

# FRANCHISEUpdate

ISSUE 2, 2024



June 18 — 20, 2024

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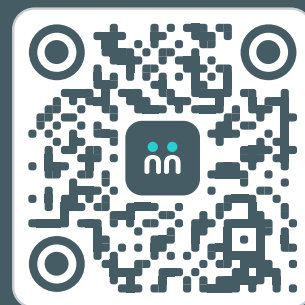
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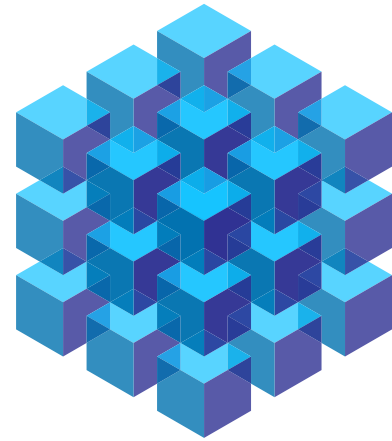
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# Back to BASICS

Faithfully delivering on your brand promise



Written by **ANDREW SEID**

**S**uccessful executives focus on the basics every day regardless of the internal or external circumstances of their business or the world at large. In franchising, focusing on the basics is crucial. A franchisor's main goal and obligation are to ensure that franchisees effectively deliver on their brand promise to consumers without the added level of control that corporately owned locations allow. The most effective franchisors have a well-defined understanding of their core brand promise and what support franchisees need to best meet that standard. From that base of understanding, a franchisor can then branch out and identify areas of the business that need to be specifically addressed or adapted and areas that should stay the course without much adjustment.

This focus on basics is crucial during periods of sustained success and during challenging times. While each difficult situation is different, there is frequently a clear and avoidable thread that runs through the troubled systems we have seen. Difficulties often become more pronounced during times of economic uncertainty.

Successful companies, whether in franchising or not, understand that breaking through and achieving sustainable success as a brand requires a laser focus on three basic elements of their business:

- Identifying, prioritizing, and maintaining **brand standards** at each location
- Intelligently growing to scale in the relevant markets to ensure **brand recognition**
- Maximizing the **unit economics** across your system, chiefly through achieving economies of scale

The difference between doing well and struggling almost always stems from whether management has continued to focus on and prioritize these basic issues. As franchise sys-

tems grow, they often place greater emphasis on strategies to drive franchisee recruitment than on the health of the actual franchise system and unit-level operations. That neglect can sometimes go on without creating a noticeable impact during periods when things are otherwise going well. However, those problems can create systemic issues that rear their ugly heads should other challenges occur that stress the brand in other ways.

## BEYOND SYMPTOMS

Take a step back from the immediate issues your franchise system faces today and look closely at the reasons underlying your problems—not just the symptoms. Recognize that some of the issues are caused by structural decisions made in the past that need to be corrected. Often in franchising, many of those decisions were caused by a focus on growth and not the needs of sustainable growth management. Too many franchise strategies are built to emphasize selling franchises and, unfortunately, not making the franchise system viable for the long haul. It is far easier to sell a franchise than to sustain a franchise system, and that is a dangerous trap for a franchisor of any size or experience to fall into.

Ask a franchise executive, “How’s business?” You are likely to get one of two answers. Experienced franchisors will talk about same-store sales, franchisee performance, new product development, and issues focused on system sustainability. Less experienced franchisors will generally talk about the number of franchise sales in the pipeline, and frequently, when probed, do not know anything about the unit economics at the franchisee level.

When asked how frequently a franchisee is visited, inexperienced franchisors will measure frequency by the calendar. Experienced management will talk about a visitation schedule based on unit performance measures, the requirements of ensuring quality

operations, and the plan for each unit visit. Focusing on the basics doesn’t mean you should not have a nuanced process for supporting your franchise system.

Franchise systems need to have a balanced approach, and that means fees need to be set to allow for the proper training, support, brand evolution, relationship development, and return on investment required to deliver a consistent brand promise to consumers. Franchisees today may require additional or different support than traditionally provided, new product development to meet consumer demand, and brand marketing to achieve their financial goals. Equally important, decisions based purely on a franchise salesperson’s desire to overcome prospective franchisees’ concerns can put long-term stress on the system. Balancing marketability with the needs of the unit operations is an essential part of the decisions to be reviewed in ensuring sustainability at each level.

Make sure to include your franchisees in the process as their support in executing any systemic change will be essential. Create clearly identified and measurable KPIs to measure and manage the performance at the unit level. Communicate and train your franchisees on how those KPIs will impact their business. Get feedback from them on whether meeting those KPIs is having a positive impact on their business. Consistently evaluating your KPIs will provide the tools needed to manage and evolve your system’s goals and objectives.

When the going gets tough, get back to the basics of your franchise system. Focusing on the three basic elements above will allow you to understand the unique requirements of your businesses and enable you to modify your strategies appropriately. ■

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# Contents

Franchise Update | Issue 2, 2024



## 28 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Proficiency and friendliness still matter. But satisfying customers isn't so simple these days because expectations have changed. It's crucial to make sure your customers feel valued.

## 36 AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS

Since joining Walk-On's Sports Bistreaux, CMO Laurie Curtis has embraced her company's rich canvas of stories and keeps looking for different ways to share them with guests.

## 54 NEW HORIZONS

Nontraditional locations offer franchisors new opportunities to reach customers. It can present challenges, but putting restaurants where people will find them has definite upsides.



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EDITOR'S NOTE

06 Nontraditional Locations and Unprecedented Service

COVER STORY

28 The X Factor  
Franchisors emphasize personal customer journeys

LEADERSHIP

08 ANATOMY OF A BRAND:  
Fazoli's  
Italian concept keeps it "fast, fresh, and friendly"

10 CEO PROFILE:  
Richard "Richie" Huffman  
Celebree School's leader trusts his values

16 CEO PROFILE:  
Scott Zide  
Empower Brands is ready for significant growth

22 Franchise U Is in Session  
Yum! Brands and the University of Louisville change lives

26 IFA Report  
The fight against joint employer continues

CONSUMER MARKETING

34 Best Practices  
Certification program aims to drive franchise growth

36 CMO Q&A  
Walk-On's Sports Bistreaux CMO Laurie Curtis embraces authenticity

40 CMO Roundtable  
"How does your marketing team work with other departments to elevate the guest experience?"

48 Social Media  
Expect the 2024 election to disrupt digital media

50 Customers Count  
Use AI to create a competitive advantage

52 Marketing Tech  
Boost ROI with geofencing

GROWING YOUR SYSTEM

54 New Horizons  
Nontraditional locations go where the guests are

58 Challenge the Pros  
"How do you emphasize the customer experience when working with franchise leads and prospects?"

66 Sales Smarts  
Making prospects feel valued, understood, and connected

68 Market Trends  
Travel centers offer unique opportunities

70 International  
Touring nontraditional locations around the globe

72 It's Closing Time  
Structure improves predictability for signings and revenue

Our Team

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# Nontraditional Locations and Unprecedented Service

From airports to food trucks (and, it seems, just about everywhere in between), franchise brands are looking high and low to identify nontraditional locations that can carry out the brand's promise.

At the same time, franchise brands are more focused than ever on taking their customer experience to the next level, enhancing the journey so that customers join the loyal ranks of raving fans. These are both hot topics in franchising right now, so we decided to dig in to discover what strategies are working and what kinds of results franchisors are getting.

Our Managing Editor M. Scott Morris connected with executives from several brands, querying them about their brands' strategies and the risks and rewards of experimenting with nontraditional locations. You may be familiar with nontraditional sites like airports and universities, but franchisors are also turning to movie theaters, travel centers, military bases, and beyond. There are, of course, pros and cons to trying out nontraditional locations, but when they work, franchisors say, there's a rewarding ROI.

It's hard to believe, but there was a time when saying, "Can I help you?" and "Thank you," were enough to pass for good customer service. While proficiency and friendliness remain important, meeting customer expectations has become significantly more complex. Our Colleen McMillar spoke with executives at three distinct brands about how they are defining, and redefining, the customer experience.

Today's successful companies need to go beyond the basics to truly understand their customers, anticipate their needs, and tailor communication across multiple channels. Perhaps most importantly, they must foster a sense of value for their guests. The reason is simple: Loyalty is no longer a given. Brands that consistently exceed expectations and make customers feel valued are the ones that will thrive. Companies that earn the newly created Franchise Customer Experience Certification examine those topics in granular detail, and you can read about the course in this issue.

You'll also find profile Q&As with Celebree School CEO Richard "Richie" Huffman, Empower Brands CEO Scott Zide, and Walk-On's Sports Bistreaux CMO Laurie Curtis. All of our usual departments and columns are also here.

One thing you won't want to miss in this issue is the unique story about how the University of Louisville's Yum! Center for Global Franchise Excellence is making a difference in the lives of young business students. As they take courses in franchising and learn about this powerful business model, students see new possibilities for the future. The inspiring story by Helen Bond celebrates the franchising community as it opens the way forward for the next generation of franchisors and franchisees.

  
**KERRY PIPES**  
Executive Editor





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# "Fast, Fresh, and Friendly"

Fazoli's seeks to transform guests into fans

Written by **TISHA BARTLETT**

While many brands try to reinvent themselves as time goes on, Fazoli's, America's largest quick-service Italian chain, has never had the need. The authenticity of the brand and its unwavering commitment to its tagline of fast, fresh, and friendly stands the test of time.

Founded in 1988 in Lexington, Kentucky, the first-of-its-kind brand took off and delved into an untapped category, quick-service Italian. After cementing itself as a beloved leader in the space thanks to its baked fresh-to-order, signature unlimited breadsticks, Fazoli's quickly spread across its home state.

After a few years of company growth across Kentucky, founder Kuni Toyoda developed his next big plan: franchising. In 1991, the brand made its foray into the new model, opening franchised locations in Kentucky, Indiana, and Florida. This has since been a key growth lever for Fazoli's.

To this day, Fazoli's continues to stand alone in the restaurant industry as the only quick-service Italian concept that provides true consumer value while still serving up fresh, quality ingredients and a made-to-order experience. No other quick-service competitor is serving classic Italian fare on real flatware with tableside grated parmesan, and hot, fresh unlimited breadsticks served right at guests' tables while simultaneously serving guests on the go through its popular sales channel, the drive-thru.

The brand continues to steadily grow across the U.S., operating now in 27 states and, more recently, overseas. Last year, expansion plans

were announced in Puerto Rico, and to kick off 2024, a 25-unit development deal was announced in Canada. This is a new chapter of global growth for the brand.

Fazoli's has one of the most loyal fanbases in the industry. At recent openings, fans have waited overnight for hours and even showed up to Fazoli's in themed costumes. Take a quick visit to the brand's social media channels and you'll see even more evidence: messages and comments inundated with requests to open in new states. Homesick is the word to best describe those who move away from a neighborhood Fazoli's because it's hard to forget the piping-hot breadsticks. The social media team collects dozens of messages from fans asking to somehow receive a shipment of breadsticks—nothing beats a fan like that!

### Menu innovations

To keep guests coming back for more, Fazoli's is constantly working on culinary innovation to appeal to the preferences of today's consumers. Over the years, the brand has rolled out hit after hit, such as Pizza Baked Spaghetti and a full sub line. Most recently, Fazoli's introduced premium Stuffed Shells entrees, leaning into the demand for freshly made, satisfying food. Made with high-quality ingredients, such as ricotta cheese and shrimp, the menu line performed incredibly well, outperforming even the highest limited-time-offer expectations.

Aligning with like-minded brands has also been a priority for the brand. Since 2019, the Cheesecake Factory Bakery has been working with Fazoli's to whip up the most mouthwatering cheesecakes, including the Italian Cream

Cake, which was so popular that it sold out within weeks of rollout, and the supply was upped to meet the demand.

Just like guests, employees are fans of the brand. Both at the corporate level and store level, day-one employees and franchisees still exist across the country—a rarity in today's restaurant landscape. The family-centric values shared with guests are also reflected at the employee level, which has led to tenured employees across the system. Notably, Fazoli's very first franchisee is still operating in Ashland, Kentucky.

Fazoli's exudes warmth. The dining room is constantly filled with happy families who love sharing a wholesome, value-friendly meal. The brand is undergoing a refresh and modernization this year while still remaining true to its foundational roots.

Fazoli's unique positioning, coupled with the modernization provided by parent company Fat Brands, creates an exciting trajectory for the brand's domestic and global expansion. The brand is especially focused on young consumers and investing in a revitalized digital experience, including an updated website, ordering platform, and app experience and a revamped loyalty program. In today's competitive landscape, Fazoli's is taking every step to enable its unwavering fans to take advantage of its fresh and affordable Italian cuisine. ■

**Tisha Bartlett** serves as vice president of marketing for Fazoli's, leading all facets of marketing and customer experience while driving vision, value, and growth. She brings more than 20 years of experience in corporate and franchise marketing for multi-unit systems.







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Richard “Richie” Huffman

“Spending lots of time with the executive team allows them to take my values and beliefs to schools.”

## “PROTECT, EDUCATE, AND NURTURE”

Celebree School’s founder trusts his values

Written by **KERRY PIPES**



### RICHARD “RICHIE” HUFFMAN Founder and CEO

Company: **Celebree School**

Age: **56**

Years in franchising: **2**

Years in current position: **30**

**R**ichard “Richie” Huffman opened the first Celebree School preschool location in 1994 when he was 26 years old. He may not have realized it at the time, but he was launching a company that would eventually turn to the franchising growth model in 2019 and now has more than 120 locations open or in development. Celebree School operates in six states and has more than 1,300 employees system wide with an enrollment of more than 4,500 children.

Celebree Schools offer early childhood education, including infant and toddler care, preschool, before and aftercare, and summer camp programs. Its mission is to “Grow People Big and Small.” Huffman describes the core vision

of the brand as “change, innovation, and the constant pursuit of self-improvement.”

As founder and CEO, Huffman is dedicated to building a corporate culture that attracts leading executives to the brand while always focusing on Celebree’s short-term and long-term vision. His 30 years of experience behind the wheel of Celebree School allows him to share his expertise and insights with the brand’s franchisees.

He says the growth the brand has experienced since beginning to franchise is not surprising because of the ongoing demand for the services the company provides. “Communities need quality pre-K education and daycare, and we can fill that gap,” Huffman says.

The world is taking notice. In 2023, Celebree School claimed the No. 1 spot in Entrepreneur’s Top New and Emerging Franchises, and this year it made Entrepreneur’s Franchise 500 list—no small feats.

Huffman is bullish on the future of Celebree School. “We will continue to invest in initiatives that position us for franchise success and equip us with the resources we need to scale the business and continue to deliver best-in-class results,” he says.

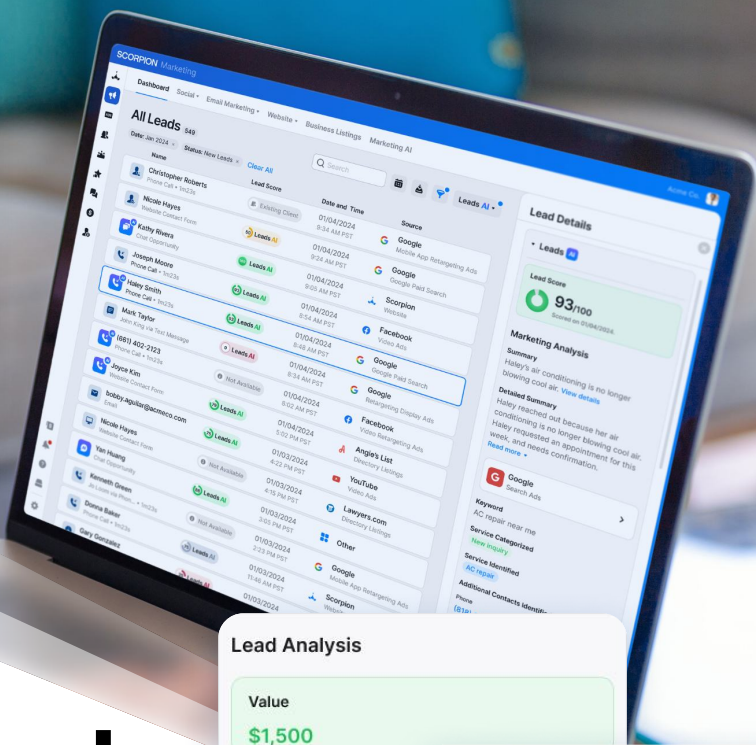
#### LEADERSHIP

**What is your role as CEO?** My role as CEO is making sure every action I take furthers our mission to “Grow People Big and Small.” My role is to make sure our corporate team and franchisees have the support they need to grow professionally and personally. This allows them to be better teachers and support members, making parents feel confident in bringing their child to Celebree School.

**How has Covid-19 affected the way you have led your brand?** Covid-19 didn’t change my leadership style as much as it made me recognize the team we have and focus on the vision of caring for children in the community. We were not going to close. We pushed through and didn’t fold.

