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1. VISION

Our vision is to

1. Create the ultimate platform for children's high-end party supplies and party clothes in Canada by offering some of the world's leading designers of party goods.
2. Be recognized as the primary brick and mortar destination (supported by a sophisticated online presence) for stylish and unique children's party supplies while offering unparalleled customer service.
3. Provide a one-stop shop where a parent can source everything they need to host a memorable party for their child, including referrals to caterers and entertainers and potentially rentals of party equipment.
4. Help customers throw a stylish children's party with little time and effort.
5. Build a strong business in distinctive holiday supplies, including holiday wear, decorations, tabletop accessories, etc. for Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter.
6. Build a sustainable customer base, creating a highly profitable business with a strong rate of return for investors.

Long Term

There is great opportunity to expand the initial brick and mortar store to include:

- A tea party room serving cupcakes, tea, and other snacks.
- A party room that can be rented out.
- Rentals of party supplies such as bouncy castles, tables, and centrepieces.
- Beautiful balloon bouquets for birthday parties and other special occasions.

There is also the possibility of opening other locations and franchising the store model. The website has the opportunity to reach customers across Canada and expand into other countries.

Balloon Bouquet



2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Enchanted Party supplies high-quality and unique children’s party supplies, including table dressings, party bags and favours, party clothes and accessories, and curated parties in a box that contain a themed set of items to throw a party. We’re excited to offer a range of exquisite children’s party wear that is sure to entice any parent who buys new clothes for their child’s birthday parties or for holidays such as Christmas and Easter. We offer an international range of products, some of which are exclusive to Enchanted Party in Canada. We also offer custom made and handmade items, and where possible, we sell ethically-made products. Enchanted Party focuses on providing exciting products that create charming and memorable celebrations.

Enchanted Party has the following advantages:

- No other store in Toronto offers the same product range.
- The partners—Tamara and Sheryl—have good eyes for buying as well as access to international markets to buy stock that you can’t usually get in Canada, including exclusive lines.
- Both partners have backgrounds in retail and in party and event planning.
- In one location, parents can purchase everything from birthday outfits, to full table settings, to balloon arrangements, and receive referrals to entertainment and catering services.
- The partners and employees will provide expert party planning advice.

ENCHANTED PARTY



3. MARKET AND INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

The following sections define our customers, outline the growing party market, provide case studies and revenue and turnover rates, and outline the strong Canadian retail and ecommerce markets.

3.1 Market Need

Parents have demonstrated an increased desire to spend freely on their children's parties in order to provide memorable experiences. The popularity of stylish and glamorous parties on Pinterest, other social media sites, and in magazines shows that there is a strong trend towards stylish parties. There is also a rise in "competitive parties" where parents try to outdo each other on their kids' parties.

3.2 Target Markets

- Style-conscious parents aged 25-50 from professional households with higher than average incomes.
- Style-conscious parents aged 25-50 from households with average incomes and who will spend extravagantly on parties and special occasions (Average household income of couples with children: \$93,700 according to Stats Can).
- Grandmothers buying party dresses and accessories for their granddaughters.
- Tourists in Yorkville (or another affluent area) who buy items as souvenirs or as impulse buys. Tourists tend to have disposable income and are willing to spend it on special and fun items.

3.3 Relevant Market Size

- In 2011, there were 5.5 million children 13 and under in Canada (Stat Can).
- The average household income of couples with kids in 2011: \$93,700 (Stat Can)
- In 2011, 4,617,280 families made over \$70,000 a year with 2,960,190 families making over \$100,000 (Stat Can).
- Over 21 million people visit Toronto annually. In 2010, visitors to Toronto spent \$4.4 billion (City of Toronto).

3.4 Party Industry

The research available focuses on the British market, but given strong cultural similarities, we can assume the North American experience is similar.

