for parts, there appears to be a deep bias. When comparing the classic system results to the new system, many of the sellers are omitted on the new system, which increases the prices. We've asked for some clarification and transparency, but it's like talking to a dog."

The MOC shop cum Studio Gallery got some attention: "My MOC Ferrari poster where I built a fairly accurate logo out of tiles was downgraded from Public (share instructions) to just View (read only). This was due to Intellectual Property concerns. Seems like there are fewer and fewer places to share my own creations. . . I explore typography in LEGO and there's no good outlet for critical expression.

Seriously have you tried to make Futura Bold Italics from plates? Not so easy, my friend."

And this, presumably in response to the BrickLink 20th Anniversary promotion:

"I was THIS close to getting a job as the merchandiser for PNW before the pandemic made all the things close and we had to quarantine and are still in quarantine. I was in communication with local store owners who helped me talk to LEGO as I have a disability that makes it a bit hard. When the pandemic started BrickLink asked for people to write in with their experiences on BrickLink and I shared about a kind soul who

waited for me to pay for several weeks as I groped with the loss of an immediate family member. Later from BrickLink I received a bunch of LEGO gear like bags, etc. which was cool. I'm not sure if it was direct, but it seems like the sort of kindness that a central authority would do, and I liked it."

Who is who?

Something apparent from reading all the responses is the conflation of the two entities, BrickLink and LEGO Group. Things have changed on the BrickLink platform and some users are pointing fingers at LEGO when they should probably be pointing them at BrickLink. Or pointing them elsewhere. In any event, what is clear is that for some users BrickLink is now LEGO and the users are assuming either correctly or incorrectly that LEGO is the root source of the changes and are laying the credit or blame with LEGO. We at the magazine tend to think that the changes relative to taxes and other legal compliances are issues that any company doing business on the internet has to deal with, and as such are within BrickLink's necessary sphere of governmental compliance, and are not directives and mandates that are coming down from TLG.

For example, the issues surrounding color are wide and deep and could stand some time and energy devoted to the situation from on high to get things into a consistent nomenclature across LEGOs own platforms, to facilitate interconnection with third parties via APIs and whatever other relevant technologies are in play, and to reduce friction and confusion at the consumer level. The color name change from "flesh" to "nougat" was initially suggested by one specific long-time

contributing member on the BrickLink forum because not all persons have the same color flesh. Forum regulars are aware of this. Survey respondents, apparently not frequenting the forum, mention the color change from flesh to nougat a few times in response to various different survey questions and they clearly point a finger at LEGO for directing the change.

While not frequently mentioned in survey responses, the intellectual property rights issues relative to MOCs on BrickLink likely are subject to dictates from LEGO. That said, we do have to question the apparent heavy-handedness BrickLink is using to enforce the policy, which, to some, comes across as "if there is any doubt about anything, disallow everything".

There are other who's who issues relative to the catalog changes that are attributed by respondents to one entity or the other, often emphatically, and outside the gleaming white walls of the Ivory Tower of Irvine does anyone really know who is steering the catalog decisions? We know the decisions are no longer being guided by the volunteer associates as this has been stated on the forum.

There are a few instances in the survey responses where respondents call on LEGO to raise their profile relative to BrickLink, at least two of these are noted at Q10 above, and we have to agree. We feel it would go a long way to quelling the masses and reducing the speculation and disinformation if LEGO would come out and clearly and specifically define to what degree they are and aren't involved with direction and policy making at BrickLink. Given the current state of things, especially after reading survey responses,

we can only conclude that the absence of clarity is muddying the reputations of both LEGO and BrickLink.

Did LEGO miss the boat?

Given that BrickLink was conceived by an AFOL for similarly minded AFOLs, and that its content was shaped and populated by a hardcore AFOL community over many years, is the introduction of a new audience of less hardcore individuals who are not necessarily aware of or wanting to become part of the AFOL community, a step in the right direction? Yes, additional bodies may increase sales somewhat, but are these new folks going to develop into long-time fans, devoted followers, and contributors? Some sellers are noting an increase of problem buyers and new buyers with a totally different set of expectations and a distinct lack of understanding of what the BrickLink marketplace is and how it operates.

