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Major technology companies join forces to inspire the next generation of innovators, thinkers and engineers through the use of LEGOs.

Austin, TX – NIWeek– The X PRIZE Foundation, Google Inc., LEGO Systems, National Instruments, and Wired's GeekDad has announced "MoonBots: A Google Lunar X PRIZE LEGO MINDSTORMS Challenge" at National Instruments NIWeek 2009.

The new contest will challenge small teams comprised of children and adults to design, program, and construct robots that perform simulated lunar missions similar to those required to win the \$30 million Google Lunar X PRIZE, a private race to the Moon designed to enable commercial exploration of space while engaging the global public.

To further this purpose, the X PRIZE Foundation and Google have joined forces with three other well known technology companies to offer a competition that will stimulate learning of robotics and team building while exciting students and their families about their potential roles in the new Moon race.

"The Google Lunar X PRIZE is helping to open a new era of lunar exploration that will involve much broader participation than the first Moon race," says William Pomerantz, Senior Director for Space Prizes at the X PRIZE Foundation.

"We want students and their parents to understand that they can tackle difficult engineering problems and generate important new ideas regardless of their age or their background—and that they can have fun doing so. This contest is quite accessible for even very young children, but still demands creativity, intelligence, and hard work. It's a perfect starting point for the next generation of rocket scientists!"

Once registration for the contest opens, teams will be asked to submit designs illustrating how they will build, program and operate their robots using LEGO MINDSTORMS robotic kits. There will be no charge to enter the contest and registration will be open to teams across the globe.

The competition will encourage the participants to use free software tools such as Google's SketchUp, LEGO's Digital Designer, National Instruments LabVIEW, and Google's YouTube platform to delineate how their entry will be constructed and how their team will function.

>From these submissions, a select group will be chosen as finalists and provided with free LEGO components to construct a large Moonscape that will serve as the competition's 'playing field.' Finalists will then construct, program and demonstrate their robots to be judged.

For more than a decade, the LEGO MINDSTORMS robotics toolkits have given children of all ages the best of both the physical and virtual world, combining LEGO bricks with state-of-the-art hardware and easy-to-use programming software. LEGO MINDSTORMS empowers users to conceive, build and program robotic inventions for both play and learning purposes. In just 30 minutes, young robot creators can build and program their first working LEGO robot.

“Thanks to the many thousands of users in the LEGO MINDSTORMS community, we have an impressive track record when it comes to amazing, imaginative robotic inventions and applications,” says Steven Canvin, Marketing Manager for LEGO MINDSTORMS.

“Users have in the past decade created LEGO MINDSTORMS robots that have been into space twice, so creating the MoonBots contest together with the partners around the Google Lunar X PRIZE is a natural choice.”

“The teams of children and adults around the world will be challenged to use their imagination and problem-solving skills to develop a robot for a complex mission, and we hope that their work will encourage and inspire others to explore their creativity. The mission of the LEGO Group is to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow, and we hope that the MoonBots Challenge can be part of fulfilling that mission,” continues Canvin.

"We hope competitions like the Google Lunar X PRIZE will revolutionize space exploration, and we want everyone to be as excited about space as we are," says Tiffany Montague, Technical Program Manager of the Google Lunar X PRIZE.

"MoonBots is an important next step in this ongoing effort because it will help better our understanding of the challenges of working, and eventually living, in space. The participants in the MoonBots competition may become the future technologists and engineers that ultimately help us return the Moon - we're looking forward to seeing their work."

"Travel to the Moon holds a unique place in childrens' imaginations, and using LEGO to bring our kids' imaginations to life is one of a GeekDad's favorite pastimes." says Ken Denmead, Editor for the GeekDad blog at WIRED.

"WIRED and its GeekDad parenting blog look forward to working with our partners on the MoonBots challenge to inspire the next generation of lunar explorers to build their dreams with one hand while they reach for the stars with the other."

“Today's students are tomorrow's innovators,” says Ray Almgren, Vice President of Academic Relations at National Instruments.

“National Instruments is committed to inspiring children to develop their creativity and explore the wonders of science and engineering through hands-on experiences such as the MoonBots contest. MoonBots participants will program their robots with easy-to-use, graphical software powered by National Instruments LabVIEW – the same software used by engineers and scientists around the world for innovative applications such as testing next-generation gaming systems and creating breakthrough medical devices.”

For more information visit:

www.moonbots.org

www.googlelunarxprize.org

www.xprize.org

www.lego.com

www.Wired.com
www.ni.com/nati