- The cost of a children’s birthday party has risen to £214 (\$356 Canadian) (Daily Mail: Average Cost of Children’s Birthday Party Soars).
- One in 11 parents said they would spend £800 (\$1331 Canadian) on a party for their child (Daily Mail: Average Cost of Children’s Birthday Party Soars).
- British families collectively spend almost \$2 billion on first birthday parties alone (ABC News: Parents Spend Big Bucks on Outrageous Kids’ Birthday Parties).
- Competitive birthday parties are on the rise. 40 percent of parents said they felt pressured to throw more extravagant birthday parties for their children (Globe and Mail: Birthday Party Market is a Recipe for Success).
- A third of parents splurge on their children’s birthday party to guarantee it is better than their friends’ parties (Daily Mail: Average Cost of Children’s Birthday Party Soars).
- According to Gigmaster’s survey of 8,000 parents, spending on parties remained strong despite the economic downturn (Spending on Children’s Parties Holds Strong Despite Weak Economy). For example, Party City’s revenue grew 17% to \$1.85 billion in 2011 while same-store sales rose 8.7% (LA Times).
- In the United States, the party goods industry is worth \$10 billion a year (LA Times).

There are other indications of the popularity of sumptuous parties for children. For example, once a year the popular life style magazine *Donna Hay* devotes an issue to extravagant children’s parties. The 2013 issue featured Tutu Du Monde, one of Enchanted Party’s leading brands.



3.5 Revenue and Turnover

The revenue of retail stores that sell children’s clothes or party supplies in Toronto indicate the strength of the local industry:

Business	Sales Revenue ¹
Once Upon a Child	\$678,000
High-end children’s clothing store	\$250k - \$500k
Indoor Playground And Party Center	\$100k - \$250k

While inventory turnover data is not available for party stores specifically, we can look at turnover rates for children’s clothing stores (since Enchanted Party sells clothes) and gift stores. Because these stores are similar, we can assume turnover rates will be similar for party stores.

- According to the Thomson One Banker database, the average merchandise turnover in the retail clothing industry in 2011 was 3.91 (Chron.com: Average Merchandise Turnover in Clothing Stores).
- According to RetailOwner.com, the turnover of Gift, Novelty & Souvenir Stores was 3.2 with a gross margin of 48%.
- In 2008, the inventory turnover for non-chain clothing stores was 2.4 per year (Stat Can).
- Turnover for The Children’s Place clothing stores is 4.2 to 4.4 yearly (GuruFocus.com).

3.6 Examples of Similar Successful Businesses

Stores similar to Enchanted Party have been highly successful in other cities around the world (see photos in Appendix):

- The Fairy Shop in New Zealand is a store dedicated to girls’ high-end fairy themed party products. It has had significant growth in the past 5 years and doubled its store size.
- Balloon Celebrations in LA is an inspirational concept store, offering beautiful and elaborate balloon bouquets. Enchanted Party would create and sell similar balloon bouquets.

¹ Source: <http://canada.businessesforsale.com>

- The Coop in LA is a fast-growing example of a highly successful children's party venue and concept store that has experienced significant growth since its inception, eight years ago.
- Eloise at The Plaza in NYC is an opulent concept store located at the Plaza Hotel. It includes a Fashion Room that sells one-of-a-kind merchandise, a stylish sales room with a concierge, and a tea party room available for parties.

3.7 Seasonal Holiday Retail Stats

Enchanted Party will sell supplies for major holidays, including Valentine's Day, Easter, Halloween, and Christmas, thus tapping into the lucrative seasonal holiday markets as demonstrated by the statistics below.

Valentine's Day

- In 2013, Canadian households spent an average of \$37 on Valentine's Day. This is an average with some people spending \$5 on a card and others spending hundreds on large ticket items (Retail Council of Canada).
- In 2013, Americans spent \$3.77 billion on Valentine's Day gifts for family members besides spouses (for example, children, parents, etc.). Because of cultural similarities, we can assume that Canadians also dish out on Valentine's gifts for other family members (Retail Industry About.com).

Easter:

- According to the National Retail Federation's Easter spending survey, Americans spent an average of \$145 on Easter items in 2012. Total spending hit \$16.8 billion. This is up 11% from 2011. Consumers spend this money on apparel, candy, food and decorations (Huffington Post).

Halloween

- In Canada, Halloween is trumped only by Christmas and Back to School in amount of money spent (Retail Council of Canada).
- In 2011, Canadians spent \$1.5 billion on Halloween. Households with three people spent about \$66 while households with four members spent over \$75 (Retail Council of Canada).

Christmas

- According to a Bank of Montreal survey, Canadians spent an average of \$1,397 per person during the 2011 Christmas holiday season (CBC).

- In 2012, Canadians spent an average of \$1,610 per person during holiday season (Winnipeg Free Press).

