



When **Shari Spiro** gets a business call, she lights up and turns on. It's all business, sure. But she clearly loves what she does.

Spiro said that, on her best days, she's a dream maker. Her company, **AdMagic** in Netcong, helps tabletop game designers take their ideas and bring them to life, either through publishing or helping them get into retail outlets.

"The best phone call I made yesterday was to one of my designers," she said. "I said, 'Your game is going into the **Barnes & Noble**.'"

"That was one of the best phone calls I'd had in a long time because he basically said, 'Thank you for making my dream come true.'"

But that wasn't always the case. Spiro started AdMagic in 1997 as an advertising and promotional firm.

"We started out in ad specialties and did that for a number of years," she said.

One day in 2003, some custom cards came across Spiro's desk and, taken by the design possibilities, she decided to start printing custom playing cards.

"I started in custom playing cards because I liked them," said Spiro, whose business cards are printed on the back of playing cards. "They came across one day, I looked at them and said, 'A rectangle: That's really easy.'"

"You can print anything on a rectangle." Then, in 2011, AdMagic had a new client ask it to print a new card game they had been

developing. It was a small run, just enough to fulfill orders the game designers had received on **Kickstarter** as they were trying to fund further development.

"We ran the Kickstarter run for them where I was lucky if I made \$50," she said.

That game was **Cards Against Humanity**. In two years, it would be well on its way to slicing out its own comfortable spot in the cultural zeitgeist.

"(**Cards Against Humanity**) is our flagship client," she said. "We promote them and also fulfill some of the roles of a publisher, but they've really created their own culture."

The company operates in two arms: one as AdMagic, and the other as its publishing wing, called **Breaking Games**.

"We bring games to shows and move stuff into retail, but it's basically 'indie,'" she said. "On our publishing side, which is Breaking Games, some games we do from scratch where a designer will come to us with an idea, we build the art, we test the mechanics, publish it, put it in stores and test it at conventions."

"Other games will come to us already made and we'll take them to different levels by working with those people. We have a very much custom model based on both manufacturing and publishing."

The manufacturing aspect of the business is still the largest revenue driver. It's brought the company major growth, but the sudden demand for **Cards Against Humanity**, the drive that started it all, presented some real challenges for Spiro and her then four-person company.

"That first year and a half was spent just trying to keep **Cards Against Humanity** in production," she said. "But it was like stepping into where I should've been from the beginning; it was like going home."

Then, sitting in the audience for a panel of the designers of **Cards Against Humanity**, Spiro had an "a-ha!" moment: This is where she was supposed to be.

The company spent the next 18 months working to keep up with the demand for



Shari Spiro is the founder and CEO of AdMagic. -PHOTOS BY AARON HOUSTON

Cards Against Humanity, but one fact was clear: AdMagic was now a gaming company.

"It completely changed my path because I fell in love with games," she said. "I went and saw one of (**Cards Against Humanity**) panels and I was laughing because they're so funny."

"I just thought, 'Oh, my God: This is my job now.' This is the greatest job in the world."

AdMagic's products are now in major retailers across the country and continuing to spread.

"We have **Cards Against Humanity** going back into **Target** this year, along with five or six other games, and we'll be in **Barnes & Noble** this year," she said.

Biz in Brief

COMPANY: AdMagic

FOUNDER: Shari Spiro

HEADQUARTERS: Netcong

EMPLOYEES: 13

ONE MORE THING: Aside from being passionate about games, **Shari Spiro** is also a musician who plays bass, keyboards and sings.

"There's a lot of exciting stuff going on."

The company has distribution in Canada, Europe, the United Kingdom and Australia, as well as the United States.

"That came from traveling all over the world," she said. "We basically just threw ourselves into it and said, 'OK, let's try it.'"

The company also recently purchased **Print & Play** in Vancouver, Washington. That

new wing of the company does small runs of specialized manufacturing for the company's Kickstarter campaigns.

"We do the prototypes and small game runs in Washington," she said. "Designers can use it if they have an idea and want to print a prototype."

And the company just expanded to a new warehouse space in Stanhope, the next town over.

"We have our own warehouse now, which is pretty big," she said.

But, with all this expansion, Spiro doesn't plan on leaving the state anytime soon. In fact, the new warehouse was purchased specifically because it was within walking distance to the company's current location.

"I grew up in New Jersey," she said. "I love New Jersey, and I'm not planning on leaving."



Bull----!

Shari Spiro loves a good challenge. The founder and CEO of **AdMagic** is passionate about her love for games and is always looking to help her clients bring new and exciting products to market.

This last Black Friday, that included "Bull----" for **Cards Against Humanity**.

"It actually has (expletive) in it," she said. "You could buy bull---- for \$6 that, by the way, probably costs \$7. They didn't make any money, but they got a tremendous amount of publicity."

The custom box included genuine bull excrement from Texas that was specially dried under UV lights.

As for Spiro's role in taking her client's idea and helping to make it a logistical reality?

"I manufactured everything," she said.