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Celebrating Home Birthing a New Business

When Home & Garden Party acquired the assets of failing company Home Interiors, it became direct selling's Cirque du Soleil, performing amazing feats of energy, skill and creativity that most companies wouldn't even attempt. The industry watched as, in a few short weeks, it birthed Celebrating Home.

The new company was far more than a new name.

"We actively think of it as a new company because we made such widespread change," says President Heather Chastain. "All the experts would tell us we couldn't do all that at once, but because we did change so much, I think we actually tipped the fulcrum the other way and did things we might not be able to do otherwise. We pushed past the point of discomfort about change. No one is working under the old compensation plan or party format or collateral or even the old order-entry system. Everything is new to everyone, so the whole company seems new."

She says that the key has been clarity of vision and the ability to articulate it to everyone involved with the change—the internal staff, field leaders, and the numerous consultants that helped guide and support the process.

"You execute by getting everything together, communicating the vision very clearly and working really, really, really hard. And don't sleep very much! It truly is a lot of work," she says. "But you can't drag it out. The field cannot deal with uncertainty."

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

The key was communication with the field salesforce, which the company calls designers. Celebrating Home's management recognized that numerous emotions were in play—confusion, resentment, uncertainty, even a lack of trust—because Home Interiors had declared bankruptcy. They needed to send a strong message to the Home & Garden Party field that there was great value in Home Interiors. Likewise, the Home Interiors consultants needed to embrace the new company as their home instead of seeking an alternative. How to make that happen? Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Celebrating Home used multiple media to deliver the message, and also to listen to designers. Blogs, video, conference calls, personalized communications, and lots of face-to-face discussions.

“We held a big meeting for leadership teams to come together and meet each other in Dallas. At one of those sessions, I stood onstage for three and half hours answering tough questions. There was resentment, confusion, all the emotions you'd expect,” Chastain explains. “You have to be confident enough to stand up and take it head-on. But it helped us make better decisions because we knew that every decision we made would be onstage to be scrutinized.”

Communication is still continuing, but the pace is slowing gradually. For example, initially, Chastain wrote her blog daily. Now she does it every three or four days.

Celebrating Culture

The merger made clear sense. Both companies sold home-decorating and entertaining items, and both were party plan companies. But, more important, they had similar cultures. Celebrating Home confirmed the match by working with ReThink, a consulting company that helped identify the two companies' shared values and strengths and pull the best of each company together into the new culture of Celebrating Home.

“We needed to answer the questions, What do people think now, and what do we want them to think after we launch the new company? We let those answers drive the branding,” explains David Singer, ReThink Companies Creative Imagineer. “It was really

a blessing that there was not a single strength that one company had that the other either didn't have or wasn't striving to achieve. They had the same core beliefs.”

Each company was based on a proud Christian foundation, and each was public about putting God first in how they lead the business. The driving force behind each company went far beyond selling home-decorating products. It was really about making a home a haven. Those key principles have eased the transition from two established companies—one 52 years old and the other 12—into a brand-new company.

Singer says, “That gave us the opportunity to take the best of both worlds and start over with a new company that is modern and up-to-date and takes advantage of the best compensation plans, the best hostess plans, the best of every aspect of their business.”

Chastain reports that the transition is going well. Designer retention is three to four times as high as she had hoped, and she's also pleased with the number of parties being held. Recruiting lags a little, but she believes that as designer comfort in the new company increases, they'll gain the confidence to offer the opportunity more often.

“We have to be patient with our field as they're learning and understanding something new,” she says. “They have to go through that process before they can share it with someone else. I think we'll have a strong summer because our field is now getting comfortable with the story, our new systems and our compensation plan—all those things that lead them to feeling confident and feeling good about what they're doing.”

Meanwhile, Celebrating Home gets to reap the excitement and enthusiasm of a startup while leveraging the foundation of two well-established companies.

About *Celebrating Home*

Celebrating Home, headquartered in Marshall, Texas, offers high-quality products to decorate and enliven homes, including stoneware pottery, candles, wall décor, gourmet food mixes, dining and entertainment pieces and accessories for your home and garden. *Celebrating Home* enables thousands of women across the United States to earn extra income, have fun and make friends while working from home as Designers.

Additional information about *Celebrating Home* products or business opportunities is available via the company web site at www.celebratinghome.com or by contacting Sue Kiple, director of marketing and promotions at (903) 935-4197 x1810 or skiple@celebratinghome.com