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How One Mom Turned A Kid's Haircut Into A Booming Small Business

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Joanna Meiseles wanted her son's first haircut to be memorable. Her plan was to videotape and savor the moment that her baby's gentle, golden curls fell to the floor for the first time. Imagine her surprise when she took him to a local family-style hair salon and nobody wanted her business.



“None of the hairdressers that were working there wanted to cut his hair,” Meiseles said. “Finally, the lowest hairdresser on the totem pole was the one who ended up having to cut his hair. It didn't occur to me that hairdressers don't want to work with kids.”

This was her “lightbulb moment.”

“I came home from his haircut and said to my husband, ‘I should open a children's hair salon.’ And he said, ‘You should call it Snip-its,’” she said.

Building The Brand

With a kernel of an idea, a working name and a determination to make it happen, Meiseles spent the next two years researching and developing a unique, kid-focused brand that would deliver high-quality haircuts in a fun and welcoming environment. She did use the name [Snip-its](#).

She even developed her own set of Snip-its brand cartoon characters, called Snips and the Gang, and brought them to life in a salon with floor-to-ceiling murals and vibrantly colored decor.

Once in the chair, kids are kept entertained with interactive games led by Snips and the Gang while parents sit nearby to watch the process.

Putting The Customer First

Meiseles didn't just create a salon; she also created a customer experience like no other.

Customer experience can have a huge impact on a company's brand and bottom line. A recent survey by [NewVoiceMedia](#) estimates that U.S. companies lose \$41 billion each year due to poor customer service. In fact, 97 percent of global consumers say that customer service is very important or somewhat important in their choice of and loyalty to a brand, according to a [2015 report from Microsoft®](#).

So imagine that the customer you are serving is an anxious, squirming toddler with an equally anxious parent looking over your shoulder. For Meiseles, it could've been a screaming disaster — but it became a recipe for success.

Recruiting For Success

To ensure the best customer service at Snip-its, Meiseles had to find employees who believed in her mission to deliver an extraordinary experience for kids and their families.

“The staffing of the salons themselves is very difficult, and it's hard to find hairdressers who want to work with kids,” Meiseles said. “For many years, I recruited stylists anywhere I could get them.”

One recruiting trick she learned was to take stock of potential employees working nearby.

“I made a list of every single hair salon that was a family salon or that would do kids at all,” she said. “And I found out who is the hairdresser at each of those salons that gets all of the kids. I don't need every hairdresser to want to work at Snip-its. I just needed that one.”

Once hired, Snip-its employees are put through a training program that teaches them how to deal with challenging situations.

“There’s a big part of the training that deals with customer service and how we deal with customers who are not satisfied,” Meiseles said. “How you handle those types of situations can make or break your reputation.”

If a client is not completely satisfied, Snip-its doesn’t charge for the haircut.

“I’m a very strong believer in an expression: ‘Lose the sale, keep the customer.’ And that basically says the lifetime value of a customer is much greater than the individual sale today,” Meiseles said.

Specialized Training

Meiseles also designed a training program to meet the more specialized needs of autistic children and their families. The national autism advocacy group Autism Speaks certifies Snip-its employees who complete the program.

These hairdressers are in high demand from families looking for this unique set of skills, Meiseles said.

“Parents of children who have any kind of special needs, they tend to want consistency,” she said. “And it’s actually super-gratifying to see a kid who cannot handle a haircut, and maybe six months, a year later, they’re actually enjoying the haircut. That, in and of itself, is another reason why our hairdressers love their jobs.”

Lessons Learned

Since the first Snip-its salon opened in Massachusetts in 1995, the company has expanded to 22 states with 63 salons that bring in more than \$15 million in revenue annually.

Meiseles said the rapid growth and strong brand help her hire good people.

“As you start to build your reputation, you start to have people who want to work for you. And those sorts of people are much better than people who apply for a job really not knowing what it’s about,” she said.

One of the most important lessons Meiseles learned from launching her business was realizing she couldn’t do it all. That didn’t stop her.

“I’m not a hairdresser, I’m not a contractor, I’m not a lawyer, I’m not a recruiter. I’m not any of those things, so how am I qualified to be the entrepreneur behind Snip-its?”

Her answer: “At some point you have to be OK with the not knowing and just go for it.”

Heather Whitley is a senior-level writer and producer with a passion for storytelling. She has produced a wide variety of content for both television networks and digital platforms around the globe. Her work has been featured on multiple shows on CNN as well as ABC’s “20/20” and Gannett Digital’s websites.