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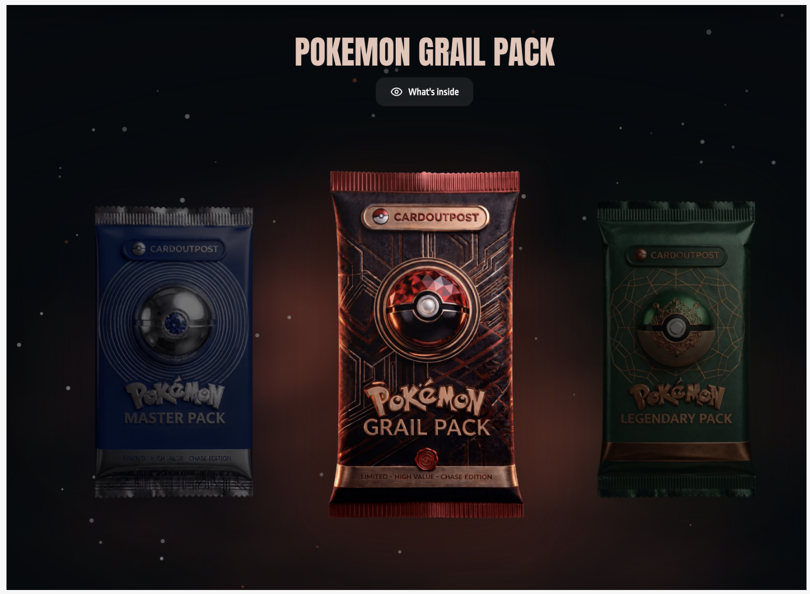
Pokémon Cards Beat the S&P 500 by Nearly 8x Over 20 Years, Card Ladder Data Shows

Card Ladder data reported by Fortune shows the average Pokémon card outrunning the S&P 500 nearly eightfold over two decades



cardoutpost

WILMINGTON, DE, UNITED STATES, August 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The average Pokémon card has gained 3,261 percent over the past 20 years, according to [Card Ladder pricing data reported by Fortune](), the largest long-term increase of any card category tracked. The same comparison puts the S&P 500's total return over those two decades at 421 percent.

Card Ladder is a pricing platform that tracks trading card sales across major marketplaces. The 20-year comparison comes from data the platform provided to Fortune for a July 2025 report by Preston Fore, which examined why Gen Z and millennial collectors increasingly treat cards as an alternative investment. In that dataset, Pokémon led every category tracked, and American football, basketball, and baseball cards also outpaced the index over the same window.

The one-year picture was steeper still. As of the July 2025 reporting, the average Pokemon card was rising at nearly 46 percent a year, a pace above the S&P 500's average annual return rate of 12 percent and ahead of prominent technology stocks over the same stretch.

A Record Sale Resets the Ceiling
The market's top end set a new benchmark this year. In February 2026, YouTuber and entrepreneur Logan Paul sold his PSA 10 Pikachu Illustrator at auction for $16,492,000 including buyer's fees, a record for the most expensive trading card ever sold, Fortune reported. Paul had purchased the card in 2022 for $5.3 million, at the time the most expensive private sale on record.

The interval between those two prices bookends a period in which trading cards moved into the same conversation as the other unconventional assets Fortune reports Gen Z investors now pursue, from cryptocurrency to designer handbags. The difference is that the card market's flagship transaction tripled in value in under four years, in public, with the sale price on the record.

Demand Moves Into Mainstream Retail

Demand signals now run well beyond auction houses. Recent reporting and company disclosures point to a category operating at retail scale:

eBay users searched "Pokemon" nearly 14,000 times per hour in 2024 (Adam Ireland, VP and GM of global collectibles at eBay, to Fortune)

The total gross value of cards sold on eBay rose for nine consecutive quarters (Fortune)

Collectibles, including trading cards, made up 29 percent of GameStop's total sales in its fiscal first quarter, surpassing video game software (GameStop)

Walmart and Target temporarily limited or paused trading card sales during the 2021 surge (Fortune, citing NBC News)

The adjacent sports card segment adds scale of its own, generating more than $1 billion in annual sales revenue according to SkyQuest Technology, and GameStop's chief executive Ryan Cohen has described trading cards as a natural extension of the retailer's existing business.

Supply is straining to keep pace. Pokemon Company International is "printing at maximum capacity" for current expansions, the company's vice president of game development, Barry Sams, told Fortune. Sams added that collectors who grew up with the franchise are now introducing it to their children, extending demand across generations rather than concentrating it in one.

The Pack-Opening Moment Moves Online

Part of the hobby's core ritual, the pack opening itself, is meanwhile shifting to digital storefronts. CardOutpost, a digital Pokémon card pack-opening platform operated by Arcade Processing LLC, lets collectors open packs online and then either request physical shipment of pulled cards, subject to availability, through a US-based warehouse or sell them back to the platform at 100 percent of displayed fair market value, minus a handling fee. Displayed values are set from third-party market data and historical sales, with the median of those prices used to keep valuations representative. Where a shipped item is a graded card, the platform fulfills it with a physical card of the same card and grade from the same grading company.

"Collectibles have earned a seat in the alternative-asset conversation, and the next phase is access," said a CardOutpost spokesperson. "People want the pack-opening moment to be as immediate as the market data they follow, without giving up the real card in hand at the end of it."

Collectors can open Pokémon packs on CardOutpost across tiers priced from $25 to $2,500 per pack, with maximum pulls ranging from $250 to $25,000.

What the Averages Do and Do Not Say

The headline figures carry documented qualifiers. Fortune notes that cards must be rare and in pristine condition to command significant profit, and financial commentators reviewing the Card Ladder comparison have pointed out that aggregate collectibles indexes are constructed from graded, high-condition sales rather than from the typical unopened pack in a closet. The 20-year number describes the tracked market's trajectory, not a guaranteed outcome for any single card.

That distinction has done little to slow the category. Two decades of pricing data, a public-record sale, and sustained retail shortages describe a collectibles market that has moved from nostalgia purchase to tracked asset class, with the index still pointing up.

About CardOutpost
Based in Wilmington, Delaware, CardOutpost is a digital Pokémon card pack-opening platform operated by Arcade Processing LLC, on a mission to bring the pack-opening moment online while delivering real, sealed cards to collectors' doors. Users purchase digital booster packs across seven price tiers, then choose between physical shipment of pulled cards through a US-based warehouse and a sell-back at displayed fair market value. Pack values are set from third-party market data and historical sales.

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