One survey respondent notes:

"BrickLink is a platform for professional AFOL community and now waves of ordinary buyers who think it's some "spare brick" LEGO store come in without any idea about what BL really is.

I mean if there is some promoting going on, maybe the target audience is not the right one."

We would think that if LEGO is going to promote BrickLink to the casual customer, it should coincidentally explain what BrickLink is and how it functions. The AFOL who organically discovers and becomes involved with BrickLink is of considerably different temperament than Jane Weekday being told by a store associate that last year's no-longer-in-stock set can be found on some obscure web site. And when Jane arrives at said web site she can be met with "this store doesn't ship to my state/country", impossible payment options, and a myriad of other interface and procedural shortcomings. If Jane makes it to the forum and asks a question, she is just as likely to be greeted by a member of the legion of frenemies of mankind as not. She certainly will not be greeted by BrickLink staff. Anybody reading this pretty much knows that navigating the idiosyncrasies of BrickLink requires time, patience, desire, and the testicular fortitude of a mother giving birth to quintuplets.

WTF? Messaging versus Reality

In the video message posted 2 December 2020, <https://youtu.be/YxUldvkHt4Q>, Julia Goldin:

"Our number one priority is the community, and you are this community. . .and what is really beautiful about this platform is it enables you

“BrickLink is a platform for professional AFOL community and now waves of ordinary buyers who think it's some “spare brick” LEGO store come in without any idea about what BL really is. I mean if there is some promoting going on maybe the target audience is not the right one.”



Julia Goldin and Marvin Park, from video posted 2 December 2020

to connect seamlessly with everybody around the world and do it in a way that really services your needs.”

“So our number one priority is to invest to strengthen the relationship we have with the community. . .”

Let’s pause here for a moment. The number one priority is the community. The number one priority is to invest to strengthen the relationship we have with the community. Okay. *Number One*. Said it twice. Let’s continue.

“ . . . and that’s why we will expand the BrickLink team that will include a bigger focus on the community relations. This will enable us to have more dialogs with you and to listen to you and to get your input. Because with your input we can develop the tools and the platforms to enable to service you in a much better and more effective and efficient way.”

“Our future vision is for BrickLink to be a modern global platform for all adult builders. A platform that . . . is able to service your needs, whether it is from building or being able to access the marketplace or being able to connect with other builders. . . around the world.”

Is it safe to say what we have seen in December, January, and February is exactly the opposite of that? BrickLink’s handling of the various tax schemes and BrickLink’s requirements for compliance have not achieved that goal, to say the least. We see some stores restricted from shipping. We see some stores with no possible way to comply with both BrickLink’s requirements and legal requirements of their own countries. Certainly some of the blame can be laid at the feet of the various taxing authorities, but not providing adequate or workable payment options through their portal is completely on BrickLink. What we think we see is a solution born more of some skill or systemic limitation on BrickLink’s

part instead of devising a workable solution that fits the needs of the sellers. Instead of a global community we have community members stuck in regional silos with no way to access foreign markets.

Marvin reiterates the point: “The LEGO Group is investing significantly to BrickLink by expanding the organization to better serve the needs of the community. First of all we are ramping up BrickLink team and also setting up a dedicated role of community engagement to better reflect and coordinate different needs from the community. . . With the upgraded capability of the team, we are committed to enhance the performance and security of our marketplace platform.”

Julia: “In the next couple of days, Marvin and I and our community engagers will be really listening and actively engaging with you in a dialog, and I’m really looking forward to hearing from all of you.”

Eight weeks later

Trying to be thorough in our line of inquiry, we wondered: “did this happen?” Did Marvin and Julia and the “community engagers” really listen and actively engage in a dialog?

We hadn’t heard of anyone being engaged “in the next couple days” and no one anywhere in the survey mentioned anything about being engaged. The survey said emphatically the opposite with 154 responding “no”. We reached out on the LAN to see what, if anything, we could find in regards to the question there. We were directed to Russell Callender at BrickLink. Russell replied graciously and quickly to our inquiry. We have edited together our questions and his answers for clarity.

HBM: An important part of our survey is based on the message conveyed by LEGO in [the December 2] video. At 2:49 Marvin mentions: “First of all we are ramping up BrickLink team and

also setting up a dedicated role of community engagement to better reflect and coordinate different needs from the community.”

