

# Recipe for Success: Mix Cereal with Novelty Toys

By BILL NEWKIRK

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — "Waaah! I want the cereal with the magic whatzis in the box!"

Ever hear a tot roar out that demand in a supermarket?

It may be murder for mother, but the younger generation's weakness for breakfast food premiums is the lifeblood of two scholarly brothers named Benjamin and Henry Hirsch.

The Hirsches, who specialize in the manufacture of cereal toys, literally sit up nights dreaming up new ones to make junior hunger for scraunchie raunchies instead of pippie wippies.

"We have to," said 52-year-old Ben, elder of the brothers by three years. "The novelty in novelty toys wears off quickly, and if you're not ready with a new one, you're dead."

## No Shortage

So far, the Hirsches show no signs of running out of ideas.

Their inventions include a "Nautilus" submarine which dives and surfaces under the power of a mysterious "atomic fuel" (baking powder) and a sailboat which glides along in a windless bathtub after "nuclear propellant" (a camphor-like substance) is dabbed on its stern.

Since all Hirsch toys currently go to a breakfast food manufacturer, buying cereal is the only way to get one.

Even with orders for toys running into the 10 millions the three-story brick building housing Hirsch Laboratories, Inc., operates as a factory for only about five months out of a year.

Then the 150 production workers go home and the Hirsches settle down with a skeleton staff to plan next season's toys.

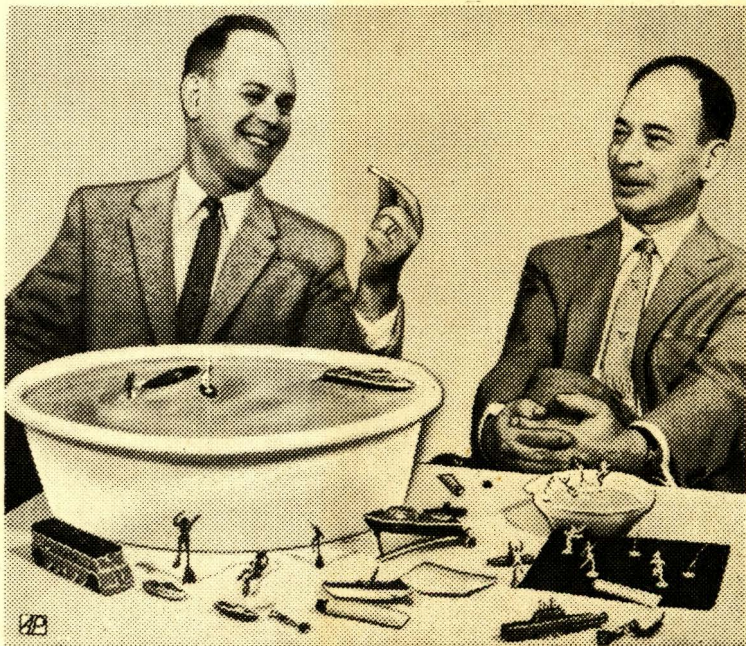
"That," said Ben, "is when our work really gets tough. We start from scratch again and hope we can come up with something in time."

## Ideal Combination

By nature, the Hirsches are ideally fitted for a team job.

Ben, a chemist, can produce an "idea a minute" and enthusiastically defends every one to the last ditch.

Henry, who as an engineer must apply the ideas to a production



INVENTIVE BROTHERS; Henry (left) and Ben Hirsch admire a plastic ice skater, one of the many toys they have produced as breakfast food premiums.

line, has developed a defense mechanism that prompts him to mutter "I doubt it" whenever Ben has a fresh brainstorm.

The brothers have worked together since their high school days when Ben invented a cream to slick down stubborn hair. That enterprise started in their mother's kitchen, graduated to the garage, and eventually took them into a profitable cosmetics business.

A fire in 1944 ruined their business. The plant rebuilt, the Hirsches spent two years in a vain effort to get back into cosmetics. Finally acknowledging failure and almost broke, they decided to take a chance on toys.

"We didn't know much about toys, but we thought they held some possibilities for a chemist and an engineer," Ben explained.

The brothers devised tiny plastic skaters which scooted around on water on camphor tablets and found willing customers in the five-and-dime stores. Within two months after the skaters went on sale the brothers had sold more than a million and paid off all their debts.

In 1955, several toys later, the Hirsches approached a breakfast

food company with a crude model of a toy submarine and made a bid for the cereal box business.

At first, the breakfast food people were dubious. But the Hirsches managed to come away with an initial order for 250,000 units of the toy, later patterned and named after the real atomic submarine, "Nautilus."

They delivered the order, and in a couple of weeks the breakfast food company was screaming for more.

## New Gimmick

The exact figures on sales of the sub and similar toys are a secret of the cereal firms. Breakfast food moguls also display all the caution of automobile tycoons in guarding the designs of new premiums and model changes.

Right now, the Hirsches are trying to develop a cheap battery whose components can be run off on a printing press. If they succeed, the battery will be used to run their next toy, which...

Oops. Uh-uh. That'll cost you a boxtop, and your kids will be sure to tell you when it's available.