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If She Won't Go to the Party, the Party Will Come to Her

Pleasure parties, the state of the business, and the women who throw them

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Adult home parties are stepping into the limelight, and the reps may very well be the future of sex-ed, but how's business?

Business Is Going...

Well, over 25 years ago there were less than 100 pleasure party companies.

Today there are over 10,000 small to large companies and more popping up daily, says Tamara Payton Bell, president and founder of the [Home Pleasure Party Plan Association](#) (HPPPA) and owner of her own home party business. Despite this growing number, the state of the economy hasn't gone unnoticed.

"We're all going through a tough time...We do go through peaks; sometimes we're really slow. Not that we don't have business-just fluctuation," says Payton Bell. "We're all feeling the brunt of the election year."

Payton Bell also observes that "in the last years, we have seen growth in party planning...People are taking notice, manufacturers are really interested in what we do...Now we're being watched and examined by our manufacturers to create products that fit because we are an important part of adult."

Bobbi Nolan-Hill, president and CEO of the top-eight national party company [Pajama Parties](#), adds, "People don't have the money to go out and spend it on dinner and movies, but they're still at home having sex, and they are still having parties. Sex is always going sell."

In a long-term sense, the business is growing. For example, [Athena's Home Novelties](#), now a mid-size company found in 32 states, but mainly in New England, has grown from about 140

reps, called "goddesses," to about 1,000 in the past five years, following a complete update of the company's image and the technologies used.

However, Craig Jolicoeur, Athena's director of marketing, expresses a seemingly nascent threat: "We have a running joke: The day Walmart starts selling vibes is the day we're out of business because their buying volume allows them to price lower. Do I ever think that some of the more risqué products will turn up on a CVS counter? Well, no. But I never thought I'd see the Trojan Vibrating Finger on the counter, either."

...Up

The mainstreaming of adult toys is contributing to the increased interest in home parties, according to representatives from small and large companies such as San Francisco Bay Area's Isles of Paradise and also Pajama Parties. These companies do not feel like they were losing business to brick-and-mortar retailers because of this mainstreaming. Quite the contrary.

"Women are not likely to go into stores because it's not how they have been marketed: 'the store women don't go into because there was creepy guy there...,'" says Nolan-Hill. "The home party experience is 'safe.'...Women want to know more about it [adult novelties]. There is a demand for more distributors, more advisors."

Aside from providing a comfortable shopping experience for women, Leslie Shwartzner, national sales manager for the distributor [Holiday Products](#), notes, "Sometimes products don't work in a brick-and-mortar store or on the internet. These are the 'touch, taste, or feel' products. For example, massage mitts...Stuff like this explodes at a home party."

The home party market caters to women and couples, but aims to have something for everyone. Jolicoeur says his target demographic is "females 18 to 100, but mainly it's females 22 to 45." Jolicoeur adds, "We've developed our line to have something for everyone: a candle for grandma, a massage book for mother, and a vibe for daughter. Anyone who shows up will find something."

And for women who fear they'll end up beholden to their Rabbit, like Miranda in *Sex and the City*, or men who are afraid of being "replaced," a recurring sentiment in the business is that the products are enhancements, not replacements. (Which perhaps accounts for Athena reps selling thousands of Ruby Ring cock rings per week.)

Not to mention, anyone who takes a product home will know how to use it. Of course, retailers who put a premium on having their sales associates double as educators deserve all the kudos they can get. However, the consensus of party hosts is that they offer a unique educational and bonding experience not found in stores.

Novelties Sales and Sex Ed Go Hand in Hand

Consistent factors of pleasure parties are that they are private parties with friends and acquaintances where women are allowed to be curious and are ready to be educated in a home environment without judgment. Reps are trained to explain all about the product and its uses. But who are these women?

"Intelligent, empowered women do this. These women have the opportunity to educate, the time and capacity to educate people. I really believe these girls are the sex educators of the future," Shwartzner says.

Nolan-Hill says, "We're finding different types of women want to sell. One of our top reps is a microbiologist. It's not just college students wanting to make extra money. Career women want to do it to earn vacation money or to help others-it goes hand in hand with the mainstreaming of things. Now women are more empowered about their sexuality than before."

The parties are generally for women and by women. But, for example, Isles of Paradise's Jacobs has done coed parties at colleges and couples parties. Also the HPPPA's Payton-Bell aims to work more across cultures. As part of this broader reach, she works with a gay black men's organization in Sacramento County-the organization brings the topic of discussion to the meeting; she brings the party.

