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(Photos available for download)

The Accidental Entrepreneur **(Stan Goldin Bio)**

Like a muggle-born, chancing upon the world of wizards and magic, Whimsic Alley founder and owner, Stan Goldin came to be the world's leading retailer of Harry Potter and related products almost entirely by accident. Goldin's background had been in the world of corporate finance and accounting. He held senior management positions during a 25 year career at such companies as Six Flags Corporation, Xerox Corporation, and Transamerica Insurance Company.

Goldin is a single father. One day his adolescent son, Reid, asked him to buy him some Pokemon cards. At the time, Pokemon was all the rage and, much to his chagrin, Goldin ended up spending three times the face value for six packs of Japanese cards.

Goldin devised a shrewd plan. He would purchase a full box of the cards directly from Japan. Reid could then sell half the box to his friends at the inflated rates they were going for here in the States, and keep the other half of the box for himself. Unfortunately—or fortunately, as the case may be—the plan failed. Being a middle-school Pokemon pusher was not Reid's idea of fun and he gave up on the plan after selling just a handful of packs.

Can a Cartoon Mouse Sustain a Business?

So now, Goldin was left with the lion's share of the box of Japanese Pokemon cards. With the intention of just recovering his costs, Goldin decided to open the packs, sell the rare cards at a premium price, and discard the common cards. He opened shop on eBay, which was itself a new fledgling company, and very quickly became one of its largest Pokemon dealers. He made several close contacts in and around Japan and was soon importing rare promotional cards that no one in this country had ever seen.

Discouraged by eBay's many shortcomings, Goldin eventually set up his own Pokemon website called Pokestore, which quickly became one of the largest Pokemon websites. Eventually, Pokemon sales became more lucrative—and fun—than Goldin's day job and he began devoting himself full time to the

Internet business. Working from his apartment, with staff coming in to fill orders, Goldin rented the next door apartment and persuaded his landlord to cut doors from one unit to the next.

Like all good things, the Pokemon fad eventually came to an end. Anticipating this, Goldin began searching for the next great fad. There was Magic the Gathering, Digimon, and YuGiOh. But what caught Goldin's eye was something very different—Harry Potter.

Along Comes Harry

At the time, there were only three Harry Potter books. Goldin had never read or heard of any of them, but became intrigued when he noticed that they were atop the best-seller list at numbers one, two and three. But no book of any sort had ever led to the type of fad that Goldin had experienced with Pokemon. Only after Warner Bros. announced it would be making a movie of the first Harry Potter book did Goldin feel that Harry could possibly fly. He and Reid quickly read the first three Potter books and fell in love with them.

It was set, Goldin would begin building an online Harry Potter store similar to his successful online Pokemon store. There were only two problems. First, although the movie was getting quite a bit of early buzz owing to the success of the books, it was still in the very early stages and its anticipated release was nearly two years down the line. Yet this paled in comparison to the second problem, which was that there was absolutely no Harry Potter product available yet to sell.

Not discouraged, Goldin registered the domain name Harry Potter Wizard Store and formulated plans to begin selling Harry Potter merchandise online just as soon as anything became available to sell. The first products began showing up a few months later. The former Warner Bros Stores introduced a small line of Harry Potter collectibles and Hallmark Stores issued a small line of Christmas Ornaments and decorative items. Both stores were direct-to-consumer retailers and would not wholesale their products to Goldin or anyone else. Goldin's only alternative was to purchase the Warner Bros and Hallmark merchandise at full retail and mark it up to some price higher than retail. Not exactly an ideal business model. But as luck would have it, that was precisely the model that Goldin had found success with in his Pokemon business.

Many months later, other companies began producing Harry Potter product for resale. Goldin recalls the first national apparel show he and his longtime mate, Sue, attended. It may as well have been a Harry Potter show. Harry was everywhere. Finally Goldin was able to purchase items at wholesale prices and sell them to his customers at competitive rates. His website now offered hundreds of unique products.

Selling over the net provides little human interaction. In 2003, Goldin and Reid travelled to Orlando, FL to be a vendor at Nimbus 2003, the first Harry Potter Symposium. It was Goldin's first opportunity to meet his customers face-to-face. He learned a lot about his customers and what they wanted. With the experience of Nimbus under his belt, the idea of a brick and mortar store began to take seed in his mind. A year later, again by happenstance, that seed would sprout.

Whimsic Alley

The business was growing. Yet it was still operating from Goldin's house. Eventually the neighbors began complaining and Goldin was forced to relocate the business to a commercial location. His most logical choice was a light industrial facility where he could store goods and process orders. But Goldin came up with a different solution. Since he was being forced to incur an additional rent for commercial space, he would open a retail store as well. All he needed from the store was to generate enough revenues to cover the rent, and the warehouse/shipping space would be free.

Goldin knew nothing about operating a retail store and after signing a lease on a suitably large space, he was told to contact space planners for ideas on how to build out the space. Ever the unconventional retailer, Goldin's idea for the layout of the store was vastly different from that of the space planners he consulted. What he was suggesting seemed to go right over their heads. He did not want a store where people could simply go and buy Harry Potter branded items. He wanted a store that made people feel they were entering Harry Potter's world—shopping for magical wands, robes, quills and the like, just as Harry and his friends would. Instead of a space planner, he turned to a Hollywood set designer, Paul Felix Montez, who instantly saw Goldin's vision ran with it.

The resulting store resembles a Dickens-like alleyway with a series of specialty shops such as a wand shop, a robe and cloak shop, a witch and wizard hat shop, a quill and ink shop, a wizard confections shop and more. And yes, it does have the original Harry Potter Wizard Store, featuring more Harry Potter branded items than any store in the world.

In the four years since it opened, the store, to Goldin's complete surprise, has become something of a tourist destination. Customers from all over the world have told Goldin that the only reason they selected Southern California as their destination was to come to Whimsic Alley. Tourists have put it on their must-do plans alongside Disneyland and Universal Studios.