3.7 Retail Statistics

The following statistics indicate an optimistic Canadian retail market in years to come. Research also shows that households with children spend more on entertainment than anyone else does:

- Canada's retail sales grew at a steady 3.6% from 2010 to 2011, and in 2011, the national retail sales were \$454 billion with \$160.62 billion spent in Ontario (The Retail Report Canada Spring 2012 – Edition: Colliers International).
- Retail grew 96% faster than the Canadian economy as a whole between 2004 and 2008 (Huffington Post Canada: U.S. Retailers In Canada: 7 Reasons They're Suddenly All Showing Up).
- Couples with children spend significantly more on entertainment than households without children (Stat Can).

According to a recent study by WSL/Strategic Retail, Canadian women are not focused on bargain hunting:

- Only 55 percent of Canadian women use coupons (compared to 68 percent of American women).
- Half of Canadian women look online for coupon opportunities (Huffington Post Canada: U.S. Retailers In Canada: 7 Reasons They're Suddenly All Showing Up).

This suggests Canadian women are willing to spend more and are less interested in searching for the lowest price.

3.8 Internet and Ecommerce Stats

- In 2010, Canadians spent \$16.5 billion online. By 2012, that number had risen to \$21.1 billion (Google Canadian e-commerce).
- Canadians place 114 billion orders online a year, averaging about 10 orders per person per year (Stat Can).
- Women spend 41% more time than men on social networking sites such as Pinterest (Stat Can).
- 80% of Canadians are online and 82% of Canadian internet users shop online (E-marketer, 2011).



5. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS AND ADVANTAGE

Competing party shops in Toronto, such as The Little Party Shop and Party City, are well known and have large inventories. However, they offer generic products, and don't sell stylish and unique brands. They also do not sell children's party clothes. Other competitors are department and dollar stores that sell party supplies, but they have small selections and low-quality products.

The table below highlights the advantages Enchanted Party offers over the competition.

	High-end products and custom-made party supplies	Curated collections of stylish themed party supplies	Exclusive international lines	Children's party wear (dresses, tutus, capes, etc.)
Enchanted Party	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Little Party Shop	✗	✗	✗	✗
Party City	✗	✗	✗	✗
Department and dollar stores	✗	✗	✗	✗

7. ABOUT THE BRAND

Enchanted Party strives to make it super easy for parents to have the best parties for their children, create special childhood memories, and wow their guests. No matter how big or small your party is, Enchanted Party can make it look smashing without too much dashing.

With coordinated pre-curated party options, we help customers plan and create stylish parties with little time and effort. Our in-store staff and our online blog and newsletters will provide helpful advice to customers on planning parties.

Enchanted Party is a highly visual brand. So our brick and mortar store will include eye-catching window displays to attract people to the store. We will place a great deal of focus on cutting edge and awe-inspiring merchandising that will tell a story about the featured collections. The beautiful displays will help avoid sticker shock since they will signify a higher level of quality and tempt consumers to spend more.

Online, the brand is presented visually using colourful and fun images of parties and products, contrasted with our elegant logo and site design. This incorporates both sides of the brand: luxury high-end products that help create joyous times for children.

We will build strong relationships with customers and employees by means of a company culture that is founded on following values:

- Friendliness
- Quality
- Happiness
- Helpfulness
- Approachability



8. MARKETING PLAN

Our marketing initiatives will include the following:

8.1 Partnerships and Promotions

Partnerships with likeminded businesses and organizations will give us valuable opportunities to promote Enchanted Party. Promotions with other organizations will allow us to tap into the customers of our partners while aligning ourselves with established and better-known brands. We will form strategic partnerships and promotions with other businesses and organizations such as cupcake shops, children's clothing stores, party venues, entertainers, community centres, and schools.

8.2. Public Relations

In the short term, we will hire a PR person on a part-time basis to help build awareness of the brand. This will include well-placed stories in traditional media (print, online, and broadcast) and an attention-grabbing launch event at the store.

8.3. Social Media

Our approach to social media will be guided by the values that define our brand: friendliness, approachability, enjoyment, and helpfulness. Enchanted Party is a highly visual brand and will be represented on social media with beautiful professional photos of our own parties and products. Using these photos, we will tap into the trend of unique and glamorous parties on social media to help build the Enchanted Party brand.

We will use content marketing, providing helpful advice, unique ideas, and inspiring photographs to help customers host their own stylish parties with little effort. This content will be available on our blog, email newsletters, and our Pinterest, Twitter, and Facebook accounts.