**Describe your leadership style.** I would consider myself to be very collaborative and supportive. People want to be a part of something special, so I always make sure I





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communicate that, share and celebrate the wins, and share the successes of each person who makes up the Celebree team. My style is a verify-then-trust approach. Once there's trust, I'll let you own it. My focus is on the vision of the company: where we are headed, following the strategy in place, and holding people accountable.

and then it goes into the schools. It all trickles down to the school teams—promoting vision and mission, goals for schools for the year, and core competencies. It's what makes us different.

**Where is the best place to prepare for leadership: an MBA school or OTJ?** I think about this, if it would be better if I got



People want to be a part of something special, so I always make sure I

communicate that, share and celebrate the wins, and share the successes of each person who makes up the Celebree team. My style is a verify-then-trust approach. Once there's trust, I'll let you own it. My focus is on the vision of the company: where we are headed, following the strategy in place, and holding people accountable.

**What has inspired your leadership style?**

That came from watching my parents. They were totally relentless in their work ethic—working hard during the week and, over the weekend, still working toward their goals. They didn't take a break.

**What is your biggest leadership challenge?**

I've come to realize as I've gotten older that it's being patient. I used to think this was a horrible word that meant relaxing and not working hard. But it's not lowering standards or giving up on goals, but giving grace in time to catch up. My wife even brings this to my attention. I will ask her something and expect it 10 minutes later. But I've been thinking about it for hours or days, so I expect it quickly. Patience and grace.

**How do you transmit your culture from your office to frontline employees?**

Our culture is transmitted from corporate to the schools. This is transmitted through our district directors. The more time I spend with Allison Tsomos and other key executives, the more they know the expectations of our culture. Then they bring this to our district directors as our executives spend time with them,

my degree. I thought about getting my MBA but decided not to because I gain my knowledge from experience and on-the-job training. After high school, by the time my friends were three years into school, I was buying properties and running my own business. I got a jump ahead. I got knowledge through reading books and taking action.

**Are tough decisions best taken by one person? How do you make tough decisions?**

I'm not sure there is a tough decision. If you are set on your values and mission, it's easy. You find it is black and white; there is right and wrong if you put decisions through the lens of your mission and values. It used to be "What would Richie do?" Now, it's through our values: protect, educate, and nurture. Our teachers look at decisions through this.

**Advice to CEO wannabes:**

CEOs come in different flavors. I think it's more of an entrepreneur wannabe. You will find out really fast if you have what it takes to be an entrepreneur. There is pressure in every area. Many give up and take the easy route. Entrepreneurs make it through, and the team you build will ease this pressure though it never goes away.

My mom experienced this pressure and talked about it at home, but the next day she was always moving forward. Embrace it, learn to live with it, and learn to be good with it.

## MANAGEMENT

**Describe your management style:** I'm not sure I manage people, but I coach them in our mission, vision, and values. Is the strategy right? Are we reaching goals? Etc.

**What does your management team look like?**

They tell me it looks a lot like Richie. This comes through time. They will understand how you think and mirror this and your values. Spending lots of time with the executive team allows them to take my values and beliefs to schools.

Allison, our COO, worked with Celebree for 24 years. What does my touch base with her look like compared to someone who has only been here one year? She is family; they are family. The coolest thing about this company is I've never seen myself as the owner. I see myself as the CEO and part of the team. I make some of the decisions but not all of them. I play a role here. We all want to win, and we work hard every single day.

**How does your management team help you lead?**

I remember when it happened with our CTO, Lisa Bricker. She looked uncomfortable when she was about to give me some tough feedback. At that moment, I had to decide to take that feedback and create our culture and allow us to give each other feedback to be better leaders. This changed the entire organization. At the end of the day, we want what's best for the company and each other. We give all we have every single day.

**What makes you say, “Yes, now that’s why I do what I do!”?**

We were on an awards call with franchise partners, and this particular partner was obviously interested, but the wife was not giving the same signs. She seemed hesitant. The day that we awarded them, I could see her excitement in becoming a Celebree franchise partner—not just changing her perspective on the industry, but coming into a business with our team.

## OPERATIONS

**What trends are you seeing with consumer spending habits in your stores?**

Spending habits have not changed. Parents are always willing to spend as much as needed for children, especially in high-quality preschools. Parents are more educated in what they are looking for in early education. Even if one



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“Our culture is transmitted from corporate to the schools. This is transmitted through our district directors. The more time I spend with Allison Tsomos and other key executives, the more they know the expectations of our culture. Then they bring this to our district directors as our executives spend time with them, and then it goes into the schools. It all trickles down to the school teams—promoting vision and mission, goals for schools for the year, and core competencies. It’s what makes us different.

parent can be home, they still want children to meet development milestones to prepare for elementary school.

**How is the economy driving consumer behavior in your system?** Coming out of Covid has changed it—hoping for a hockey stick rise in education. Parents knew the importance, but Covid highlighted it. Enrollment shot through the roof, and we can’t build schools fast enough.

**What are you expecting from your market in the next 12 months?** There are now more children trying to get in than ever before, and we see that continuing.

**Are your franchisees bullish or bearish about growth and adding additional units?** Bullish. A majority are looking for multi-development deals (three or more). All want to be a part of it.

**Are commodity/supply costs any cause for concern in your system?** A little bit, but they are starting to come down a bit. I haven’t heard any stories lately of not being able to get building supplies.

**In what ways are political/global issues impacting the market and your brand?** States and governors emphasize the

importance of early education. Building these relationships with political figures and understanding policies that impact our industry. Getting in front of the issues and being a thought leader in the industry.

#### PERSONAL

**What time do you like to be at your desk?** Why do I need to be there? I’m constantly working from before waking up to night. Everywhere is my office, and I’m always working toward goals with the business and family. My thoughts don’t start at 9 a.m. and end at 5 p.m. I’m always going.

**Exercise in the morning? Wine with lunch?** I prefer to work out in the evening. Don’t drink now, but when I did, never at lunch.

**Do you socialize with your team after work/outside the office?** Only for special events (philanthropic, etc.). If we are together, that means they are not with their families. They need to be with their families.

**Last two books read:** *Believe in People: Bottom-Up Solutions for a Top-Down World* by Charles G. Koch and Brian Hooks and *The Holy Grail of Investing* by Tony Robbins.

**What technology do you take on the road?** Just an iPhone. It gives me access to email, podcasts, and YouTube. (I’m constantly looking for motivation, education, and validation.)

**How do you relax/balance life and work?** To me, it is focusing on things that mean the most to you. Find goals and objectives and stick to them. Whether it’s personal or professional, determine how much time is spent here. Why? Goals? Action steps?

**Favorite vacation destination(s):** The farm is my favorite place to spend time. It allows me to reconnect with nature.

**Favorite occasions to send employees notes:** It’s easy with email and technology to reach out to franchisees on their milestones or executives on their birthdays. I prefer phone calls over texts because you can hear each other’s voices and emotions. But my children try to convince me texts are better.

#### BOTTOM LINE

**What are your long-term goals for the company?** Keep building and constantly looking for ways to improve. I am super excited about where we are with our franchisees and love watching them grow and helping franchisee partners in buying properties.

**How has the economy changed your goals for your company?** Helped accelerate growth due to the demand for early education. Little to no impact on capital.

**Where can capital be found these days?** Community banks. We have great partnerships with national and local banks.

**How do you measure success?** Spending time in categories important to me and reaching my goals inside those categories. Hitting goals in health, wealth, family—get this—very successful.

**What has been your greatest success?** My kids. We have five kids from ages 14 to 23. Watching them grow and become adults. The way they treat each other as a family.

**Any regrets?** No. Every single bad decision was a phenomenal learning experience. I never see bad decisions, just opportunities to improve.

**What can we expect from your company in the next 12 to 18 months?** Growth. More schools. More real estate. Main focuses. ■



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Scott Zide

“The pandemic taught us the importance of adaptability and resilience.”

## “HEAVY FRANCHISE DEVELOPMENT”

Empower Brands' CEO expects significant growth

Written by **KERRY PIPES**



### SCOTT ZIDE CEO

Company: **Empower Brands**

Units/Brands: **10 brands, 800+ total units**

Age: **52**

Years in franchising: **25**

Years in current position: **2**

**S**cott Zide's journey to franchising launched as soon as he graduated from college. He and a friend opened two Mr. Goodcents franchise locations in St. Louis, and he was hooked on franchising.

Zide's next big career move came when he franchised with Outdoor Lighting Perspectives in 2000. During this time, he began to envision a multi-brand company that could house complementary brands focused on home services. That vision became Outdoor Living Brands, which eventually included Outdoor Lighting Perspectives, Mosquito Squad, Archadeck Outdoor Living, and Conserva Irrigation. Zide served as president and COO of Outdoor Living Brands from 2008 to 2022.

Though Outdoor Living Brands divested Mosquito Squad, its broader growth attracted attention from Lynx Franchising, leading to a significant investment in 2021. By the following year, Lynx Franchising and Outdoor Living Brands rebranded as Empower Brands, and Zide became CEO.

With more than 25 years of franchising experience under his belt, Zide oversees a portfolio that includes Jan-Pro, FRSTeam, Archadeck Outdoor Living, Outdoor Lighting Perspectives, Conserva Irrigation, Superior Fence & Rail, Koala Insulation, Bumble Roofing, Wallaby Windows, and Canopy Lawn Care. That's 10 brands and more than 800 units.

Zide's knowledge of franchising and commitment to fostering a franchisee-first culture continues to drive the brand. That means a focus on unit-level economics and the profitability of franchisees.

“The success of our franchisees is always at the forefront of what we do,” he says.

### LEADERSHIP

**What is your role as CEO?** As CEO of Empower Brands, my role involves setting strategic direction, guiding our growth, and ensuring that our operations align with our mission. I'm responsible for making high-level decisions, building a strong organizational culture, and leading our executive team toward achieving our company's objectives.

**How has Covid-19 affected the way you have led your brand?** The pandemic taught us the importance of adaptability and resilience. It pushed us to innovate, particularly in how we use technology and digital platforms to engage with our customers and support our franchisees. It also underscored the value of communication and community in navigating challenges. That said, we were pretty fortunate during the pandemic because of the nature of the brands we have under our umbrella. People were spending a majority of their time at home and looking to us to either improve their experiences or serve as essential services to care for their homes.



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**Describe your leadership style.** My leadership style is participative and inclusive. I believe in empowering my team, encouraging open dialogue, and fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. I would consider myself a servant leader, and leading by example is one of the best methods of leadership anyone can adopt.

**Where is the best place to prepare for leadership: an MBA school or OTJ?**

Both have their merits. MBA programs offer theoretical knowledge and networking opportunities while on-the-job experience provides practical insights and problem-solving skills. A combination of both can be highly beneficial.



My leadership style is participative and inclusive. I believe in empowering my team, encouraging open dialogue, and fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. I would consider myself a servant leader, and leading by example is one of the best methods of leadership anyone can adopt.

**What has inspired your leadership style?**

My leadership style is inspired by a blend of past mentors, personal experiences, and the belief that empowering individuals and championing their success leads to collective success.

**What is your biggest leadership challenge?**

Balancing rapid growth while maintaining a strong company culture and ensuring that all team members feel valued and engaged is one of my biggest challenges.

**How do you transmit your culture from your office to frontline employees?**

Through regular communication, training, and exemplifying our core values in my daily actions. We also leverage technology to ensure consistent messaging and culture sharing across all locations.

**How can a CEO help their CMO develop and grow?**

By providing clear strategic direction, offering mentorship, encouraging continuous growth, and ultimately trusting their expertise. I've worked with our VP of marketing for more than a dozen years at this point, and she is an expert at her craft. We've gotten to a place where we each elevate each other.

**Are tough decisions best taken by one person? How do you make tough decisions?**

While the final decision may rest with one person, it's important to gather diverse perspectives and data. I make tough decisions by consulting with my team, analyzing data, and aligning with our long-term vision.

**Do you want to be liked or respected?**

Respect is paramount as it encompasses being valued for integrity, decisions, and leadership. Being liked is beneficial, but it should not come at the expense of making the right decisions for the company. That said, kindness is the most important trait we can show others, and I strive every day to champion and uplift my teammates.

**Advice to CEO wannabes:** Focus on continuous learning, understand the value of empathy and emotional intelligence, build a strong network, and remain adaptable in the face of change.

**MANAGEMENT**

**Describe your management style:** As a servant leader, I prioritize the growth and well-being of my team members and the com-

munities we serve. I believe in leading by example, fostering a supportive environment, and empowering my team to excel.

**What does your management team look like?**

Our management team is diverse, bringing a range of experiences. They are skilled leaders committed to driving our brand forward while upholding our core values. The majority of our brand presidents are the original founders, so they bring amazing perspectives and deep levels of understanding to our franchisees.

**How does your management team help you lead?**

They provide expertise, insight, and support, helping to implement our strategy, manage day-to-day operations, and navigate challenges.

**Favorite management gurus: Do you read management books?**

At our 2024 Empower Brands annual meeting, we announced that we'll be implementing the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS Worldwide), an approach that promises to foster accountability, enhance transparency, and align our team toward common objectives. The adoption of EOS is a pivotal step in our journey, one that will solidify our operational rhythm and enhance our collective efficiency. Therefore, I recently finished *Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business* by Gino Wickman, the essential guide to management systems and EOS.

**What makes you say, "Yes, now that's why I do what I do!"?**

Seeing our team members grow, our franchisees achieve their entrepreneurial dreams, and our customers delighted by our services reaffirms my commitment to our mission.

**How do you support your employees?**

Our meeting in Las Vegas was a prime opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the employee experience. In an era where talent retention is as crucial as talent recruitment, providing an environment where our team members feel valued, supported, and motivated is key. We are dedicated to fostering a workspace that nurtures professional growth, encourages meaningful engagement, and supports our employees' well-being. Our discussions in Las Vegas went beyond conventional workplace benefits, diving into how we can enhance job satisfaction, ensure professional development, and maintain a culture where every employee feels like an integral part of our collective success. Employee experience holds equal weight to the customer experience in driving our growth and scalability at Empower Brands.



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We've started a strategic initiative to unite data and AI across our brands. This integration is critical for deepening our insights and enhancing our predictive capabilities, empowering us to make informed, strategic decisions. Adopting AI is not just about keeping up with the times; it's about setting a new standard in efficiency and innovation within our industry, fostering cross-promotion, and enhancing cross-selling opportunities.

Our success hinges on nurturing a talented, world-class team, which is why we're focusing intently on six pivotal aspects: meaningful work, hands-on management, a productive environment, growth opportunities, trust in leadership, and overall health and well-being.

## OPERATIONS

**How are you using artificial intelligence (AI) in your stores?** We've started a strategic initiative to unite data and AI across our brands. This integration is critical for deepening our insights and enhancing our predictive capabilities, empowering us to make informed, strategic decisions. Adopting AI is not just about keeping up with the times; it's about setting a new standard in efficiency and innovation within our industry, fostering cross-promotion, and enhancing cross-selling opportunities. I've challenged our franchisees to embrace technology and create a more frictionless experience for customers. Our AI-driven initiatives are crafted to automate routine tasks, thereby allowing our team members to dedicate their efforts to higher-value activities that require human insight and creativity.

**How is the economy driving consumer behavior in your system?** Economic conditions affect consumer priorities and spending.

We're attentive to these shifts, ensuring our offerings align with customer needs and expectations.

**What are you expecting from your market in the next 12 months?** We anticipate continued growth in demand for our services, influenced by trends in outdoor living and home improvement.

**Are commodity/supply costs any cause for concern in your system?** Like many industries, we're navigating fluctuations in supply costs. We're committed to efficiency and innovations, including new technology to mitigate these challenges.

**In what ways are political/global issues impacting the market and your brand?** Global and political dynamics can affect market conditions, consumer confidence, and supply chains. We stay proactive in adapting to these changes to maintain our market position.

## PERSONAL

**What time do you like to be at your desk?** When I'm not traveling, I like to be at the office pretty early. Empower Brands has a great office culture, and it's such a fulfilling and collaborative environment.

**Do you socialize with your team after work/outside the office?** Yes—building

relationships outside of work helps strengthen our team dynamics and fosters a sense of community.

## How do you relax/balance life and work?

It's a juggling act we take on as professionals and parents. It's a balancing act that constantly reminds me of the various roles I play, each carrying its own set of demands and rewards. With a daughter embracing college life and a son navigating the high school landscape, the convergence of professional demands and family values takes center stage.

**Favorite vacation destination(s):** Lately it's been Scottsdale as we've been flying out frequently to check on our home that we're in the process of building.

**Favorite company product/service:** We are an umbrella company, so it would be unfair to say.

## BOTTOM LINE

**What are your long-term goals for the company?** Continuous growth and expansion. Last year was all about acquiring brands, and now that we've grown our portfolio, it's time to focus on where we're at and heavy franchise development.

**How has the economy changed your goals for your company?** Economic conditions require adaptability. While our core goals remain, we adjust our strategies to navigate economic challenges and seize opportunities.

