

EXPAND your horizon

Hands-on franchising for practical people

If you have practical hands-on skills, enjoy meeting new people and getting out and about, expand your horizon with a franchise in the services sector. Rachel Spaul reports

So you've decided you want to invest in a franchise. You're a practical person, good with your hands, and enjoy meeting customers and providing a quality service. Travelling between jobs isn't a problem; in fact you quite enjoy it. You're fed up with employment politics and want to be your own boss with flexible working hours and variety. If this sounds like you, a 'service' franchise may be just the type of business opportunity you've been looking for.

The services sector is a substantial contributor to franchising and encompasses businesses such as Agency Express (agency board contractor), Aussie Pet Mobile (dog grooming), Cookerburra (oven cleaning), PlumbLocal (plumbing), SUMO (ground penetrating radar), Sweets For Life (distribution), TruGreen (lawn care) and Waterless Detailers (valeting). Whilst the majority of service franchises are 'job' franchises, where the franchisee actually delivers the service to the customer, many franchisors now also provide the opportunity to expand the business by taking on employees, or offer fully managed start-up packages.

Apart from those franchisors offering management packages, franchises from this sector tend to require a lower investment, as they are usually home-based, man-in-van businesses. Opportunities within this sector require investments ranging from a few thousand Euros, up to

€65,000 for a commercial cleaning franchise. However, it is rarely recommended to take on any franchise requiring an investment under €15,000 because this may imply inadequate central funds for training and support.

The majority of service franchises do not require their franchisees to possess specific industry experience or knowledge, but you will still need high levels of determination, dedication and commitment to making your business a success. By paying a franchise fee, you will be buying a format for doing business, but it is not a licence to print money. Whilst the franchisor will provide training and support, you are your own boss and the business will succeed or fail by your own efforts.

Agency Express, a specialist estate agency board contractor, looks for three main qualities in its franchisees: the ability to get along with people, basic DIY skills, and enjoyment of driving. Founder Stephen Watson explains: "The business is basically fairly simple and is much in demand by estate agencies and auctioneering companies both in the UK and Ireland. Franchisees erect, maintain and remove estate agents 'For Sale' and 'To Let' boards."

An England-based company with over 90 franchisees operating over 125 vehicles and working on behalf of over 20 per cent of all UK estate agency offices, Agency Express is expanding its operation into Ireland. "Our research shows that there is the

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potential for 15 franchises within the Republic of Ireland and a further five in Northern Ireland,” adds Watson.

TruGreen, part of the ServiceMaster Group, provides lawn care services to homeowners and commercial customers. The company does not ask that its franchisees have specific experience within this field, but they must be committed to the business and motivated, with the ability to adopt and follow the system, good administration and supervisory skills. Additional skills such as accounting, selling, risk management, supervision, technical details, time management, and organisational skills are taught on the training course.

TruGreen franchisees are trained to offer a full range of services aimed at improving poor lawns and maintaining them in first-class condition. As a fully trained lawn specialist, they can diagnose and remedy a host of lawn ailments and deal with granular fertiliser application, mechanical operations such as aeration and scarification, moss control and eradication, weed control, pest and insect control, turfing, seeding, renovation and top dressing, and can offer consultancy and advice.

Like many franchises within this sector, TruGreen franchisees run their business from home and travel between jobs in a fully liveried van. However, franchisees are only recruited if it is their intention to grow a substantial multi-employee business. Most service franchises have built in growth paths whereby the franchisee can grow the business by employing staff and putting additional vans on the road but it is becoming increasingly popular to only award franchises to people with multi-van ambitions.

Established Irish franchisor, Cleaning Doctor offers a number of opportunities for franchisees to grow the type of business they want to suit their ambitions. The company offers three packages: Cleaning Doctor - carpet, curtain and upholstery cleaning; Cleaning Doctor - floor restoration and contract cleaning services; and Clean Team - home cleaning services. “We are passionate about our franchise operation and about giving our franchisees the opportunity to maximise their potential,” comments Founder William Little. “All our territories are large enough to support a multi-team,



An Agency Express franchisee loads 'For Sale' boards ready to erect for estate agents

multi-vehicle operation.”

Cleaning Doctor is very particular about the type of franchisees they are looking for: “During our selection process we quickly establish that the potential franchisee is prepared to get involved in a hands-on business. We insist that franchisees are totally involved in the actual physical work, whether it is cleaning a suite of furniture, sanding a wooden floor, or cleaning the inside of a shower cubicle. We teach franchisees to be professional cleaners first, and then we teach them how to run the business.” Franchisees must be prepared to give 100 per cent commitment to their franchise. They must enjoy a hands-on business, be totally honest, sincere, enthusiastic and ready to follow a proven system.

If physical work is not your thing there's any number of delivery and distribution franchises available. Sweets for Life for instance, which is currently launching its franchise in Ireland, involves placing boxes of high quality confectionery in places of work, where people make their choice from the different varieties on offer and place the money in an honesty box. Snack-in-the-Box is a very well-known brand in the world of franchising. Its franchisees similarly distribute boxes of snacks to places of work.

