

Not all fun and games

*Marketer turns ideas,
toys into profits*

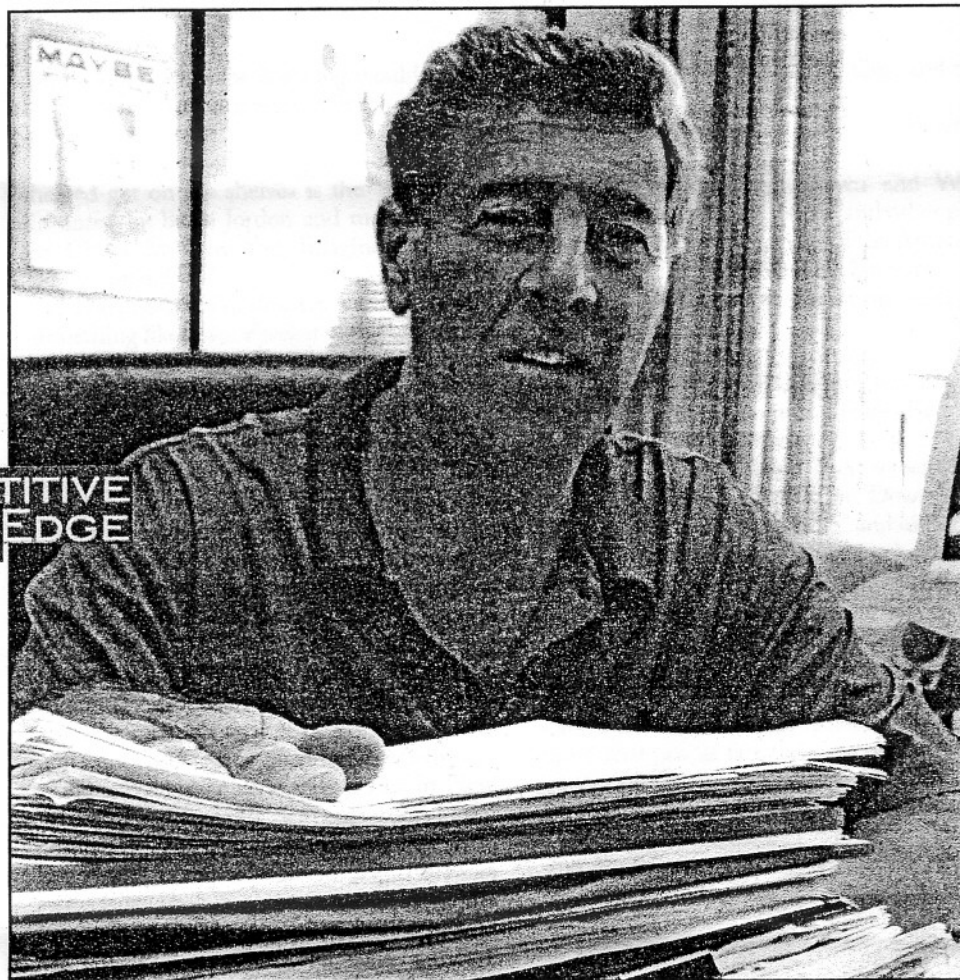
BY DAVID J. GLENN

Let's say you've thought of a great idea for a new action figure. You'd like to get it to market, but you don't really know how to go about it. After all, you think, how could you get anyone to be interested in your creation when the major toy companies have teams of researchers coming up with new ways to entice kids and draw money from their parents' wallets?

Actually, you should think again. The big toy corporations depend on private inventors — all the toy sensations, from the still-alive-and-kicking Barbie to the all-but-forgotten Cabbage Patch dolls, originated with individuals. The companies simply buy the rights to the toy and pay royalties to the creator.

This is where Gary Ahlert comes in. He founded Creative Group Marketing (CGM) in Stamford in the early 1990s, and has presented thousands of product ideas, mainly toys, to manufacturers, succeeding in getting some 40 items licensed each year. "Most people don't realize that the majority of all toy and game ideas come from private individuals," he said.

The key to the growth of Creative
See: Fun, page 8



**COMPETITIVE
Creative Group
Marketing**
EDGE

Gary Ahlert, founder of Creative Group Marketing in Stamford, says he has received many entries for his recently launched "Toy Search America 2003," an idea basket for new toys.

COMPETITIVE Creative Group Marketing EDGE

Fun: Continued from page 1

Group Marketing, Ahlert said, is selectivity. "We turn down 80 to 90 percent of the products we see," he said. If he or his associates don't believe the prototype has much of a chance to reach store shelves, the company just won't agree to try to get it licensed.

This is quite unlike the practice of the many companies that advertise on the Internet or run late-night infomercials, asking in one way or another, "Are you an inventor, or do you have an idea for an existing product?"

These outfits promise to market the product — for a fee of up to several thousand dollars. "I'd be surprised if one-tenth of one percent of the products submitted to these companies ever get licensed," Ahlert said.

His company, by contrast, relies primarily on royalties for its revenues. Ahlert will sometimes charge a retaining fee, depending on the

product and what the licensing would entail, "but our key source of revenue is the royalties" if the product gets licensed, he said.

A popular toy that CGM most recently helped get on the shelves is the "Airzooka," invented by Brian Jordon and manufactured in China by Can You Imagine based in Chatsworth, Calif.

The plastic cylindrical toy — which looks something like a wastebasket with a trigger — shoots a blast of air. The package tells "KIDZ" that they can "blast your family and friends — or try some indoor target practice!" Airzooka is "fun for GROWN-UPZ," too, who can "blast your grumpy old boss — or that pesky co-worker!"

Amid all these fighting words — including the boast that Airzooka "blows 'em away!" — is a statement that the toy "blasts a harmless ball of air up to 20 feet!"

Ahlert recently launched "Toy Search America 2003," encouraging inventors to submit their ideas for toys, games or baby products to CGM without the usual submission fees. CGM will then choose which toys to introduce at the annual Toy Fair in New York City next month. For more information on the toy search, call (800)-678-8972.

Ahlert, 58, who lives in Rye, N.Y., is proud that he is the third generation in "a

family that has been in music, films and theater for over 70 years."

His grandfather, Fred, was a songwriter in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, composing "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter," "I'll Get By" and other popular songs. He was president of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers and drafted licensing rules for musical performances.

Ahlert's father, Richard, was on ASCAP's board of review and was a composer for Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Johnny Mathis and others.

Ahlert's sister, Eve, is a screenwriter whose most recent credits are "Down With Love" and "Legally Blonde II," and his brother, Arnold, writes commercials, including the "Let me get my Hanes on you" campaign.

Ahlert is also the co-author of "Selling Your Idea or Invention" and other such books.

He stresses that he understands firsthand the "difficulties, hardships and frustrations" that people face trying to market a new idea or product, especially in a field that is "fraught with fraud and scam operations."

There's a real need, he said, for a business that can "legitimately assist inventors in the licensing of their products."