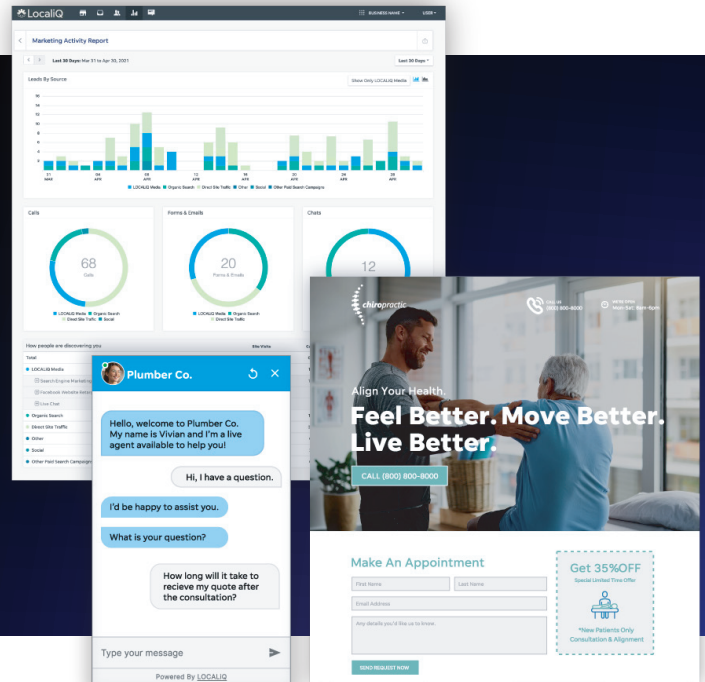
**Any regrets?** No.

**What can we expect from your company in the next 12 to 18 months?** Significant franchise development. ■





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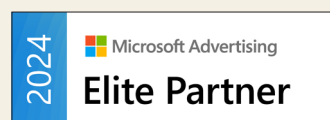
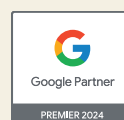
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# FRANCHISE U IS IN SESSION

YUM! BRANDS AND THE  
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE  
COLLABORATE TO CHANGE LIVES

WRITTEN BY HELEN BOND





**S**ummer Worful was 15 when she landed her first job as a crew member at McDonald's. Despite being painfully shy, she came out of her shell as she fell in love with her weekend side hustle. Still, when she left her small hometown of Smithfield, Kentucky, for the University of Louisville, Worful knew nothing about franchising and had never envisioned a future that included owning a business.

Everything changed when Worful took a business course on the fundamentals of the franchise model offered through the University of Louisville's Yum! Center for Global Franchise Excellence.

Part of the center's undergraduate franchise management certificate track, the class opened Worful's eyes to the world of franchising and the depth and breadth of what it offers. This spark of enlightenment was ignited in real-world ways when the 22-year-old senior, a business administration major with a minor in management, joined three fellow students at the 2024 International Franchise Association (IFA) Annual Convention in February.

"It really made the impossible seem possible," Worful says. "I got a lot of inspiration from people who were underrepresented or had a lot of struggles in life and saw how they took that as an opportunity and not as a setback, and it made them more motivated and even hungrier to go after their dreams. When I left, I seriously had the mindset that I could be a franchisee if I kept working hard. It was so awesome."

### BREAKING BARRIERS

Expanding the reach and opportunities for franchise education and entrepreneurship across industries is exactly what Kathleen Gosser had in mind when she leveraged her franchising and learning background to co-create the online franchise management certificate program—the first of its kind at a public university.

The center is part of Louisville, Kentucky-based Yum! Brands' Unlocking Opportunity Initiative, which is a five-year, \$100 million commitment designed to promote equity, inclusion, education, and entrepreneurship for employees, frontline restaurant teams, and communities worldwide.

Gosser, director of the center at the university's College of Business, spent 35 years with the global brand before retiring to start her encore career. Under her leadership, the center continues to build momentum for its mission

through multilevel online franchise education and research and an ever-expanding number of heavyweight industry partnerships, including a franchising "who's who" that makes up the Yum! CFGE advisory board. (Therese Thilgen, co-founder and CEO of Franchise Update Media, is a board member.)

"Our vision is to empower communities to build and sustain generational wealth through franchising," says Gosser, who earned her MBA and Ph.D. from the University of Louisville. "Our mission is to be a world-class center that brings franchise education and research to all. That's really important to us."

“  
OUR VISION IS  
TO EMPOWER  
COMMUNITIES  
TO BUILD  
AND SUSTAIN  
GENERATIONAL  
WEALTH  
THROUGH  
FRANCHISING.”

Launched in 2021 with a stackable graduate-level franchise management certificate, the center was a success from the start. It was followed quickly by the development of a non-credit executive education version, now a requirement of the IFA's credential, the Certified Franchise Executive (CFE).

Gosser, an assistant professor of franchise management, believes she's found the sweet spot with the addition of the center's nuts-and-bolts undergraduate franchising track. The modules are open to any business school student as electives, with the online franchise management certificate available as an opportunity for management majors and students

who minor in entrepreneurship. Classes fill up immediately, and there are waiting lists, Gosser says.

Four courses, including a management practicum in the form of a research project or internship, focus on the critical elements of franchising through the lens of the franchisee. Students explore the pros and cons of the franchise model, dive into the franchise disclosure document and franchise agreement, learn what it takes to buy and grow a franchise, and unpack all the angles of the people side of the business. In fewer than three years, 432 undergraduate students have enrolled in the program.

"If I had my way, everyone in the college of business would take the first franchising course because if I'm a finance or a marketing major or any of the others, I can have a job in franchising," Gosser says. "Opening their eyes up to it is my big goal for folks to understand there are opportunities like you can't believe in this wonderful business model."

Marlee Henson, 19, discovered the franchise fundamentals and legal class while hunting for a management elective to add to her busy schedule. Henson, who says her nature is to do extra things, is passionate about everything she takes on. She had previously experienced Gosser's gift for teaching in an orientation class and was eager to discover what the introductory franchising curriculum had in store.

"I mostly thought of restaurants and didn't really think of all the opportunities that are out there," Henson says. "It was so intriguing to me that there are not only a lot of different job opportunities but also industries within franchising, so I wanted to explore that more."

Henson was hooked. The sophomore from Harrisburg, Kentucky, decided to add a franchise management certificate to her pursuit of a double management and marketing major along with a stackable healthcare leadership certificate to support her current job in marketing and communications for a local healthcare system.

Henson also attended this year's IFA Annual Convention. She is finding her way in franchising, but she already has a keen interest in how the industry invests in communities.

"I see franchising as this middle ground where generational wealth is created in outstanding ways," Henson says. "There are so many stories that are so inspiring. At the same time, there's so much opportunity for growth. People are growing, and the economy and



local communities are growing, but at the same time, people are actually being helped, and it's making a real difference in people's lives."

Henson plans to take a course on franchise human resources and leading teams as she continues to be on target for early graduation in December 2025. She's still determining what the future holds but expects it to include the pursuit of an MBA and a master-level franchise management certificate.

"If I end up working in franchising, I'm sure I'll get my CFE as well," Henson says.

As Worful wraps up her last semester of college, she reflects on an experience that has played out in unexpected ways. She had never planned to work for McDonald's after high school, but an offer to lead shifts as a restaurant manager, along with partial tuition assistance through the brand's Archway to Opportunity program, was too good to pass up.

Worful's work and school lives crossed paths, forging a career right before her eyes. In October, she jumped at the offer of a unique part-time opportunity as a business unit administrator, working with roughly 30 franchisees in the Bluegrass Operators Association (BOA), which includes 170 McDonald's restaurants in the Louisville and Lexington areas of Kentucky.

Everything clicked for Worful when she enrolled in the introductory class on the basics and legalities of franchising. As she began analyzing the FDD as part of the coursework, she chose what she knew for a case study. Her firsthand experience at McDonald's helped her better understand the franchise business model structure and the risks and responsibilities of a franchisee in an industry that is all about relationships. After graduation, Worful will be ready with a foundational degree and a full-time position with the BOA waiting for her.

"I think that the class gave me the opportunity to have the job I have now because I can use it as a tool that most people don't have," Worful says. "Unfortunately, most people don't have the opportunity to take a franchise class. And I honestly don't think they really know what they're getting into whenever they have positions like mine. Having that background knowledge makes my job a lot easier. They can talk about franchisees and franchisors and the relationship, and I know what that's like."

With each uplifting story, it's easy to see why the franchise industry has embraced the center's work. Along with financial aid for all program levels in the form of scholarships, the CFGE board of advisors has provided travel money for the past two years for a select group of undergraduates to attend the annual convention of the IFA, which waived the registration fee.

Gosser says she has been overwhelmed by the willingness of franchise industry executives to take part in virtual roundtables, appear as a guest on her "FranchiseU" podcast, and donate their time, money, or resources in other ways.

"I cannot tell you how many people have reached out to me and said, 'What can we do to help?', 'How can we provide our expertise?', 'Is there a way we can teach?', 'Is there a way we can speak to your students?'" says Gosser. "And, when I ask, no one says no."

The center is establishing a system to track undergraduate data, but with students like Henson and Worful, you don't have to look far to see the program's impact. And you can bet Gosser's not done yet.

Along with opening up the franchise management education program to the entire university—which is on the docket, says Gosser—she hopes to see franchise education become a mainstay in all higher education institutions.

She also looks forward to welcoming former students back as they venture out and become franchisees, work for franchisors, or have a career in a related field.

"I want my students to go on and be successful within the franchising model and then come back and have the students learning from them, so it's full circle," Gosser says. "That would be the real win." ■





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# Call to Action

## The fight against joint employer continues

Written by **MATTHEW HALLER**

If one thing is certain in the world of political uncertainty, it's that direct engagement with lawmakers is essential to successful policy outcomes. This year has brought one of the most consequential policy battles to date for the franchise sector: fighting to overturn the National Labor Relations Board's (NLRB) expanded joint-employer standard.

That fight continues because, in early May, President Joe Biden vetoed legislation that would have ended the threat of joint employer. The veto, which took place during National Small Business Week, came after 5,300 franchise community leaders from all 50 states sent a petition to the White House urging President Biden to sign the legislation to protect small businesses.

President Biden claims to be a champion for small businesses, but he turned his back on franchising, a business model that puts countless Americans into small business ownership, particularly traditionally underrepresented minorities, women, and veterans. With that action, the administration solidified its position that it cares more about special interests than small business owners and their employees, who face a near-daily onslaught of costs and uncertainties from overregulation.

This rule from the NLRB takes away franchisee autonomy, wipes out franchisee equity, and changes the franchise business model as we know it. We experienced the consequences

of this rule when a similar standard was issued in 2015. That's why the franchising community has been outspoken against the rule and critical to ending it once and for all. Members of IFA have advocated against expanded joint employer, leading to bipartisan support for legislation to overturn the rule. The legislation passed both the U.S. House and Senate with bipartisan majorities—undoubtedly a direct result of lawmakers hearing from concerned constituents about the harm this rule would bring.

Now is not the time to back down. The importance of the franchise community engaging in advocacy is paramount, especially with increased government and media scrutiny over the franchise business model.

### Speaking out

At this year's IFA Annual Convention in Phoenix, attendees heard from multi-unit giants David Humphrey of Ignite Fitness Holdings, Greg Flynn of Flynn Restaurant Group, and Jesse Keyser of Keyser Enterprises, who shared why it is a priority for them to take time away from their day-to-day jobs to get involved in government relations.

Flynn said, lawmakers "believe more of what you have to say because you're doing it from firsthand experience. Advocacy is so important for our businesses. We operate in a tangle of regulations and laws that are very hard to

navigate. They really affect our outcomes in an important way. Anything we can do to make our lives a little less burdened by the regulations or even assisted by helpful legislation ... has outsized impacts on our businesses."

We continued the conversation on a panel at the recent Multi-Unit Franchising Conference with multi-brand franchisees Rob Branca and Nate Garn, who detailed the real-life implications of the California FAST Act and the bottom-line impact of tax law changes, such as the need to reinstate the interest deduction that expired in 2022. We also discussed the importance of having relationships before you need them, which happens through persistence in advocacy over years.

Whether you're a long-time advocacy pro or don't know where to start, the most important thing to remember is that your voice does make a difference, and IFA is here to support you in that journey. Whether it's making a connection, facilitating a meeting, or sharing your message, we are working tirelessly here in Washington, D.C., and around the states to protect this powerful business model. We can't do it without you.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to make a difference, including the 5,300 individuals who joined the petition to the White House urging the president to sign the legislation to overturn joint employer. We appreciate your work to make this business model stronger. Together, we can change the narrative around franchising so lawmakers truly understand how the business model works and see all the good that business owners like you do every single day. ■

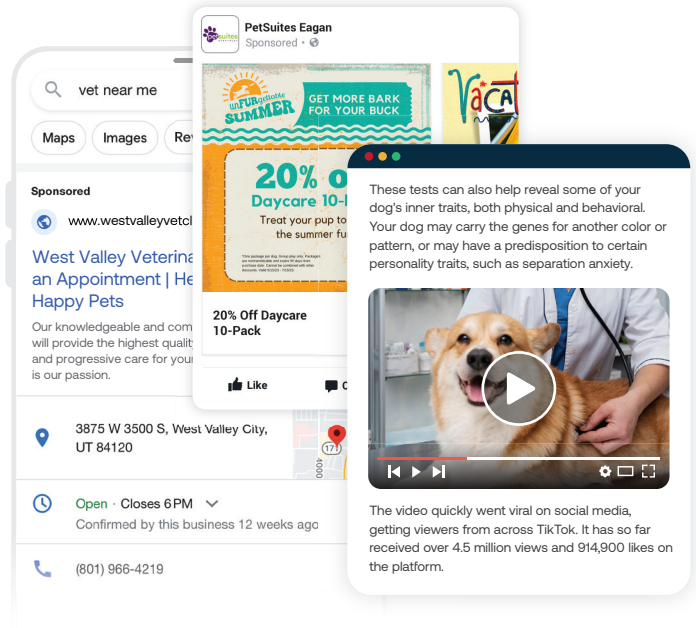
**Matthew Haller** is president and CEO of the International Franchise Association.





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# THE FACTOR

FRANCHISORS EMPHASIZE PERSONAL CUSTOMER JOURNEYS

Written by  
**COLLEEN MCMILLAR**



The medical assistants who staff Any Lab Test Now's 230 facilities throughout the country are essential to the company's operations and success. They are the faces of the brand, and they are frontline superheroes as far as Any Lab Test Now CEO Clarissa Bradstock is concerned.



**CLARISSA BRADSTOCK**  
CEO / ANY LAB TEST NOW

The company offers consumers direct access to clinical, DNA, and toxicology lab testing. To ensure that prospective medical assistants are a good fit, many franchisees add a layer of screening during the hiring process, so the inquiry goes beyond a résumé review.

Applicants are presented with a series of scenarios and asked how they would handle them. The additional scrutiny is meant to discover whether potential employees possess an abundance of empathy, the quality Any Lab Test Now values most.

Empathetic, efficient service that's easy to schedule separates Any Lab Test Now from its competitors when it comes to providing a holistic, frictionless customer experience, Bradstock says.

"When people come to us, they can be just really stressed. It could be stress that their cholesterol isn't going down. Or they may have a sexually transmitted disease. Or they might have drug interactions. There are all kinds of examples for why they come to us," Bradstock says. "What's really important for us in health care is that level of empathy and understanding and making them feel welcome. That empathy side is something that's really so important for our brand."

In the not-too-distant past, many businesses thought that providing a good customer experience was as simple as being proficient and saying, "Thank you."

Proficiency and friendliness still matter. But satisfying customers isn't so simple these days because expectations have changed. Regardless of the services they offer, today's franchisors need to deeply understand their patrons and anticipate their needs. They also must employ multiple channels and tailor their messages when reaching out. Perhaps most importantly, they need to make sure the people who use their services or buy their products feel valued. Loyalty is earned, and that means going above and beyond customer expectations.

After medical assistants are hired at Any Lab Test Now, many undergo an additional certification process. "The majority of that is focused on the customer experience, really training them in the Any Lab Test Now way," Bradstock says. "The Any Lab Test Now way is to greet people in a friendly and open manner and also to get them in and out as quickly as possible. Because the value of our brand isn't just the pricing of the tests, it's also respect for their time. And then there's that level of empathy."

#### A FLURRY OF FEEDBACK

Exceeding customer expectations means providing transparency and soliciting feedback again and again, says Joaquin Erazo, director of marketing for DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen.



**JOAQUIN ERAZO**  
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING /  
DREAMMAKER BATH & KITCHEN

The company is a full-service kitchen and bath remodeling franchise with 44 locations in 23 states. Its franchisees operate design centers in retail locations, allowing customers to see the remodeling options available.

"When they walk into a DreamMaker design center, they will see half a dozen kitchen vignettes with different styles and options

and cabinetry and faucets and under-cabinet lighting as well as bathrooms, anything from showers with multiple body sprays to free-standing tubs," Erazo says. "The design centers also have selection areas with lots of flat-screen TVs to show different before and after renovations. The very first step in the client experience is radically different from what most remodelers would offer people."

It's an important step because renovations are big-ticket investments, and franchisees want to do everything they can to ensure that customers are getting what they want and paying a price they can live with, Erazo says.

"Our design centers help homeowners communicate what their vision is for their own space, so they can immediately eliminate what they don't like and highlight the things that they do like," he says. "Then our franchisees can help to frame a little bit more of their budget expectations on what the cost and investment should be."

