

16th International Franchise Expo—Something For Everyone

Selling is about relationships.

By Joel Goldstein

When the 16th annual International Franchise Expo opens its three-day run in the nation's capital March 30, more than 300 exhibitors will be on hand to welcome an expected 15,000 prospects from 85 countries.

And by the time the last visitor exits the Washington Convention Center on April 1, thousands will be well on their way to making dreams of business ownership come true. For the exhibitors, the opportunity to meet face-to-face with hundreds of prospective franchisees, will lead to more than a few matches.

Expo has consistently attracted quality foreign buyers.

No other event offers the scope and depth of opportunity—among both buyers and sellers—as does the International Franchise Association-sponsored Expo. As a participant in the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Buyer Program, the Expo has consistently attracted quality foreign buyers, investors and distributors from around the world ready to do business. In return, exhibitors large and small, old and new have made it a mission to use the show as a launching pad for franchise development on an annual basis.

"It's the one show every year that brings some of the world's most recognized franchisors, the hottest newcomers, and the domestic and foreign investors together in their collective quest for business success," said Richard Del Giorno of MFV Expositions, producer of the show.

For exhibitors, the show offers a broad range of qualified, motivated investors, making it a "must-do" part of franchise development programs.

"The IFE shows have proven very advantageous

for us," says Mail Boxes Etc. and The UPS Store Manager of Franchise Development Debbie Heiser. "The attendees are there with a purpose and are well-qualified so it gives us a great opportunity to showcase Mail Boxes Etc. We were very excited when they added a West Coast show. Those have been fantastic and when we learned they were adding a show in Miami (this past January), we signed up immediately."

Leads, Leads, Leads

Vocelli Pizza Dir.of Franchising Bob Montanari echoes those sentiments. Vocelli Pizza will be at its third IFE and Montanari says, "The shows have been extraordinarily successful for us. We had over 400 leads from our first show and it's grown every year."

Vocelli representatives will hand out more than 6,000 slices of pizza prepared fresh in their booth during the show. That gives potential franchisees an opportunity to actually sample the product. In 2006, those 6,000 slices of pizza led to 450 leads.

And as Montanari recently discovered, once a lead, always a lead.

"In fact, in November 2006, we closed on a sale with a contact we received at the first show we attended so there is a strong residual impact."

As a result, the IFE has become a fixture on the Vocelli marketing plan.

"IFE shows have become a necessity for our marketing program; it's what we work our schedule around," he said. "We currently have franchises east of the Mississippi, but we're working to go national and IFE helps us contact the people we need to talk with to reach that goal. In addition, the staff is extremely professional and very responsive to our needs."

Re-Bath Director of Franchise Development Cecil Johnson, one of the largest one-day bath remod-

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eling companies in the United States, is a veteran of all 16 IFE shows and also views them as a critical element of his company's marketing program.

"I wouldn't miss it," Johnson says. "I have made a sale at every show."

This year, Re-Bath hopes to expand internationally. Johnson says IFE allows the company to reach a prospect the company ordinarily would not have an opportunity to talk with face-to-face: the international franchisee.

"We have 175 franchises in the U.S. and six foreign countries, but we haven't targeted international growth until this year," Johnson says. "We opened in Trinidad last year and it's been extremely successful so we expect to meet and talk with a wide range of international and U.S.-based franchises this year at IFE."

Educational Sessions Abound

As usual, this year's IFE will offer a number of symposia and sessions for international attendees as well as domestic franchisors considering expansion overseas. Each is designed to educate attendees on the myriad of differences between franchising in the United States and operating a franchise in markets around the world.

Among this year's free seminars will be: "How to Finance Your Franchise," "The Basics of Master Franchising," "Earnings Claims," "13 Costly Mistakes Tenants Make Negotiating Their Lease or Renewal," "Ready, Set Go! Steps to Awarding Your First Franchise," "Dispelling the Myth of Owning a Franchise," "How To Enforce Franchise Agreements and Resolve Disputes in International Franchise Relationships," "Analyzing the Master Franchise" and "Choosing the Right Franchise."

Specialty seminars will include: "Franchising 101 for Veterans," "Opportunities in Franchising for Minorities and Women," and "Multi-Unit Franchising for Smart People."

The explosive growth of business ownership among women and minorities is also once again addressed. Today, America has more than 9.1 million women-owned businesses that employ 27.5 million people and contribute \$3.6 trillion to the economy.

In addition, U.S. Census data and the government's survey of male and female

minority business owners recently showed entrepreneurship up 45 percent among African Americans, 31 percent among Hispanics, 20 percent among Asians and 20 percent among women. To address these dynamic audiences, the IFE will feature a special seminar, "Opportunities in Franchising for Minorities and Women."

IFE also offers more in-depth, fee-based seminars including:

- "The A to Z's Of Buying a Franchise," a two-day symposium designed to help prospective franchisees as they evaluate opportunities.
- "Franchising Your Business," a two-day symposium on how to successfully expand your business through franchising.
- "Operations Manuals: The Foundation to Consistent Execution," a look at how to develop effective manuals.
- "Acquiring a Master Franchise," insight on how to select and negotiate a master franchise partner and agreement.
- "Global Franchise Expansion Strategies for Lucrative and Planned Growth," a look at the most common business and legal problems affecting international franchising.
- "Structures and Operational Strategies for Successful Expansion Within the U.S.," a symposium that will explore a wide range of subjects affecting the successful expansion of a franchise.
- "The Use of Technology in Franchising," a seminar explores ways for prospective and currently franchising companies to use technology to enhance their business and franchise relationships.
- "Strategies for Penetrating the U.S. Market for Overseas Franchisors," a look at how to successfully enter a vast and complicated market like the United States.

No Other Way

Missing the symposia means missing an outstanding opportunity to better understand how to evaluate and make decisions on the many opportunities that are available. The symposia give attendees access to some of the best legal, financial and development expertise in franchising. There is no other way to get as much valuable information without paying for their services.

Units Mobile Storage Dir. of Operations Ronny Baroody is also a believer in the power of the IFE and the seminars and workshops.

"Our experience at the IFE show last year in D.C. was a good learning experience because we now know how to stand out among the other exhibitors at the show," he says. "I attended a few marketing sessions as well and learned how to properly market the Units brand."

Baroody says the workshops will be on his agenda while at the IFE for a simple reason. "It is very important to stay abreast of the latest changes and advances in franchising," he says.

Interestingly, in the face of increasingly, fragmented media opportunities, as well as technological advances that seem to create unique new marketing opportunities almost hourly, old-fashioned, one-on-one, face-to-face remains one of the most effective ways to sell a franchise. And that's what the IFE is all about.

The IFE gives buyers and exhibitors an opportunity that can't be duplicated any other way: meeting and talking face-to-face. Selling is about relationships. A Web visitor cannot 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 sector professionals while trying to navigate the nuances of franchising is something that is just not available in any other forum.

It's the reason why an estimated 15,000 visitors will be in Washington for the show. And it's the reason hundreds of the world's leading franchise concepts will be there to greet them. ■

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