# When 3D printing is turned into kids' play: ThingMaker

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Now families, including children, can be toy makers. It is something like the 21st century version of children delighted to be pouring gelatin mix into bunny and heart shaped molds and waiting by the fridge to see their

results. Fundamentally, children like to make *things*.

Mattel in a collaboration with Autodesk is offering up a printer plus mobile app system called ThingMaker. The "things" they can make range from characters to scary creatures to jewelry and accessories ThingMaker in a sense is throwing the keys to the toy factory over to the family at the kitchen table, saying go ahead, use me, design, print, play away. To create toys, children can fire up the app on an Android or iOS device, pick a design and customize the design in terms of shape, size and color.

This is a $300 3D printer system. Is it exaggerating to say it might change the way kids play?

Lee Mathews in *Geek.com* walked readers through: "Once all the pieces are finished, they simply snap together."

There is nothing strange about the machine itself; it is a 3D printer which was designed with special care for ease of use and safety for children.

The printer door automatically locks when printing. This guards against an eager child reaching inside when the heated printer head is in motion. "When a print completes, the still-hot extruder retracts so that over-eager hands don't get burned when they reach in to grab a fresh part for a toy," said Mathews. The heated print head retracts into a recess that little hands cannot reach.

The parts were designed for easy assembly via their ball and socket joints. The system was seen at the New York Toy Fair with a range of different colors on display.

According to *Gizmodo*, "A Mattel spokesperson also said there's a good chance that the company will release different printing materials, too. One of the obvious candidates is a softer plastic which they had used to

create malleable figurine head. There is also a high probability that Mattel will include glow in the dark plastics or others that change color when exposed to UV rays."

As for the app, it is called "ThingMaker Design." ThingMaker Design is available in the App Store and Google Play. The ThingMaker Design app also works with other printers; it is available to download for iOS and Android devices. *Gizmodo* noted that the 3D modeling software "lets kids or parents render new toys straight from their tablet or smartphone" and that the app makes it easy to understand what is printed out and how it would connect to other toy parts.

The ThingMaker 3D Printer will be available fall 2016. One can do pre-orders beginning Monday on Amazon.com. The news release stated that Mattel will have a variety of filament color options available for the ThingMaker 3D Printer "with additional design content including branded options rolling out at a later date."

**More information:** thingmaker.com/printer

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