Most people think about remodeling for years before they actually do it, and they read reviews—lots and lots of reviews—on social media about the company they are thinking about using.

"Reviews and reputation matter," Erazo says. "Consumers will put a lot more weight on the opinions of strangers than they do with whatever the brand voice is. And the higher the ticket of the item that you're trying to purchase, whether it's a product or service, the more weight you're going to place on those reviews."

That makes customer satisfaction key. It's a message that DreamMaker drives home at every opportunity. "Early on, we emphasize the importance of reviews to new franchisees, and we make it a point to make sure that every single client is satisfied, and we're exceeding their expectations," Erazo says. "How do we do that? We lean heavily on surveying our clients."

DreamMaker surveys after the first visit to the design center, after selecting appliances and fixtures, after the first day of demolition, and at the end of the project. All of that feedback gives franchisees an opportunity to correct an experience that's not meeting a client's expectations. "By the time the project is completed, there should not be any surprises," Erazo says.

Along the way, clear communication is essential. A remodeling job takes weeks, sometimes months, depending on the scope of the project. Franchisees don't start a project until all the material comes in, including every cabinet, knob, faucet, and piece of tile. That's





“We encourage our franchisees to take it to the next level because they’ve built a relationship with these clients throughout the process. If you discover that both husband and wife went to Georgetown University, maybe the end-of-the-project gift is an autographed Patrick Ewing jersey, something that is meaningful to them and more personal. That’s a little bit of a cherry on top because we get to know them, and we’re very proud of that.”

**JOAQUIN ERAZO** DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, DREAMMAKER BATH & KITCHEN

because the pandemic caused ongoing supply chain issues.

Keeping clients in the loop as the items arrive allows families to know when demolition is likely to start and when a project might be finished. Franchisees and their workers get to know their customers as well as their habits, schedules, preferences, and annoyances. Relationships are formed that can become close bonds.

When the job is done, DreamMaker franchisees present clients with an end-of-the-project gift, often one that’s more personal than a cutting board or a bath set.

“We encourage our franchisees to take it to the next level because they’ve built a relationship with these clients throughout the process,” Erazo says. “If you discover that both husband and wife went to Georgetown University, maybe the end-of-the-project gift is an autographed Patrick Ewing jersey, something that is meaningful to them and more personal. That’s a little bit of a cherry on top because we get to know them, and we’re very proud of that.”

A job done well could result in the prize DreamMaker seeks: the coveted review or referral.

“If you haven’t remodeled before, you think you’re buying a product or a combination of products: the cabinets, the flooring, the ap-

pliances, all that,” Erazo says. “In reality, we are selling a service. It’s listening to the needs, wants, wishes, and desires and translating that into the parts and pieces of the kitchen and bath and delivering an outstanding experience, so at the end of the project, the customer says, ‘That went a lot smoother than I thought it was going to. It was a great experience.’ And they’re more than happy to post that on Google or Facebook.”



**MIKE SKITZKI**  
COO / GOLDFISH SWIM SCHOOL

#### DEFINING THE X FACTOR

Over the past year and a half, Goldfish Swim School Chief Operating Officer Mike Skitzki has visited most of the franchise’s 168 locations. He found that franchisees are aligned

with the brand’s core values and Goldfish’s mission to help kids be safer in and around water. But many of the schools also had an X factor, one that was hard for Skitzki to articulate. Some schools just felt different. Special. Incredibly welcoming.

Then Skitzki read the book *Unreasonable Hospitality* by Will Guidara, which details how a 26-year-old restaurant general manager took over a struggling New York City brasserie and transformed it into a restaurant that was named the best in the world 11 years later. Guidara instilled the importance of exceeding customer expectations in the restaurant’s employees. He focused on genuine interactions with patrons and creating memorable moments.

The book “gave me a vocabulary around this idea of hospitality. And what I realized was that some of our schools on purpose—a lot of our schools by intuition—were delivering on this concept of hospitality,” Skitzki says. “When you genuinely engage with the people you’re serving, and you can make authentic connections, that’s hospitality. And when we’re purposeful about that at Goldfish, that’s the X factor, and those are our schools that are just through the roof with customer satisfaction, retention, growth, and lots and lots of really happy kids.”

What does that look like in practice at Goldfish? It’s what they refer to as providing a





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Golden Experience, which includes anticipating needs. “I need to encourage and empower and train my teams that when they see mom coming in with her kids, and mom’s hands are full, let’s offer to carry something,” Skitzki says. “Or if someone forgot their goggles, let’s give them a pair of goggles. If mom is heading out to her car, let’s hold the door. Let’s walk out with an umbrella in the rain.”

It also includes creating memorable moments. If Goldfish does that well, positive reviews might get shared on social media. “Maybe it’s as simple as when we make a reservation for the first time, when we make that very first booking, if we ask mom what her kid’s favorite color is, and we’re waiting at the door with a yellow balloon for little Emma when she comes in,” Skitzki says.

Franchisees and their employees look for creative ways to show customer appreciation. They also try to foster personal connections with smiles and eye contact and by taking the time to update parents on their little swimmers’ progress.



**SHANA KRISAN**

CMO / GOLDFISH SWIM SCHOOL

Of course, it’s important that booking apps work, that scheduling make-up appointments is easy, and that websites have pertinent information. Marketing also matters.

“One thing that we’ve always looked at as a company is making sure we understand the consumer first,” says Chief Marketing Officer Shana Krisan. “We did a big study across all of our locations. We wanted to make sure that what we were doing was still in line with consumer expectations and making sure that they understood why we are the best choice for swim school.”

The analysis delved into what customers thought about Goldfish’s marketing, curricu-

lum, technology, and other aspects of the schools’ operations. “Our whole goal was really to identify any gaps that we could then take back in-house to fix,” Krisan says. “There were franchisees involved, lots of consumers, lots of consumer surveying, lots of consumer phone calls across 36 states.”

The information gathered is critical to Goldfish’s goal of ensuring the franchise is meeting and exceeding expectations all around the country. “From a marketing perspective, those consumers and those markets can look quite different,” Krisan says, “so we need to make sure that we’re not only telling the story and educating the consumer from where we started in the Midwest, but that it also makes sense in the South and in the East and in the West, where we’re going. We found that we do a pretty good job across the board, but there are always areas for improvement. And so that’s where we’re focusing right now in 2024, improving on that customer experience and that customer journey.”

Krisan and Skitzki say candid feedback is an invaluable tool that should be embraced. “If we’re open-minded and listen with open hearts and open ears, and we take the feedback that comes,” Skitzki says, “that helps us get better.”

### ONE GOAL, MANY LAYERS

It often takes a concerted, sustained effort for a brand to stand out in a crowd of competitors. Every aspect of a business—operations, marketing, technology, and training—should be geared toward that goal.

There isn’t one aspect that’s more important than the other, says Bradstock of Any Lab Test Now. “I think, at the end of the day, that relationship with a human being is going to be what’s going to bring that customer back,” she says. “But the interesting thing is that if they don’t come through the door because there’s too much friction in ordering, then we don’t get that experience. So, they are all equal in how they can impact the customer experience.”

Any Lab Test Now is always looking to take the customer journey to the next level.

“We continuously improved our website. Now, consumers can go online, schedule an appointment, and we have a shared calendar at the store, so it’s real-time interacting. They can pay for the test online. They can also do the consent forms online. When the customer comes into the facility, we already know who they are, and we’ve already gotten all their information. They’ve paid. We just have to do the service and get them in and out as quickly

as possible, which we try to do in 15 minutes. Customers really like that because they can do everything up front, and everything is seamless. And that’s something we’ve changed over the last three years, really adding those features,” Bradstock says.

It benefits the customers and the franchisees. “From the store level, it makes it so much easier for them because they don’t have to deal with paperwork, so we’re making it easier for franchisees. They can just pull up the customer and get all the information they need,” she says.

This summer, the franchise plans to roll out an AI tool to help customers better understand what lab tests are available and might prove beneficial. The messaging around the benefits of particular tests often comes from customers themselves. That feedback enables franchisees to feel more empowered to go out into the community and share the Any Lab Test Now story.

Not too long ago, a triathlete in his 50s wandered into a store in Utah. He was curious about the services offered. The medical assistant on duty answered his questions, and then the man confessed that he hadn’t felt like himself lately. He also said he didn’t like needles and wondered whether a urine test would suffice.

The medical assistant listened and then explained the options and what might be useful. Without pressuring him, she encouraged him to consider taking a complete blood count test. Though he was hesitant, he decided to do it. The results came in, showing the man had signs of having an aggressive form of leukemia.

Though he could hardly believe the results, a doctor confirmed them. The man sought treatment and says his life was saved because of his spur-of-the-moment decision to pop into that Any Lab Test Now location.

“I’m here as a result of it,” he says in a video recorded for the company’s YouTube channel.

It’s hard to top that story when it comes to making a difference in a customer’s life. Still, Bradstock says, “It’s just one of many about how we’ve really helped people during tough times.” ■



# WHAT'S WITH THE PINK?

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# SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Certification program aims to drive franchise growth

Special to Franchise Update Magazine

**W**hy do some franchise brands make it while others fail? According to FRANdata research, approximately 300 companies begin franchising each year in the U.S., but 84% of franchise systems never grow beyond 100 open locations. A new initiative called the Franchise Customer Experience Certification seeks to tackle this challenge.

According to founder Jayson Pearl, growth stalls for one reason above all others. “Our research shows that growing past 100 locations—or not—comes down to unit economics,” Pearl says. “Without it, even the most positive and engaged franchisee can’t afford, or won’t choose, to invest in sales and marketing,

to add additional units, or to recommend the franchise when prospects call for validation.”

Customer experience is a crucial and often missing element of success, Pearl says. A recent McKinsey study found that brands with higher customer experience scores have double the revenue growth of their peers. “However, there’s very little research into the most effective practices to leverage the customer experience to drive growth in franchising,” he says.

A 30-year franchising veteran, Pearl was inspired to create the certification program after working with the International Franchise Association and Franchise Update Media on the

Franchise Customer Experience Conference in Atlanta.

In May 2022, he assembled a working group of franchisors to explore solutions. Brands were chosen from different industries, but all have many years in franchising, consistent growth, and top consumer and franchisee-satisfaction accolades. Leaders included Chicken Salad Chick COO Jim Thompson; Christian Brothers Automotive Chief Growth Officer Brad Fink; PuroClean VP of Marketing and Online Learning Alex Pericchi; Wild Birds Unlimited COO Amy Moore; and Carrie Evans, a Certified Franchise Executive.





The group began with the hypothesis that profitable franchise unit growth happens when highly satisfied franchisees create highly satisfied consumers, leading to a cycle of growth and success. Focusing on franchisee and consumer experience, they set out to identify the most effective franchisor practices needed to create this virtuous cycle.

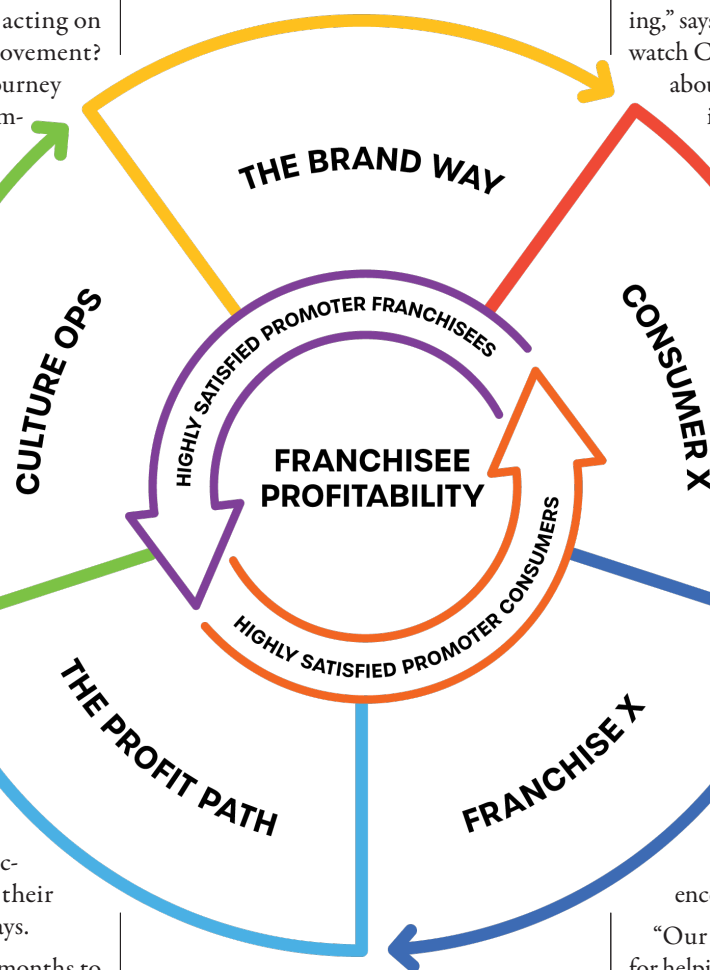
Their goal was to identify the standards and processes that lead to better franchisee profitability. For example, consumer feedback is important, but how are brands acting on that feedback and tracking improvement? What elements of the consumer journey have the biggest impact on customer loyalty? How do these metrics link to franchisee profitability? What are ways to recognize franchisees who are driving profitability through great consumer satisfaction? What is the effect of franchisees collaborating on business planning and sharing accountability for results?

The franchisor leaders discovered that collaborating to support franchising had unexpected benefits. “Networking with fellow franchise executives was an indispensable way for us to unlock the secrets of delivering exceptional customer service, learning the most effective ways that brands can help their franchisees drive success,” Moore says.

The working group met over 18 months to share and analyze their brands’ practices and processes and examine examples across franchising. From this research, they developed a model with franchisee profitability at the core. They identified 32 different practices around franchisee and consumer experience that, when active and effective, lead to higher franchisee profitability. The group organized these into five pillars of success: Operationalizing Culture, Defining the Brand Way, Measuring and Improving Consumer Satisfaction, Measuring and Improving Franchisee Satisfaction, and The Profit Path.

The brand leaders were especially surprised by how much they could learn from each other.

“It turns out that a lot of the things that I thought we did differently aren’t as different. There are others out there who are very interested in the satisfaction of brand experience—and we can learn from them,” Fink says. “This further solidified the belief that if the franchisor prioritizes franchisee satisfaction and experience, and teaches, coaches, and trains guest satisfaction, it’s not hard to get positive, multi-directional results throughout your brand and into your communities.”



Based on the working group’s discoveries, Pearl founded the Franchise Customer Experience Institute this past year to build a certification program for brands seeking to drive faster growth through better consumer and franchisee experiences.

The institute’s team built the processes for validating franchisor practices through a secure online entry portal, franchisee and consumer interviews, and third-party data. The team also created a Franchise Customer Experience Resource Center with research and more than 100 best practices and tools for brand teams to use as they pursue and achieve their certification.

In November 2023, the institute invited brands from across industries to become certified and contribute their expertise toward improving the program. Participants included Batteries Plus, Fastsigns, Homewatch CareGivers, Massage Heights, My Salon Suite, NerdsToGo, and QC Kinetix. These brands completed their certifications and were recognized with awards at the IFA Annual Convention in February.

“There’s really nothing like this in franchising,” says Todd Houghton, president of Homewatch CareGivers. “We expected to learn a lot about the good things we are already doing along with ways to improve, and we did, but we also found that the process of gathering together all that we do around many areas of our organization was valuable. We now have a complete view of all the processes and tools related to our culture, training, and customer experience and how these drive franchisee profitability. We can use this in many ways, including onboarding new home office team members.”

Today, the Franchise Customer Experience Institute is working with executives for the next round of certified brands to be recognized at Franchise Update Media’s Franchise Customer Experience Conference in Atlanta, June 18–20.

“Our mission is to be the trusted resource for helping more fully build the community of franchise brands dedicated to customer experience excellence, learning from each other, and growing to new heights,” Pearl says.

[Photo: The Fastsigns brand leadership team was one of 11 that received the award recognizing their Franchise Customer Experience Certification at the 64th International Franchise Association Convention. From left to right are Chris Becraft, Grant Walker, Andrea Hohermuth, Jeffery Lewis, Scott Krupa, and Lana Daley.] ■





# “A MARKETER’S DREAM”

CMO LAURIE CURTIS EMBRACES AUTHENTICITY

Written by KERRY PIPES



**L**aurie Curtis believes authenticity and a genuine connection to guests are at the core of a successful marketing strategy. She's brought that mindset with her during her first year as CMO with Walk-On's Sports Bistreaux.

Curtis was appointed to the head marketing spot at the sports restaurant brand in December 2023. She draws from more than 25 years of franchise marketing leadership experience with Denny's, Pizza Hut, TGI Fridays, and Domino's Pizza. In those roles, she was responsible for brand and field marketing, product development, communications, strategic marketing initiatives, and building brand visibility. These experiences developed her ability to drive growth, innovation, and brand revitalization.

