

Start 2010 by Meeting New Prospects in Miami Beach

Exhibitors offer tips of the trade on how to make Franchise Expo South a success for your company.

BY JOEL GOLDSTEIN



More than 8,650 people from dozens of countries attended Franchise Expo South last January and expectations are even higher for the fourth annual FES when doors open at the Miami Beach Convention Center January 15 for the three-day event.

As the gateway to Latin America, Miami provides a perfect backdrop for FES and exhibitors are lining up to take advantage of one of the most diverse and cultural populations—and prospect bases—in the country. More than 40 countries were represented at the 2009 event, proving that FES attracts prospects not only from Latin America, but also from around the world.

“We know the leads will walk through the door, now it’s up to exhibitors to capture their attention,” said Tom Portesy, president of MFV Expositions, which produces the International Franchise Association-sponsored FES, West Coast Franchise Expo and the International Franchise Expo in Washington, D.C.

Why Exhibit?

Before discussing tips on how to build a presence and become a strong exhibitor, let’s first discuss why exhibiting is beneficial to capturing prospects. You might be sitting there thinking to yourself, “why should I devote my time and energy, not to mention money, exhibiting at a trade show when I can attract prospects online and hold my own webinar for free!”

Simply put, the key difference is quality of leads. Larry Trimble, vice president of franchise development for United Franchise Group, an umbrella company to franchise brands including Sign-A-Rama, EmbroidMe and Plan Ahead Events, explains it this way:

“Our company receives a larger quantity of leads from online sources, but I believe the quality of leads from the trade shows are better because the prospects had to get up out of their chair, drive to the show, and pay to get in,” he said. “Therefore they are more serious in general.”

Even Subway, a franchisor with more than 32,000 franchise restaurants operating in 91 countries with 35 to 40 additional units added every week, continues to see the value of trade shows over simple online correspondence.

“Franchising, at least for our company, is about relationship building,” said Don Fertman, director of franchise sales. “And being able to meet in person provides a stronger start to what will hopefully be a successful, long-term relationship. Trade shows provide that opportunity in an environ-

ment that is conducive to discussion and information sharing.”

“The missing link from online resources is the ‘human touch,’” says Collin Gaffney of Cavas Wine Tasting Room & Café. “Too many prospects think they have figured out the franchise opportunity but the online resource severely limits the all-important face-to-face meeting.”

“Presence at a trade show is very important,” adds Patrice Rice, president of Patrice & Associates Franchising, Inc. “People may see information about your opportunity online, or in a magazine, but being able to actually ‘reach out and touch’ someone gives validity to the brand.”

Rice recently exhibited at the West Coast Franchise Expo where she met with a prospect who attended the event specifically because they saw that Rice was participating.

“The West Coast Franchise Expo gave us credibility,” she said. “And that prospect became a franchise partner who will be joining our next class.”

Trimble has a slightly different take on the situation. While he believes it is important to exhibit at franchise trade shows, he thinks the prospects that have already narrowed

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their options down to a specific concept or industry may or may not come to a trade show.

"While franchise prospects can certainly get a lot of information online, many do not come to a trade show with a specific concept or industry in mind. They are still evaluating different options and that is why it is important to exhibit," he said.

How to achieve success?

The main goal for any franchisor attending any expo is leave with numerous quality leads. The tough part is turning that goal into a reality. Experienced trade show exhibitors know that takes more than just showing up and hoping a prospect will stop by your booth and say, "Hey! I want to buy this franchise!"

We interviewed some of the industry's most successful franchisors for tips on presenting, managing and executing a successful franchise event. Here is their advice:

1. Before the Expo begins, ensure there are adequate quantities of literature available for prospects to take away.

"I am always stunned by the number of exhibitors who run out of business cards the first day," said Gaffney.

2. Stay away from items unrelated to your business as some may end up in the trash before the prospect even makes it outside the venue. Save yourself the hassle and money by sticking to important leave behind materials like business cards and useful franchising information such as financials, investment levels and available territories. Also be sure to capture as much data from the prospect as possible. And if you meet a qualified lead who's a good fit for your brand, send them away with a call-to-action, such as a one-on-one meeting request form.

"People will always grab the freebies, but the serious investors want to talk to someone that has in-depth knowledge of the opportunity and is more interested in being provided with real information," said Rice. "An entrepreneur is not going to make a decision because they got a free Frisbee with a logo on it."

3. Several experienced exhibitors place emphasis on keeping a professional, tidy booth during the event.

"I think the most important aspects are presence at the show, booth display and the personality of the franchisor representatives," said Rice. "You must do something to make people remember you as they have hundreds of franchisors competing for their attention."

4. Remember, not all prospects are educated about which franchise they prefer, or even which industry for that matter. Don't just sit behind your booth and wait for the prospect to approach you. Take the initiative; engage the prospects that seem to be lost or wondering aimlessly around the Expo.

Not all prospects are educated about which franchise they prefer.

"Most prospects go from booth to booth speaking with brands they recognize," said Rice. "A franchisor attending a trade show must make every effort to speak with people about their concept."

5. Another tip: schedule one-on-one meetings with serious prospects over breakfast or after the event. Be sure to give them added attention during or after the Expo.

6. After the event be sure to follow up with any and all prospects you spoke with. A personal connection may be just the thing missing to help you find the right match for your concept.

"Turning a trade show into a lead-generating machine isn't about luck or magic," said Portesy. "We have franchisors who have been with us for years. They stick with the basics, follow a game plan and walk away with quality leads they turn into franchisees. And they do it time after time after time." ■

Joel Goldstein is director of marketing for MFV Expositions. He can be reached at jgoldstein@mfvexpo.com. For more on the West Coast Franchise Expo, International Franchise Expo, IFA and MFV Expositions family of shows, visit www.mfvexpo.com.

The 2010 Franchise Event Calendar



Franchise
Expo
South

Franchise Expo South

www.FranchiseExpoSouth.com

Miami Beach Convention Center

Jan. 15-17, 2010



INTERNATIONAL
Franchise
Expo

International Franchise Expo

www.IFEinfo.com

Walter E. Washington Convention Center

April 9-11, 2010



The West Coast
Franchise
Expo

West Coast Franchise Expo

www.wcfexpo.com

Los Angeles Convention Center

Nov. 5-7, 2010