

SHE'S GIVING US EXCITATIONS

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By Karin Tanabe, for Bisnow on Business

It has happened to all of us. The strained fake smile. The uttering of "It's just what I've always wanted." The prayer that there's a gift receipt inside. Sure, sure, it's the thought that counts...and, heck, cubic zirconias look just like diamonds.

Kim AuBuchon, co-founder and COO of the Sterling-based **experiential gift** company [Excitations](#), is an experience junkie. "I've done loop-da-loops in a biplane and driven the world's lightest production racecar." Founded in 2005, Excitations provides gifts of experience partnering with companies around the country.



Kim with her feet firmly planted on the ground in the Excitations office.

The U Mich grad and mother of two did not start her career swinging from a trapeze but in the wild world of high tech. "I joined AT&T right out of college and then went to work for Concert, a joint venture between British Telecom and MCI. At Concert, I hooked up with Ian Landy who is now my business partner." After leaving Concert in 1996, Kim went on to work as VP of Marketing for Lightspeed International, a tech company co-founded by Landy that was acquired by Cisco Systems in 1998. Kim stayed with Cisco, concentrating on the worldwide voice market, until 2001

when she decided to change course and try her hand at being a stay-at-home mom. “I wanted to do something new. That could have meant being a stay-at-home mom for good.”

But in 2005, Ian popped into her kitchen and said, “Look at this!” “There was a company in the UK doing experiential gifts called Red Letter Days. We looked in the US and there was no one doing anything like it.” Excitations launched in the DC market in October of 2005 and now offers experiences in 8 major US cities. They plan to triple their geographic coverage over the next two years, launching in Miami, Denver, Houston and San Diego by the holidays.



Kim in the meeting room with her Excitations staff. The women-owned business is primarily run by women, too.

The greatest challenge for Kim and Ian was not staying calm while defying gravity but finding a name for their company. “We went through a list of about 200.” Ian and his family were buying tickets to a Beach Boys concert when Kim received an excited call from her cohort. “They were singing the song Good Vibrations and right in the middle they stopped singing and called me up.” The name of the company was born from the song: “I’m picking up good vibrations, she’s giving me excitations.”

Excitations caters to those whose mantra echoes Auntie Mame’s “Live, live, live!” and would rather make like Thomas Crown soaring silently in a glider than receive another ugly sweater. “We look for everything you can imagine. I recently went to a little cheese farm in the Hudson Valley. It was a goat farm owned by nuns and run by graduates of the Culinary Institute of America. Who would have known that discovering cheese making would be so popular?” Though the majority of gift givers are 35+ women, Kim says you still can’t predict. “We just had a woman come in and buy her mother a ride in NASCAR. We are seeing a huge crossover in who’s giving and who’s getting.”

So has Kim passed on the experience junky gene to her two kids? “We’re trying to book a trip to go through the Panama Canal. We have hiked through the rainforest in Costa Rica and hiked out to the lava flow of Mount Kilauea in Hawaii. But we also try to go to Rehoboth every year.”