



- [Home](#)
- [Media Info](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [City Guides](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [E-magazine](#)
- [Book Flight](#)



• **Advertisement**

**ADVENTURES in
BABYSITTING**

The CEO of a multimillion-dollar babysitters club created a service that parents had been desperately seeking



As the oldest of seven kids (along with her twin), Genevieve Thiers began babysitting at a young age. The dirty diapers, endless whining and countless hours spent putting siblings to bed may have cost her a few Friday nights out with the girls, but they definitely paid off in the long run.

It all began in 2000, in her Boston College dorm room. While studying for an exam, Thiers' eyes drifted from her books and out the window. Rather than gazing at the trees, daydreaming about the weekend, her eyes focused on a very pregnant woman climbing a long set of stairs, posting fliers for a babysitter as she ascended. Desperate to lend a helping hand, Thiers rushed out and assisted in the search.

Search

Features
 City guides

• **Archives**

Select Month ■

• **Categories**

- [Atlanta](#)
- [Beauty](#)
- [Books](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Cars](#)
- [Celebrities](#)
- [Charleston](#)
- [City Quiz](#)
- [Crew Cuts](#)
- [Destinations](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Fashion](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Gastronomie](#)
- [General](#)
- [Home Turf](#)
- [Hotel Review](#)
- [Media](#)
- [Nightlife](#)
- [Orlando](#)
- [Puerto](#)



“I remember my ‘Eureka!’ moment,” says Thiers, the CEO of Sittercity.com, a company that links parents to sitters. “While I was posting her flier by an elevator, I thought, ‘There must be a better way to bring parents and sitters together.’ It just resonated with me, and I knew it would be big.”

She points out that entrepreneurs are those who find an opportunity where there is an inconvenience. Worried parents hire sitters as if they are screening a combination of security guard, psychologist, nurse and tutor—and it isn’t easy to find someone who has the complete skill-set for particular needs and charges a reasonable price.

Having met her boyfriend (now husband) online, Thiers was convinced that the internet was the most effective medium. She had confidence that a dot-com for sitter-seekers was the solution, so she bought the domain name with a \$120 loan from her father, and saved every penny from a job at IBM to hire two friends to build the site.



When Thiers began pitching local investors, they dismissed the idea, shooing her away with the demeaning excuse that they did not fund “babysitting clubs.” One even added that his wife took care of “that sort of thing.” Undeterred, Thiers set out to recruit sitters. After passing out 20,000 fliers across 12 local colleges, she received 600 responses. As soon as word of her service got out, desperate parents flooded the office with thankful goodies.

- [Rico](#)
- [Puzzle](#)
- [Round up](#)
- [Slopes](#)
- [Spas](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Travel News](#)
- [Go guides](#)



BETTER-R-VALUE
FOAM INSULATION

BIOBASED
SYSTEMS
SPRASED FOAM INSULATION

START SAVING GREEN TODAY.

- Cut home energy costs by up to 50%
- Drastically improve indoor air quality
- Simple/fast installation for new & old homes
- Block infiltration of mold, insects and animals

404-343-1349
bettervalue.net

Better-R-Value, Inc.
512 Drexel Avenue
Decatur, GA 30030

To call it an “office” is actually a bit of a stretch, though. When a newspaper wanted to take photos of the company’s headquarters, Thiers and her roommates moved furniture into the basement and put up signs to create a fake office. When people began wondering whether Sittercity was a real company, Thiers started answering the phone in different voices and would offer to go get the boss.

In 2002, when she got accepted into Northwestern University, Thiers had the freedom to pack up Sittercity and set up shop in the Windy City. She earned a master’s degree in opera singing, and—as if she didn’t have enough drama in her life with one company—she cofounded OperaModa, dedicated to performing American operas. (She would show up at business meetings for Sittercity dressed in her stage costume.)

Today, Sittercity is by far the largest online service of its kind, with half a million members who pay \$39.99 for the first month and \$9.99 a month thereafter, or \$95.88 a year, for access to 150,000 babysitters, nannies, petsitters and elder-care givers. It has 25 employees and is a multimillion-dollar business, with 300% year-over-year revenue growth in each of the past two years.

