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Not-so-trivial pursuit: By offering exclusive games, Gail DeGiulio's company keeps consultants in demand.

DeGiulio approached them with the idea of using direct sales to sell games, and it clicked instantly. "On the retail shelf, regardless of what your product line is, you're competing against a bunch of other boxes," says DeGiulio. "We knew this was a product line that would benefit from being experienced in someone's home."

Though the trio thought they had a great idea, they took their time making sure they were right. They spent the beginning of 2004 researching the direct-sales industry by hiring an industry expert, attending other companies' parties and making sure they could make money for both their company and their consultants. "If you can't figure out a compensation model that works to make it worthwhile for the consultants," says Molen, "you shouldn't be in direct selling." Then, starting in summer 2004, the three partners spent six months holding parties in their homes and at their office, testing prototypes of their games, figuring out how the parties should work and making sure people would want to come back for more. Finally, in January 2005, they felt confident enough in their products and their plan to begin offering a direct-sales opportunity.

Now Bellevue, Washington-based SimplyFun offers its own line of games, puzzles, puppets and other family activities. The exclusivity of the products is essential to direct-sales success, according to Molen and DeGiulio, because the products don't have to compete with any others and the consultants don't have to compete with retail stores. "We want to make it easy for the consultants to be successful," says DeGiulio. To that end, they provide training in person, online, by video and through conference calls; choose not to charge their consultants for their website or require them to keep any inventory; and offer incentives to encourage their consultants to reach certain goals.

But they also realize that attracting and keeping consultants is about more than just money and rewards. "For your consultants to be excited and passionate about what you're doing, they have to feel attached and connected to your mission," says Molen. "Our mission is to promote play and get people to laugh, create memories and connect through face-to-face fun." Guided by that mission, they have signed more than 1,000 consultants in 45 states, and the company saw 60 percent growth last year. ■

WHAT BETTER WAY is there to really get a party going than with games? That's what the founders of SimplyFun LLC thought. But they realized the fun wasn't just in playing games at parties—it was also in selling them.

GAME PLAN

THIS COMPANY'S APPROACH TO DIRECT SALES? LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL. *By Tracy Stapp*

After working in product development and marketing for a game company, Gail DeGiulio, 49, started a consulting business to help early stage companies.

Through this business, she met Matt Molen and Jeremy Young, 33 and 35, respectively, who were importing European games into the U.S. and translating them into English, but were struggling to get their products into stores. Then