

The Heart of Direct Selling: The Home

by Barbara Seale
& John Fleming

What's the ideal home-based business? More than 16 million Americans think it's direct selling.

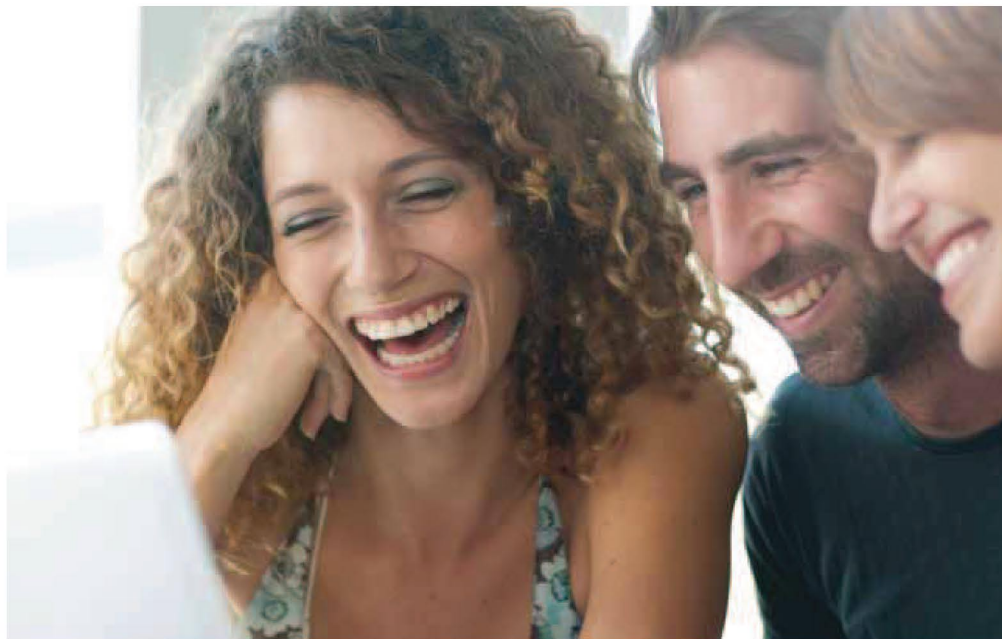
They represent one of the hundreds of U.S. direct selling businesses, and together they generated \$28.3 billion in annual sales last year. While a few direct sellers work at their businesses full time, about 90 percent work part time to supplement their income. Some 80 percent of direct sellers are women, and almost all say they appreciate the schedule flexibility and low cost of starting their business. Customized technology lets them make their business portable and convenient. They can show high-quality products or share their business opportunity at a home party, but it's just as easy to do at a coffee shop or restaurant.

Direct selling companies, sometimes referred to as network marketing companies, are gaining the attention of some of the world's foremost financial experts, including Suze Orman, noted author, television personality and consultant to Avon Products Inc.; Robert Kiyosaki, best-selling author of the *Rich Dad Poor Dad* series, who has sold more books on financial guidance than any author in history; and David Bach, *New York Times* best-selling author, to name just a few. All have responded positively to the significance of the direct selling business model.

"The beauty of the direct selling business opportunity is that it's all done for you," Bach says. "There isn't any real startup time. You don't have to create a business plan. You don't have to create a product. The only thing you need to do is find a reputable company—one that you can trust—that offers a product or service that you believe in and can get passionate about."

A Growing Trend

What is most appealing about becoming a direct seller is that anyone can do it. Today's technology offers many viable options for working from home, not to mention the comfort and enjoyment of not having to go to a place of employment at a certain time each day. The essential activities related to building the business are usually conducted in the home. The party plan approach to selling is found to be very easy to learn—and to enjoy. Meeting prospective customers and potential direct sellers at a coffee shop is far more relaxing than the traditional business conference room.



As the ultimate equal-opportunity solution, a direct selling home-based business may represent the purest form of equality through free enterprise. That's one of the most striking aspects of direct selling as a business model: It involves men and women from all walks of life, all ages, and all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. According to the Direct Selling Association, the industry's trade organization, 24 percent of direct sellers have a high school diploma or less education; however, 35 percent are college graduates and 1 in 12 has a postgraduate degree. These statistics are expected to possibly change dramatically as technology redefines the way direct sellers conduct their businesses and more and more Americans look for easier ways to attempt entrepreneurship by starting their own business.

The Primary Benefit: Work-Life Balance

A home-based business is a valuable asset when it is developed successfully. Since there is no commute to work, one's business can be managed to accommodate one's working hours, family life and personal interests. This is one of the

primary benefits that have historically attracted women to the business model. Today, there are millions of men and women who seek a business opportunity that offers the ultimate work-life balancing potential.

Around the world, millions of families use earnings from their direct selling businesses to make their monthly car or mortgage payments, take family vacations, send their children to private schools or purchase a few luxuries. For these individuals, the money earned each month, regardless of the amount, makes a big difference. And the big benefit? It's that they are doing it on their terms and in accordance to the time they are willing to invest.

The Benefit of Owning Your Own Business

Some direct sellers and network marketers (all are independent business owners) choose to view their business as an opportunity with unlimited earning potential. They realize they can increase their chances of achieving financial freedom by building a strong business. This requires time and energy to attract customers, sell their products and build a sales organization of others who

are recruited, coached and supported in their efforts to also build successful businesses. By treating the opportunity as a true business, these direct sellers have the potential to earn significant profits from their investment of time.

The Benefit of Personal Development

Personal development is a phrase often used when direct selling companies describe the benefits associated with the training they offer. Direct sellers tend to rave about the support they receive regardless of whether they are in the business for a new lifetime career or just a few months to earn some needed extra income. Some have been known to report that as a result of the training offered by the direct selling company they chose—usually offered free or at minimal cost—they were able to step out of their comfort zones, engage in conversations more effectively, speak in front of groups of people, manage time and money more effectively and, ultimately, enrich their lives through the experience.

The Ideal Business

While every company has its unique traits, the entire direct selling way of doing business shares common threads of empowering men and women to dream, to reach beyond what they thought to be possible, and to be supported in a very strong manner. Direct selling is a great example of how the free enterprise system can be engaged without the traditional risks associated with a brick-and-mortar business model. ■

Top 5 Reasons for Considering a Direct Selling Business

Be Your Own Boss—You are in complete control of how you invest your time and how you go about building your business.

Save Time and Money—As an independent business owner, you purchase the products you love at discounts and you operate all activities from your home.

Expand Your Circle of Friends—Direct selling business opportunities are based on building relationships. When building a direct selling business, customers and other team members appear to quickly become important and rewarding aspects to one's life.

Be Recognized and Rewarded for Achievement—It's not every day that an adult receives praise for an effort well done, but direct selling companies recognize and reward their independent business owners through bonuses, trips and prizes. This is an essential component to the business model.

Build Income—The direct selling compensation model offered by most companies allows the building of organizations that have the potential to create incomes beyond those earned from the personal selling/servicing efforts of the direct seller.