

Contest whiz works at winning

October 14, 2009

Carola Vyhnak

A case of Goldfish crackers, a gourmet meal cooked by celebrity chef Bob Blumer in his Los Angeles home, a visit to the set of *Harry Potter* in England.

Such are the free fruits of Carolyn Wilman's labours – and luck.

The self-proclaimed "Contest Queen" is a whiz at winning.

"I call it contest crack. It's an addiction," says the 42-year-old Oshawa resident, who spends up to two hours a day at her computer entering online competitions.

While Wilman gets her kicks just playing the game, she averages between five and 15 prizes a month. The 4 1/2 kilograms of crackers were a particularly good catch, lasting her family of three a year and a half.

On recycling days, she and husband Craig go hunting through blue bins in their neighbourhood to find product packages with PIN codes needed to enter contests on the manufacturer's website.

She leaves nothing to chance. The walls and shelves in her feng shui-ed home office are filled with leprechauns, horseshoes and laughing Buddhas. There's a sign that reads: "You are lucky if you think you are."

That's one of her "secrets."

"You have to believe you can win. I did it. I wanted to go to London so I focused on it every day and three months later I won a trip to London. I don't believe it was coincidence."

Of course, while she was visualizing the trip she was entering contests. Highly organized, she checks emails and websites listing current contests and uses software to fill in entry forms. Occasionally she enters radio call-ins with a phone on autodial in each hand or uses her cellphone for texting entries.

Good fortune doesn't come without effort, she says, quoting film producer Samuel Goldwyn: "The harder I work, the luckier I get."

She got serious about contesting after looking for a way to balance motherhood, work and having fun. She parlayed her hobby and a 20-year marketing background into a career, teaching others how to haul in the loot and coaching businesses on how to give it away.

"Companies don't do it out of the goodness of their hearts," she says. Contests are "a cheap way for them to get millions of dollars worth of demographic info and get customers excited about their products."

A sign outside a church that read "You can't lose helping others win" was her signal to write a book, *You Can't Win if You Don't Enter*, says Wilman, who's happy to share her winning ways by posting tips on her website, www.contestqueen.com.

The prize values in emails from other "contestors" she's helped have topped \$1 million and include a house and cars. One wrote to thank her for helping her win a \$250,000 house in a draw when she was on disability and her husband was out of work. They had just refinanced their home to pay off debts.

Wilman has racked up thousands of dollars worth of shopping sprees and gift cards, including one for Sport Chek that covered all her family's winter gear needs. But it's things you can't put a price on that she values most, like a soccer ball autographed by Toronto FC and a chance to meet Sting during a speaking engagement in Toronto.

Wilman advises contestors to protect their computer with a good firewall, and anti-virus and spam software. She'll share her secrets at a seminar Nov. 21 at the Bond Place Hotel in Toronto. Pre-registration on her website is required. And of course, there will be prizes.



"Contest addict" Carolyn Wilman wins an average of 10 prizes per month.

TORONTO STAR STAFF