

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 49 of Compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Have you thought about how you and your network can support each other? Today, Kate Birtch and I talk about that and more when we discuss getting into rental property insurance. Are you ready to become location independent but aren't sure what you can do? Schedule an hour long discovery call with me, where in addition to figuring out what your location independent career will be, we also work out a plan to get you there and give you accountability along the way. Visit compasspod.com/discovery-call to book. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course, we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. Kate, welcome to the show.

Kate: Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Kate: I think when I was five I wanted to be a veterinarian. Probably like other little kids. We had lot of pets growing up and so I think that influenced that career goal.

Kathryn: How has that changed by the time you left high school?

Kate: I think I still wanted to be a veterinarian or work in the animal world in some capacity. We had horses growing up and we lived out in the country and we ended up moving from California to Nebraska, so like a very rural type of home life. So I think that was still a goal when I was in high school.

Kathryn: Did you pursue college?

Kate: I did. I went to Arizona State University for a few years and then transferred to a school in South Florida. They had an entrepreneur degree that was a little bit more specialized in terms of what I wanted to go into for my career path.

Kathryn: So are there things from that that, that transfer into what you do now?

Kate: Yes and no. My first job out of college was working for a construction company, so I'm not sure if that's very entrepreneurial, but college did teach me how to be a problem solver and how to keep clean records and organization when it comes to running a business. So I think that there were definite skill sets that I picked up from school and then also just from my first job out of, out of college that have helped me along the way here and what I'm doing today with insurance.

Kathryn: How did you get started with insurance?

Kate: So I got into investing in short term rental property and running them as Airbnb. And as I was hosting guests from all over the world, our Airbnb is in Hawaii and we actually had a guest named Frank come and he damaged our so fast, he actually peed on our couch.

And when I turned the evidence in and sent pictures to Airbnb to be covered under the host guarantee program that they promote, they actually denied the claim. And so I was stuck with the bill replacing the sofa and so as I was going through what my options were going to be and I kind of dug into the world of insurance and realized that there wasn't any insurance products out there for people that own and manage Airbnbs. So with my technology and marketing background, I actually built an insurance technology platform to serve the Airbnb owner population and we sell damage policies to Airbnb owners today.

Kathryn: How did you get into being location independent?

Kate: Oh that's a good story. So I used to work in Silicon Valley in California and I was sitting in an office with a really cool company and product, but the office, no windows and sitting there with the team, we're all in little cubicles and you know you sit there for eight, nine, 10 hours a day sometimes and you just wish you were somewhere else. And at the time Zoom was just starting to kick off. Skype was already in full effect. People were using that and I realized you don't actually need to have face time with your team being in an office, you can have face time where you're sitting in a bamboo coworking place in Bali and still talk to the same people as long as you're on a similar time zone. So I actually went up to my boss and I told them I don't want to do this three hour commute every day anymore. I'm moving to Hawaii and he actually let me do it. He was a great boss and so I worked for that company for two more years before I ended up going out on my own, as an independent consultant.

Kathryn: How do you describe your work to people who are just being polite, when they ask?

Kate: Usually I just say I run a digital insurance company. Insurance is hard to navigate and it's really complicated. So that kind of is a light little response for most people.

Kathryn: And when you're talking to someone who really wants to know the details.

Kate: If somebody is familiar with insurance, and I usually respond with we're an insurtech solution for startup companies, we're able to plug and play products across different markets and different regions and serve up insurance products online compared to the traditional brick and mortar office types of insurance.

Kathryn: How do you find your clients?