Curtis sees herself as a collaborative leader and motivator with a reputation for uncompromising ethics and high standards. In less than a year at Walk-On's, she has already spearheaded initiatives to create an unforgettable dining experience for guests. "My vision is to not only make Walk-On's a household name, but to help transform the brand into the icon we truly believe it can be," she says.

It all comes back to fostering authentic connections. "By keeping our guests at the center of our marketing strategies, we cultivate authentic connections and build lasting brand loyalty," Curtis says.

She says Walk-On's has fostered an internal culture that embraces innovation and values learning from mistakes. "This approach to growth has distinguished us as a franchise organization and reflects our desire to lean on one another for feedback and insights. By collaborating, we can connect deeply with our audience to drive meaningful results," she says.

**Describe your role as CMO.** As the chief marketing officer at Walk-On's, my responsibilities span across marketing, communications, and culinary. Overseeing culinary is somewhat unique to my role as not all CMOs take on this kind of work. The amount of scratch cooking and hand work done in each kitchen is remarkable, and I'm lucky to have the chance to use this differentiator as a key tool in our marketing efforts.

I joined the company at the end of 2023, and what drew me to Walk-On's was its authenticity; it's a marketer's dream. We have several compelling stories to share, from our founder's journey to the natural alignment with athletes and sports. Our brand ethos is

exemplified by the team members who were once walk-ons themselves and those who embody our team-spirit mindset in their work each day. The company's rich canvas of stories makes my role incredibly fun and rewarding.

**What's the most challenging part of being a CMO today?** As the brand grows, one of our challenges lies in succinctly telling our story and fostering loyalty in new markets. To ensure we're connecting with our community in new areas and encouraging repeat visits, we focus on nurturing genuine brand loyalty. We emphasize field marketing, regional culinary support, and ongoing support for our franchise partners. This helps us keep our food quality high and ensures we stay true to who we are even as we grow quickly.

**How has Covid-19 impacted the way you have led your brand's marketing efforts?** Covid-19 has underscored the importance of off-premise dining. The brand rapidly adapted to this shift, ensuring a seamless customer experience and leveraging data-driven insights to optimize resources. The lessons learned during Covid-19 are the importance of remaining nimble and using data to guide your decision-making. You must know what is going to keep your business afloat, and you have to be strategic about leveraging your resources. No matter how much you plan for marketing initiatives or other projects within the business, it could all change in a second. You must remain adaptable when things don't go to plan.

**What are the three most important keys to being an effective CMO leader today?** From my perspective, effective leadership as a CMO hinges on three core principles: 1) surrounding oneself with top talent and fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation, 2) respecting and rewarding team members—including agency and vendor partners—and 3) embracing change with an open mind. Hire people who are experts in their field because they are people who will challenge the brand in a positive way. And don't be afraid of change. The pace of transformation today has accelerated so rapidly that you have no choice but to embrace it.

**How do you prepare a marketing plan and execute the strategies?** Crafting a marketing plan begins with a deep understanding of our guests' needs. When preparing a plan, always consider first what is best for the guest, and you'll find that the rest starts falling into place.

Execution involves leveraging data and insights to address challenges, whether it's enhancing brand awareness, driving traffic, or elevating PR initiatives. Understanding the trade area is another aspect of this. By focusing on the top of the funnel and engaging with our local communities, we can ensure that our marketing strategies resonate authentically and drive meaningful results in our markets.

**How do you measure marketing results and effectiveness?** Outside of traditional measuring tools and KPIs, such as sales and traffic, I like to consider measuring the efficacy of our marketing efforts through guest feedback and operational excellence. If you're doing a good job, it will show up in sales and performance first and foremost. But how is your experience being rated? What are your guests saying about you? How is the food quality differentiated from other concepts? What is the total value of the product? When measuring marketing results, look toward the satisfaction of your guests and the effectiveness of your operations.

**Discuss your core consumer marketing strategies and objectives.** Our consumer marketing strategies center on expanding brand awareness, maximizing the value of our culinary offerings, and fostering authentic connections with our guests.

We prioritize engaging with our fanbase across various touchpoints, leveraging our unique blend of sports affiliation, family-friendly fun, and celebratory atmosphere. Our food will also always be a core component of our marketing strategy. Our menu is unlike any other full-service restaurant, and we take pride in our culinary strengths, so it's important to us that we convey that to our guests.

Additionally, our commitment to community engagement and philanthropy underscores our brand's values, resonating with consumers on a deeper level. One initiative that exemplifies this is the Walk-On's scholarship program that we launched in honor of walk-ons everywhere and NFL veteran Jason Kelce. This was a genuine initiative that we felt passionately about. We're helping change people's lives.

**How do you go about creating a customer-centric marketing and brand philosophy?** Our customer-centric approach begins with a deep understanding of our guests' preferences and needs, ensuring that every interaction reflects our commitment to providing an



exceptional experience. From menu offerings to atmosphere, we prioritize guest satisfaction at every touchpoint, fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie.

**Describe your marketing team and the role each of them plays.** Our marketing team comprises five departments, each playing a vital role in shaping our brand's identity and driving growth. The culinary team focuses on food and beverage innovation while the brand team oversees calendar planning, menu development, and product innovation. Field marketers collaborate with franchisees to ensure brand consistency and excellence at the local level while the digital and guest experience team manages CRM, website, and digital consumer engagement. Finally, the PR and communications team supports brand awareness efforts and franchisee relations, reinforcing our brand's values and messaging across all channels.

**Why is it so important for the marketing department to have a personal touch when it comes to helping the brand connect with franchise prospects?** Maintaining a personal touch in our marketing efforts is paramount to building trust and rapport with franchise prospects. We actively engage with franchisees during discovery days and demonstrate our commitment to collaboration and support from the beginning by seeking and valuing their feedback.

**How does this help your franchise sales and development effort?** This resonates with prospective leads for many reasons. It showcases our authentic approach to collaboration and allows us to understand each franchisee's unique perspective. This personalized approach fosters a sense of trust, which is crucial in attracting and retaining franchisees. Discovery days serve as a platform for building a foundation of confidence and rapport with our franchisees, and we want to show them that we are investing in them as much as they are investing in us.

**What ways/tools do you rely on to do this?** The best way to align with franchisees is to listen to them and allow them to provide feedback. We can't know how we're performing if we don't give them a platform to tell us. In addition to discovery days, we leverage restaurant visits, regular franchisee communication, and quarterly town halls to connect and collaborate with our franchise system. I

personally make every effort to answer any question a franchisee has because if there's a question, there's a reason for it.

**Do today's prospects expect more from the franchise marketing department? What, and how do you provide it?** Today's prospects expect transparency, collaboration, and authenticity from the franchise marketing department. In addition to providing marketing guidance and support, we prioritize open communication and feedback channels, ensuring that franchisees feel heard and valued as partners. It's important for franchisors to understand that this business may be a franchisee's lifeline, and we don't succeed unless they do.

**How is today's consumer and marketing data helping you fine-tune your marketing initiatives?** Consumer and marketing data are pivotal in shaping our marketing initiatives and driving strategic decision-making. We're doing a lot of primary research for our brand to understand who our guests are and their occasions. By leveraging data analytics and insights, you can open doors to consumer behavior you may have never considered. This data-driven approach enables us to identify emerging trends, anticipate consumer needs, and optimize resources, ensuring our marketing initiatives remain relevant and effective in a rapidly evolving landscape.

**Describe the evolving role of social media in your brand's marketing efforts.** Social media has become a powerful tool for engaging with our audience and amplifying our brand's voice. By leveraging our genuine sports affiliation and culinary offerings, we connect with our fanbase and attract new followers organically. Social media allows us to share compelling stories, highlight community engagement initiatives, and foster meaningful interactions with our guests, ultimately driving brand awareness and loyalty.

**How do you work with other internal departments, and does technology help?** Collaboration is at the core of what we do with marketing, operations, culinary, and development working seamlessly together to achieve common goals. Technology plays a crucial role in streamlining communications and data sharing, facilitating cross-departmental collaboration and decision-making. By leveraging technology and a variety of platforms, we enhance efficiency, transpar-

ency, and alignment across all departments, ensuring a cohesive and integrated approach to achieving our brand objectives.

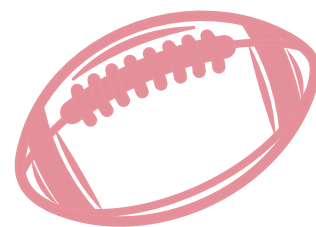
**How do you manage costs and budgets for the marketing department?** We regularly monitor and evaluate performance metrics, enabling us to identify areas for optimization and efficiencies, ensuring we deliver maximum ROI on our marketing investments.

**Do you see vendors as business partners? Why/why not?** Our vendors and agency suppliers are extensions of our team, and we treat them as such. We think this is important because we always encourage them to share their perspectives and ideas. We truly want to hear their points of view, and it helps that we're all working toward one common goal. Seeing them as extensions of our internal teams helps us all work together.

**How have marketing strategies/tools changed over the past decade? How have you adapted?** Over the past decade, it's no secret that digital has revolutionized the marketing world. In more recent years, we must also acknowledge the innovation that AI has brought to the table. As a marketer, I've learned that we must adapt and remain open to new tools. The world is gravitating toward these new, high-tech advancements, and that won't be changing anytime soon, so we are better off embracing them.

**How is your marketing/branding strategy developed, and how does it flow through the system?** Collaboration is paramount with the operations, culinary, marketing, and franchise development departments to ensure our teams work together as one. There's no one out of the loop, and we embrace the team-spirit mindset that's been instilled in the company from the top down.

**What advice would you offer to aspiring CMO executives?** Aspiring CMOs should prioritize authenticity and genuine connection in their marketing strategies. It's essential to stay true to the brand's identity and values, but it needs to come from a place of genuine care. You can promote menu offerings and campaigns all you want, but it will never resonate with your intended audience if it isn't coming from a place of authenticity. ■







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# How does your marketing team work with other departments to elevate the guest experience?



## MADELEINE ZOOK

Chief Marketing Officer  
Premium Service Brands

Gone are the days when corporate teams toiled away in isolation, focusing solely on their individual tasks and departmental deliverables. Particularly within the realm of franchising, it's imperative that every home office department understands each other's contributions and actively operationalizes relationships. Cohesive teamwork is vital, but it's the shared understanding of each other's roles that truly drives success. When these elements harmonize, we excel in delivering value to our franchisees and customers.

Given marketing's involvement across various departments and the diverse personalities and expectations at play, it's crucial to establish an objective road map. This ensures the development and maintenance of operational relationships are clear and effective. Here's an effective strategy:

### 1. Identify the pillars

- Operations, marketing, sales, development, etc.
- Who are the decision-makers?
- Where are the outliers, and where should they live?

### 2. Determine the crossover

- Audit and assess your current state.
- Conceptualize what improved operational relationships look like.
- Answer why you want this structure.
- Build a business case.
- Identify needs and bottlenecks.

### 3. Consider your culture

- Does this new structure fall in line with your current culture?
- If not, what types of cultural changes need to happen for this new structure to work? How do communications

need to change for this to become achievable?

- Analyze if you have the right personnel to implement and effect change.

### 4. Implementation strategy

- Start small. Find projects where newly integrated processes can be tested.
- Form small implementor teams with members from every department who can test new systems, guide new processes, and answer questions.
- Remember that change doesn't happen overnight. Don't stress your system or people as it will have a countering effect.

### 5. Accountability mapping

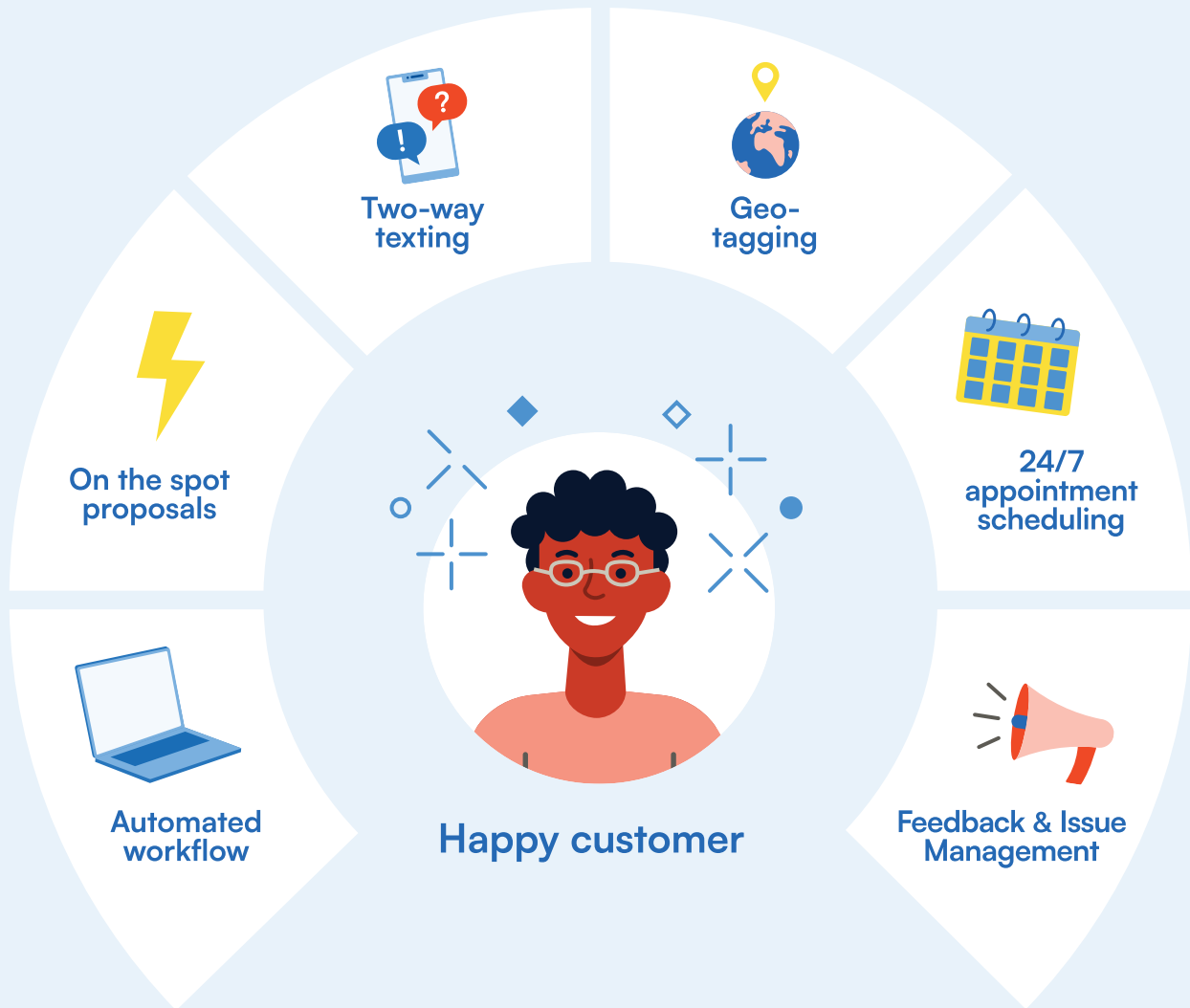
- Create an easily accessible accountability map to help your company visualize where responsibility and resources are housed.
- Develop a grievance system to handle issues as they arise to protect your newly developing culture of synergy.
- Develop a communications strategy that includes the franchisor and franchisee networks.

After elevating the operational efficiency of your internal teams to seamlessly collaborate, prioritize nurturing these relationships. Allocate resources and establish a standardized communication protocol, ensuring that team interactions remain aligned with the overarching company goals rather than being confined to individual departments. Don't forget to celebrate successes, request feedback, and dedicate collectively to continued improvement.



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*I firmly believe that ‘Guest Is Boss.’ As marketers, we need to understand our guests’ preferences to create appealing products and meaningful brand experiences.*



## PATRICK SCHWING

Chief Marketing and Strategy Officer  
Zaxby's

I firmly believe that “Guest Is Boss.” As marketers, we need to understand our guests’ preferences to create appealing products and meaningful brand experiences (what Zaxby’s calls “encore experiences”).

A strong consumer understanding is the competitive advantage, specifically in the crowded QSR category. Our consumer insights research influences our product innovation strategy, advertising strategy, media placement investments, and approach to creating a seamless digital user experience.

Creating a QSR brand that stands out from other key players in the market is a cross-functional effort across the business. We must work as one team across all touchpoints that impact the guest experience. This isn’t just limited to our external marketing efforts; it is equally applicable to field operations, our internal training teams, and more. When we get it right across marketing and operations, our guests reward us with more business, translating awareness into brand preference and guests into loyal brand fans.

