

Women of the Web

By Dee Gill
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Growing up in Philadelphia, Genevieve Thiers and her twin sister, Katherine, divided up their neighborhood, landing 10 baby-sitting jobs apiece each week.

So it's no surprise that Ms. Thiers invented a more-efficient way to dole out sitting jobs. In 2001, she founded Sittercity Inc., a Web site that allows parents to choose baby sitters online.

Sittercity has registered more than 1 million independent caregivers, who offer child, senior and pet care and house-sitting and tutoring services. Parents, who subscribe to Sittercity for about \$8 a month, hire baby sitters from the Web site at a rate of one every three minutes.

"We're safer than hiring the girl next door, who you wouldn't put through the gantlet of background checks, references, etc., that our sitters go through," she says.

Last year, Sittercity's revenue exceeded \$3 million after several years of 300% growth. Ms. Thiers, 30, started adding corporate accounts two years ago: Monster Worldwide Inc., Northwestern University and Avon Products Inc. now subscribe to Sittercity for their employees. She declined to forecast 2008 sales but says the company is still "in highly aggressive growth," with 31 employees, up from 20 a year ago, and will move into a bigger space in River North this year.

Jenni Prokopy is another Chicago woman making a name for herself on the Web. She started ChronicBabe.com in 2005, six years after being diagnosed with asthma, anxiety and fibromyalgia, a chronic condition causing widespread pain and fatigue.



ChronicBabe.com

Chronic Illness Awareness Week's online conference.

Like Ms. Thiers, Ms. Prokopy is expanding. Since recovering from a storm that ripped off the roof of her Uptown condominium (also ChronicBabe's headquarters) over the summer, she has added a podcast and forum to the

The blog provides self-care tips and gives readers a way to connect with others with similar conditions. Site traffic has grown to 2,000 viewers a day, with 1,900 subscribing to her biweekly newsletter, which provides articles on subjects like nutrition, treatments and how to calm down after intense situations.

The Web site has led to speaking engagements including one in September, when Ms. Prokopy, 35, was the headliner for the National Invisible

site. She also has started selling advertising, primarily to companies selling treatments to people with chronic illnesses.

"At the heart of the site is the belief that there's a ray of light that gives us hope despite illness," she says, "and that we can and will be successful."

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