Kate: So we actually have done a lot of research in terms of where our clients hang out and a lot of Airbnb owners seek advice in Facebook groups and other trade industry conferences. So we've participated as a key opinion leader in a lot of these Airbnb host Facebook groups or vacation rental Facebook groups. I've done a lot of speaking at industry conferences about insurance. It's a tough topic to navigate and there's not a lot of people that can kind of give you an idea of what you're going to need as a property owner to run an Airbnb. And we've done a lot of podcasts too, to kind of help people navigate the different layers of insurance and the different types of hosting that they're doing. And how and what insurance might be applicable to them.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Kate: Oh, that's a good one. When we were designing the software, I've launched many websites. Most of the time it wasn't with my own money, it was with a company's money, that I worked for, and I look back and I wish that I would have used web developers that were offshore. They were just a lot cheaper and a little bit more nimble. I felt that when I launched Property Protect, I wanted to have everything go, you know exactly plan and I didn't have much room financially for error. So I decided to hire web development company in Los Angeles. And looking back, I wish that I would have, kind of been a little bit more thrifty and taken a chance that some of the offshore development companies, because they're excellent and it would've saved us a lot of money that we could have applied in different areas of the business. But you live and you learn.

Kathryn: And how about your first major success?

Kate: I think the first major success would probably be, we went to an industry conference and San Antonio, Texas. And from that conference we gained quite a few customers and one being a particular property manager that moved over I think 30 or 40 of her Airbnb listings to our products. So that was a huge validation of the need for the product. And I felt like, yeah, we're making it, people will see you know, that this is a valuable policy to have and we earned our place in the market. And so that was a, that was a really great day and a really good success for us.

Kathryn: If you could go back and give your younger self just starting this business, any advice, what would you say?

Kate: Probably to travel and to start to develop your business network earlier on. I don't think there's enough focus on that. There's a big focus in the world of professional development of networking, but not really choosing key people to align with and keep them as formal relationships. As you grow your professional career, you can lean back onto them or chat with them on how you can help each other's businesses out. I think that I didn't really connect the dots on how important your network is until later in life and now I look at your network is equal to your net worth and so I do a very good job now of kind of curating a really small group of people that are mentors, advisors, that are connectors and that's really, really helped and I think if I could go back into my twenties and thirties, early thirties really kind of have that as a main focus as I started to, to go through my career.

Kathryn: Odds are there's no such thing as a typical day for you. Do you want to give us what a random day looks like?

Kate: Today? Today was a very random day. Now we have the offshore developers and so my day starts usually at six in the morning. With that, I'm on Skype with them and talking through different project tasks that we've got. Later that morning I had a meeting with an investor group that's interested in investing in our company. I followed that appointment with more product development and sales calls. We had customers calling

and we're trying to get them into certain products and also talking with a colleague of mine to figure out how we're going to sell into a certain group and that lasted a couple of hours and I have this podcast interview today and then a peer advisory group that I'm a member of. I'm going to a cocktail reception later this evening, so it's all over the board. And in between that I still have our Airbnbs that we manage personally and so I was getting a contract ready to send to one of our upcoming guests.

Kathryn: Is there any licensing you need to keep up with?

Kate: I actually am not licensed personally. My business partner is licensed in all 50 US states. I manage kind of the marketing tech and sales side of the business and he manages the insurance, licensing and regulation side of the business. So I have sought out and getting licensed, but right now we are using his license for all of the insurance products.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education, formal or informal?

Kate: I do a lot of professional development education. I listen to a ton of like audible ebooks and belonged to a women's peer advisory group. I don't have a lot of spare time as a solo entrepreneur, but I do believe that you can always better yourself as you grow professionally and personally and try to pick up on different podcasts or seminars, you know, as they kind of fit into my schedule.

Kathryn: What are you excited about right now in property insurance?

Kate: We have the opportunity to be a first mover in our industry with certain products and so I'm really excited about that. Where we would kind of pave the way for a new product to be developed and sold. Additionally, in the insurance technology space, there are very few women, so it's great to be a female founder in a male dominated industry and doing really cool things like coming out with new products.

Kathryn: Now it's time to get into the numbers. What would you say your income range is and how long have you been doing the work?