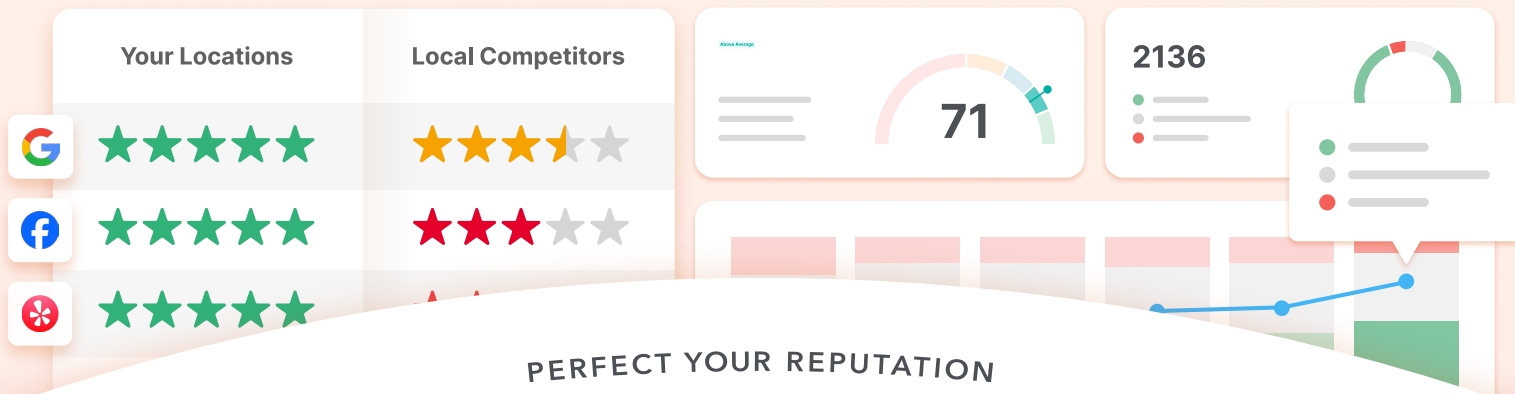
We are constantly innovating at the speed of retail, so we must hold transparency, one of our values, at the center of our work. Having a high level of trust with our consumers allows for better collaboration among our team members, which is particularly important for innovation. At Zaxby’s, we work to optimize the quality of our products with the supply chain while testing new items from our culinary team based on data-driven consumer insights. This is a cross-functional effort across departments, including ops, supply chain, menu innovation, marketing, finance, and IT.

Our highly collaborative workstream enables us to drive sales overnight while building our brand over time. We are focused on the long-term, sustainable growth of Zaxby’s as a strong player in the chicken QSR category. Growing a business responsibly means creating a brand that consumers love and delivering a great guest experience at every visit.



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# How does your marketing team work with other departments to elevate the guest experience?



## ANGELA ZERDA PAULES

*Chief Marketing Officer*  
Buzz Franchise Brands

Collaboration across departments is key to elevating the customer experience. At Buzz Franchise Brands, our approach begins before we have the customer onboard with a focus on efficient lead management. This pairs strategic marketing initiatives to drive inquiries with an intentional focus from the operations and sales departments to guarantee quick, personalized responses to set the stage for a strong relationship. We underscore the importance of a fast response time to leads through regular franchisee training and the deployment of various automated systems for instant communication via text and email. Data from our analytics team vividly demonstrates the positive impact of rapid response on conversion rates, which translates to an efficient customer acquisition cost. If there's one language everyone speaks clearly, it's getting the best bang for our buck!

In addition to using technology to support fast response times, it plays a vital role in other areas of the customer experience. For example, our marketing team worked closely with our IT team to support the development of a new app for Wonderly Lights that dramatically improves customer engagement by enhancing the design experience as part of the initial consultation process.

With our recurring service brands, we strive to build long-lasting relationships with our customers, so clear and continuous communication is crucial. We look for ways to

interact with our customers throughout the year, providing franchisees with templated seasonal communications and making it easy for them to send customer appreciation gifts or special offers. This is complemented by using Net Promoter Score surveys, which are reviewed across our marketing and operations teams to guide franchisees on continuous improvement in staff training and service delivery.

The beauty of franchising is that we're always trying new things in different areas. We can share those experiences to better the system. To do so, communication within our corporate team and franchise system must be efficient to optimize that information sharing. Our marketing team works in lockstep with our franchise business coaches, analyzing data to identify and act on opportunities for improving customer experience.

Our tagline at Buzz Franchise Brands is to "build brands that get people talking." Nothing does that more than a customer experience that goes one step beyond the expected, but it takes seamless collaboration across departments to achieve that goal.



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*Whether through training, marketing initiatives and materials, or online review evaluation, we provide our franchisees with the tools to create a positive customer experience.*



## AMANDA MAQUET

Marketing Director  
Moran Family of Brands

By collaborating closely with our operations and customer service departments, Moran Family of Brands' marketing team is setting new standards in customer engagement and satisfaction. Our marketing team strives to offer comprehensive resources to empower franchisees and enhance the customer experience. Whether through training, marketing initiatives and materials, or online review evaluation, we provide our franchisees with the tools to create a positive customer experience.

Our operations department complements our efforts by reinforcing marketing messages and including the marketing team when necessary, creating a seamless partnership. We also provide our operations team with guidance on customer expectations and emerging market trends, allowing it to adapt processes and services as needed.

A cornerstone of our strategy is our aggressive approach to reputation management. Our marketing division maintains our positive online reputation by meticulously monitoring and addressing location reviews across multiple digital platforms. The initiative safeguards our brand's digital footprint and serves as a critical feedback mechanism, enabling us to harness customer insights to improve our services.

Our partnership also extends to the field, where franchise business coaches use the marketing data we gather from reviews to help franchisees refine their approaches to customer service, focusing on creating positive interactions online and in person. Auto repair requires a high degree of technical knowledge, which most customers lack. By providing transparent, courteous, and informative service, shops can bridge the knowledge gap, demystify auto repair processes, and build a trusting relationship with their clientele.

Coaches are provided with these reputation performance metrics for each location they support. The data includes review ratings, sentiment analysis based on keywords, and the number of reviews over a designated period. We equip the coaches with detailed insights into interpreting this data, enabling them to incorporate these findings into their consultations with franchise operators.

While the coaches focus on creating positive customer interactions, our marketing team complements their efforts by enhancing our brand reputation. Working together enables us to create a cohesive strategy that sets a high standard of support in our industry.





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# POLITICAL NOISE

## Expect the 2024 election to disrupt digital media

Written by **JACK MONSON**

**T**ake your entire franchise development ad budget for the rest of 2024 and spend it right now. Spend it all before Aug. 31.

The 2024 election season in the United States will present a unique challenge for politicians and voters as well as advertisers and marketing professionals. The intersection of intense political advertising and heated discourse on social media platforms will create a nasty environment, disrupt traditional marketing strategies, and build huge hurdles for franchisors aiming to grow their systems in the second half of this year.

As political ads saturate advertising space on online platforms, the cost of advertising increases drastically, squeezing out businesses with modest budgets. The sheer volume of political content can lead to ad fatigue, causing consumers to tune out or avoid media altogether.

Media buying is going to get tough around August. Everything will be difficult in September. It will all be impossible by October. The Republican National Committee, the Democratic National Committee, and, even worse, all political action committees are about to make marketing your brand impossible on many digital channels, including Meta and Google. Several political groups and advertising sources now estimate that more than \$16 billion will be spent on the 2024 election. That's 30% more than four years ago.

Much of that spend will be on digital channels. Your current cost per lead on many platforms is about to skyrocket, especially if you're targeting people in battleground states, including Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Georgia, or states with high-profile Senate races: Arizona, Nevada, and Montana.

Oh, and just as the election ends, it will be the holiday season. Merry Christmas—no leads for you!

### ALTERNATIVES

While the political candidates and their marketing arms continue to refine their strategies in digital marketing, it's time for you to refocus your own tactics to drive leads. A dry spell of leads and prospects in late Q3 and Q4 will spell disaster for your franchise development plans in early 2025. But you have options.

### LINKEDIN

If you haven't yet tried advertising on LinkedIn, this may be the time. If you're looking for quality over quantity, LinkedIn for franchise development is the best place to invest. It's not cheap, but if your target personas include multi-unit owners and serial entrepreneurs, LinkedIn will deliver.

### TIKTOK

Political ads are prohibited on TikTok, so 2024 could be the perfect time to move some spend over to TikTok. My prediction is once some franchisors invest in TikTok, they may not go back to Facebook. (Editor's note: We're assuming TikTok will still be available.)

### ORGANIC SOCIAL

Instead of overpaying for paid spots, consider improving your organic game. What's working in organic now? Not the same old static posts on a company page or profile. The reach on those on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn is weak.

Short-form videos work well for B2B marketers as videos are the preferred option on most platforms. And on Reels (Instagram and Facebook) and TikTok, the algorithms for vid-

eos do not rely on who is already following you, so you can start reaching new people on day one even with a new account.

Go all in on LinkedIn. While political content is creeping in, many users have their personal settings adjusted to mute politics. It may be our only politics-free space. The closer we get to Nov. 5, the nastier Facebook, Instagram, and X will get. But LinkedIn should be relatively safe.

Consider bypassing your company page and using your personal profile for any organic content sharing. Company pages perform poorly. The real goldmine on most channels, especially LinkedIn, is the collective reach of all executives' connections.

Even organic posts on neutral sites may be a challenge. The current polarizing nature of political discourse on social media has created a minefield for brands seeking to maintain a neutral or inclusive image. In an era when consumers are increasingly conscious of the values and ideologies associated with the brands they support, any perceived alignment with a particular political stance can alienate a significant portion of their prospect base. Be careful to not get thrown into anything that could be perceived as political or inadvertently associated with divisive rhetoric.

### CREATE CONTENT NOW!

This could be the time to create more owned-media content in an environment where you can control the narrative and everything else on the page.

If you start right now, you can have franchise-development videos, podcasts, and blogs telling your authentic stories by the end of summer. And—who knows?—perhaps your ideal candidates will be ready to watch, listen, and read after fleeing the political noise on other media. ■

**Jack Monson** is the CEO of franchise development marketing agency Brand J and has been helping franchisors with digital marketing for 15 years. He is also the owner and host of "Social Geek," the top podcast in franchising.

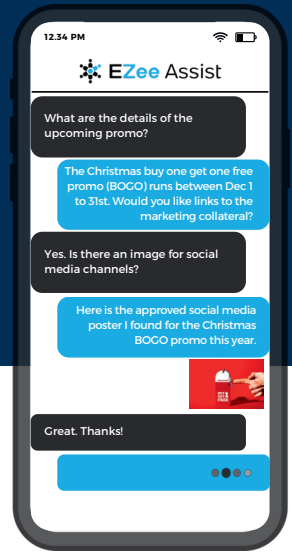






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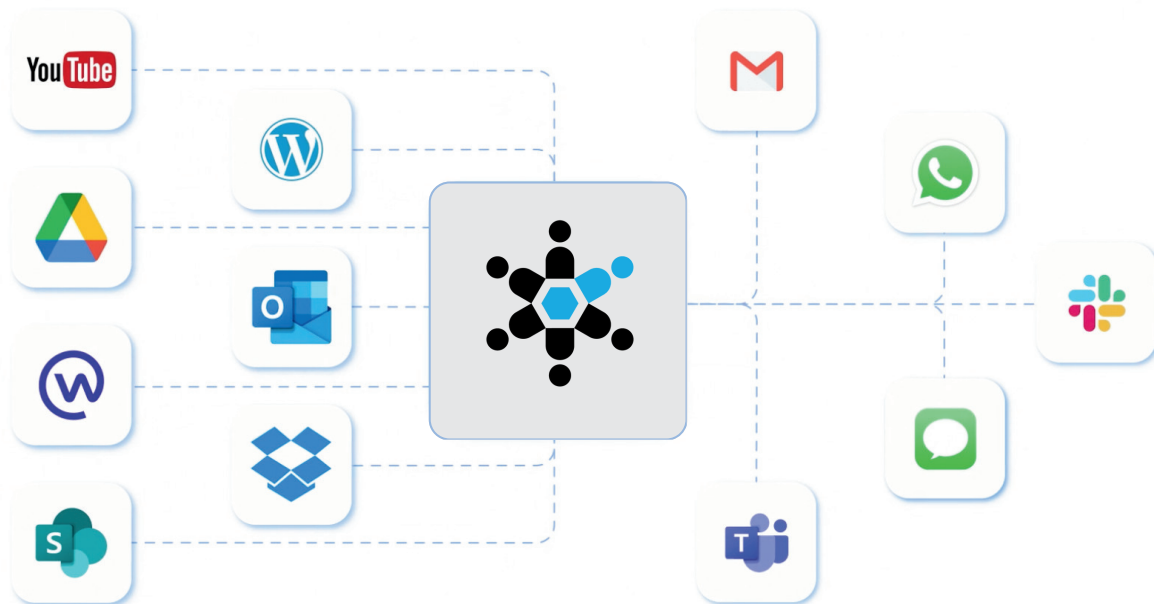


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# A Customer Experience Revolution

## How AI can create a competitive advantage

Written by **JOHN DIJULIUS**

If artificial intelligence (AI) is not already a major part of your business strategy, you may become the next Kodak, a film company in the digital age. According to Craving Tech, organizations that have integrated AI into their operations saw a 25% boost in customer satisfaction in 2023. AI is transforming customer service by taking over tasks traditionally done by humans.

### Call center changes

AI is not set to eliminate contact centers, but it will lead to the emergence of collaborative AI, which combines human and machine intelligence capabilities to improve problem-solving, decision-making, and overall effectiveness.

Empathy is fundamental in customer service to foster trust. Research from Harvard Business Review indicates that emotionally connected customers are 52% more valuable than satisfied ones. A PwC study revealed that 73% of consumers would leave a brand lacking personal engagement, and Qualtrics found that 86% of customers are willing to pay more for empathetic customer service.

A typical day working in a contact/support/call center can be extremely repetitive and mind-numbing with different customers asking the same questions. Empathy fatigue usually occurs in industries that deal with customers who have high stress levels and anxiety that could be blamed on the company they are calling.

AI doesn't tire of repeatedly answering the same question. AI doesn't take it personally when angry customers yell at it. AI doesn't suffer empathy fatigue. A Wall Street Journal article, "Can AI Do Empathy Even Better Than Humans? Companies Are Trying It," shares how computer scientists teach artificial intelligence to understand and simulate empathy. Large language models, powered by AI and trained on extensive datasets of voice, text, and video conversations, are becoming adept at recognizing and replicating emotions such as empathy—sometimes more effectively than humans, according to some claims.

During peak days or seasonal rushes, answering the same question hundreds of times daily doesn't make any employee happy. AI will eliminate most, if not all, of these transactions, such as delivery status questions, freeing up customer service representatives to focus on the more complex, rewarding tasks that require human attention. Employees will bring the best of their humanity to each customer interaction.

### More with less

AI can help front-line employees be more efficient and productive, which potentially means less staff will be needed. AI sifts through knowledge bases during calls to find relevant information, which is then displayed on the agent's screen. Chatbots are beneficial for customers and businesses, reducing the resolution time for simple queries and cutting costs by up to 30%. A PwC study found that 34% of business leaders report a decreased workload thanks to chatbots.

AI can listen to a customer's call and act as a search engine for a company's database, website, and product/service offerings, immediately populating potential answers to clients' questions for agents.

Machines and AI are faster, cheaper, and more efficient than humans and make fewer mistakes than people. When a bank started using chatbots to handle more than 1.5 million claim requests each year, it found that the work of 85 bots was equal to the output of 200 full-time human employees at 30% of the cost.

### Proceed with caution

Artificial empathy in clinical environments raises concerns about diminishing the expectation for authentic human empathy toward those in distress. Could relying on AI to articulate empathy lead to a decline in our empathetic competencies?

According to Jodi Halpern, a professor of bioethics at the University of California, Berkeley and an expert on empathy and technology, AI can exhibit "cognitive empathy" by

recognizing and reacting to humans based on training data. However, this is distinct from "emotional empathy," the ability to deeply understand and share in another person's emotional state and feel genuine concern. Halpern emphasizes that the type of empathy most valuable in a clinical context requires the healthcare provider to engage with the patient's experiences emotionally. This level of empathy is beyond what a bot can offer.

### Convenience

Customers are becoming more accepting of dealing with AI and chatbots, especially as the younger generations represent more of businesses' customer base than older generations. Today, only 42% of consumers still prefer human customer service representatives to AI alternatives, a Servion survey reported. A Capgemini survey found that more than 70% of customers favor voice assistants that mimic human interactions.

Self-service options powered by AI allow customers to resolve their issues at their convenience without a live agent. AI's ability to enable self-service is growing, offering users autonomy.

Chatbots provide convenience for users who prefer digital communication over traditional phone calls. AI excels in automating routine inquiries, freeing up human employees for more complex issues.

The integration of AI across customer service channels is set to increase as clients become more accustomed to AI interactions, helping businesses improve efficiency and service quality. Juniper Research predicts that bots could save various industries about \$11 billion in costs.

The rise of AI in customer service signifies a shift in how businesses engage with their customers. It's essential to remember that AI is not here to replace humans but to enhance customer service. By combining AI with human expertise, businesses can offer exceptional experiences that foster loyalty. ■

**John R. DiJulius III**, author of *The Customer Service Revolution*, is president of The DiJulius Group, a customer service consulting firm that works with Starbucks, Chick-fil-A, Ritz-Carlton, Nestle, PwC, Lexus, and many more. Contact him at 216-839-1430 or [info@thedijuliusgroup.com](mailto:info@thedijuliusgroup.com).



