



Warner Walker's job is to scout locations for all the new metro-area Starbucks.

EXECUTIVE PROFILE  
6B

Section B

March 2-8, 2007



JOANN VITELLI

**She started small:** Anna Griffin got her name out there by making invitations for charity events for free. Today, her company includes a wide variety of products sold in more than 3,000 stores.

# Inviting Success

Not being afraid of failure has netted Anna Griffin an empire

By Debbie Held Maslia  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

After two callbacks for "The Apprentice: Martha Stewart" ended with a rejection, Atlanta entrepreneur Anna Griffin declared it a good thing and continued to focus on her ever-expanding stationery and crafting empire. Stewart's show tanked, but the show that is Anna Griffin Inc. continues to be a hit. The company is a multimillion-dollar enterprise, and with a couple of new licensing deals already sealed, Griffin expects revenue will continue to rise.

Though she declined to release exact figures, Griffin said her business today is worth more than 20 times its first-year value of \$500,000, and sales have tripled over the past four years. Griffin's products are in more than 3,000 stores in nine countries.

The company has grown from one employee, Griffin, in 1994, to 40 employees occupying a 40,000-square-foot space, including a day-care center. In addition, Griffin has her own television show, "Anna Griffin Elegant Crafting," currently in its fourth year on QVC.

► See **INVITING SUCCESS**, 5B

## Griffin's growth

- Start with a trusted employee who is in synch with your personality.
- Don't be afraid to cut ties early on with employees who aren't a fit.
- Stay true to the core product or service.
- Trust your instincts over anyone's advice.
- Seize opportunities for growth, including licensing.
- Learn from your mistakes.
- Love what you do, and do what you love.



### BEYOND THE BRAND

Good marketing doesn't guarantee a purchase

JEFFREY GITOMER

### TALK TO THEM

E-mail not always the best way to communicate



### PROSPECTING

Dig around in our records listings.



LEADS

# Inviting success

Continued from 1B

Griffin's major growth strategy: Stay true to the core essence and integrity of the product or service, and roll with opportunities for growth.

The original intent of Griffin — who became passionate about nuptials after working for two years with a New York wedding dress designer — was to start a wedding invitation company that crafted three-dimensional invitations that brides could assemble themselves, instead of having to custom-order.

Along the way, she never wavered from her original premise: Opening an invitation should be a sensory experience, in the same vein as opening a gift.

"We're masters of three-dimensional invitations and art projects," she said. "We make craft projects come alive."

After moving home to Atlanta in 1994, Griffin worked on getting noticed.

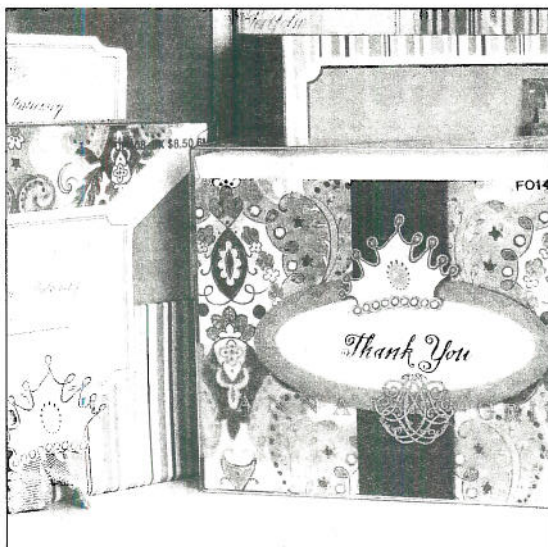
She started by creating invitations pro bono for charity events at Atlanta History Center and the Atlanta Botanical Garden.

Brides soon began to take notice, but a quick calculation indicated that Griffin was earning less than minimum wage, working out of her 350-square-foot studio.

So Griffin launched a product line, manufacturing artful wedding products, from invitations to tasteful bride and groom accessories.

When Griffin and her first employee hit the Atlanta Gift Mart with her line in January 1995, she finished the show less than a week later with \$70,000 in orders.

By the end of the year, Anna Griffin Inc. had grossed more than \$500,000 and the business was profitable.



PHOTOS/JOANN VITELLI

But she would need more employees, a bigger office space and more capital — obstacles that Griffin took as opportunities for learning.

She learned one of her biggest lessons early on: Find a trusted, high-level employee who is in synch with your personality.

As for other employees, Griffin says, don't be afraid to cut ties early with those who are not a fit.

"There's a misconception that a warm body is better than no body," in a small business, said Griffin, a philosophy she hasn't found to be true.

Griffin's next growth spurt came when she exploded onto the mass merchandise scene in 2001 in the scrapbooking industry, hitting shelves in hobby store Michael's and mass merchandiser Target, using different, "lower-end" brand names for each store's line of products.

Griffin's foray into the world of scrapbooking gained her a bump in sales of \$2 million that year.

For Griffin's third and latest incarnation, she has teamed with Norcross-based craft licensing company Plaid Enterprises Inc. and Minneapolis-based Lenox Group Inc.

Both manufacturers approached Griffin for similar reasons: her timeless style and ability to translate tradition into either do-it-yourself or three-dimensional fare — from crafting kits to dinnerware — that is in step with today's trends.

"Anna has a unique way of taking something old and making it feel

contemporary and new," said Pam Schechtman, director of communications for Lenox Group.

The company will be rolling out a new baby-themed line for Griffin this spring, among other products.

Plaid Enterprises President Mike McCooney said a licensing partnership, like those Griffin has with Plaid and Lenox, allows an artist the ability to create commercial ideas without having to deal directly with dozens of vendors.

These partnerships have been successful for Griffin, who has been pleased with her ability to both expand her brand and to replicate her "core essence" into other lines.

COMING SOON

**REVVED UP**

How Newnan-based Triumph Motorcycles rebuilt its brand.

**WHEN MESS IS BEST**

Disorganization doesn't always spell disaster.

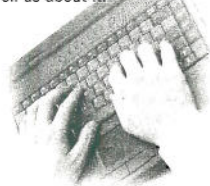
**THE SECRET BATTER**

Huddle House shares the strategy behind its expansion.

CONTACT

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