Kate: So I was earning probably a little over a hundred thousand as a consultant, but as you veer into the world of entrepreneurship, that changed and I knew that it was going to change. As an entrepreneur, you've put a lot of your own money into your business and so it's always good to have multiple streams of income if you do a career shift. I've been in the startup world since 2004 so probably about 15 years now. I say, like beginning income range could probably be like around \$50,000 a year annually. He works with like a traditional retail agency, top of the income range, you know, it just kinda depends on how hard you want to work. Insurance can be pretty lucrative and you can easily earn over six figures depending on what type of insurance you sell, whether it be, you know, a property and casualty or a commercial insurance. There's definitely a benefit with the harder you work, the harder you network.

Kathryn: How do you decide your pricing structure?

Kate: So we do a lot of market development and market research studies. Pricing depends on the value that you're going to bring to the client. With insurance it's a little tricky because value can sometimes then equate into coverage. I know that when we were designing the host insurance, that is our flagship product. We wanted the product to be affordable, offer adequate coverage, but also be easy to maintain as you've got all these guests coming and going all the time. So I think if you're adding value that's going to correlate to sales and have a really easy friction point with how you have to manage it. You can probably charge a little bit more. We wanted to have a very affordable product. Have our owners only have to register once and if they had a claim they could come to our website and submit the claim on our website directly. I know other products charge annual premiums, but we were kind of changing the way that insurance is administered and run. So I felt that our pricing was pretty favorable to our customer base.

Kathryn: So how do you fund something like this?

Kate: With my background of marketing and technology, I didn't know insurance at all. And so I went through my network of friends and family and just started asking like, who's in insurance? Can I talk to them? How hard is it to create a product? And got connected to an insurance agency through a friend of mine. And we partnered where I brought to the table, kind of the Airbnb experience, marketing experience, web development, tech experience, and they brought the insurance experience. So we formed a partnership and through that partnership they actually helped to fund some of the web development that we needed to start the company. And so, you know, you don't necessarily have to go out and seek venture capital money or have, you know, hundreds of thousands of dollars to start a company on your own. You can actually figure out a way to bring your skillset to the table with somebody else's and potentially start a company that way.

Kathryn: Is there anything you do to keep your income stable?

Kate: We, in fact in real estate, both long term and short term. The profit of from those rentals generates some nice monthly income. We only did short term rental for a long time, but now kind of diversifying our portfolio and getting into both sides of rentals. We've had rentals in Vietnam, we've had rentals in Cape town, South Africa, Texas, Hawaii, and now we have some in Tulsa too.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for women looking to get into property insurance?

Kate: I would say jump in and find a mentor and be a learning sponge, offer to work for free or for very little amounts of money and provide a value to that mentor for them to take you in and teach you everything you know. It's invaluable sometimes to be working with somebody that's experienced in that industry and for you to work your way up from an entry level role to the company principle is a very long road. So if there's a way that you can shorten that road by getting that life experience from them in another way, that's definitely going to help you. So find out who's killing it in insurance these days and ask if you can be a volunteer or an intern for them and offer them some sort of value in return, whether it be like business administration or record keeping or whatnot.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Kate: We're going to be growing Property Protect into a next year by adding a few more products and so that's really exciting. We're expanding the company and going to be making our first hire, so that's also wonderful because I've been doing all the jobs of different departments for a long time and really excited to kind of pass up some knowledge that I have to someone else and help them get started on a cool career in insurance as well.

Kathryn: Where can listeners find you?

Kate: They can email me directly. I'm happy to field any emails anytime, my email address is kate@mypropertyprotect.com and then mypropertyprotect.com is our website, and then I also have an Instagram page, which is my personal digital nomad page called [@iworkwhereiwant](https://www.instagram.com/iworkwhereiwant) and you can see all my travels in there with my laptop, the different countries we've been to.

Kathryn: Kate, thank you for joining us. This has been great.

Kate: Thank you so much. I'm very glad to have the opportunities to talk with you and share my experience and I hope it's helpful.

Kathryn: If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in [compass insiders](https://compasspod.com/insiders) where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at compasspod.com/insiders Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find their direction too. Thank you for listening to Compass. You can find today's show notes at compasspod.com/049, that's compasspod.com/049. Join us next week when we talk with Tamar Levi, book illustrator.