8.4. Online Marketing

The rich content of our social media and website will help build the Enchanted Party brand. In addition, we will employ an ongoing SEO strategy and place banner ads in likeminded online magazines and websites.

8.5 Window Displays

Our brick and mortar store will feature inspiring window displays that will be changed regularly to attract customers. We will use cutting edge merchandising and visual story-telling to create striking window displays that will become a local attraction.



8.6 Postcards

At launch, we will do a mailbox drop in affluent neighbourhoods to raise awareness of the store. Following that, we will mail out postcards seasonally (4 times a year) to further grow awareness of the brand and to tap into seasonal holiday markets.

8.7. Print Advertising

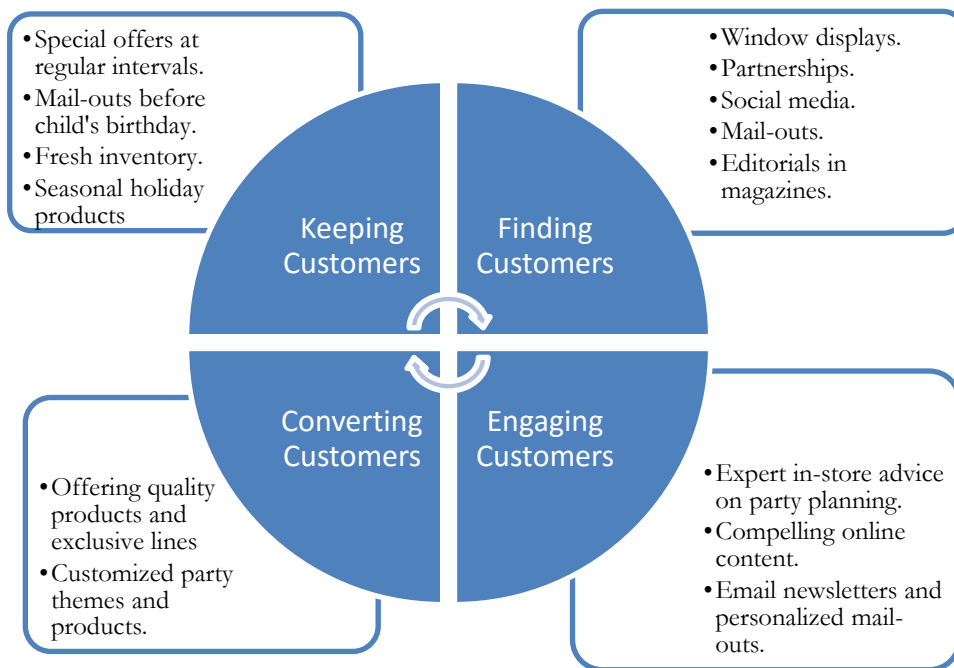
We will publish editorials published in school magazines and local publications to raise awareness of the store. School magazines and local publications tend to have lower advertising rates and will reach our target markets in the local neighbourhoods near the store. We will also strive to be featured in articles in magazines with wider reach, such as Parents Canada. As budget permits, we will take out print ads in these magazines.

8.8. Direct marketing

Direct marketing provides a strong strategy to drive repeat customers. We will build a database of customers and send a reminder postcard to families 6 weeks before a child's birthday to draw them back to the store. In addition, we will send out regular email newsletters, as mentioned above.

8.9. Customer Strategy

Our customer lifecycle strategy is outlined in the chart below:



9. BUSINESS MODEL

This section provides an overview of our plan for the store, our product strategy, the day-to-day operations, our goals and milestones for the business, and a SWOT analysis of Enchanted Party.

9.1 Distribution Plan

We will distribute products through the existing website and a brick and mortar store. A possible location for the store includes Yorkville, Yonge and Summerhill, and the Eglinton West area. Higher-income customers frequent the areas and people expect to pay more when shopping there.

The store will be stand alone or on a street front with easy access for parents with strollers. Attractive window displays will help draw customers into the store. We will start off with a smaller space (about 1,000 square feet). Once the business has reached profitability, we'll expand to incorporate a tea party room that serves cupcakes, tea, etc. to provide a pleasant experience for parents and children who will be tempted to shop next door. We also plan to expand to include a room that can be rented for parties.

The website will support the brick and mortar store by giving customers who live further away the convenience of shopping from home rather than travelling to the store.