In addition to having financial success, the company has garnered industry recognition (first place in the UPS “Out of the Box” competition last year) and glowing media coverage, including Time’s “50 Coolest Websites” list. Thiers has appeared on “The View,” “The Ellen DeGeneres Show,” “Good Morning America” and “Today.”

Along the way, Thiers has found common lessons in her twin passions of sitting and opera. The first is to talk to your customers early and often.



“I’ve made the mistake of creating a beautiful product only to find out that no one wants to buy it at the price I want to charge,” she says. “Get your ego out of the way, get down on the floor and kiss their feet for telling you what they really want.”

She also learned the hard way about the value of teamwork—after nearly suffering a nervous breakdown by trying to do everything herself.

Another realization is that you can get creative to make things happen on a budget. It would be nice to do things the “right” way, but achieving something good that isn’t perfect is better than never getting off the ground with grand, expensive plans. “A company is, above all, its cash flow,” she says.

But it’s also about providing something your customers need—and for working parents, childcare is high on the list.

GETTING NOTICED

Genevieve Thiers shares tips on attracting attention from the media and public.

PITCH IDEAS

Become an indispensable expert on a niche topic. “Watch or read reporters’ stories and give them a whole package on a silver platter about something bigger than just your company—tie it to a social or business trend. Then be patient and remind them in nonintrusive ways from time to time that you’re there and eager to be a source.” Be patient, she adds. “Some of Sittercity’s biggest hits took years to

get.”

GAIN CONTACTS

Thiers stresses the importance of getting to know reporters, producers, hosts and writers personally, and letting them use your product or service. If they love it, you're likely to get coverage. “We found nannies for some of them,” she says.

PARTNER WISELY

“A lot of venture-funded companies try to buy everything and don't understand the finesse that's needed to partner, but we've been more capital efficient by showing other companies the value in working with us,” Thiers says. When Sittercity launched its pet-sitting service in May 2007, it did a profit-share with PETCO in exchange for displays in stores and fliers in shopping bags.

CORPORATE CARE

Companies are recognizing that employees have personal lives and that it's a win-win to offer them help with childcare.

Connecting sitters and working parents has been an important part of Sittercity's growth. Its corporate customers now include FOX Networks, Avon and Monster Worldwide, covering about half a million workers in 2008. What makes the Sittercity formula attractive to businesses?

CHILDCARE IS A HIGH-VALUE, LOW-COST BENEFIT that is accessed through a company-branded portal, which is a competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining good employees.

WHEN FIRMS HELP WORKERS GET HELP, it enables the workers to start work on time and reduces distraction and absenteeism.

COMPANY-SPONSORED CARE

enables business travel and unusual or extended hours, without worrying about what's happening at home or having to pick up the kids at a precise time.

WORKERS GET A RESOURCE that has experienced, well-qualified caregivers, rather than being left on their own to try to find someone who is reliable, cost-effective and good with children.

SITTERCITY ORGANIZES

“SPEEDSITTING” EVENTS at companies, which give workers an opportunity to spend a couple of minutes getting to know a lot of local sitters.

MOMS WHO TAKE A LEAVE OF ABSENCE to care for young children can return to their jobs earlier, knowing their kids will be taken care of by someone they can trust.

Almost one-third of Fortune 's “100 Best Companies to Work For” have an on-site childcare center.

 [Bookmark This Post](#)  [Email This Post](#)

Recent Posts:

- [Tecnology](#)
- [Harnessing Knowledge](#)
- [To Give is to Receive](#)
- [ADVENTURES in BABYSITTING](#)
- [IN BUSINESS](#)
- [Real Estate Moguls](#)

Leave a Reply

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.

- [Home](#)
- [Media Info](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Register](#)
- [Recruitment](#)
- [Book a Flight](#)

[© 2008 Ink Publishing. All rights reserved.](#)