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Connecting Moms

Interview with Genevieve Thiers of Sittercity.com

Sittercity is a privately owned corporation founded in 2001 and is a certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE). With over 150,000 caregivers nationwide, Sittercity is a way for parents and caregivers to contact each other and set up childcare jobs. Founder Genevieve Thiers spread the Sittercity message over twelve major colleges in Boston on foot to gather an opening database of 600 babysitters (and many blisters) within three weeks. Parents love the service for the accessibility it gives them to talented, caring babysitters and nannies, and sitters love it for the range of jobs it provides. Connecting Moms conducted an interview with founder Genevieve Thiers.

Q: Can you tell us about your company and site www.Sittercity.com?

A: Sittercity.com is America's largest, most easily accessible database for babysitters and nannies. With over 150,000 caregivers nationwide, we think we're the Web's best way for parents and caregivers to contact each other and set up childcare jobs.

Q: How did you come to develop such a service?

A: I was a college sitter, and one day I saw a pregnant mom walking up the 193 steps from Boston College's lower campus to its upper campus. I was horrified, so I took the flyers she was posting for a sitter, sent her home, and posted them for her. While I was posting one next to an elevator, I thought, "Wouldn't it be great if someone created one place in a city where parents could go to find care in that city?" And Sittercity.com was born.

Q: Many mothers and parents are often hesitant to hire nannies and babysitters, how does your company address this?

A: We actually make finding sitters and nannies safer than it was before. Before, parents would talk to pals or place a classified ad. You never know who you are getting. On Sittercity.com, we have over 150,000 sitters, with references, feedback from parents, background checks, interview info, detailed profiles, pictures ... it's just incredible. It's entering sitter heaven.

Q: What criteria do your sitters need to fulfill in order to become employed?

A: They must be over seventeen and have one childcare reference. We have an internal Q/A department that makes sure that these criteria are filled. They also have the option to

purchase a background check on themselves and post it for parents to see. This is very popular!

Q: How did you spread the word?

A: I flyer'd every college in foot and talked to every parent that I sat for in the beginning. We launched in Boston in 2001. I had found 600 sitters on foot, and thirty parents.

Q: Having started in Boston, Massachusetts, how long did it take for your company to grow and reach other cities and states?

A: The site grew virally, at an incredible pace! By 2002, we were in three cities. By 2003, ten cities. By 2004, national, and today, we have more than a half a million users nationwide!

Q: Do you get repeat customers often? And how do you get feedback?

A: Yes! Parents always come back once they use us because sitters usually graduate, move, or change careers within a year of being hired. So we generally see parents several times, and always make them welcome when they come back. As for feedback, parents send it to us every day, and we post it. We also ask parents and sitters to leave feedback on each other, and this is becoming a popular site option.

Q: What has been the most challenging part of being an entrepreneur?

A: Learning to let go. In the beginning, you want to control everything, and it's small. Learning to hire and trust my amazing team was hard, but now I am in heaven! It's an amazing group of people, all with their own talents.

Q: Would you have done anything differently in the beginning with what you know now?

A: Actually I think that I was incredibly lucky. When I tried to launch Sittercity, I went to VC's and angels, and tried to get funding. They laughed me out of the room. So, I launched the site alone, on foot, with a little money and a ton of sweat. We have made it this far growing on revenues—it's an incredibly healthy way to grow. When you work with VC's, you usually lose control, and then anything can happen.

Q: What do you owe Sittercity's success to?

A: My team, my fiancé Dan Ratner, who is our VP and seasoned entrepreneur and taught me a lot of what I know, and blood, sweat, and tears!

Q: Being featured on a slew of well known media sources such as the Today Show, ABC, CBS, and FOX, as well as receiving kudos from the President himself, what has been the highlight for you thus far in your journey?

A: When Al Roker asked me to baby-sit for him live on the Today Show. That was awesome. I said yes.

Q: How do you balance work and family?

A: It's hard. My fiancé and I talk about work all the time and have to make time for us. We recently almost cancelled a vacation to Kauai, and then decided to go. It was so great! We need time to be a couple, and we get very little of that while running a company.

Q: What are your hobbies?

A: I am a professional opera singer in Chicago. I sing about three shows a year. I have a master's from Northwestern, and majored in music all through school. I also love to dance and write.

Q: Do you have any new projects in the works?

A: I was part of the founding team and also now run OperaModa, a Chicago opera company. You can find info at operamoda.com.

Q: What are some general words of wisdom that you can share with our ConnectingMoms community?

A: If you can raise a child, you can do anything. We women are amazing.