While we have identified communication from you as Admin, it is not clear to us how this new role of community engagement has been filled. Who is the dedicated community engagement person, when did they step into this role and what specific actions have they taken?

RC: When the Admin account is used to post a reply in the Forum, that is the account that speaks for the whole site. For the most recent News post, we actually had a team of people who recorded the responses, came up with answers, and then finally one person posted the answers under the Admin account as they were ready. This is what Julia is referring to by “our community engagers”. This “group method” of answering is something we’ve done several times since the acquisition, and actually many of the responses I give from my personal account are a combination of narrative from multiple sources as well.

I’m pleased to see that you have taken notice of some new efforts in community engagement. The community is a critical part of our plan to move forward as a site, and a new role dedicated to Community Engagement is indeed being developed. But as with many things concerning the transition we are in at the moment, it is taking perhaps longer to get going than we had originally hoped. This is always the risk of mentioning any sort of upcoming plans in public. In this case I would expect the role to be officially established some time over the next few months. But no promises.

. . . I am often the one that physically accesses the account, but there are also others. Currently we have two public facing employees—myself under Admin_Russell and Rachel under QA_Rachel. We did once use a “LEGO AMA” account for purposes of answering questions. But even though my account is currently the most visible, I do not fill the Community Engagement role. I am the Head of Administration, and my official role in the Forum is more akin to that of a police officer. I am often asked, however, to share information publicly on behalf of other people (see the many recent posts on tax and VAT issues).

Regarding the official new role, we hope it will be filled soon. We do not typically disclose information about the role of BrickLink employees to the public. However, it would be reasonable to assume that a person filling a role entitled “Community Engagement” would become known to the public.

“...I’m really looking forward to hearing from all of you.”

HBM: At 5:20 Julia mentions “In the next couple of days, Marvin and I and our community engagers will be really listening and actively engaging with you in a dialog, and I’m really looking forward to hearing from all of you.”

We have looked at the BrickLink forums and the only public record of this active engagement appears to be this thread [<https://www.bricklink.com/v2/community/newsview.page?msgid=1236889>], which contains some engagement from the Admin over a period of eleven days from the initial announcement.

Aside from that topic, who was engaged and what tangible effects has that engagement had?

RC: We are still in the process of getting things started in a formal sense, but informally there has been a lot of activity surrounding community engagement from even before the acquisition.

The vision that we have is that community engagement is not something that is tacked onto an otherwise independent program—we are really striving to make community engagement part of the essence of our BrickLink company. There is a lot of background work being done at the moment which will build the foundation for a complete and authentic approach toward the community.

HBM: In what other ways has the community been publicly engaged and what has resulted from that engagement?

RC: There hasn’t been anything public yet.

HBM: The conversation linked above also doesn’t reveal anything about a Community Engagement Team. Who are the members of this Community Engagement Team and what are their individual roles and how have they interacted with the community?

RC: I wish I could help you more, but the extent that this sort of inside information is revealed will be up to the new Community Engagement role. What I will tell you now is that there will be a formal role and a team in some form will be there to support them.

I look forward to reading about the results of the survey.

It didn’t happen.

That’s our takeaway from this communication. Two months after stating that the community would be engaged by Marvin and Julia, BrickLink

is still in the process of getting things started, there will be a Community Engagement Role, and inside information is inside information which will or will not be revealed if and when the Community Engagement Role actually becomes a thing.

It is discouraging to us... and one might imagine embarrassing for the Chief Marketing Officer of LEGO... to make public statements and then not deliver. What is the community to think when the CMO states “... I’m really looking forward to hearing from all of you,” and then can’t be bothered to have a simple conversation? At the very least it is not good marketing.

For BrickLink to promise something and not deliver is regarded by many as standard operating procedure for the last seven years, so no real surprise there.

Twelve weeks later

A visit to the BrickLink forum will reveal that last year’s status quo is this year’s status quo, plus some new quos that have come up during the last year. Site reliability, which had been relatively good for several months, seems to have again taken a downturn with notable incidents in early February and again in late February and early March. The tax situation and the requirement that sites have an onsite payment method enabled still hasn’t been communicated sufficiently to store owners as there are frequent questions posted about “why can’t the customer check out” and “customer says I don’t ship to [someplace] but I do.” Other problems mentioned in the survey all persist at one level or another. And there is still no notice of a “community engager.”