Before making any investment it is vital that you thoroughly investigate the opportunity. Little advises: “We always clarify the amount of hard work

that is expected in order to be successful, and also the importance of the franchisee's willingness to follow the franchise system. We say that getting into franchising is like getting married; select the wrong partner and it could end in failure, but select the right partner and it could be a very successful relationship with many happy days and great financial rewards. We encourage enquirers to speak to existing franchisees. The health of a franchise network can easily be gauged by an enquirer talking to franchisees.”

Watson agrees: “Speak to existing franchisees, but make sure *you* choose which ones and not the franchisor. Also make sure that you visit the franchisor's head office and meet the support staff. Make sure that your potential franchisor is a member of the British Franchise Association or the Irish Franchise Association (IFA) and take legal advice from a specialist franchise lawyer.”

The IFA also strongly encourages

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potential franchisees to speak with as many existing franchisees as possible. “It is important that you are systematic in the search for a franchise and do not rush into the first franchise that comes along,” advises John Green, IFA Chairman. “Even though you may be in a hurry to start a business because of redundancy or job insecurity, if you do not get the selection right you could end up in a worse position than when you started.” Get it right however and it could be the start of a mutually beneficial relationship. u

RESOURCES

Franchise Development Services
Call: 0044 (0) 1603 620 301
Visit: www.franchise-group.com

The Irish Franchise Association
Call: 00353 (0)1499 1091
Visit: www.irishfranchiseassociation.com

The United Kingdom Franchise Directory
Visit: www.theukfranchisedirectory.net

The Irish Franchise Magazine
Visit: irishfranchisemagazine.net

CLEANING DOCTOR ^u Interview

'A proven business formula'

An established business with comprehensive marketing strategies and nationwide recognition appealed to Eric Wharton, who launched his Cleaning Doctor franchise covering Tralee, Dingle and Kerry North in November 2005.

"When you think of franchising in Ireland, the first company that springs to mind is Cleaning Doctor, and what better way to start your own cleaning business than with a proven business formula," he relates.

"With my background, I've seen plenty of marketing campaigns and I could tell immediately that the whole marketing strategy is well thought out." Coming from a printing background, Wharton is practically minded and good with machinery and found the practical side of the business easy to learn. Following the four weeks of initial training, Wharton has benefited from ongoing training courses conducted both in the field and



Eric Wharton

at head office.

He also benefits from ongoing support from the Cleaning Doctor team. "I can't fault Cleaning Doctor in anyway," he praises. "William Little, the Founder, is very approachable and helpful. In addition, there is great support from other franchisees."

Within six weeks of the launch, Wharton's business turned over approximately €18,000, and he anticipates achieving turnover in the region of €86,000 to €100,000 in his first year. When it comes to sales, Wharton says "no problem". "The system is tried and tested so it's an easy sales process if you do a good job."

Ten times happier than when he was employed, Wharton reveals: "The most enjoyable aspect of the business is meeting new people - it's brilliant."

TRUGREEN ^u Interview

'A brilliant opportunity'

Reading an advert for lawn-care franchise TruGreen in a national newspaper, Tony Lawrence found the future business he would run with his son Edmund.

At the time, Tony was working in financial services and Edmund was about to finish his 'A'-levels. "My son has always wanted to work outdoors," Tony explains. "It was something that was very important to him, so I thought that this would be a brilliant opportunity for him."

After speaking to TruGreen, the pair's enthusiasm for the concept grew and they launched their Hertfordshire business in 2004. "Edmund received plentiful and comprehensive training," reveals Tony. "There was a lot to take in but it covered everything from marketing, to banking, product knowledge, and lawn-care itself."

With an effective initial marketing campaign, Tony was delighted when work started coming in straight away. However, the business started to grow quickly and was going so well that Tony decided to join his son in

running it. "I was planning to wind down my career," he reveals, "but the TruGreen business was going from strength to strength."

Taking on a "behind the scenes" role in their home-based business, Tony has left his son to: "do what he loves - getting outside to do his work while meeting new people every day."

Tony and Edmund enjoy independence, the ability to work on their own terms, and benefit from TruGreen's continual support. "They give us good advice," he says, "and are always there at the end of the phone should we need them."

Now advertising in the local press, as well as sponsoring a youth golf tournament, Tony is positive that the business will continue its success: "The business benefits from a very high level of customer referrals and this is only going to get better."

With Tony's eldest son Thomas planning to work with them in the near future, their TruGreen franchise is turning into a real family business.

How Franchising Works

Franchising is a diverse industry with an estimated 759* business format systems operating in the UK, and around 240** in Ireland. In essence, a franchise is an agreement between an existing business (the franchisor) and the newcomer to business ownership (the franchisee).

THE FRANCHISEE buys licensed rights to clone the business from the franchisor in a specified territory for a specified period of time, backed by training and support.

THE FRANCHISOR provides a ready-made, established and tested business format, including name, corporate power, know-how, training, and support.

THE FRANCHISEE invests capital, time, effort, and relevant past experience to create a business replicated from the franchisor's business formula/system.

THE FRANCHISOR gains a new outlet in a new territory with minimum capital investment in setting it up.

THE FRANCHISEE expands his network cost-effectively with your investment.

*Source: 2006 British Franchise Association/Natwest UK franchise survey
**Source: The Irish Franchise Association

