

Central Virginia Joins the Franchise Expo Tour

New partnership helps expand trade show circuit, attract more leads.

By Joel Goldstein

Following in the very large footsteps of such renowned trade shows as the International Franchise Expo, West Coast Franchise Expo and Franchise Expo South, the International Franchise Association and MFV Expositions have teamed again to unveil their latest partnership, the Central Virginia Franchise and Finance Expo.

This latest addition to the expo tour launches March 1 for a two-day run at the Greater Richmond Convention Center. In addition to IFA, the event also has the support of the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Greater Richmond Small Business Development Center and the U.S. Franchise Registry.

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“This is the perfect event to reach a new market of entrepreneurs looking to discover how to be in business for yourself, but not by yourself,” said Tom Portesy, with MFV Expositions. “This area of the country is emerging as one of the nation’s leading areas for business and economic development. It is ripe for franchising and we specifically selected this area because of the growing demand for franchises.”

Local business organizations in the Mid-Atlantic region also are offering strong support for the trade and finance show. Economic development commissions, chambers of commerce, local chapters of the U.S. Small Business Administration and federal franchise organizations across the area are working to promote the event. These groups will utilize newsletters, direct mail, e-blasts, seminars and meetings to spread the word.

Play N Trade, a rapidly growing video game franchise, will exhibit at the expo. The company currently has more than 125 stores open, has sold



Greater Richmond Convention Center

more than 400 franchises and also exhibits at the IFE, WCFE and FES.

Exhibiting at the expo is a good opportunity to let people experience Play N Trade’s culture,” said Charles Franklin, vice president of franchise development. “Participating in a trade show gives franchisees a better idea of what we’re all about. Not only do we get to demonstrate our concept, but it gives potential franchisees a chance to meet the

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people they'd be working with directly and experience our company."

"We continue to be pleased with the turnout at IFA events," he said. "The IFA creates a lot of interest and we're always happy with the number of leads we generate. They attract the right folks."

Virginia Barbeque, founded by Rick Ivey with headquarters in Fredericksburg, Va., is another franchisor who will be seeking franchisees during the expo and for good reason. "We do all the IFA-sponsored expos in order to keep our name out there. Exposure is important," said Ivey, adding that attending a smaller show like the Central Virginia Expo can be especially beneficial to a growing brand.

"I think these smaller shows are less intimidating for potential franchisees," he said. "It has the feel of a local show and it's less expensive. Here we'll be able to better develop relationships with attendees and get more one-on-one time. Plus this show is in our own backyard and we're going to have more name recognition here than at the larger shows in D.C. and Los Angeles."

In addition to product sampling and the opportunity to meet face-to-face with representatives from top franchise concepts, the Central Virginia event will also host educational conference tracks that provide information potential franchisees need to find the franchise that best matches their skills, interests and budget.

Conference tracks during the expo will include:

- "The A to Zs of Buying a Franchise" is designed to help prospective franchisees as they evaluate the opportunities available. Topics will include "Finding a Franchise That's Right for You," "Questions to Ask the Franchisor and Franchisees," "Understanding Legal Documents and Protecting Your Investments."
- "Financing Your Franchise" is geared to help franchisees prepare to find and secure financing and also to decide what investment level best suits them. Financing opportunities available through the U.S. Small Business Association program will also be discussed.

IFE 2008: Education Designed for the Franchisor

As with all expos, this year's premier franchise showcase, the International Franchise Expo, scheduled April 11-13 in Washington, D.C., will offer an assortment of presentations and workshops. This year there will be a variety of symposia designed with the franchisor in mind. Planned seminars will include:

- "Franchising Your Business" which is geared to early-stage franchise companies seeking guidance for expanding the business.
- "Operations Manuals" will provide franchisors guidance on creating a user-friendly operations manual to maintain consistent execution of their franchise concept.
- "Selecting, Negotiating and Operating a Master Franchise" will help attendees to understand master franchising and how to acquire or grant franchise rights for a country or region.
- "Global Franchise Expansion" will direct U.S.-based franchisors planning to expand abroad and address the most common business and legal problems that affect international franchising.
- "Structures and Operational Strategies for Successful Expansion within the U.S." will include a wide range of topics such as successfully expanding a franchise beyond its original market.
- "The Use of Technology in Franchising" will explore how to use electronic, telecommunications and Internet technologies for a franchise business.
- "Strategies for Penetrating the U.S. Market" which is geared to overseas franchisors, will focus on case studies and how to enter a complicated market like the United States.

Check lists and Preparation Tips for 2008

In 2007, attendance was at an all-time high; this year's franchise expos are expected to bring in even larger crowds.

No matter where a company is based, the IFA sponsors a show nearby. Check out what's on the docket for 2008:

- **Central Virginia Franchise and Financing Expo**, Richmond—March 1-2
- **Mexico Franchise Fair**, Mexico City—March 5-8
- **International Franchise Expo**, Washington, D.C.—April 11-13
- **West Coast Franchise Expo**, Los Angeles—Nov. 7-9

Preparation for a successful trade show can take weeks, even months, of work and planning. Here are some tips to ensure that franchises are ready for the busy year ahead:

Update the booth

First impressions are key component of a trade show. That's why special attention should be paid to the booth. If the company logo or company message has been updated recently, make sure that photos and graphics reflect those changes. Choose booth colors and content carefully. Displays, walls and carpet should all coordinate, not clash. If possible, the colors of the booth should embody the image the brand conveys. Also, size matters. A booth that's 200 square feet will stand out more than 100 square feet, which means more people are drawn to it.

Train the staff

A large booth boasting a plasma television and the latest technology is only effective if the staff can engage those passing by. Have the team rehearse and practice the pitch delivery. It's important to keep those pitches short. If one feels the attendee's attention starting to drift, it's time to wrap it up.

Be available

Now that the staff knows their lines and how to engage an attendee, make sure they are available to potential franchisees. If there is ample booth space, don't bring only two staff members and expect them to catch every person that stops in. The same goes for keeping staff in the booth at all times.

Rotate salespeople every few hours to keep them at the top of their game. A tired staff can mean missed opportunities. The best system is a steady rotation to keep the message fresh and prospects interested. Before arriving at the show, create a schedule that outlines times for the staff to take a break or have lunch. The same goes for setting up the booth and tearing down after the show. Be timely with the setup. Getting a late start could mean putting on the finishing touches as the show begins. And when it's time to tear down, don't jump the gun. Tearing down early could mean missing out on a prospect.

Dress the part

Dressing the part is as important as the booth and company message. Business dress is the standard at a trade show. Remember that odds are that staff members will be on their feet all day, so comfortable shoes are a must. If wearing shirts with the company logo, make sure that the logo is up to date. A uniformed and professional look can go a long way to conveying the company's image.

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Effective follow up

The job isn't over once the trade show ends. Effective follow up with qualified prospects is a necessity to closing a deal. If someone assembled a lead sheet during the show, be sure to follow up with each person in a timely manner. Waiting two months to give someone a call could mean they've already spoken with the competition. Being proactive is the best way to keep a lead alive.

Ask for help

If this is the staff member's or company's first trade show, don't be afraid to ask for help. Trade show veterans and show producers that have been at this for years know the ins and outs of the business. Try asking them to meet for coffee or dinner after the show and find out what advice they have to offer.

For information about the Central

Virginia Franchise and Financing Expo, or to register, visit www.cvfexpo.com. ■

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