Turning back the clock

Going back to this thread at BrickLink, <https://www.bricklink.com/messageThread.asp?ID=261535&nID=1171248>, we find a nice chart, courtesy of AFOL StormChaser. He counted up all the people on the forum who expressed a position about the acquisition. We thought it would be interesting to compare that data set with the current data set. Interestingly enough his dataset then contained 162 points and our current one contains 171. So there is a fairly close parity in the numbers.

For comparison purposes we will take

StormChaser’s Chart:

40 Pro, 38 Con, 37 Wait and See, 37 No Opinion

Positive	Negative	Wait and See	No Opinion
Acorn04	amebica	ashermer	59transamman
Adjour	Barrythelego	bje	Admin_Russell
allistar005317	Biglesdug	Bricks_NW_UK	AndersPaludan
Androv	Black_Arnor	calebfishn	Blue85
APS_HEARS_ABS	charlman70	calsobricks	Brett1666
arinic	christus1313	cycbuld	BrickBuy
ash_274	d3Rr4d0if	DB361	BricksBoy
axaday	d65n	Dolfer413	brikomania
BigBBricks	dawnie82	EnchantedBricks	Brock
BrickCompulsion	dearlydeparted	fantasmadaopera	Captain_Q
Brickity	Dino1	gilles78120	celloguy
coomleray	Djurae	gogogovno	charlesjay88
Costruzionologo	echogamer	Hardstone	Classicsmiley
DallasBricks	elangab	HTownBricks	cwl
DarcTangent	Emilio_Magnelli	Legoboy_II	DeLuca
dcarmine	iancellis	legocastle	electricbaer
Doughboy6480	IronRaven	Lottieslego	firestar246
edeevo	J_Money	Louvrecaire	FoxPrimus
gcarter03	jackdg	Marco0	Give.Me.A.Brick
gaurnt	julencin3000	MonkeyManWhee	leopard37
juliek	JusTic8	montana_girl	manganschlammm
misbi	keith_rowland	Nathan123	medicus
monkeynut12	kennard42	nize	mhortar
msutuba	legokopen	Old2new4u	miskox
picabo	legoman77	QCBricks	negative
Pipplybly	Imeyer	Quill_Toys	nerdsforprez
ProbablyDylan	locksdorf	randy17	nikilyn
Rob_and_Shelagh	lylicf1ch1	red_wheelbarrow	PeterJritter
stacey_love	Mardosul	Sadler_Bricks	popsicle
StormChaser	mfav	Shintaku	povoq
Stuart9	Patko	speshy	RedBeardDan
SuperChris01	pilotguy72	StarBrick	Schuler
Teup	Redn_2000	Steineflut	superbonzo
tomato_1984	rprebel	SylvainL5	tadmochi
Tomme06	rtjpsen	VandyandtheMtn	thirsh42
tvettima	runner_caller	WoutR	Thunor
udenbricks	ShrikeArghest	yorbrick	xGattoMattox
victor_lego	SimplyBricks		
waltzking	Smokie31		
	stefan		
	supergoose		
	the.lego.lord		
	thornton_john		
	UltimateBrick		
	uslackeru		
	wookiee1987		
	zoomatomic		

2019-12-21 40 Pro 74 Neutral 38 Con



2021-01-24 9 Pro 91 Neutral 71 Con



StormChaser’s Wait-and-Sees and his No-Opinions, combine those as “neutral” and compare them to our current state perceptions from Q6. We’re aware this isn’t quite apples-to-apples, but as a rough indicator it should serve well enough as a comparison between the stated prediction of then versus the perception of now. It appears that the fairly even balance at that time between pro and con has definitely shifted now towards con. The cons have doubled and the pros have quartered. We would imagine this is not the trend that LEGO would want to see a year after their acquisition.

Thanks to everyone who participated!

Sincerely, a big thanks to everyone who participated in the survey. We couldn’t have done it without you. Additional thanks to Russell for providing some BrickLink-side information.

If anybody has anything further to offer on this subject, feel free to submit via the contact form on our website. If we get something we deem of community interest, we will share it in an upcoming issue.