Relationship building and pole-dancing are also making themselves at home at pleasure parties. Michelle Micola, owner of [Oh, You Naughty Ladies Pleasure Parties](#), already understands the role of her reps as "relationship enhancement specialists," but [Dr. Ava Cadell](#) is making her own name as a Loveologist in this market. Knowledge gained from her online Love University, culminating in the student becoming a certified Love Coach in intimacy and sexuality-related topics, is being incorporated into home parties. Donna Jacobs says she is taking these courses to "revamp" her home parties and help women "get really into it."

"I want to take it [parties] to another level, to make it more of an education-type meeting: talk about relationships, what may work for you and your mate, learn how to give a blowjob, or know how to be intimate," she explains. "Multi-faceted parties are the way of the future."

Micola adds, explaining the draw of Cadell's courses, "My favorite part is educating in a fun way. Not like in a classroom, but in a fun party atmosphere. If they have an issue, we can help them find the right toy for them or their husband. I hear so often about women not having an orgasm, asking how to find the G-spot, how to teach their husband's to stimulate them. I get these questions all the time. I really feel like I earn their trust."

Pole-dancing is another way to put the "vamp" in revamping parties. As Miyoko Fujimori, creative director of [Party Gals](#), saw when she taught pole-dancing to reality TV show star Denise Richards and friends, after women see their friends trying new things, they open up too.

"If it's about women coming together and having fun, feeling flirty, and sexual, lots of women come out of their shells when they see their friends doing it," she said. But she cites a strong product base as key to a successful home party.

"The product is constantly changing, but also women have a need to get together and commune. There will always be a reason to get your girlfriends together. The competition is what needs to be addressed: picking up the product line, staying up with the styles and the time in order to keep clients," she adds.

The Look of the New

"Keeping up with the styles and times" is what Fujimori has been helping Party Gals do. She re-branded their image-for the first time in the company's 15 years.

"It was time for a fresh look. With all new home party companies, it's important to make sure that you've got a cutting edge product appealing to the masses," Fujimori explains. "The look is very hip, funky, stylish and eclectic. Something that goes from urban to rural areas."

Like Fujimori, several others mentioned what we can call a "kid factor." As in, "Can I leave this product out in the open?" For this reason and also to suit the diverse representatives, Holiday Products prints a generic catalogue.

"We do a woman-friendly generic catalogue so the home party girl can carry it with her...It's for mid-level people who are not ready to print their own catalogue. And also so people don't have a truckload of product that doesn't sell well, like harnesses. But the catalogue allows the option to take orders for that," Shwartzner says.

In a similar vein, companies large enough to do private label items, like Athena, tailor their packaging to suit the female sensibility and solidify their brand image.

Repping for Sex

There are three tiers of party companies, says Payton Bell of the HPPPA: small, medium, and large. Large companies are extensive multi-level marketing organizations (and often do private labeling); Payton Bell cited Party Gals and Pajama Parties as large. Medium-sized companies, like Athena, may do private labeling and, as per Jolicoeur, pride themselves in being able to give highly personal support to their representatives. Small companies, like Isles of Paradise and Giggles and Moans, often are women who have broken off from larger companies, wanting to strike out on their own.

To become a rep, Fujimori says, "There's lots of competition with buying discounts and benefits. Regardless, you need to be happy where you are and feel supported. Companies can promise anything, but are you able to be successful within their infrastructure?...Unless [representatives]

really connect with people, they're not going to be successful, that trickles down from the top to the bottom."

Fujimori adds: "Providing training and support, implementing technology that gives distributors the ability to connect online and do teleconferences."

Most companies offer training and support for their reps. Pajama Parties, for example, provides an "hour to an hour and a half" of orientation training, a 150-page manual, a *Sex Sells* guide book that the CEO wrote, a monthly orientation, video and training sessions on their website, and weekly customer service calls to check in with the reps, establish goals, sort out dilemmas, and address needs.

Jolicoeur of Athena feels his company provides the most comprehensive training for new associates. "We have a mandatory two-day training seminar. One day is based solely on product: their uses, the terminology. The other is based on how to run your own business. A lot of people who join direct sales don't have a business background. We give them as much information as we possibly can."

Like the flow of their catalogue, Athena suggests easing in party-goers: starting with spa products and working up to dildos, assessing the comfort levels of the room during that time. Athena also has a 24-hour support line, a message board with sales tips and party tips. They also offer a better business workshop at the home office that can be viewed online.

Jolicoeur concludes, "One thing we always say: 'You're in business for yourself, not by yourself.'"