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NASA Gives Pixar's WALL-E A Big Mission

BY PATRICK SEITZ
INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

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The latest computer-animated movie from Walt Disney's (DIS) Pixar studios could serve a greater purpose than entertaining the masses and generating big profits for its corporate creator.

It could help inspire a new generation of engineers and scientists.

The title character of the movie, "WALL-E," is a waste-disposal robot on Earth in the distant future. NASA and educators have teamed with Walt Disney to create educational materials and curricula around the film, which is expected to join Pixar's parade of hits such as "Toy Story" and "Finding Nemo."

"WALL-E" opened Friday.

The G-rated family film will reach young people at an impressionable age and could foster an interest in science and technology, says Wolfgang Fink, head of the Visual and Autonomous Exploration Systems Research Laboratory at the California Institute of Technology.

The character of WALL-E (short for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class) resembles robots being built today for space exploration and defense purposes. That makes it easier to show children how the movie relates to science in the real world, Fink says.

"Robots will be the next big thing to come," Fink said. "Robots are more and more

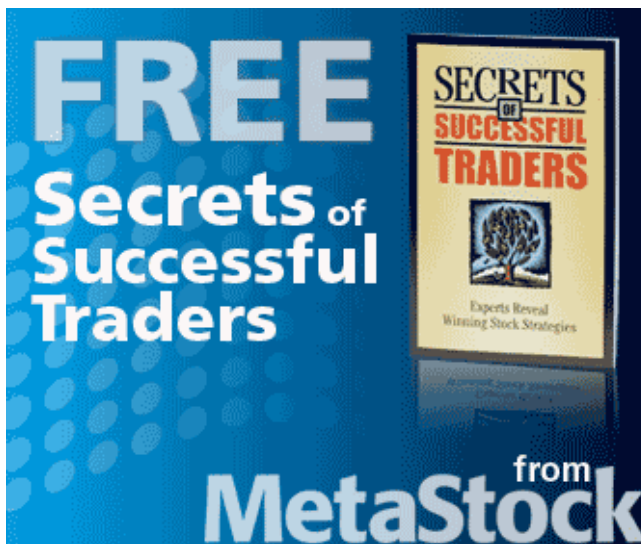
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deployed in households. Think of those vacuum-cleaner robots (the Roomba, from **iRobot** ([IRBT](#))), for example."

WALL-E also is cute and friendly, like a mix of E.T. and R2-D2, so kids will want to own one or build one themselves, Fink says.

NASA is keyed up about the potential impact of "WALL-E" on young minds. "Kids get hooked in through these exciting films," said Bert Ulrich, multimedia manager for NASA. "You're really reaching a very important segment of the population, because they're basically NASA's future."

NASA and Disney agreed to a series of educational and public outreach activities related to the film.

Disney created a 30-second public service announcement featuring WALL-E for NASA's television channels and Web site. The video is designed to draw students to NASA's Web site to explore the agency's missions.

Disney also designed promos for the movie that touch on the science and technology driving NASA programs. The promos began airing on the Disney Channel in June.

The WALL-E character also is featured on NASA's Kids' Club Web page. Plus, NASA and Disney are working on a curriculum-based education program as part of NASA's Digital Learning Network.

"For us, it's just a wonderful way to get the word out about how exciting space is, and the little rover helps," Ulrich said.

Disney stands to benefit by selling movie tickets and other tie-in products. Video game publisher **THQ** ([THQI](#)) has released "WALL-E" games for nine platforms.



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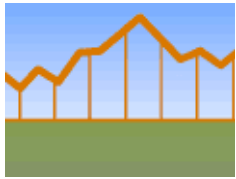
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