

# Going Solo: Creative Tools for Teaching Entrepreneurship

## University of Illinois

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Going Solo is an activity based entrepreneurship curriculum and computer simulation game developed by University of Illinois staff and faculty in 1994. Within the first two years of the program's inception, Extension educators reached over 1,000 youth and adults with Going Solo materials in settings as diverse as summer camps for inner city youth to traditional classrooms in rural communities. Other educators were eventually enlisted to field test the curriculum. Assessments by educators at these sites were the basis for continued improvement and the development of the materials in use today.

Extension then adopted a train-the-trainer format as its delivery method of choice. Since the program's inception, U of I faculty and staff have trained over 1,500 educators both in the United States and abroad to use the Going Solo materials. Partners in these training venues included: the Illinois State Board of Education, community colleges, the International Association of Home Economists, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

### Objective of Going Solo...

- Create an activity- based, flexible entrepreneurial program for instructors with varying degrees of business knowledge to use with diverse audiences.

The curriculum is designed as an easy-to-use teaching resource for entrepreneurship educators. Program developers learned that many educators in entrepreneurship have little or no formal business training. With that in mind, Going Solo employed the Experiential Learning Model in its design and consequently allows the instructor to become more of a facilitator rather than a lecturer. Going Solo includes learning modules addressing topics ranging from record keeping to communication skills. All business concepts are taught in an integrated fashion rather than as discreet subjects. A flexible format was built into the materials so it could be used in venues as short as one day or as long as one semester. The materials can be used for a wide range of audiences but they have been developed as a teaching resource for the educator.

The online simulation game is a "virtual jewelry market place" used to teach business basics in a hands-on highly interactive environment. Events and market conditions generated in the game allow those playing to test their business decision-making skills against competing companies. Results are reported to participants in the form of financial statements.

### Objectives of the Game...

- Participants will learn business concepts such as marketing and finance in an integrated fashion as opposed to studying each area as a separate discipline.
- Participants will learn the practical application of business fundamentals.
- Participants will learn that pricing, marketing, and production strategies should be influenced by the marketplace.

- Participants will learn that the performance of each company is greatly influenced by the quality and quantity of the competition.
- Participants will learn there is no right or wrong decision. Success in small business is achieved by making the best decisions under uncertain conditions.
- Participants will learn the concept of resource optimization.

Although materials were originally designed to reach high school students in traditional classroom environments, participants now use the materials in a diverse range of settings including youth camps, behavior disorder classes, and entrepreneurship classes for disabled adults, single mothers, and low income women in Caribbean countries. The Caribbean Association of Home Economists (CAHE) adopted the curriculum to teach rural women how to begin home-based businesses. That program was recognized as a Best Practice at the 2004 IFHE World Congress in Tokyo. To meet a growing interest within the Hispanic community, Going Solo has been translated into Spanish. The Extension staff introduced Bulgarian educators to Going Solo as part of the United Nations sponsored Bulgarian Education Project. The Market simulation became part of their nationwide curriculum on entrepreneurship.

Going Solo continues to be a work in progress. Feedback from Going Solo educators over the years has resulted in revisions and improvements. The team sees the need to capitalize on new technologies to enhance dissemination, design, and to make the materials more user-friendly for students and instructors. This feedback has moved Going Solo into the current direction of online dissemination.

Several challenges facing the previous version of Going Solo can now be addressed:

- An inability to provide updated curriculum in a cost-effective and timely manner. Now curriculum can be updated on a consistent basis and provide instructors with current information.
- On-going training that was specific to an instructor's needs was difficult and costly to address. Web-based Going Solo gives the team additional opportunities for training instructors, such as topic-specific podcasts and tutorials.
- Illegal dissemination of material. Only instructors who have subscribed to the online version of Going Solo can have access to the curriculum and game.
- Limitations to the Excel spreadsheet Going Solo simulation game. By creating an online version, instructors have access to all of the companies' information in an easy format. It allows the instructors to input data easily, create reports and charts, and create discussion forums with students. This version gives the instructor the option of permitting students to access and input information about their company online. In addition, the online simulation game gives the team flexibility in creating different virtual marketplace businesses.

Going Solo was initially funded by a mini-grant offered through the University of Illinois. Once the program began to take form, another larger grant was pursued and accepted through the University of Illinois. After the original completion of Going Solo, resources of funding came from training and selling curriculum and bead kits. Through these funds, Extension staff was able to take Going Solo to its next phase. Going Solo continues to look at cost recovery by training and subscription fees as well as partnerships within the communities.