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# Tupperware ... then sex toys ... now gold gets the party going

Women are selling jewellery at home or by post, but the prices do not always glitter

## Kathryn Hopkins

In the 1970s, a new trend swept across Britain. Women would buy a few bottles of Mateus Rosé, put some cheese and pineapple on cocktail sticks and invite friends over to buy food storage boxes.

Tupperware parties became the height of fashion but as tastes changed and the ubiquitous plastic fell out of favour, other companies rushed to cater for women who wanted to socialise, drink wine and spend money at the same time. Since then, there have been Ann Summers parties, Botox parties, Bodyshop parties and now gold parties.

Women - and those at parties are mostly female - invite friends over and tell them to bring unwanted gold or silver jewellery lying about their house. It could be necklaces, bracelets, rings or even broken chains.

Once a few bottles of wine have been opened and canapés nibbled, a representative from the gold party company will weigh the gold and offer the guests a cheque there and then. The representative sends the gold back to the company to be melted down.

At a party organised by the gold party company **Ounces2Pounds** in the leafy suburb of Chipstead, Surrey, last month, one partygoer, Sue Barclay, found an old

necklace to be worth £250.

"I didn't think it was gold," she said. Her jewellery turned out to be worth £690 and despite her concerns that she might have made more money at the jewellers, she went away with the cheque. "I can take my whole family to

Center Parcs with this," said Barclay. Ounces2Pounds, which started in the US last April as Glitter2Green, is now organising up to 75 small residential parties of 13-15 people a month in the UK. The phenomenon has also spread to Australia and Japan.

Its founder, Krista Waddell, puts its success down to the global recession and people's need for extra cash to make ends meet. "Everyone is in the same boat. Bankers' wives are selling everything including oversized 80s-style earrings, single cufflinks, coins, broken bracelets, necklaces, charms, even a broken gold-plated iPod in the 'gold-rush' parties in the States. These are people who wouldn't be seen dead in a pawn shop. They'd be too embarrassed."

The hosts earn 10% of the total payout at their party, 3% commission from every future party and £35 towards entertainment costs. "Enough for quite a few bottles of reasonable supermarket wine," said Waddell. She believes that Ounces2Pounds offers its customers a

win-win situation. "In today's economy, everyone could use some extra cash, and the majority of women have jewellery sitting in their box that is broken or out of date," she said.

"Our target market are the women who would never feel comfortable walking into a pawn shop and are smart enough not to be taken advantage of. We offer high prices, the chance to offload items that are just sitting there anyway, and a great night out with their friends. Not to mention that the host earns a nice bit of money at the same time."

The company is also popular with the newly single, with women trading in gifts from former husbands and ex-boyfriends. "A lot of it is broken bits and pieces," the company said.

The price of gold has soared over the last year. In January last year, an ounce of gold cost as little as \$750 (then about £520). But on 3 December, it hit a record high of just over \$1,226. Since then it has slid to \$1,095 but is still far above the average level of the past few years.

Many businesses have followed Ounces2Pounds and there are also postal services for unwanted gold with huge advertising campaigns.

However, gold parties and postal dealers have come in for criticism. A recent study of postal companies by the

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consumer rights group Which? revealed shockingly low prices. It sent a nine-carat gold necklace from Ernest Jones to Postal Gold but was paid only £25.04 and when it sent an H Samuel 9ct-gold bracelet, which cost £115, to Cash4Gold, it received just £10.31.

However, Ounces2Pounds insists it pays the going rate. "Ounces2Pounds pay two to three times more than an average pawnbroker for the precious metals bought at the parties," said a spokesperson for the company.



**A Tupperware party in 1958. Since then Botox and sex toy parties have followed**

