

No monkeying around: The real reason behind the Fingerlings shortage



Terri Peters TODAY Contributor

A fresh holiday season brings joy, cheer, and a new must-have toy that is impossible to find.

Enter the Fingerlings — an adorable collection of monkeys, a unicorn and a sloth that are 2017's hot, hard-to-find toy. Created by WowWee, Fingerlings are baby animals that cling to a child's finger, make cute noises and react to sound, motion and touch. And stores, of course, cannot keep the tiny plastic critters in stock.



Confused? It wasn't so long ago that moms were jockeying for chubby dolls with plastic faces that grew on a veggie farm. This is the same deal, said James Dion, president and founder of retail consulting firm Dionco Inc.

"There's just about been one every year for the last 35 years," Dion told TODAY Parents. "I think it started with the Cabbage Patch Kid dolls back in the early eighties and it's been happening every year since, whether it's the Furby or some other toy du jour."

Dion said that the Fingerlings' price point — just a little over \$10 — combined with the toys'



impressive technological capabilities makes it a unique item.

And once stores sell out of a toy, whether or not they'll get more in stock is unpredictable and a "crap shoot," he said, because retailers place toy orders between seven and eight months before the holiday season to allow time for manufacturers to fill and ship their orders.

"Every retailer has got their fingers crossed that the items they selected are the ones that will be chosen by the consumers," said Dion. "For every one of these items that make it, there are two or three hundred others that don't and are sitting in a warehouse somewhere."



For the toys that do "make it," like Fingerlings, Dion said that gathering the necessary supplies, space and manpower to create more once supplies run low is difficult.

"As a parent it drives you crazy," said Dion. "These kinds of toys become unicorns. They're black swans and if you don't get them at the right time, there's no guarantee you will get them later."

Currently, Fingerlings are fetching around \$40 on eBay. Some ambitious sellers are marking them up into the triple digits. Keep in mind: It's still November.



New Hampshire mom Brenna Jennings says she purchased a Fingerling months ago, but has yet to hear her 9-year-old daughter mention the toy.

"I bought one because everyone was freaking out about them. I have no idea what I'll do with it," said Jennings. "I hid it and I don't know where."

"Two of my friends posted about it being the 'it' toy months ago," said Pennsylvania mom-of-three Lynne Getz. "I laughed and thought, 'Sure, whatever,' and didn't bite but now my kids want them. Damn it."



Kathy Frank, a Florida mother and grandmother who remembers hunting down Cabbage Patch Kid dolls in the eighties, says she will continue to hunt for Fingerlings for her three grandchildren.

"The grandkids saw them months ago and I said I'd think about them closer to Christmas — maybe I waited too long," said Frank. "Of course I'm still going to look for them... I'll go to almost any lengths."

So what does WowWee think about the success of Fingerlings? And is the toy manufacturer planning to make more in time for Christmas?

"Since our launch in early August, the fan response we've received for our Fingerlings brand has been phenomenal," said Sydney Wiseman, brand manager at WowWee. "We want every fan to have their own Fingerlings friend as we head into the holidays, which is why we're working very closely with our retail partners to ensure stores across the U.S. are stocked."

"However, as we have seen in the past, the hottest toys of the holiday shopping season that are in the greatest demand do disappear quickly from store shelves."