

# “Super Bowl” of Franchising Has Something for Old and New

Selling is not about technology.

By Joel Goldstein

The theme of this year’s International Franchise Expo could easily be “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” When organizers were putting together the first Expo 15 years ago, few could have predicted the dramatic change and growth that franchising would experience over the next decade and a half.

In the early 1990s, franchisors were limited in how to promote their franchise opportunities. There were newspaper or magazine ads, direct mail campaigns and a few local or regional franchise shows. Today, technology has created a myriad of dynamic new ways for prospects around the globe to research information on franchise opportunities and interact with the franchise sales teams.

But when the doors open on the 15th annual show on June 2 in Washington, D.C., thousands of potential buyers will have an opportunity that can’t be duplicated online or through an advertisement. Even the most technologically savvy franchise companies in the world will be on the floor waiting to greet these prospects the “old fashioned” way—with a smile, a handshake and a little one on one interaction.

## This is sort of the Super Bowl of franchising.

“Successful franchise development is all about personal relationships, which are best established in person,” says Jim Squire, director of franchise development for HoneyBaked Ham Company and Cafe. “The trade show gives the exhibitor the opportunity to meet the prospect face-to-face and start the relationship building at a much higher level than you can start over the Internet and long-distance calling.”

“The Expo provides the opportunity for us to show and tell what we do,” adds Linda Kelley, vice president of franchise development for Jimmy John’s Gourmet Sandwich Shop.

Jimmy John’s booth, for example, will be a mini replication of their restaurants where the staff will be baking bread and making sandwiches for attendees to sample.

“They will be able to see this in action,” said Kelley. “It is a chance to promote the brand and provide additional exposure to attendees that may not know about us.”

### Serious about expansion?

PostNet International Franchise Corp. was an original exhibitor with the show and has made 15 straight appearances.

“It’s a ‘must attend,’” says PostNet founder, President and CEO Steven Greenbaum, CFE, who was at the original Expo. “This is sort of the Super Bowl of franchising. It’s one of those events that you can’t afford not to do.”

Greenbaum says there are numerous reasons his company continues to expand its presence at the show. “One reason is that it’s an opportunity to expose your brand and operation to the industry as a whole. If you are not there, I think it’s an indication that you are not serious about franchise development, growth and perhaps your company may not even understand where the growth opportunities are,” said Greenbaum.

HoneyBaked Ham is serious about expansion and Squire said that the event will play a central role in that effort.

“We have added trade shows back into our franchise development marketing strategies, and the Expo is the leader in franchise shows,” he said.

Leo Tudela agrees. Tudela says that the Daily Grind needed only one appearance to realize the impact of the face-to-face opportunities the Expo offers on franchise sales.

“We exhibited for the first time last year in Washington D.C. and from that one show we were able to convert six leads into franchisees,” said Tudela. “The event exceeded our expectations.”

This year the company hopes to use exposure to the hundreds of international attendees and prospects that annually

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Leo Tudela



Debby Gordon

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attend the trade show to begin expanding overseas for the first time.

"We have made the Expo a key component of our growth strategy for the future," he said.

So has Snappy Auctions. After five months in business, the company launched its franchise program at the 2004 show.

"It was our first entree into franchising and I thought, 'I'm going to be there.' And there I was," says Debbie Gordon, founder and CEO of the company that lists, packages and ships items for customers who sell products on eBay. "We were the first one in our space to be there two years ago and we sold two franchises that first show."

Gordon, who estimates that 20 of her more than 100 franchises came from contracts during the Expo, says she was especially impressed at the quality of the prospects. The show offers an extensive menu of workshops and seminars, providing attendees with access to leaders in franchising in a variety of areas.

"(Prospects) knew what questions to ask and they were very educated," she said.

Now the company plans to expand globally and, of course, "the Expo is the place to be if you want to expand into international markets," she says.

Ultimately, franchise development comes down to the ability to sell a concept to a quality prospect. And there are few outlets such as the franchising trade show that afford such a one-stop opportunity to do just that.

### A Key Role in Growth

Ray Titus, of United Franchise Group that includes such well-known brands as Sign-A-Rama, Minute Man Press, EmbroidMe and Billboard Connection, was one of the original exhibitors who has returned for more every year. He knows the value that the Expo has played in his organization's growth.

"The Expo has been a huge help to our growth, not only domestically but internationally as well," he says. "We have opened over 10 countries directly from the show. Each year we get leads for



**Ray Titus**

franchises in over 30 states, as well as the great response internationally. The show just seems to get bigger and better every year, and we should know—we have attended every one."

## The Expo has been a huge help to our growth.

"Since the beginning, Concerto Networks' association with the trade show has definitely assisted us with our international expansion plans," adds founder and CEO Raymond Hivoral. "It is an excellent forum to meet highly qualified and very interested prospective master license franchisees from all over the world, as well as prospective franchisees in the U.S."

"When we originally started we were relatively new to franchising. In fact, I think it was our first year so we really didn't know what to expect or what not to expect," remembers Kelly Krause, vice president of international marketing for Crestcom. "I can look back and say that we probably do at least one international deal a year, and from that standpoint it has been a great success."

In fact, Krause remembers how the Expo brought new life to a deal apparently gone dead.

"There was one group we had originally spoken with, and then it sort of died down and for a long time we hadn't talked to them," he recalls. "Then they came through the trade show and we were there, and it gave us a chance to sit down and talk to them again. We were able to get the deal done. It was perfect timing that we were both in the same place at the same time."

### Timing is Everything

Timing, of course, is a big part of franchise development and for 15 years, even in the changing face of technology, the Expo has provided an opportunity for the franchisor and the potential franchisee

to spend quality time together.

"Looking back, it was an easy decision to go to the Expo that first year," says PostNet's Greenbaum. "We felt the show had the potential to be a front runner even back then. We met Tom Portesy, president of MFV Expositions, and he is just a fantastic champion of the franchisors who helps take care of things and make it happen. We knew even then that they had a good team and a good vision of where they were going."

Titus, of United Franchise Group and an original exhibitor, agrees.

"I would add that the key to any trade show is the people who run it, and it's obvious the Expo has the best, especially Tom Portesy, who always delivers," he said. "To run an event that size each year without a hitch is nothing short of magic."

Ultimately, new technology has enabled the show to deliver an even more qualified candidate than before. Web sites such as [www.BeTheBoss.com](http://www.BeTheBoss.com) provide prospects with extensive background information on thousands of franchise opportunities worldwide.

Selling, however, is not about technology. It's about relationships. A Web visitor can't absorb the look and feel of a store or concept. A Web visitor also cannot take advantage of the symposia and free seminars available at the International Franchise Expo events. The opportunity to meet and greet leading industry professionals while trying to navigate the nuances of franchising is not something available through websites.

"It's all about personal relationships," adds Squire.

More information on the 15th annual International Franchise Expo is available at [www.franchise.org](http://www.franchise.org). ■



**Raymond Hivoral**

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