

PARTY ON!

Millions of women are weathering the still-tough economy by earning extra cash through direct sales—supplementing a salary that just doesn't cover everything or replacing one that vanished. Innovative options include power tools, home decor items, even professionally fitted bras. These moms are all making a home-party business work for them. *By Ellen Parlapiano*



Annual earnings in the six figures started with Ginny just wanting to earn some free jewelry.

meet

GINNY FISCELLA, 47

Mom of two, ages 15 and 12
Lives in Overland Park, Kansas

PRODUCT Silpada jewelry (silpada.com)

STARTED 1999

WORKS 4 days and 2 nights a week

MANAGES 2,000

EARNs Over \$200,000 per year

It's a typical workday in the Fiscella home: Ginny, leader of Silpada jewelry company's top sales force, makes phone calls in her home office, while husband Doug handles her administrative tasks from his laptop in the kitchen. The arrangement gives him time with daughters Caroline and Molly and frees Ginny to focus on what she does best—selling, recruiting, and motivating her team.

BACKSTORY In 1999 Ginny left her full-time job in hospice management when the family moved from Arizona to Kansas so that Doug could take a new job. Bored one afternoon, she browsed through a Silpada catalog that

belonged to her sister-in-law. "Halfway through, I already had a \$350 wish list," she says. So Ginny decided to become a rep to earn some free bling and hopefully make friends. She took \$1,000 from savings to purchase display jewelry, conservatively calculating that she'd need 12 parties to replenish the account. Her first party yielded \$1,500 in sales, \$450 each in commission and free jewelry, and 6 more bookings. Doug said, "Something tells me we've got a good thing going here."

THEN WHAT? Within a year and a half, Ginny was earning \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month, doing two to three parties a week. However, not wanting to seem pushy, she wasn't recruiting her hostesses to sell. After her best friend signed up as a rep, and found she could finally afford to cover all her kids' sports activities, she told Ginny, "Shame on you for keeping this to yourself." That's when Ginny started recruiting anywhere and

everywhere: at the supermarket, on vacation, even in restaurants. (When a fellow diner complimented her bracelets, Ginny gave them to her, along with an info kit. The woman became a rep a few weeks later.) By 2005, Ginny was making six figures annually from three parties a week and commissions on her team's sales. Meanwhile, Doug had changed jobs and was miserable. He

decided to quit so Ginny could expand her business even more. His handling of car pools and homework has enabled her to achieve \$1 million in cumulative retail sales and become the family's main breadwinner. Ginny admits initially feeling guilty about delegating "mom" tasks to Doug. "But I feel much more fulfilled now," says Ginny, "which is better for all of us."

➤ WHERE TO START ➤

The Internet is an awesome resource for info and advice from experienced sellers. Check out directselling411.com, directsaleshelpers.com and directsalestalk.com. When you've chosen a company, you'll need to buy a start-up kit so you have supplies for your first wave of get-togethers. Plan your first party in your home, then ask friends to host in theirs. They snag freebies while you work the crowd and reap commission, usually around 25% on whatever is purchased, plus extra rewards for meeting sales quotas. Once you're really moving and grooving, recruit new consultants, known as your downline. You earn anywhere from 2% to 5% on what they sell. As sales grow, you rise in rank and earnings.



A desire to empower teens fueled Nakia to start a mentorship program linked with direct sales.

meet

NAKIA EVANS, 35

Mom of three, ages 18 and 16 (twins)
Lives in Baltimore, Maryland

PRODUCT Soul Purpose body care
(soulpurpose.com)

STARTED April 2009

WORKS Around 35 hours per week

MANAGES 257

EARNs Around \$40,000 per year

All it took was a few minutes of soaking her feet at a cousin's spa party for Nakia to fall in love with Soul Purpose all-natural scrubs. She started selling on nights and weekends to supplement what she earned as a full-time commercial property manager and subsidize her children's school trips, extracurriculars and proms. As she grew her team (which includes her mom and husband Robert, 39), she realized this was a great opportunity for teens too. "They always need money but have limited time to work," she says. Her son,

SOLID PROSPECTS

Yeah, these companies have been around awhile—because they have top-quality products that keep customers coming back. Check them out if you haven't lately to see their updated 2011 style.

Makeup **Mary Kay**, marykay.com
 Kitchen storage **Tupperware**,
tupperware.com
 Women's clothing **Carlisle**,
carlislecollection.com

James, 18, had already made some sales to friends and teachers. But Nakia envisioned a formal entrepreneurship program, with training and mentoring from seasoned sellers, teaching teens how to grow businesses that fit around schoolwork and activities.

