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Contact

Richard Vaughan
Proto Labs, Limited
+44(0)1952 683031
richard.vaughan@protolabs.co.uk

Media Contact

Matt Bailey
for MBMC
+44(0)1603 283601
matt@mbmc-uk.com

Proto Labs Helps Bring Maze-O Closer to the Masses *Maze building toy named Cool Idea! Award recipient*

MAPLE PLAIN, Minn. – March 19 2013 – [Maze-O](#), a colourful plastic maze building set, is one step closer to hitting toy store shelves thanks to Proto Labs (NYSE:PRLB), which awarded the start-up a Cool Idea! Award.

Proto Labs, the world's fastest manufacturer of CNC machined and injection moulded parts, launched the [Cool Idea! Award](#) in 2011 to give product designers the opportunity to bring their innovations to life by awarding up to \$250,000 worth of prototyping and short-run production services to recipients. Maze-O is the first toy to receive the award. Proto Labs provided Maze-O with injection moulded parts for the initial working prototypes used to market the toy to potential distributors at New York City's Toy Fair 2013 in February.

The Maze-O journey began in 2012 when Dan and Jessica Friedman discovered that their son loved creating mazes with wooden blocks. Those mazes would inevitably be knocked over by younger siblings, causing great frustration. The Friedmans set out to find a sturdy maze-building toy with pieces that linked together so that it could be used with cars and other toys. Unable to find such a toy, they decided to create it themselves. The result is a set of brightly colored ramps, straights, turns, T-junctions, and dead-ends.

"Mazes are everywhere in a kid's world—restaurant placemats, cereal boxes, and even computer games—but there is no physical play kit that kids can use to build original mazes," says Jessica Friedman, Maze-O co-creator. "Kids are creative and many enjoy completing mazes and puzzles. It was a sort of light bulb moment that went off in our heads believing a toy like this can exist."

The Friedmans downloaded CAD software, bought a 3D printer, and began designing. The original design produced chunky pieces, and if everything went smoothly, one set of Maze-O pieces could take three days to print. In addition, the 3D printed parts were not strong enough to hold up to active play. In order to be ready to pitch the product at Toy Fair, an alternative method was needed to produce the needed parts really fast, and in a production-ready material. After hearing about the Cool Idea! Award and speaking with Proto Labs, they determined injection moulded parts would solve their durability issues, and Proto Labs' quick turnaround time would have the pieces ready to go before they left for New York.

“The whole process was new to us. Many inventors have at least some knowledge of the part making process. We had never worked with a manufacturer prior to this, and we learned CAD software, 3D printing and design for injection moulding of real parts as we went along,” says Dan Friedman, Maze-O co-creator. “When we called Proto Labs they walked us through the entire manufacturing process. We asked basic questions that larger manufacturers didn’t seem to have time for. Proto Labs was patient with us and helped us learn on the fly.”

“We were excited by the product’s educational aspects,” says Larry Lukis, CTO and founder of Proto Labs. “Spatial reasoning and fine motor skills are paramount in many growing fields, and this toy fosters those skills in a fun way.”

Unlike other product awards that recognise products after they’re in mass production and on store shelves, Proto Labs’ Cool Idea! Award is meant to help cool ideas come to life. Eligibility for the award is determined during the design and development stage, when innovators are too often stymied by lack of resources or funds to turn their ideas into real products. For more information about the Cool Idea! Award and how to apply visit www.protolabs.co.uk/CoolIdea.

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About Proto Labs

Proto Labs (PRLB) is a leading online and technology-enabled quick-turn manufacturer of low-volume CNC-machined and injection moulded custom parts for prototyping and short-run production. The company provides “Real Parts, Really Fast” to product developers worldwide and has two quick-turn services in North America, Europe and Japan: Firstcut (www.firstcut.eu/gb) CNC machining and Protomold (www.protomold.co.uk) injection moulding. Both are capable of providing parts in as fast as one business day. Product developers who use Proto Labs for prototypes and short-run production can upload a 3D CAD file at any one of Proto Labs online sites, get an interactive quotation and place an order for Proto Labs services directly online. For more information, visit: www.protolabs.co.uk.

About Maze-O

Maze-O is a new maze-building toy for kids. With bright fun colors and easy to put together pieces kids enjoy building new and complex mazes while they learn spatial reasoning and fine motor skills. Parents love seeing their children learn as they form amazing mazes all on their own. For more information, check out [Maze-O on Facebook](#).