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TECH MATTERS

jjslist rates businesses' service for disabilities

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Few restaurants or retail businesses can afford to shy away from nearly 20 percent of their potential customers, particularly in this economy. Yet consumers with physical or developmental disabilities — who spend an estimated $175 billion a year — aren't always served with respect or understanding.

"A lot of businesses don't look at people with disabilities as a marketplace," said JJ Hanley, founder of jjslist, a website that rates how local businesses accommodate what is the fastest-growing minority in the country. "There is true value in making their workplaces flexible and respectful of people with disabilities."

Since going live in March 2009, jjslist has published more than 1,000 reviews of 750 local businesses across more than 50 Chicago-area communities. Businesses rated by the site vary from the Joliet Wal-Mart to Homer's Ice Cream in Wilmette. Reviews are almost always written by people with disabilities and/or their family members and companions.

A volunteer-driven organization, jjslist is funded by donors with additional assistance from Hanley's savings account. A former securities trader and veteran documentary producer for Chicago-based Kartemquin Films, Hanley, 50, has a teenage son with autism. The idea for the site came while producing the award-winning film "Refrigerator Mothers," which profiled mothers in the '50s and '60s unfairly blamed for their children's developmental disorders.

While the original plan for jjslist involved professionally produced content, Hanley believes its current user-generated platform (like Yelp) is superior because businesses can communicate directly with their constituents. Pace suburban bus, for instance, is incorporating conversations with customers on jjslist within its overall marketing campaign to reach out to people with disabilities.

Hanley hopes to raise enough money in the coming years to take the service national.

"There is so much for neighborhood businesses to learn about people with disabilities," she said. "By doing so, there is almost nothing to be lost and everything to be gained."

Comment at suntimes.com.

TrustWave gets Breach

Chicago-based data security firm TrustWave recently acquired Breach Security, which specializes in firewall technology for Web applications.

37Signals adds iPad app

West Town-based Web application developer 37Signals — which, along with Groupon, is a poster child for Chicago's Web resurgence, last week released its first application for Apple's iPad.

Available for $9.99, the Draft app lets users digitally sketch, store and share design concepts.

While there are a number of similar iPad apps available, Draft integrates 37Signals' industry-leading Campfire productivity application.

Meebo comes to Chicago

Expanding its business beyond integrating multiple instant messaging programs into one service, Mountain View, Calif.-based Meebo last week opened up a Chicago sales office. The five-person team will call on Web publishers and agencies to sell the company's popular Meebo Bar, which enables thousands of sites including The Hollywood Reporter, All Things D and CafeMom to share content via multiple social networks.

One local client already on board is JCPenney. Meebo is backed by Sequoia Capital, Time Warner Investments and other venture capital investors. The company's new office is in River North at 311 W. Superior.