9.2 Product Strategy

- Continue purchasing unique merchandise by continually researching new lines and by establishing partnerships with suppliers of custom made goods and with companies for exclusive lines.
- Create compelling assortments with distinct styles tailored to Enchanted Party's target market.
- Ensure we offer a well-balanced selection of appealing products to cover every discerning customer's tastes and needs.
- Attract higher spending clients with luxury brands, while still attracting new customers with more accessible brands.
- Low-ticket items will be offered so everybody can experience the Enchanted Party brand. The low ticket items will include as birthday cards, invitations, hair accessories, small gift items, etc.

9.3 Operations

Below is an overview of key tasks for successful operation of Enchanted Party.

Human Resources:

- At launch, Sheryl, Tamara, and a part-time staff member (3 days a week) will staff the store from 9 to 5.
- Hired staff should have experience in the party industry or children's retail, preferably with balloon making skills.
- Hire a part-time window dresser to create compelling window displays.
- Hire new staff as business grows.
- Wages will comprise of a base salary (\$12.50/hour) and a commission rate of 1% for the salespeople.
- Build strong relationships with employees by creating an open and friendly work environment.

Buying:

- Sheryl, Tamara, and a prospective third-party partner would develop three year vendor plans.
- Create and curate plans for seasonal assortments.
- Travel to or attend local tradeshows on an annual basis to keep apprised of market trends and buy new merchandise.
- Monitor delivery dates from vendors and ensure Enchanted Party's shipments are prioritized.
- Monitor sales and inventory for in-season action (e.g. repeats, product swaps, and returns).

Sales and Marketing:

- Hire and liaise with publicist to optimize sales.
- Create a strong focus on visual merchandizing through amazing window displays.
- Change store window seasonally to achieve maximum attention.
- Mailbox drops of seasonally promotional postcards to select areas.
- Build customer database to send out postcard to families before child's birthday.
- Send out email blasts and customer e-newsletters.
- Develop a PR strategy and outreach.
- Implement a social media strategy, including regular blogging and posts to Pinterest, Twitter, and Facebook.
- Review sales performance monthly.

Finance:

- Develop and review operating statements monthly.
- Prepare monthly financial statements to be reviewed by shareholders.
- Prepare annual budget plans.
- Create and review a monthly sales and inventory forecast.



9.4 SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owners’ experience in retail and party and event planning. • Unique product lines. • Void in Canadian market. • One-stop shop providing party goods and referrals to cake makers, entertainers, photographers, etc. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unknown brand. • Limited finances to start. • High price point.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the store at later date to include a tea party room and a party room. • Potential to franchise the model. • Expanding balloon side of business. • Potential to rent equipment for home parties, such as bouncy castles, tables and chairs, and other equipment. • Potential for providing for full-service parties at home. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing wrong location. • If other party stores start selling high-end products. • Not maintaining exclusive lines.

9.5 Business Milestones

Year 1:

- Establish and fit-out an attractive store in an affluent neighbourhood.
- Hire full-time staff member.
- Establish partnerships with caterers, photographers, entertainers, etc. to provide referral services.
- Strengthen relationships with vendors and suppliers to secure exclusive lines and custom-made goods.
- Build customer database, tracking birthdays to send out postcards and special offers before child’s birthday.

Year 2:

- Double customer base and sales.
- Take on second part-time staff member.
- Expand balloon bouquet side of the business.
- Create an inventory of rental equipment such as bouncy castles, tables and chairs, and table centrepieces.

Year 3:

- Expand store to incorporate tea party room.
- Increase inventory of rental equipment.
- Expand depth of product and increase profitability.

10. OWNER PROFILES

Enchanted Party was conceived by mother and daughter team Sheryl and Tamara Murie. As the founders, we believe that we have the background and skills to create a primary luxury party shop. Both of us are experienced party planners with many fabulous events under our belts.



Sheryl Murie

Sheryl started her career as an artist and window dresser, later opening a women's wear boutique in partnership with a girlfriend. The four years she spent designing high-end women's clothing and managing the store has given her valuable experience in retail management.

Sheryl's talent for business and the visual arts saw her team with her photographer husband in the late 80's; for over 15 years, she ran their highly successful international photography business with bases in Australia, Hong Kong, and later a presence Dubai. Sheryl fronted both the marketing and sales side of the business as well as coordinating production and delivery of the product.

