

This Inc. 5000 Founder Started a Virtual Team-Building Business During Quarantine

Andrew Nadel's new venture-- ConnectRship--aims to help clients' team-building efforts through remote versions of classic games.

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Social distancing guidelines and quarantines have largely put an end to happy hours and other in-person company events. That has presented a golden business opportunity for businesses that can offer alternative ways to stay connected, like ConnectRship, which offers remote team building activities centered on classic board games.

ConnectRship was born in April when founder Andrew Nadel and his wife wanted to host a virtual happy hour for clients of their company Pride Products, a maker of promotional merchandise that has made the Inc. 5000 list every year between 2014 and 2017. Nadel decided to mix things up by playing virtual board games during that meeting.

What started out as a way for him to get to know his consumers became a business idea after multiple clients asked if he could host something similar for their own employees. After hosting more sessions internally to figure out which games would work best and what videoconferencing software to use, in late April, Nadel launched ConnectRship.

Each game session is hosted over Zoom and lasts around 30 minutes.

Nadel acts as referee, guiding players through a set of classic games like Taboo, charades, or Pictionary, alongside trivia and other guessing games.

"Everyone's feeling out of touch with their colleagues and doing the same things day in and day out," he says, adding that a virtual game session is a perfect way to break up the monotony.

Nadel is a self-proclaimed game freak. Every New Year's Day for the past 15 years, his family has hosted a "game day" for others in their neighborhood with trivia, brain teasers, and timed juggling competitions catered to older parents and young children. Nadel personally hosts each event, and now each virtual game session at ConnectRship--sporting the same striped referee shirt he's worn each day on New Year's.

Although the business is only a few weeks old, Nadel says it has hosted sessions with companies like Revelwood, an analytics consulting

firm in New Jersey, and Lando & Anastasi, a law firm in Boston. ConnectRship has hosted around 12 virtual game sessions with 50 participants thus far. Although the company started by hosting games for Pride Products' customers, it has since expanded beyond that group-- Nadel's daughter Amy is ConnectRship's creative director, and handles social media marketing and running the brand's website, which has helped to attract a wider array of companies.

Pricing is based on the number of games a company books as well as the length of the session. Nadel says sessions are also customizable to any group size, with options to play games in pairs or smaller teams.

ConnectRship joins a growing industry: Board game companies like Kingmakers, based in Ohio, are also offering guided virtual gaming sessions for families or businesses. Virtual gaming apps like Houseparty or Drawful have similarly grown in popularity in recent months.

While virtual game sessions can help with team building within a company, they're also useful when it comes to building relationships with investors or prospective clients. Nadel says games that riff off of speed dating, for example, are designed to deepen relationships and allow players to gain a better understanding of one another's likes, interests, and hobbies--similar to dining or attending a baseball game with a client.

Nadel says he doesn't expect companies like ConnectRship to disappear once employees return to offices. For one, rather than hosting annual in-person conferences, larger companies with employees in multiple locations can save time and money by encouraging employees to connect virtually. Offering a virtual game session can also be an innovative way to connect with clients, or a means for internal team building as a human resource initiative.

Employees simply need an internet connection to participate--the rest is up to ConnectRship. "This has unlimited potential," Nadel says. "I think the sky's the limit."