

# International Franchise Expo a Launching Pad for Sector Growth

Popular trade show is the place to meet new prospects, launch new concepts.

By Joel Goldstein

In the world of trade shows, the International Franchise Expo has created a 15-year legacy for helping franchisors grow their networks across the nation and around the globe. In June, that legacy will continue as more than 15,000 visitors from 85 countries are expected to fill the Washington, D.C. Convention Center in search of the perfect franchise opportunity to fit their business and personal needs.

As a participant in the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Buyer Program the Expo has consistently attracted foreign buyers, investors and distributors from around the world ready to do business. In return, exhibitors large and small have made it a mission to use the show as a launching pad for franchise development on an annual basis.

*"There's only so much information I can get over the phone."*

"It's the one show every summer that brings together some of the world's most recognized franchisors, the hottest newcomers, and the domestic and foreign investors looking to be part of those systems in their collective quest for business success," said Richard Macaluso of MFV Expositions, producer of the show.

## Big Beginnings

Given that kind of reputation, Ali Zarbarpur can't wait to be there. As director of franchising for Fashion Time, a watch and clock retailer with 24 corporate locations throughout the Virginia and D.C. metro area, Zarbarpur's company will use the Expo to debut its franchise program.

"One of the key reasons for exhibiting at Expo is the location," said Zarbarpur, who visited the show last year. "The show is right in the heart of our own locations. What better way to have a franchisee prospect come out to the event, qualify him, take him to visit our area locations and make the right connections to grow?"

Because Fashion Time has been around since 1992,

Zarbarpur said people in the area have questioned when it would begin franchising.

"Our big goal at the show is just to get the word out," he said. "A lot of people have been speculating that we were going to franchise, and this is to let everyone know that now we are."

Nature Stone Floors will be another newcomer to the exhibit area. Franchising since June, the company, based in Bedford, Ohio, already has five franchisees and is looking at the show as way to grow even further. The business, which offers a stone and epoxy flooring that goes on top of concrete surfaces to improve aesthetics, add stability and cover concrete cracks, averages more than 3,000 jobs a year at its corporate stores. According to Jim Teresi, director of operations for Nature Stone Floors, the concept is ripe to franchise and the Expo is the place to make those connections.

Nature Stone Floors has enjoyed success in Ohio, where harsh winters can damage concrete floors, Teresi said. The company is targeting prospects in similar climates in the eastern United States at the Expo for early development and he looks forward to making face-to-face contacts.

"There's only so much information I can get over the phone," Teresi said. "One on one is a whole other story. That's definitely going to be a plus at the show."

## Universal Appeal

For Michelle Violetto of Little Scoops Franchise Corp. in Blauvelt, N.Y., the regional opportunities for franchise development close to home are obvious. But she said her company's appearance at the IFE also is about the  
(Continued on page 84)



*(Continued from page 83)*

universal appeal of her franchise concept and connecting with a diverse crowd.

"The International Franchise Expo is not only a great forum to learn more about the business of franchising, it's a wonderful place to network with other vendors and attract serious potential franchisees from around the world," Violetto said.

Specializing in hosting children's parties in an old-fashioned ice cream parlor setting, Little Scoops translates well across cultural and demographic boundaries, according to Violetta. And that makes the show's international scope attractive.

**The key is being open to the opportunities that present themselves.**

---

"It allows us to step back from our day-to-day operation and look more globally at how we do business and with whom," Violetto said about the show.

"Little Scoops is always looking to grow. And luckily both ice cream and parties are concepts understood and celebrated around the world. First we'll conquer the U.S., and then we'll see."

#### **Open Minds and Open Doors**

Whether the intention is to grow across the United States or across the ocean, the Expo has historically become a place to expand one's perspective. By attracting strong domestic candidates, as well as international delegations, exhibiting franchisors meet qualified prospects who can often lead to discussions about new markets. The key is being open to the opportunities that present themselves.

"We have 56 units," said Kim Swanson, director of franchise operations for Young Rembrandts, a children's art enrichment program based in Elgin, Ill. "And we would like to average 20 to 25 franchisees every year. Internationally, we're pretty wide open to whatever would come our way."

That's one reason Swanson has an open mind about Expo and the international potential that will be present. Admittedly, she said she expected to focus on English-speaking countries

when Young Rembrandts was ready to explore international expansion. But while the company is focused on growth in the United States among the Mid-Atlantic States, she doesn't rule out any possibilities.

"We're very interested in our horizons with international exposure," Swanson said. "We think art is universal and our concept is universal, so we would be open to anyone who might be open to Young Rembrandts."

Having been in business for 17 years, Young Rembrandts began franchising in 2001 with a proven business model, Swanson said. Now the company is focused on growth, using the Expo as a vehicle to market it.

For others looking to capitalize on the Expo to heighten their marketing and franchise development success this year, immediate action is suggested since space is limited.

For more information or to register for the 2006 International Franchise Expo, visit [Franchise.org](http://Franchise.org). ■

---

*Joel Goldstein is the director of marketing for MFV Expositions. He can be reached at [jgoldstein@mfvexpo.com](mailto:jgoldstein@mfvexpo.com).*