Upon coming to Canada Sheryl worked in women's wear for Hugo Boss Canada. She is currently working part-time as an office manager in her family's law firm.

During the course of Sheryl's career she has developed strong skills in negotiation, sales, client relationship building, time management, project execution, financial planning, and projection ability.

With a dynamic combination of creativity and strong business acumen Sheryl brings years of invaluable practical experience to Enchanted Party.

Tamara Murie

Tamara is a mother of two (Chloe, 6 and Oliver, 13) and has had a long career in retail in Australia, England, and Canada.

After graduating with honors from La Trobe University, Tamara went to London, England where she worked for the world famous Harrods department store. Harrods prides itself on offering excellent customer services and the finest luxury goods. Tamara was the manager of the Armani boutique at Harrods where she managed staff, liaised with buyers to select the seasonal buy, monitored boutique sales, and sold to her own private clients.

Upon marrying, Tamara moved to Toronto where she attained a position with the Chanel boutique. Tamara quickly established a highly successful sales career selling both ready-to-wear and fine jewelry to clientele in Toronto and around the world. Tamara was Chanel's top sales person during her time with company.

Tamara's skills include buying, stock management, staff management, and strong client building skills.

11. FINANCIAL PLAN

11.1 Equity

11.2 Financial Highlights

11.4 FUNDING REQUIREMENTS/USE OF FUNDS

The estimated cost of setting up a bricks and mortar shop is as follows:

Shop rental based on 1000 square feet at Yonge & Summerhill (Yorkville could be more):

Inventory:

Advertising and Marketing:

Miscellaneous operating costs:

APPENDIX A: ARTICLES

Average cost of a children's birthday party soars to £214 as competitive parents admit to giving out ever more lavish goody bags - just to trump their peers

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2382430/Average-cost-childrens-birthday-party-soars-214.html>

- Third of parents splash out to guarantee party is better than friend's party
- 9% spend at least £800
- Gift bags can even contain iPod, make-up and gift cards
- Ideal party would be at theme park with lunch at Nandos, say children
- Ideal celebrity guests are David Beckham and One Direction

By Bianca London

PUBLISHED: 14:03 GMT, 1 August 2013

When it comes to a beloved child's birthday, parents have long gone all out to ensure that their day is as special as possible.

But it seems that pleasing the little darlings is setting parents back more than ever, as the typical cost of a children's birthday party rises to more than £214.

On average, a parent will fork out an average of £214.54 per party, while 64 per cent say they want to ensure their child enjoys a 'super sweet 16' style bash every single birthday.

Extravagant: Parents are so desperate to please their children and outdo their friends that they spend, on average, £214 per party

Research found a third of mothers and fathers splash out on their children's birthday bash to guarantee it is 'better than their friend's'.

And the pressure is so great for one in 11 parents (nine per cent) that they would spend a staggering £800 - at least - on a party for their child.

The study looked at the growing trend of hugely extravagant celebrations thrown by parents for their children's birthdays.

So fancy are some birthday parties that two per cent of the 1,000 parents surveyed said their child has received an iPod in their party bag.

Furthermore, 16 per cent said their child had found make-up in their party bag, while four per cent had received gift vouchers.

And as part of the research, children aged between 5-13 were also polled to find out the criteria for the perfect party.

Competitive: Research found a third of mums and dads splash out on their kids' birthday bash to guarantee it is 'better than their friends'

According to the young respondents, the ideal party would be held at a theme park and last five hours eight minutes, with 30 guests invited.

Meanwhile, the bash should also involve them receiving 17 presents, lunch at Nando's and even a guest appearance from footballer David Beckham.

Interestingly though, children would rather their grandparents, 47 per cent, and school friends, 67 per cent, attend their party than One Direction.

In contrast, the study also asked the parents polled how their children's parties differ to the ones they had when they were growing up.

One in five, 21 per cent, admitted they didn't even have a birthday party while growing up.

And those who did said on their gift list were items such as clothes, board games and outdoor activity games - not televisions and games consoles.

Gary Kibble, from Littlewoods.com, who carried out the survey, said: 'Though the blueprint for the ideal party is quite staggering, parents needn't feel under pressure to make these parties become reality.

'It's great if parents can include some elements of the blueprint in their kids' parties but it's not essential to have them all, like David Beckham attending.

