

HOT 100

#50 What Kids Want! Inc.

Working with toys may sound like a lot of fun and games—and it can be—but it's still serious business for Jordan and Steven Kort, founders of the Northridge, California-based company What Kids Want! Inc.

The brothers, who each have more than 20 years' experience in the industry, partnered up to start the company in 1999 after leaving their jobs at a toy business. The brothers' combined toy expertise has paid off in their new venture: Sales skyrocketed from their first-year take of \$3 million to over \$10 million in 2003.

Starting out on their own as a homebased business never discouraged the Korts from approaching big-name toy companies, and today, product licensing plays an important part in the company's success. What Kids Want! holds licenses with Kellogg's, PepsiCo, and the "Got milk?" campaign, creating a role-play set for each of them. The Korts also scored a license with Disney, which was a slight challenge. But using references from longtime buyers such as Target, Toys "R" Us and Wal-Mart, in addition to their creativity, the Korts won respect and the license. They now work with Disney to produce sidewalk items such as jump ropes, yo-yos, chalk and paddle-ball sets, as well as foam play mats.

The Korts also created, develop and distribute the What Girls Want line of dress-up/role-play and lifestyle accessories. Along with favorites like fairy princess garb, their trendy play shoes, jewelry and other dress-up accessories complete the line. Now projecting \$12 million to \$13 million for 2004, the Korts are proving that toys—and their company—are hotter than ever.

Because they have their products manufactured in China,



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BIG THINKERS: Starting small didn't stop brothers Jordan (l.) and Steven Kort from going after big-name toy companies like Disney.

Jordan, 52, and Steven, 47, set up a Hong Kong office within their first year and now have 7 employees there; at their U.S. office, they have 6 employees. In addition to the United States, What Kids Want! sells its products in Australia, Canada, South Africa and the United Kingdom and is seeking distribution worldwide. Although the products demand long hours and dedication from the toy makers, "at the end of the day," says Steven, "with the distillation of product ideas, fitting them within retail product schemes and price points, it's still all about the toys."
—April Y. Pennington