BACKSTORY Nakia drafted a proposal for her Essential Soul Purpose Youth (ESPY) mentoring program, for ages 14 to 17, and pitched it to company CEO Nadine Thompson, who loved the idea. Nakia found 15 interested teens through her kids and sales force. They kicked off with a fashion show fundraiser in February 2011, with aspiring entrepreneurs modeling Soul Purpose makeup and clothes from local boutiques, to build buzz and recruit community mentors.

THEN WHAT? After training, teens consult with their mentors for a year, corresponding twice a month. "It's not just about business," says Nakia. "They cultivate life skills like goal-setting, decision-making and money management." The objectives mesh perfectly with the company's mission to empower women of color, and Soul Purpose is rolling out the ESPY mentoring program nationwide. "This prepares teens for the future," Nakia says. "I was a teen mom who struggled at times to make ends meet. I believe in teaching kids how to become financially independent."



A bra that fits perfectly can instantly make a woman look like she lost 10 pounds, says Carrie.

meet

CARRIE STEUER, 39

Mom of two, ages 10 and 7
 Lives in Chicago, Illinois

PRODUCT Essential Bodywear
 (myessentialbodywear.com/breastfriend)

STARTED March 2005

WORKS 25 to 35 hours a week

MANAGES 130

EARNES \$69,000 per year

Five years after leaving corporate America to be a full-time mom, Carrie started selling specialty foods to try to earn money to buy a new car. Her exhibit at a women's expo had basically zero foot traffic, but she noticed a booth with bras was packed. "The rep offered to fit me, and when I came out of the dressing room and checked the mirror, I looked like I had lost 10 pounds," says Carrie. "Who doesn't love that?"

BACKSTORY To earn a free bra, she volunteered to host a party. But before it rolled around, she'd researched the company and signed on as a consultant. "I couldn't stop talking about that bra," she says. "Being passionate about the product is key to success in direct

sales." Fourteen friends attended her first event, learning about common problems like too much cleavage and nipple show-through. Then each got measured, privately, for a bra to suit her body type. "The transformations were amazing," says Carrie. "They stood taller and more confidently." She sold a lot that night, and asked those friends to have parties. "Try to book as many as you can in the first month to build momentum," she recommends.

THEN WHAT? Carrie recruits new hostesses and consultants at every event and saves customers' sizes for easy reordering. She now works three nights a week, typically two at parties and one on coaching calls, encouraging her team to set tangible personal earning goals. Her own income goes toward her mortgage, saving for her kids' college tuitions and charitable donations. "It helps to sell something that every woman needs," Carrie says. "Bra measurement is a dying art." One customer was so thankful to find a good-fitting bra that she bought six. "I never really thought of myself as a salesperson, but magic happens when you find a product you completely believe in."

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OR



B

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(thehappygardener.info)
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Dove Chocolate Discoveries
(dove-chocolate-discoveries.com)
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Vault Denim (vaultdenim.com)
Designer jeans at discount prices to take home on the spot.

Mark (meetmark.com) Avon's cool little sister, a favorite with style-conscious college students.

meet

LEAH ADAMS, 30

Mom of three, ages 10, 6 and 4
Lives in Denver, Colorado

PRODUCT Celebrating Home tableware and decor
(celebratinghome.com)

STARTED January 2010

WORKS About 15 hours a week

MANAGES 7

EARNS About \$15,000 per year

Moving is a way of life when your spouse is in the Air Force—and makes it tough to hold down a regular job. “Who knows where the military will send us next,” says Leah. “Now I can work wherever we go.”

BACKSTORY Leah discovered Celebrating Home at a school PTO event, while living on Grand Forks Air Force base in North Dakota. Having just finished chemo for cervical cancer (she's in remission now), she hosted a party for fun. While it was winding down, her husband, David, 32, came in from his second job and said, “You could sell that stuff.” Leah laughed it off, but David encouraged her to try. “He felt I needed something positive after being so sick,” she says. When offered a

start-up kit for half price as part of a special promotion, Leah bought in and lined up events with friends on the base, showing how to cook quick meals and set beautiful tables with the stoneware.

THEN WHAT? Within three months she'd earned enough so David could quit his second job. After the military relocated them to Denver, Lisa was fortunate to meet more potential reps while selling at a local crafts show and learn marketing tricks at the company's training conference. But a few months later, David was deployed to Afghanistan. While he was gone, Leah and the boys lived in Pennsylvania with his parents. Her mother-in-law connected her with possible hosts, and her eldest son, Luke, loaded the car before events. Even David pitched in, posting specials to his Facebook page. “This business provided a needed distraction,” says Leah. “It helped me and the kids forget, even if for a few hours, how much we missed Dad.” When David's tour of duty ended safely in June, the family celebrated with a beach vacation in Sea Isle City, New Jersey, thanks to Leah's earnings. Now back in Denver, Leah has sales reps in three states and a growing team. ●