'What is refreshing from this research, is children put immediate family and close friends higher up on their guest list than their favourite celebs.'

Birthday party market is a recipe for success

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/small-business/birthday-party-market-is-a-recipe-for-success/article558356/>

Marlene Habib

Published Thursday, Oct. 20 2011, 5:00 AM EDT

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Planning a party for a birthday boy or girl can stretch parents' imaginations and schedules – a motivating factor for companies looking to tap the lucrative children's birthday party market.

While figures on the birthday party industry in Canada are hard to come by, Statistics Canada says there are 5.5 million children 13 and under – a huge market for special events companies.

In fact, there has been such a growth in demand for children's birthday party services that the Internet is abuzz with information on the pros and cons of going all-out for a youngster's special day.

For instance, Birthdays Without Pressure, a parent-led group based in St. Paul, Minn., says more parents are outsourcing birthday parties because they're time-squeezed, and are continuing to raise the bar for parties in their community because they're competitive.

Research released in May by Lumos, a U.K. children's charity, found 40 per cent of the 500 parents interviewed admitted to feeling pressure to organize more extravagant birthday parties. Children attended an average of five birthday parties in the last year, according to the survey.

In one of her blog posts, Ottawa-area photographer and mother of three, Danielle Dingers, says she has contracted out her children's birthday parties, "largely because the idea of avoiding 10 caked-up boys drunk on adrenalin on the loose in my house is worth just about any price!"

Children's birthday parties are so in demand that companies and organizations providing other services have added them to their offerings, mostly on weekends when their facilities are typically idle.

The following are just a few of the innovative and affordable offerings in Canada that, in many cases, account for at least 20 per cent of overall business for the companies.

Little Ray's Reptile Zoo

Based in: Ottawa, with franchises in Quebec, Ontario and the Maritimes

Alligators, pythons and tarantulas, oh my!

These and other exotic creatures may not be everyday pets, but they're in high demand at children's at-home birthday parties organized by Little Ray's Reptile Zoo.

Zoo founder Paul Raymond Goulet (nicknamed Little Ray) and his wife Sheri run a company that includes a 650-square-metre rescue zoo near Ottawa's airport.

Mr. Goulet began doing animal presentations in schools and daycares in 1995. The couple's company grew quickly, and by 2000, Mr. Goulet had quit his banking job and his wife had left her restaurant management position to open the zoo.

Home birthday parties offered at the satellite locations now account for about one-fifth of Little Ray's business, conducted with the necessary government permits and inspections.

"The birthday parties are very fun, very interactive and educational," says Mr. Goulet. "One of the things that make us a success is we hire people who love children; our job is being able to speak to children in fun terms and make it educational."

During each hour-long birthday presentation, which can be held in English or French and inside or outside the home, depending on the weather, an animal handler brings a map or globe and does a world tour, bringing out the animals one at a time.

Cost: Packages range from \$145 to \$195, depending on the type of reptiles or animals shown during the presentation. No restrictions on the number of children or adults who can attend.

My Pop Star Party

Based in: Toronto

Frank Vena and Jerry Massarelli of Boom Recording Studios encourage children to channel their inner pop star at birthday parties at this suburban Toronto facility.

The business partners work with musicians and hold producer-engineering classes at their 11-square-metre studio most of the time.

But birthday parties were added to Boom's weekend services two years ago, after Mr. Vena's own son got the idea to take 10 of his friends into the studio for a karaoke-like birthday event.

The party was so much fun that Boom has been hosting such events ever since, and they've certainly helped boost the bottom line.

Not only do kids get to practise and record a song chosen from a music catalogue during a two-hour party, but they also get help with their vocals from recording artist and record producer Elissa, a Juno Award nominee.

Cost: \$350 for two hours/eight children, \$15 each additional child, up to a maximum of 12.

Paradis Martial Arts

Based in: Moncton, N.B.

Marc Paradis promotes health and fitness in everything he does: from his job as an operating room nurse at the Dr. Georges-L.-Dumont University Hospital Centre to teaching at his karate and ju-jitsu studio.

So when one of his martial arts students gave Mr. Paradis the idea of expanding his services a couple of years ago, the 42-year-old decided that adding birthday parties might be a great way to put physical activity on children's fun radar while bringing in money to help pay for major renovations to his studio.

Mr. Paradis has been a martial arts athlete for 20 years, and began teaching 15 years ago.

