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**I F YOU BELIEVE** there's nothing like playing a competitive round of Monopoly, you have fond memories of guessing the murderer in Clue, and your mind spins wildly with ideas for the next generation of board games, game manufacturing could be for you.

In fact, you might already have an idea for a game that could be the next big thing. But before you have 1,000 copies printed, do some serious play testing—and not just with family and friends. “There’s more to it than creating a game and getting it published,” says John Kaufeld, communications manager with the Game Manufacturers Association. “If you’re going to [start] a serious game company, [you also need to think about] what your *next* game will be.”

So if you’re hopping into the market right now, take note of a few trends that are shaping the board-game universe. According to Kaufeld, European-style game playing, in which a greater focus is placed on a player’s choices and strategy as opposed to just a lucky roll of the dice, will influence the mass game market over the next few years.

The industry is also seeing a rise in family-oriented games. SimplyFun LLC, a game development and distribution company in Bellevue, Washington, is on top of that trend—just ask co-founders Gail DeGiulio, 47, Matt Molen, 32, and Jeremy Young, 33, to describe the popularity of their family games, which include Liebrary (a storytelling game created by actress Daryl Hannah), Linkity

(a word-association game) and Walk the Dogs (where players collect dog figurines while hiding from the dogcatcher). Starting their business in spring 2004, this entrepreneurial trio shared a background in the game industry and a passion for emphasizing game play and family fun time.

To market its products, SimplyFun uses in-home parties and has more than 500 independent consultants nationwide. The idea hit DeGiulio as she left a scrapbooking party. “I thought, ‘This is a great way to learn how to play games,’” she recalls. And the idea has worked

for SimplyFun—2005 sales exceeded \$1 million, and the company expects to double that in 2006.

For other entrepreneurs interested in jumping into the game, check out the Game Manufacturers Association ([www.gama.org](http://www.gama.org)) and The Game Publishers Association ([www.thegpa.org](http://www.thegpa.org)). Research is key if you want to make a dent in the retail market, so be sure to attend industry trade shows like the GAMA Trade Show (held annually in March) and the Origins International Game Expo (in June)—see [www.gama.org/shows](http://www.gama.org/shows) for more information. And for more industry-specific information, read *The Toy and Game Inventor’s Handbook* by Richard C. Levy and Ronald O. Weingartner.

## GAME PLAN

BEFORE YOU ROLL THE DICE IN THE BOARD-GAME MARKET, LEARN SOME KEY RULES. **By Nichole L. Torres**



### Family values:

Jeremy Young, Gail DeGiulio and Matt Molen (l. to r.) found their niche with family games.