Alexander Reece #8479313/BSAC'06 Accounting
(No prior giving to UF)
Homestead: $619,900
Total Real Estate Holdings in Alachua County: $2,463,948 (14 properties – commercial, residential, and vacant)

AREA COMPANY LEADS TOY RACE
The Gainesville Sun
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Alex Reece (BSAC '06) has spent his career, starting at age 13, trading in the latest fad - baseball cards, comic books, Beanie Babies, Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh! cards, Razor Scooters, Webkinz.

Now, the 36-year-old entrepreneur may be at the forefront of creating the next fad as managing member of 10Vox Entertainment.

The Gainesville company has come up with the boys' answer to Webkinz - the plush toys with an online code that unlocks an interactive world on the Web - and is already on pace for a better first year of sales.

Through Tracksters, 10Vox aims to appeal to several of the major ways that boys play.

It starts with a $15 retail die-cast (metal) car, with the first series featuring Ford, Dodge and General Motors muscle cars.

The packaging includes a code to go online and download a 3-D program that includes the particular car and a multiplayer online racing game. Tracksters owners can race against the computer or up to seven online friends.

They earn track bucks by racing that can be used in the online store to buy parts that improve their cars' performance such as new tires to handle better or an engine to go faster.

But the best performance parts are available through trading cards that come seven to a pack and include scratch-off codes that are used to add the parts to the car in the Web game.

Reece studied trends in toys before coming up with the concept, ultimately combining several of the trends into the Tracksters concept.

"Webkinz had just launched. We said, 'You know, there's nothing out there for boys.'"

Kids are weaning themselves off of toys at a younger age and going to video games and electronics, he said.

For the video game aspect, he looked to MMOGs - massive multiplayer online games - such as World of Warcraft and Second Life with a social networking aspect and millions of users.

"We watched that and said, 'Young kids don't have anything like that. There's nothing out there that's G-rated.'"

They looked at the big categories of toy sales. Metal toys are second in overall sales to stuffed animal toys and are catered to boys. With 6- to 12-year-old boys underserviced in the toy industry, they looked at
what was successful - Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh! cards.

10Vox contracted with video game developers around the world, bought its China-manufactured cars from Jada Toys of California and had the trading cards made in Montreal. Reece's own kids, ages 9 and 6, have come up with ideas incorporated in the product and serve as built-in testers. The local office has 15 employees.

After 50,000 hours of game development over a year and a half, Tracksters launched in January and met with immediate success.

That month, it was named Boy's Toy of the Year in Australia.

It set sales records at an Atlanta trade show with $1.7 million in sales in five days.

The first series of cars, expected to last until August, sold out in mid-April, and 228,000 users are online.

The cars are in 3,000 retailers nationwide, including Hallmark stores, and will soon be going into Books-A-Million, FYE and airport stores.

Reece said they are expecting close to $10 million in sales this year. Webkinz did a little more than $5 million in its first year.

Trends specialist Reyne Rice of the Toy Industry Association said Tracksters are already generating a pretty good buzz, including word of mouth and online attention, because of the way it directly appeals to boys' play patterns.

It is also a bargain at a time when people are looking for long-term play value, she said.

Rice said Tracksters have also been popular with adult racing fans, with most of the adults racing online with their own children.

Reece said 28 percent of their users are older than 30. They are forming clubs of Ford guys or Chevy guys.

Chris Byrne, a regular TV commentator known as "The Toy Guy," wrote that the die-cast cars are high quality and the video game compares to console games with excellent graphics.

"This company has been flying a little bit under the radar, but we're predicting that you're going to be hearing a lot about them in very short order," he wrote.

Tracksters is 10Vox's second launch. A year ago, the company introduced KooKeys, stuffed animals that tie to an online program.

Reece said KooKeys have done better overseas, but sales were lackluster. Although the online component is different from Webkinz, with social networking and a bigger emphasis on education, he said parents don't see the difference in the store.

This summer, 10Vox will introduce a jigsaw puzzle with an online multiplayer play geared toward older women. The company also is working on a princess fairy product for girls that includes action figures and an online quest game, and a soccer toy and Web game geared toward other countries.

Reece got his start in the world of youth trends as a teenager, earning money at baseball card shows and
In college, he spent his weekends traveling the state to buy Beanie Babies at retail prices and selling them for more at The Atrium.

He bypassed a job at Ernst & Young after graduating from the University of Florida with a degree in accounting to open mall kiosks, with up to 11 at one time. He sold Razor Scooters from a kiosk at The Oaks Mall.

Reece graduated from Beanie Babies to Pokémon, eventually becoming a supplier for Blockbuster and FYE, growing that into a distributor business.

The experiences taught him a lot about what kids will buy. When it came to forming his own toy company, he brought in nine partners - 10Vox means 10 voices - to fill different roles. They include people in Gainesville with business experience, a California partner with mass retailer experience and a New York partner who deals with specialty retailers, as well as two active partners, UF business student Dean Cheshire and former UF cheerleader Darrell Bagby.

A second series of cars will come out in August, adding Japanese autos to the mix. They are adding new tracks to race on every month. And talks are under way to use likenesses of actual NASCAR tracks, as well as a Western-type track with pickup trucks and a Spider-Man vehicle and track.

With the early success and few toy makers investing in innovation, Reece likes their chances to reach 500,000 users, considered critical mass, by the fourth-quarter of the year. And that's before Christmas.

"For a Gainesville company, we've done extremely well," Reece said.