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# The Power of Geofencing

## Boost your local marketing ROI

Written by ALLEN WARREN

In today's dynamic business landscape, the quest for innovative marketing strategies is relentless. Among these strategies, geofencing emerges as a beacon of precision and effectiveness. Geofencing empowers businesses to engage with their target audience in ways previously unimaginable, offering a plethora of benefits that redefine the marketing paradigm.

### Geofencing advantages

Geofencing operates on a simple, yet potent, principle: By establishing virtual perimeters around specific locations, businesses can trigger location-specific actions when customers enter or exit these boundaries. This technology opens a treasure trove of benefits for businesses:

- **Precision targeting.** Geofencing enables businesses to deliver hyper-targeted advertising to people within a specific geographic area. By defining precise locations and customizing audience criteria, businesses ensure that their marketing messages resonate with the right audience, leading to heightened engagement and conversion rates.
- **Enhanced engagement.** Through the creation of conversion zones within targeted locations, such as retail stores or event venues, businesses can deliver tailored advertisements and promotions to potential customers as they enter these zones. This personalized approach enhances customer engagement and fosters a deeper connection with the brand, ultimately driving traffic to physical or digital storefronts.
- **Cost-effectiveness.** Geofencing offers a cost-effective alternative to traditional advertising methods. By focusing on specific geographic areas and incorporating personalized criteria, businesses can optimize their marketing spend and achieve a high return on investment. With geofencing, every advertising dollar

is maximized, delivering tangible results without breaking the bank.

### Turnkey solution

For small business owners, navigating the complex landscape of marketing can be daunting. However, geofencing presents a turnkey solution that levels the playing field. With packages starting at \$500 a month, small businesses can harness the power of geofencing to elevate their marketing efforts and compete with larger competitors on equal footing. Geofencing provides small businesses with the tools they need to reach their target audience effectively, driving traffic and increasing brand visibility without draining their resources.

### Benefits for franchises

Franchises represent a unique segment of business that can significantly benefit from geofencing advertising. Whether it's fast-food chains, retail outlets, or service-focused franchises, the ability to deliver targeted messaging at the local level can have a profound impact on customer engagement and overall business success:

- **Localized advertising.** Geofencing allows franchises to create location-specific advertising campaigns tailored to the

unique characteristics of each geographic area. This enables franchise owners to engage with their local communities effectively, driving traffic to individual storefronts and increasing brand visibility.

- **Personalized promotions.** With the ability to define conversion zones and trigger location-based actions, franchises can deploy personalized promotions and offers to attract customers as they enter specific areas. This ensures that marketing efforts are highly relevant and tailored to the immediate needs and preferences of potential customers.
- **Increased foot traffic.** By leveraging geofencing technology, franchises can effectively boost foot traffic to their physical locations. The ability to engage with potential customers as they enter a specific area provides a powerful opportunity to drive traffic to franchise storefronts and increase overall brand visibility.

Allen Warren is CEO and founder of GeoPhenom, a digital marketing and technology specialist firm focused on implementing location-based marketing and geofencing technology solutions at affordable prices. Services include strategic marketing, creative design, branding, media planning, account management, digital marketing, and new business development. To learn more, email [customerservice@geophenomllc.com](mailto:customerservice@geophenomllc.com) or call 410-562-1983.







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# New *Horizons*

Nontraditional locations go where the guests are

Written by **M. SCOTT MORRIS**





**CAROLYN CANADA**  
CDO / DAVE'S HOT CHICKEN



**JON FISCHER**  
HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT / WETZEL'S PRETZELS



**STEVE LIEBER**  
VP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT /  
BURGERFI AND ANTHONY'S COAL FIRED PIZZA & WINGS



**PETER ORTIZ**  
CDO / ASCENT HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT



**TOM RICHARDS**  
VP OF NONTRADITIONAL SALES / GOTO FOODS

Steve Lieber, vice president of business development for BurgerFi and Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza & Wings, met an entrepreneur who got into the movie theater business so that he and his friends could watch Bollywood films. The Apple Cinemas team was looking for a distinctive edge in the marketplace.

After Lieber's boss gave him the go-ahead to explore nontraditional locations in the wake of the pandemic, Lieber sent out an email blast to his contacts, and Apple Cinemas was ready to do business.

"We did BurgerFi in the movie theater in Pittsburgh," Lieber says, "and then they asked if we could come up with a pizza element."

It doesn't make sense to put a coal-fired oven in a movie theater, so the team must be flexible to make the new partnership work. "We want to use the same flour, the same tomatoes, the same cheese, and things that our guests are used to but cooked in a slightly different oven," Lieber says.

Nontraditional locations can offer franchisors new ways of reaching customers, but they have pros and cons. Space can be limited, reducing the number of menu items available. By necessity, restaurants in theaters, amusement parks, college campuses, and stadiums have different operating hours than traditional locations. And getting supplies and people through airport security each day requires an experienced hand.

However, there are upsides to putting restaurants where people will find them. According to a report from the National Association of Convenience Stores, inside-store foodservice sales accounted for \$277.9 billion in 2021. Airport Improvement magazine reports that HMS Host has licenses to operate franchises in the busiest airports in North America and brings in \$2.8 billion each year. The post-pandemic reality is people are on the move again. Clearly, there's money to be made in nontraditional locations.

"It's based on that trend of the guests wanting our food where they're at," Lieber says, "so we said, 'Okay, where are they?'"

## TWO "STAGE GATES"

Tom Richards, VP of nontraditional sales at GoTo Foods (formerly Focus Brands), represents Auntie Anne's, Cinnabon, Jamba, Carvel, Moe's Southwest Grill, McAlister's Deli, and Schlotzky's.

"We do work across all seven brands in our portfolio," he says. "I feel very blessed to have a portfolio like this to be able to work across a wide array of different nontraditional channels."

He and his small but experienced team take an anywhere-and-everywhere approach to nontraditional locations. They're working to get restaurants in travel centers and convenience stores across the country. They're also doing business with Walmart, Meijer, and others. Military bases and airports are in the plan as well.

"Colleges and universities, amusement parks, and casinos are probably where we currently have activity in a meaningful way in our pipeline today," Richards says.

When considering a franchising or licensing agreement to install one of GoTo Foods' brands in a nontraditional location, Richards and his team have two "stage gates" to work through: the consumer and the venue.

It's important to understand the potential customer base that a particular location will serve. Will they be repeat customers? Or will they be unique visitors each day? "If it's the same customer day in and day out, I've got to provide them more variety, so they come back to my brand every day," he says.

Space is a prime concern when thinking about possible venues, but a seasoned team knows counter and kitchen space don't tell the whole story. "Do I have a remote preparation or kitchen prep area that I can leverage and allow the franchisee to execute out of that space?" Richards says. "Do I have enough room in the location I've been given in the venue to succeed and develop the brand in the proper way?"

## SIZE AND SHAPE

The restaurant doesn't have to change at all when going into a nontraditional location. The owner of multiple Temp-Stop stores in Missouri and Kansas wanted to put Huddle House restaurants in his stores, says Kayla Edidin, senior director of franchise development at Ascent Hospitality Management, Huddle House's parent company.

"He had heard about Huddle House and loved the reputation and just knew it would add value to his convenience store business," Edidin says. "Really, what he's looking to do is keep people on his property longer and give them reasons to come in beyond gas."

The first location of the deal is being constructed in Sedalia, Missouri, and it'll be a full-



"We're in the midst of creating smaller footprints of approximately 1,500 square feet that would go into a lot of these travel plazas, universities, airports, you name it."

**PETER ORTIZ,**  
CDO / ASCENT HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

sized Huddle House with a 2,000-square-foot footprint. However, the team at Ascent is developing prototypes for smaller Huddle House and Perkins Restaurant & Bakery locations that can be used in both traditional and nontraditional locations, according to Peter Ortiz, chief development officer at Ascent Hospitality Management.

"We're in the midst of creating smaller footprints of approximately 1,500 square feet that would go into a lot of these travel plazas, universities, airports, you name it," Ortiz says.

Jon Fischer can talk up the tasty treats from Wetzel's Pretzels until mouths water. As head of development at Wetzel's, he has a lighthearted zeal for getting pretzels to the people. Part of that strategy involves putting a full bakery on wheels, so food trucks can reach customers wherever they congregate.

"When I joined five years ago, I would say we were still primarily a mall-based company," Fischer says. "That wasn't long before Covid hit."

The company has corporate stores in Disneyland and Disney World. It also has locations at the University of California Los Angeles campus and in a few airports, so Wetzel's had a comfort level with nontraditional locations.

"We've done some military bases," he says, "and we've done some with travel plazas and just regular convenience stores."

When he started with the company, about 90% of locations were traditional. He estimates that number to be 70% today. He

expects nontraditional growth to outpace traditional because space is limited in the nation's premier malls.

"When I joined the company, we were just testing one food truck," he says. "Today, we have approximately 25 food trucks on the road and several more in development. Last year, we had at least four owners buy their second food truck."

Part of the appeal is the truck's flexibility, he says. If there's not enough business in one location, try another. Owners find places in their territories and communities that work for them, and they can take their distinctive yellow Wetzel's Pretzels food trucks to carnivals, schools, and special events. Last year, a truck was set up outside the Rose Bowl, and NASCAR fans got to bite into pretzels on race day.

"We have trucks in Texas. We have trucks in Maryland. We have trucks in Florida. Right now, we're opening the truck in the panhandle of Idaho," he says. "We're bringing pretzels to the people."

#### ON THE MENU

The Wetzel's food trucks are full bakeries on wheels, so the menu doesn't have to change. But nontraditional locations often require simplified offerings to increase operational efficiency and transaction speed, cutting the time customers stand in line.

"You want to reduce the number of ingredients just to be logical," says Richards with GoTo Foods. "What can we make with the same ingredients? What are the most versatile sandwiches? But you're also asking, 'What are the favorites?'"

When it comes to menus, Richards says brand integrity should remain intact. "For example, at McAllister's Deli, you've got sandwiches, you've got salads, you've got spuds," he says. "We'll make sure that we have each one of those categories represented well."

It might seem obvious to shrink the restaurant menu in an airport because people are on the go. Grab-and-go food is an airport necessity, but some people believe in arriving early for their flights, and those flights can be delayed.

"In the post-9/11 world, we have a little bit longer dwell times in airports where a customer has an opportunity to get there early and enjoy a meal before they actually get to the gate," Richards says.

For Ascent's deal with Temp-Stores in Kansas and Missouri, the whole point was to put

a full-sized Huddle House into the stores. It won't be a 24-hour business, but the menu doesn't change. However, part of building smaller prototypes for Huddle House and Perkins involves getting clear about what stays on the menu and what goes.

"We're preparing menus to take advantage of that size," Edidin says. "With Perkins, the menu that we've created recently is slightly different from restaurants. It's more grab and go and fewer entrees."

Again, brand integrity matters. Both Huddle House and Perkins have reputations as breakfast restaurants. "I'm a waffle guy," Ortiz says. "We're going to have the comfort food people expect."

#### PARTNERS

Ortiz and Natalie Hansen, senior director of franchise development at Ascent Hospitality Management, have developed nontraditional locations for other brands, so they have existing relationships. They want the prototypes and menus to be 100% ready before beginning their full-court press for new locations.

"You've really got to come prepared when you're coming to talk to some of these bigger players because they can choose from hundreds or thousands of other restaurant brands," Hansen says. "We need to have one-on-one scheduled meetings where we can talk to them about how we can benefit them and bring Perkins or Huddle House to the airports, colleges, and wherever they have their concessions."

Lieber says licensing agreements are more practical than franchise agreements when dealing with concessionaires that operate multiple BurgerFi locations in multiple airports. The company also uses a licensing agreement with Apple Cinemas.

"A licensing agreement is a lot simpler. As you start to roll out more locations, you and I don't have to go back and say, 'Okay, what's the franchise fee? What's the royalty? What's this? What's that?'" Lieber says. "You just call me and say, 'Hey, Steve, I have a new location. We're opening up Apple Cinemas number 12. It's going to be in White Plains, New York. Are you guys good with that?'"

When it comes to nontraditional locations, most franchisors rely on concessionaires and food management companies, including HMS Host, Aramark, Sodexo, Compass, Delaware North, NEXCOM, the Army & Air Force Exchange Service, and others become licensing partners for military bases. As Richards says,



“The way we’re going about it is really talking to experienced owner-operators who are already operating in airports, which is different than going to an airport and saying, ‘Hey, LAX, Dave’s Hot Chicken is interested in bidding on RFPs that might be upcoming.’ We’re looking for those operators who are already in the airports and want to bring in Dave’s Hot Chicken as one of their brands.”

CAROLYNE CANADY, CDO / DAVE’S HOT CHICKEN

“They understand the nuances of doing that type of business.”

Airports, military bases, hospitals, casinos, and other nontraditional locations have rules and regulations that aren’t required with traditional locations. Getting people and supplies through airport security each day can present significant hurdles to the uninitiated.

“Regional master concessionaires work directly with minority business enterprises or disadvantaged enterprises,” Richards says. “There are percentage set-asides that the airports require that they fulfill. That’s part of the bidding process in airports.”

GoTo Foods relies on concessionaires and contract management companies for most of their nontraditional locations. However, some independent franchisees have worked with the company to establish restaurants in nontraditional locations. “We’ll definitely work with them, help them find space on a base, and coach them on how to bid the business,” Richards says.

Dave’s Hot Chicken doesn’t have its restaurants in nontraditional locations, but the company sees their potential value. Carolyne Canady, chief development officer and a Dave’s Hot Chicken franchisee, says the company doesn’t plan to work with large concessionaires. Instead, she says they’re looking to team up with owner-operators who will then respond when venues put out requests for proposals (RFPs).

“The way we’re going about it is really talking to experienced owner-operators who are already operating in airports, which is different than going to an airport and saying, ‘Hey, LAX, Dave’s Hot Chicken is interested in bidding on RFPs that might be upcoming,’” she says. “We’re looking for those operators who are already in the airports and want to bring in Dave’s Hot Chicken as one of their brands.”

A small footprint prototype between 800 and 1,000 square feet is available. It could be used for a traditional or nontraditional location, she says.

“We’re actually talking to a couple of people who have reached out to us for a couple of airports, and they’re the perfect fit,” she says. “We’re just kind of starting the process with them, getting them through the process of saying, ‘Yep, we approve you as a franchisee,’ and then we’re ready to go as soon as an RFP hits.”

#### PROS AND CONS

Canady says Dave’s Hot Chicken is running

out of development room in the U.S., so it makes sense to move the brand and its already streamlined menu into nontraditional venues. “We’ve got the country covered from a traditional standpoint, and now we want to look at some of the nontraditional opportunities for developing, like airports, college campuses, malls even,” she says. “This will be the next phase of development.”

There are potential drawbacks. Richards says some venues, including amusement parks and stadiums, aren’t open 365 days a year, so the number of event days and nights should be taken into account. Since their hours of operation are limited, revenues will be affected.

“It may not cost you a lot to build out a concession stand, but you only have X number of event days to cover that cost and investment. On a college campus, you’ve got 34 to 38 weeks a year that you’re doing business, and that’s typically done five days a week,” he says. “The math has got to be adjusted in order to make sure that you’ve got enough sales to cover the cost of investment and your operating costs.”

Wetzel’s Pretzels food trucks are a relatively new innovation for the company, but the longer they’re on the road, the more likely they are to break down. That means an operator needs to be prepared to fix and replace kitchen equipment as well as deal with tires, brakes, and other vehicle maintenance issues.

On the positive side, the barrier to entry is lower for a food truck than for a traditional build. “If you’re going to go into a brick-and-mortar location, there’s a lot of costs associated with building that out—plumbing and all the things that come with that,” Fischer says. “Our investment ranges vary, but food trucks are on the lower side of investment.”

Franchisors wouldn’t bother with nontraditional locations if they didn’t provide solid ROI for the company, and sometimes, those returns can be far reaching.

Lieber with BurgerFi and Anthony’s Coal Fired Pizza & Wings says the deal with Apple Cinemas has clear upsides. Most people go out to eat before catching a movie, so the partnership provides theatergoers a one-stop location. “They’re trying to give people a reason to get out of their house, away from their big-screen TV, and watch it all in their theater,” Lieber says.

And on every movie night, BurgerFi and Anthony’s have the chance to impress because the restaurants are located where the guests are. ■



# How do you emphasize the customer experience when working with franchise leads and prospects?



## AMMY HARRISON

*VP of Development & Strategy*  
Penn Station East Coast Subs

At Penn Station East Coast Subs, we strive to prioritize this aspect right from the onset, ensuring alignment with potential franchisees' business objectives.

Our approach begins with a comprehensive overview during the initial inquiry process, delving into our brand's history, unwavering commitment to product quality, our acclaimed training program, operational support, and robust marketing and technology resources. During discovery day, candidates receive deeper insights into these critical aspects along with clear expectations from each department head, reinforcing our dedication to enhancing the customer journey.

With our efficient, streamlined operational platform and continuous support and guidance, our goal is to empower franchisees to consistently deliver exceptional service and quality. Our emphasis on preparing products

fresh in front of the customer allows franchisees to showcase our brand's commitment to quality in real time, further elevating the customer experience.

