

# Empowering Women Across the World

from the Heart of the Tri-State

Pure Romance's Patty Brisben and Chris Cicchinelli have taken their idea from the back of a U-Haul into a global business of \$110 million in annual sales. But it's not all about the money for this mother and son team.

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Photography by Wes Battoclette

Ingrained in Cincinnati's prolific business community is the understanding that to succeed and prosper, a company must have active, innovative and industrious leadership at its core. This is especially true of the mother and son team of Pure Romance: Chris Cicchinelli, president and CEO; and, Patty Brisben, founder and chairwoman of the board.

Pure Romance was born out of a dream and a necessity. Brisben sought to build a business from her home that would allow her financial security while keeping her number one priority, her four children, at the forefront of her life.

Her mission was to empower women by giving them a safe environment to learn about sexual health, to give them permission to know their bodies, strengthen their romantic relationships and to encourage open communication with their healthcare providers.

It's these experiences that have made Pure Romance not just a company but a movement that enhances the lives of women everywhere.

Brisben's dream was becoming reality and her identity was beginning to be synonymous with Pure Romance. As the company continued to grow within the Cincinnati

market, Brisben's vision for Pure Romance also grew. In 2000, Brisben's oldest son, Chris Cicchinelli, joined his mother and for three years the two grew the business out of the back of a U-Haul.

For Cicchinelli, entering a business of this nature was foreign territory. And though the journey of course had challenges and obstacles, Cicchinelli substantiated himself as a resilient leader who took a local company with \$3 million in sales and developed it into an international business with an astounding \$110 million in annual sales.

Even through one of the worst economies in decades, how does one lead a company into such a substantial financial growth? Cicchinelli explains, "I did one important thing. God gave us two ears and one mouth and one really crucial thing I did in my career was to listen. For three years my mom and I traveled from city to city and I listened to what she said about women and what they were looking for. I listened to what their needs and wants were and to what they were saying, not only about just our product line but also about how they wanted to support their kids. I remember my mom telling me, 'Chris, if you just listen and open yourself up, that is the sign of a great leader.' I have worked to follow that advice ever since."





Pure Romance President and CEO Chris Cicchinelli

# PURE ROMANCE



The Pure Romance sales force is comprised 100 percent of women, an interesting dynamic that Cicchinelli embraced and has helped to shape him as a leader. "At first I was very intimidated," he says. "I was talking about products I couldn't reference. The one lesson my mom stressed was that no matter what the business is, you are out there to serve and take care of your clients. It is an unbelievable honor that these women entrust me to help build their business and to help lead them in a good direction. I have had to earn their trust. I have never lost sight of the fact that I am a Consultant's child. I know how important it is that they get their orders and are paid on time. I know how important it is that we constantly market for them because if my mom did not get her paycheck, I didn't get my basketball shoes. I understand what these women are going through and it is an honor to help them realize their dreams and be able to accomplish them."

When Cicchinelli describes his leadership style, one word that comes to his mind is intense. "With everything I do, it is intense. Whether that is to grow the company or listen to the employees, my day is jam packed. But I believe it is equally important to be compassionate. I have a lot of compassion toward our staff and the Consultants. As a leader you have to show compassion and have a side of yourself that is vulnerable and open so people can see the real you."

Actively immersed on the ground floor, Cicchinelli spends 200 days a year on the road. "We go out and teach them how to run a business, control their finances, set goals, and to lead and not follow," Cicchinelli says. "A lot of these women have never done anything like this before. These women are taking care of their inventory, are in charge of their finances and in charge of picking up the phone to set up parties. We are constantly out there to motivate and educate them on how to run a successful business. Once they start building a team or

organization, then we start working with them on building leadership skills. We do this to help women become better business women."

This level of passionate commitment to the company and a drive to bring opportunity and knowledge to more women ignited a determination to expand the business not only just nationally, but around the world.

In 2010 Pure Romance launched in Puerto Rico and in 2011 moved into South Africa and Australia and expanded into New Zealand in January 2014. These locations were chosen for several reasons. They were smaller markets and English speaking with a low entry cost.

"South America had a strong middle-class movement that was going on and that helped to make it an ideal location, but ultimately we wanted to make the move because at that time, they were so far behind in sexual health information that we felt it would be an honor to help these women and go out there to get them this information," he says. "It was also a way to help them earn a living. Our expansion strategy is to hit the market at the right time and find women who want this business opportunity. We get calls all of the time from people in different countries such as China and Switzerland wanting to be a part of this business. Over time, we will continue to expand."

The company's growth is limitless but no matter the extent of its growth, Cicchinelli explains that its heart will remain in the city where both he and the company were born. "I am very happy that Pure Romance is in Cincinnati. The community has embraced our company and Consultants. That is a true sign of growth in our city. It has always been important for me to keep the company in Cincinnati because this is where I was born and raised and I am proud to be a part of the Cincinnati business community."

For more information about Pure Romance, call 866-Romance or visit [www.pureromance.com](http://www.pureromance.com).