

Girl Games

Ever heard of a grandma who plays computer games?

Megan Gaiser has. In fact, she knows mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters who do it, too. The key, Gaiser says, is all in the game design.

As CEO of Her Interactive Inc. (www.herinteractive.com), Gaiser works hard to dispel the myth that video games are just for male players. Now in its eighth year of operation, her Bellevue, Washington-based company sells digital entertainment to an audience that the gaming establishment once claimed was nonexistent.

"We were told girls didn't like computer games," Gaiser says. "We knew that was bogus. They never even asked girls what they wanted."

Her Interactive has managed to build its computer software legacy by listening to girls who asked for games that challenge the intellect. The company has answered these requests with a series of 10 Nancy Drew mystery games that has sold more than 1.25 million units since 2000.

These games emphasize strong characters, vibrant settings and well-crafted story lines. For example, the latest release, *Nancy Drew: Danger on Deception Island*, is set on an island based on Washington's San Juan Islands, and features a colorful cast of characters who are working to solve a mystery involving a treasure-diving orca.

With more than 25,000 users registered on its message-board community and with eight of the current titles on the list of 100 top-selling computer games, it's hard to believe that

the company once struggled to find a publisher who believed there was a market for such games.

But that was the position Her Interactive found itself in when it completed its breakthrough Nancy Drew game in 2000.

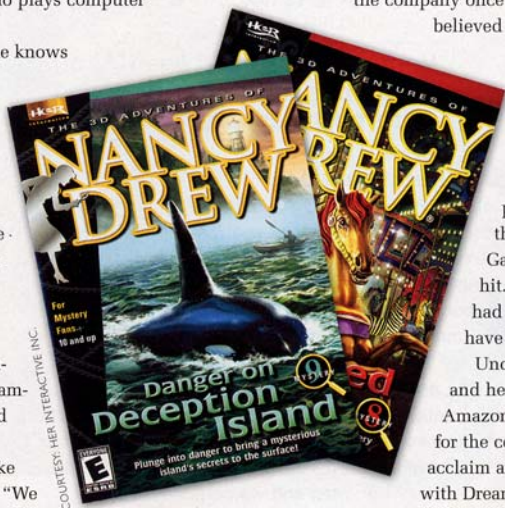
"We knocked on every possible publisher's door, and not one of them would put it on the shelf," Gaiser says. "But we knew we had a hit. We also knew that if that game had been a game for boys, it would have been on the shelf."

Undeterred by the rejection, Gaiser and her team chose to launch the title via Amazon.com instead. It didn't take long for the company to rack up sales, critical acclaim and, best of all, a publishing deal with Dreamcatcher.

Since that time, the company has continued to thrive despite being in an industry that has suffered in the past few years. In the past year alone, this privately held business has increased its number of employees from 15 to 24. And it has made a profit when others have not, not only because of the increasing fan base with each subsequent release, but also because of the sustained selling power of older titles.

Gaiser attributes much of the success to her talented team, which had confidence that there were plenty of potential female gamers out there. She also notes that Nancy Drew is a great character for a girl's game.

And what about the naysayers? Well, they've changed their tune. Says Gaiser, "Now those same publishers who rejected us are calling us frantically to ask how to make games for girls. They're convinced." —*Ericka Chickowski*



COURTESY: HER INTERACTIVE INC.



THE EARLY YEARS OF THE BEATLES are explored in "The Beatles! Backstage and Behind the Scenes," a fine art photography exhibition drawn from images by LIFE photographer Bill Eppridge and from CBS television archives. Seventy-one never-before-published images of the Beatles capture the excitement that swept over North America in 1964 as the Beatles won new audiences and revolutionized rock music during their 20-city U.S. tour. The exhibit is on display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., through at least June 2004. For more information, call 202-357-2700, or visit www.smithsonian.org.

—Leslie Forsberg

Alaska Airlines®

December 2003

PACIFIC PARADISE

Exploring Mexico's
coastal treasures

