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Great quotes

The critically acclaimed third game in the Don't Quote Me series of board games may prove to be the commercial breakthrough vaulting a London business into the big time.

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OK now, what not-so-famous Londoner said this.

"Quotes are universally popular and there is lots you can do with quotes. The games are just a start to that."

Still no clue?

He is a game maker, a multiple award winner, and a businessperson awaiting his big break in the tough, competitive North American board game market -- and he just might have gotten it.

It's Don Reid, president of Wiggles 3D, the London game maker who makes the Don't Quote Me series of games, which is getting a lot of attention for its latest Time for Kids edition.

"The game market is very competitive. It's challenging every day," said Reid from a small office he shares with his staff of five.

"There are probably 200 new games introduced every year and you have to have something really unique to get out there," he said.

Since February 2003 Reid has released the Original Don't Quote Me board game, a TV Guide edition and a Time for Kids edition. He has also created a website, two travel games and a deck of cards set to come out in October.

But his third game, the kids edition, has been winning praise, and awards, from educators, parents, children and the game industry itself.



"Everyone who has come in contact with the Time for Kids game has absolutely loved it," said Reid. "We have high expectations for the Time for Kids product."

When we can create a game that teachers, parents and children like, it shows there is a lot of value there," he said.

"The response has really been outstanding in terms of the reaction and they recognize the Time for Kids brand," said Nancy Joyal, director of communications.

"The game was very quickly picked up by Barnes and Noble and Toys 'R Us in the U.S. and by Scholar's Choice and the Toy Shoppe of London (in London)."

The Time for Kids magazine co-branded the game. The magazine is distributed to 4.2 million subscribers in the U.S. where it is read in classrooms. It provides students with learning activities relating to current events.

Similarly, the Time for Kids board game is being played in classrooms all over Canada and the U.S.

"We are offering a teacher's kit because it really is a good fit and (teachers) are always looking for new central activities," said Joyal. "It's really designed to build literacy and problem solving skills, while at the same time (the kids are) having fun and building social skills."

This is the second time Reid has co-branded a game and he believes it is part of his "secret sauce."

"We've co-branded with top international brands which has made us recognizable," said Reid. "Co-branding the games has allowed us to do advertising we wouldn't have been able to afford otherwise."

Reid also takes pride in how much information goes into each game making the entertainment a learning experience as well. By adding background information to each card players can know more about who the speaker is in each quote.

"A big part of what we are about is providing a lot of content in the game," said Joyal.

The children's version was launched at the Toy Fair in New York in February and also exhibited in San Antonio, Texas at the International Reading Association convention in May and again at Book Expo America last month.

Soon after its launch, the game received a five-star review at About.com by Toy Expert, Dipika Mirpuri.

The Time for Kids game won a Dr. Toy award this year for meeting six criteria -- a safe, well-designed game that is fun, challenging, reasonably priced and builds skill.

It has most recently won Creative Child Magazine's 2005 Toy of the Year Award in the Kid's Board Games category.

But these are not the first awards the company has won.

The original game won a Games 100 Award in 2004 which is awarded to the best and most unique games. The TV Guide edition won a Creative Child's Seal of Excellence Award in 2004 where the criteria was a game that promotes creativity and learning.

"With the Time for Kids game we are hearing it targets a market that is largely underserved, the 10 to 14 age group," said Joyal. The company also gets a lot of comments about "the design of the game and the quality of the packaging."

Wiggles 3D spent three years interviewing large and small companies, manufacturers and of course, game players before creating the first game.

"If you're playing a knowledge-based game you want to have the opportunity to succeed," said Reid.

"If you look at some games you either know the answer or you don't. There is no aided recall in helping you to solve the problem or answer the question. So we developed the game around having hints and multiple choice options. So in all Don't Quote Me games you have three opportunities to succeed."

All three board games -- the original Don't Quote Me, TV Guide edition, and Time for Kids edition -- allow the player to answer with no help, with a hint or with three options. If the player needs help the points decrease by one each time more help is needed.

The Time for Kids game required a lot of research as well. Input was taken from kids in Grade 7 and 8, teachers and parents.

In focus groups with children Reid found out "there are some words that kids know but have never seen printed, so we made sure the writing style was age appropriate."

The kids also liked the idea of building the game board as they went.

Players start on a pentagon-shaped hub and can choose a track piece that allows them to move onto any colour or category they want.

"The big thing is it makes the game different every time," said Joyal.

Event cards were also something the kids liked. It was a way to keep the players involved and engaged, said Joyal.

These cards give them a chance to do things like join another team for a question, steal turns, and ask for a different question.

"It allows them to accelerate their progress or stop the others," Reid said.

"A good example is to join another team. I can play an event card and we can answer together and both get the points."

Kids also gave input into what colours they liked, what kinds of graphics, and how long a game should take to play.

Reid, however, isn't just building a board game company, he is also trying to attract non-game players who share an interest in quotes.

"One key success criteria is to have enough products so that you have a breadth of line that makes it easier for the major customers to do business with you. They don't want to do business with you if you only have one or two products," said Reid.

"The key way to maximize the value of the company was to build the brand as large as we could make it.

"We believed we could do a better job of managing both of these things together, the resource side, the dontquoteme.com site, and the entertainment side."

But Reid's task is one the gaming industry says is a difficult one.

"It is pretty tough for a self-publisher. There is an odd hit like the CSI game but it is hard to break into the market. Nowadays two or three years out of a game, wow, that's great," said Rob Chuchla, team leader of marketing for games and puzzles at Hasbro.

Reid is currently in his third year as a self-publisher and he plans on releasing another game in February. Competition is something Reid does think about but it's not just board game companies he is aware of.

"People have said to us we decided to buy the TV Guide edition and have that at home rather than go to a movie on a Friday night because it was going to cost us more to go to a movie than to buy a game to play on an ongoing basis," said Reid.

"Ultimately consumers are saying what am I going to spend my leisure time on and my leisure dollars? Hopefully a number of them decide to spend it on the board game category."

And Reid hopes the social trend toward nesting and staying home more will mean more of them are turning to play family games, and not just watching TV.

"Our game isn't so much about who gets around the board first but it's about the dialogue, the exchange of information and the laughs."