Ten years ago, he put tens of thousands of dollars into building the studio attached to the home he shares with his wife, Lisa, also a nurse and martial arts lover, and their two young children.

While the birthday parties are an added service that also help pay the bills, Mr. Paradis says it's also a way to expose more children to martial arts and healthy active living: "It's all about getting kids to have fun when they're exercising."

Costs: From \$249.99 to \$499.99.

Halifax Citadel Regimental Association

Based in: Halifax

It's a taste of history that takes youngsters back to "the thunder of artillery, the crack of rifle fire, and the rousing sound of pipes and drums" – all within the confines of a fort that is one of Canada's most important historic sites.

The Halifax Citadel National Historic Site is a restored 19th-century British fortification that hosts numerous events, including daily birthday parties between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. for children age 6 to 12.

For the birthday parties, children get to tour the ramparts and the tunnels, as well as play Victorian games with members of the 78th Highland Regiment, wear kilts and practise marching like a soldier.

Cost: \$150 for 12 guests, plus \$12.50 for every extra child up to 15.

The Hungry Oven

Based in: North Vancouver

Debby Tonn's culinary bag of tricks is particularly magical during the children's birthday parties she organizes at The Hungry Oven cooking school for children.

Ms. Tonn founded the school after a visit to New York, where she encountered a cooking facility exclusively for kids. Her research found that no such culinary environment for kids was available in her area of Vancouver, so she sank her teeth into creating one of her own.

The Hungry Oven opened in late spring, and offers cooking lessons for children as young as 3, as well as some classes for adults. The birthday parties, for children starting at age 6, are among other activities offered; they account for about 20 per cent of the business.

Ms. Tonn is a graduate of the Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts and a mother of two. She says youngsters today are often responsible for cooking or at least helping prepare family meals as well as their own lunches, and television cooking shows are all the rage; these are factors that are driving her business.

Hungry Oven's programs are planned by Ms. Tonn with the help of her executive chef, Johannes Oberbichler, her former Pacific Institute instructor.



ENCHANTED
PARTY

The 370-square-metre cooking school has three state-of-the-art kitchens that accommodate the needs and safety requirements of children, including induction cooking surfaces and special knives that cannot cut skin, to keep children's fingers safe. Each class begins with a review of kitchen safety rules.

Cost: \$425 for up to 10 guests (plus \$25 for each additional child, to a maximum of 15). Party extras include Hungry Oven goody bags (\$10 each) and aprons (\$15 each, or \$20 with embroidered names).

A party worth \$2.7 billion? Thomas H. Lee gets down

<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jun/05/business/la-fi-mo-party-city-thl-20120605>

June 05, 2012 | By Tiffany Hsu

Slumping stocks, rising unemployment and a European crisis: Does such a depressing cocktail make consumers feel more or less inclined to party? Would you pay \$2.7 billion to find out?

That's what private equity firm Thomas H. Lee Partners essentially agreed to do Tuesday, buying a majority stake in Party City Holdings Inc.

The shindig supplier, founded in 1947, leads a party goods industry worth \$10 billion, according to Boston-based THL. Party City has products in more than 40,000 retail outlets worldwide, 825 brick-and-mortar party superstores and more than 400 temporary Halloween pop-up shops each year.

The company had filed a prospectus more than a year ago for an initial public offering, aiming to raise roughly \$350 million. But given Facebook Inc.'s floundering debut and turmoil in the markets, staying private may have seemed a safer option for Party City.

Meanwhile, THL has kept busy taking in such companies, saying last month that it planned to buy the Fogo de Chao Churrascaria for \$400 million.

Party City's current owners, private equity firms Berkshire Partners, Advent International and Weston Presidio, will hold minority stakes. Berkshire and Weston bought Party City in 2005 for \$364 million.

But consider the sour economic news of late – shaky consumer confidence, poor job growth and more – and remaining reluctance among some party-throwers and goers to let loose. Is it a good bet to invest so heavily in a company focused on the good times?

The IPO filings show that Party City's revenue soared 17% to \$1.85 billion last year. Its net income spiked 54.6% to \$76.4 million.

The New York-based company says its domestic store network is 15 times larger than its next party superstore competitor. Over time, it plans to open another 400 Party City stores in North America.

Same-store sales rose 8.7% in 2011, including a 88.7% boom in online sales due to a revamp of its website in 2009.