

Business novice **JOANNA MEISELES** made her company a success by listening to her family.

SNIP-ITS

OF SUCCESS



All it took was the experience of taking her kids to get their hair cut. Watching the stylist flee at the sight of her toddlers was enough to set off a lightbulb inside her head. Her idea: a cutting-edge kids' hair salon that looked like something out of Walt Disney World—bright, primary colors, a host of singing characters and magic prizes. But it also had to

appeal to parents, since they are the ones with the purchasing power. The services had to be affordable, the stylists had to be courteous and trained to work with kids, and the salon had to be conveniently located and clean. With all of that in mind, Meiseles, now a mother of four, birthed the first Snip-its salon in Shoppers World in Framingham, Massachusetts, back in 1995.





Meiseles opened five salons in Massachusetts before developing the franchising concept four years ago. Today, the privately held company is among the fastest growing franchises in the United States. Although Snip-its grew 67% in 2006, Meiseles reports that the company is “just barely profitable.” However, there are now 58 Snip-its in cities that include Atlanta, Jacksonville, Raleigh and Dallas, while about 30 more salons in 13 states are expected to open this year. And the company recently launched a line of kids’ hair care products to boot.

Except for a stint as an owner of a high-end shoe store in North Carolina, Meiseles had little business experience before founding Snip-its. But she comes from a long line of entertainers, which may account for the aesthetic of the salons, which is

movie producer Robert F. Blumofe (*Bound for Glory* and *Yours Mine and Ours*), Meiseles has creativity in her blood.

Snip-its was a family affair from the start. Meiseles relied heavily on her children’s input about what was cool. “I’m not just humoring [my kids],” she says. “Their opinions matter to me because I’m trying to cater to their exact audience.” Even Meiseles’ husband, Brad, gets in on the act. A member of the Snip-its board of directors, he often offers advice to his wife, who says she gladly takes it because “he’s always right.”

Walking into a Snip-its salon, parents and children alike are blown away by the rainbow of colors and the singing hair tools that come to life. Meiseles worked with animation expert Bruce Barry to design the look and feel for the entertaining characters, which include Snips (a pair of scissors that leads the Snip-its gang), Curly Comb, Flyer Joe Dryer, Jean Luc le Spritz, and the Clip-ette Sisters Marlene and Charlene. These personalities are featured in video games and cartoons that play on screens around the salon.

Although prices vary by location, most regular Snip-its haircuts cost about \$15. For baby’s first hair cut, families—mom, dad, grandma and grandpa—are welcome at the salon. Each first timer receives a Certificate of Bravery along with a keepsake photo and lock of hair. At the end of every appointment, little ones get to turn in a snip-it of hair for a prize—everything from a small rubber duck to a key chain—from the magic box located at the cash register. According to Meiseles, the little treat is the top priority of most kid clients.

Snip-its is not just a hair salon; it also hosts birthday parties, typically for girls. The “Glamour” event transforms little ladies into princesses, replete with manicures and up-dos, before getting introduced on the catwalk to show off their new look. “Trip to Hollywood” parties are for slightly older girls. They receive the same hair and nail treatments, but dress up in glitzier outfits and walk down the red carpet for interviews with salon staffers posing as paparazzi. The most unique of the three types of parties is the “Style-a-Doll” option, which gives guests the chance to be stylists themselves. They do the hair, nails and makeup for a Clip-ette sisters

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often compared to a Saturday morning cartoon. The granddaughter of the late comic Jack Benny and daughter of

To make it even more parent-friendly, adult seats are set up next to each station, so parents can keep a close eye on their child—and the stylist—during the hair cut.

doll that they then bring home as a souvenir.

Besides being an extra avenue for revenue, Meiseles says the parties provide a useful marketing tool. It allows guests—and especially their parents—to learn about Snip-its salons and services,

and spread the word to their neighbors. The franchisees are also encouraged to hand out coupons at nearby pre-schools and day care centers, and to try other grassroots marketing strategies. The idea is to get children hooked on Snip-its, from the services to the characters, so that they beg mom and dad to take them again and again. Meiseles and her team call this “pester power,” and she believes it’s the secret to their success.

In order to maintain this level of growth, Meiseles says Snip-its is going to have to beat the competition. Her main competitors are other kids’ salons, chains like Supercuts, and at-home haircuts executed by mom. What sets Snip-its apart, according to Meiseles, are the professional stylists who enjoy working with children and are loyal to the franchise. “I would challenge anyone who works in a fancy-shmancy hair salon to do what our stylists do all day,” she says. “They’re doing technically perfect haircuts on a moving target one after another after another while still being friendly and courteous.”

Indeed, Snip-its seems poised to maintain a high level of growth, creating a new niche in the hair industry. Meiseles’ ultimate goal is to open 500 profitable salons with as few franchisees as possible. She says she and her team want to grow at a steady pace so that they have the right infrastructure in place.

But her dreams are even bigger. “World domination and having my characters have a show on Nickelodeon are all things in the back of my mind,” she says. At least for a little while, that will have to wait. For now, Meiseles and her crew will have to satisfy themselves with the growing success that Snip-its has already achieved. ✂