From the outset, we stress the significance of operational excellence in driving customer satisfaction. We urge franchisees to foster genuine connections and memorable experiences that resonate with patrons long after they depart our establishments.

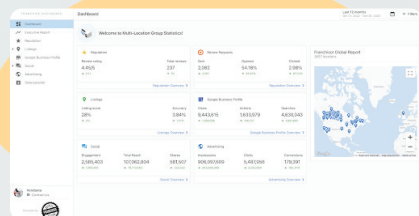
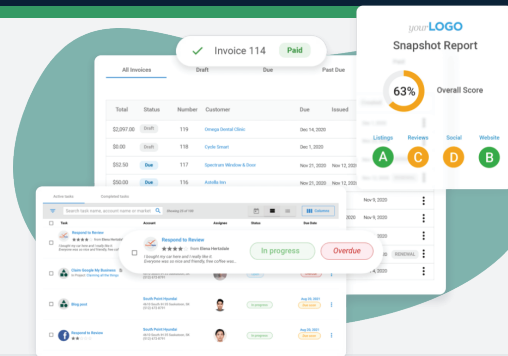
Our approach to franchise development is grounded in a shared vision and commitment to enriching the customer experience. The objective in the initial franchising process is to equip prospective franchisee candidates with the comprehensive information they need to make the best business decisions. We want to ensure the parties are aligned on the importance of providing a wonderful customer experience each and every time.



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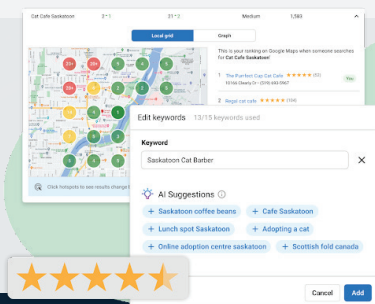
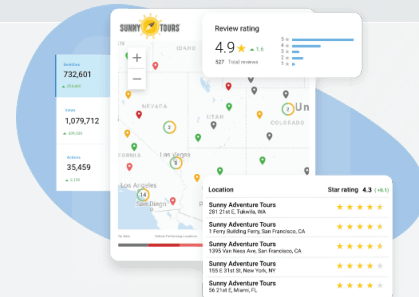


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From AI-powered reputation, listings, and social media management to SEO and Digital Advertising at a national and local level, our platform brings vendor relationships under one umbrella at the franchisor level. Helping you position franchisees for stellar marketing performance in their local marketing.

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*When we create loyalty through exceptional customer service via the drive-thru experience, we create a customer base that we will often see every day, sometimes even more than once a day.*



## TIM ARPIN

Chief Sales Officer  
Scooter's Coffee

At Scooter's Coffee, we can teach our franchisees how to run a successful business, but we can't teach them how to care about people. This is a fundamental trait that franchisees must bring to the table as owners in our brand. A customer-centric mentality is the cornerstone of any great loyalty-driven business like Scooter's Coffee.

In many businesses, you may see your customer very sporadically. In the restaurant space, although customer visits are more frequent, you will still see your best customers only once or twice a week. On the other hand, coffee is a part of the daily ritual of many people's lives. The first order of business for many Americans is to get their daily cup of coffee or espresso-based drink. When we create loyalty through exceptional customer service via the drive-thru experience, we create a customer base that we will often see every day, sometimes even more than once a day. In this way, Scooter's Coffee becomes a part of the fabric of our

customers' lives. We become part of who they are just as much as they are a part of who we are.

During the discovery process, we look for prospective franchisees who have experience in the customer service industry as well as people who have managed teams, especially in the retail sector. We discuss specific times when they have gone above and beyond for a customer or an employee, which are important factors when selecting our franchisee partners. These are the people who will build and lead teams of baristas who care about customers in the way we expect.

Our mission at Scooters Coffee is to create an amazing experience for each life we touch. This starts at the leadership level of our brand and flows through to the customer at the window. Each of us must carry this responsibility in our decision-making and in how we treat others around us. With this level of customer focus, we create something much bigger than a brand or a product. We create community.





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# How do you emphasize the customer experience when working with franchise leads and prospects?



## RICH RONEREE

Director of Franchise Development  
Bodybar Pilates

When working with franchise leads and prospects at Bodybar Pilates, emphasizing the customer experience is integral to our approach, ensuring that potential franchisees understand the paramount importance of the end customer's journey in our studios. Here are six ways we make this emphasis clear:

1. **Showcasing the model.** We begin by showcasing our customer-centric business model to prospects, illustrating how every aspect of Bodybar Pilates is designed around enhancing the member experience. From the layout of our studios to the structure of our classes and the training of our instructors, we demonstrate how these elements contribute to a positive, empowering environment for our clients.
2. **Training and support.** We emphasize the comprehensive training and ongoing support that franchisees receive. Training is focused on operations and delivering exceptional customer service. This includes understanding customer needs, creating welcoming studio environments, and fostering community among members. We make it clear that our success is measured by the satisfaction and loyalty of our customers.
3. **Community building.** Prospective franchisees are introduced to our philosophy of building microcommunities within their studios. We discuss strategies for creating a supportive atmosphere where customers feel valued, connected, and part of something bigger than a fitness class. This approach to community building is a key differentiator and a critical aspect of the customer experience.

4. **Real-world examples.** We share success stories and testimonials from existing franchisees, highlighting how focusing on the customer experience has driven their success. This includes examples of innovative customer engagement strategies, community events, and feedback mechanisms that have enhanced customer satisfaction and retention.

5. **Franchise owner feedback loop.** We work closely with our franchisees to gather insights and feedback on the customer experience directly from the front lines. This partnership allows us to refine and enhance our model continuously, ensuring that we remain responsive to the needs of our customers. It underscores the importance of a symbiotic relationship where franchisees are empowered to share their observations and innovations, contributing to the brand's evolution and success.

6. **Brand reputation.** Finally, we discuss how the collective focus on customer experience across all Bodybar Pilates locations contributes to a strong brand reputation. This reputation benefits all franchisees by attracting customers seeking a fitness experience that is about physical health and feeling supported, motivated, and part of a welcoming community.

By emphasizing these points, we ensure that franchise leads and prospects understand that at Bodybar Pilates, the customer experience is at the heart of everything we do.



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## MICHAEL WEAVER

Senior Director, Franchise Development  
Pearle Vision

At Pearle Vision, excellent customer experience isn't just a buzz phrase; it's ingrained in every aspect of our franchise operations. We prioritize delivering exceptional service and exceeding patient expectations at every touchpoint:

1. **Tailored eye-care solutions.** Pearle Vision is renowned for its comprehensive eye-care services tailored to each individual's needs. We equip franchisees with cutting-edge technology and training to provide thorough eye exams, accurate prescriptions, and personalized recommendations for eyewear solutions. By emphasizing the importance of precise vision correction and eye health, we empower franchisees to prioritize the patient's holistic well-being.
2. **Exceptional customer service.** From the moment a patient walks through the door, we prioritize their comfort and satisfaction. Our franchisees and staff undergo rigorous training programs focused on empathy, communication, and problem-solving. By fostering a culture of attentive service and genuine care, we ensure that every patient feels valued and heard throughout their journey with Pearle Vision.

3. **Strong community engagement.**

Pearle Vision franchises are more than just retail outlets; they're integral parts of their local communities. We encourage franchisees to actively engage with their neighbors through outreach events, sponsorships, and partnerships with local organizations. By immersing themselves in their communities, franchisees attract loyal patients and contribute to the overall benefit of their surroundings.

4. **Continuous improvement.** At Pearle Vision, we understand that delivering an exceptional patient experience is an ongoing endeavor. We regularly gather feedback from patients, franchisees, and staff to identify areas of opportunity and then implement any changes. Whether it's streamlining processes, updating technology, or refining training programs, we're committed to staying ahead of the curve and delivering unparalleled service.



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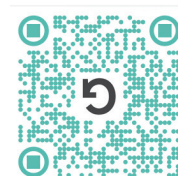
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# Building Rapport

Making prospects feel valued and understood

Written by **EVAN HACKEL**

*“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”—Stephen R. Covey.*

*“Effective communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what you know.”—Jim Rohn.*

**T**hose two quotes highlight the importance of active listening in communication. They emphasize that the emotional aspect of communication, such as making someone feel heard and understood through paraphrasing, is crucial in building rapport and trust.

In the world of franchising, selling to a franchisee is not just about presenting a business model. It's about building relationships, fostering trust, and ensuring that the potential franchisee feels heard and understood. One powerful tool in achieving this is paraphrasing.

## What is it?

Paraphrasing is the act of using your own words to rephrase or restate what someone has said. It's a key communication skill that helps ensure clarity, prevents misunderstandings, and demonstrates active listening.

When done correctly, paraphrasing can make the speaker feel valued and understood, fostering a deep connection. When you master paraphrasing, you will discover that it:

- **Builds trust.** When potential franchisees feel that their concerns and ideas are being accurately understood, it builds trust in the franchisor-franchisee relationship.
- **Ensures understanding.** Paraphrasing helps the franchisor confirm that they have correctly understood the potential franchisee's points, reducing the chances of miscommunication.
- **Encourages open dialogue.** By paraphrasing, franchisors can encourage potential franchisees to share more about their

thoughts and concerns, leading to more productive discussions.

- **Resolves conflicts.** In situations where there might be disagreements, paraphrasing can help de-escalate tensions by showing that both parties are working toward mutual understanding.



## Be effective

Active listening plays an important role in effective paraphrasing, so pay close attention to what the potential franchisee is saying without interrupting. Here are some other tips:

- **Rephrase.** Use your own words to restate their message. This might involve breaking down complex ideas into simpler terms or summarizing their main points.
- **Check for understanding.** After paraphrasing, ask the potential franchisee if you've understood them correctly. This invites them to clarify any points if necessary.
- **Avoid parroting.** Simply repeating what the speaker said word for word is not paraphrasing. The goal is to show that you've internalized and understood their message.

- **Use nonverbal cues.** Nodding, maintaining eye contact, and using appropriate facial expressions can reinforce that you're actively engaged in the conversation.

## An example

Imagine a potential franchisee, John, expressing concerns about the level of support he will receive if he comes on board. The franchisor listens attentively and paraphrases, “I hear that you're worried about receiving adequate support, especially in the early stages of your franchise journey.” John feels heard and clarifies further, leading to a productive conversation, and the franchisor can address his concerns and build trust.

## Encourage prospects

An effective way to deepen understanding and engagement is to encourage the prospect to paraphrase what they've heard from you. This can be done by asking a question like, “What about what you've heard interests you?” This prompts potential franchisees to reflect on the information shared and articulate what resonates with them, providing valuable insights into their priorities and concerns.

In the franchising industry, where relationships are key to success, mastering the art of paraphrasing can be a game changer. It's not just about selling a business model; it's about selling a partnership. By making potential franchisees feel heard and understood, franchisors can build the trust and rapport necessary for a successful collaboration.

Encouraging prospects to paraphrase what they've heard also deepens their engagement and provides valuable insights for the franchisor. In the end, effective communication through paraphrasing can be the foundation of a strong and mutually beneficial franchise relationship. ■

**Evan Hackel** is CEO of Ingage Consulting and Delta Payment Systems and an advisor to Tortal Training. He is an author, speaker, and entrepreneur who has been instrumental in launching more than 20 businesses and has managed a portfolio of brands with system-wide sales topping \$5 billion. He is the creator of *Ingaged Leadership* and author of *Ingaging Leadership Meets the Younger Generation*. Reach him at [ehackel@ingage.net](mailto:ehackel@ingage.net), 781-820-7609, or [ehackel@ingage.net](mailto:ehackel@ingage.net).



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# HOSPITALITY HUBS

## Travel centers offer unique opportunities

Written by **PAUL WILBUR**

**T**ravel centers have evolved significantly from their humble beginnings as mere fueling stations with basic amenities. Today, they stand as sparkling hospitality hubs, offering an array of services that cater to a wide audience, including truck drivers, families on road trips, and even local residents seeking convenience and leisure.

The modern travel center is a far cry from the traditional image of a truck stop. It's a place where visitors can enjoy a variety of dining options, ranging from QSR to full-service restaurants with diverse menus. Hotels and entertainment brands, including mini theaters, provide rest for travelers looking to unwind. Personal and wellness services have also found a home here with offerings, such as haircuts and massages, aimed at refreshing weary travelers.

As the automotive industry shifts toward sustainability, travel centers have kept pace by incorporating electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, catering to the growing number of EV owners on the roads. Retail and convenience stores within these centers offer more than travel essentials; they provide a shopping experience where visitors can pick up souvenirs and a wide range of products.

### Big business

According to a trend report released by the National Association of Truck Stop Operators, trucks will continue to dominate the overall freight transportation landscape, accounting for 73% of total primary tonnage by 2034. Additionally, the recreational vehicle industry has been experiencing nearly 45 years of long-term growth but saw a spike in traffic due to the pandemic. As of 2021, the last year for which the RV Industry Association has numbers, there were 11.2 million RV-owning households in the United States.

These changes make travel centers and truck stops excellent nontraditional development opportunities for all sorts of franchise brands.

Understanding the customer base is crucial for any franchise looking to establish itself within a travel center. Truck drivers provide a steady stream of business with their predictable visits offering a reliable source of revenue. Local communities contribute to the customer mix with residents visiting for various services. Finally, “four-wheelers” (casual travelers) stop by with their unique needs and preferences. A



store has both an opportunity to develop loyal, repeat customers and a chance to introduce your brand to new visitors. Franchisors can share the customer draw with complementary and anchor brands.

Franchise brands can find several advantages in developing within travel centers. Shared services, such as utilities, security, and storage, lead to operational efficiencies. The potential for favorable real estate lease terms due to the scale of these centers can be financially

advantageous. Moreover, the high foot traffic aids in staff recruitment, making it easier to attract and retain employees. Additional opportunities for shared services include global Wi-Fi, technology areas, ATMs, restroom facilities, seating areas, and green spaces where travelers can “touch grass.” Marketing can share billboards and signage as well as organize site promotions and events.

Travel center owners have proven to be successful franchisees. According to the Mega 99 Franchisee list published in issue 1, 2024, of Multi-Unit Franchisee magazine, two of the top 10 largest franchisees in the country—Love's Travel Stops and Country Stores and Pilot Company—are travel center owners. Between them, they own and operate nearly 1,400 franchised businesses in about 60 different brands located all around the country. The brands they operate are in QSR, FC, Frozen Desserts, Baked Goods, and Lodging industries.

### Broad customer base

The transformation of travel centers into multifaceted hospitality hubs presents a lucrative opportunity for franchise brands. These centers offer a dynamic environment that goes beyond traditional expectations, providing a variety of services that appeal to a broad customer base. What sets travel centers apart is their ability to communicate and adapt, providing tailored solutions and streamlined onboarding processes to align with franchisors' needs.

Prior to establishing partnerships, franchisors should seek detailed insights into the travel center's profile, including its location, customer demographics, and unique selling points, ensuring compatibility and maximizing synergy. By meeting these stringent criteria, travel centers position themselves as strategic partners, fostering mutually beneficial collaborations and driving substantial industry evolution. ■

As COO of FRANData, **Paul Wilbur** is instrumental in building the research and consulting framework at FRANData. He plays an integral role in the strategic development of FRANData's suite of franchise solutions. As a close to 20-year veteran at the company, he is the franchise business model expert and plays a key role in fostering strategic advisory relationships with some of FRANData's biggest clients.





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# Unusual Places, Unusual Reasons

Touring nontraditional locations around the globe

Written by **WILLIAM EDWARDS**

**N**ontraditional franchise locations outside the U.S. and Canada often end up in unusual places for unusual reasons and must fit into the space available. Often the size of space is smaller than the U.S. model, and the floor plan has to adapt to strange sizes. Here's a look at some nontraditional international franchise locations:

- “The Chili’s flagship restaurant in Shanghai, China, is located along the picturesque riverside of the Huangpu River with views of the iconic colonial buildings situated at The Bund. The restaurant boasts floor-to-ceiling foldable windows across the entire restaurant, which are opened during spring and fall to transform the space into an indoor/outdoor dining experience.”—Tony De Graaf, global culinary operations, Brinker International.
- “One of the most unusual Johnny Rockets locations was a post-apocalyptic themed food-trailer park between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where all trailers kept with that post-apocalyptic theme, called ‘last exit.’”—James Walker, CEO of Frisch’s Restaurants Inc., chief culinary and concept officer at Experiential Brands, and former president of Johnny Rockets.
- “We are very proud of the first Carl’s Jr. restaurant in Switzerland. Bahnhof Schaffhausen is a key point in the train system not only in Switzerland, but also in Germany. Passengers on long-distance trains from Stuttgart to Zürich and from Basel to Friedrichshafen stop here as do shorter local routes.”—Marc Mushkin, vice president, international franchise sales and development, CKE Restaurants Inc.
- “Denny’s in Central America is a generational event that appeals to all. The facility is typically 35% larger and has something for everyone, a menu that appeals to seniors and includes an indoor play facility for kids. In the Philippines, the approach is significantly different but still centered around family dining. The facility is typically 35% smaller with a limited menu that’s more localized and appeals to everyone.”—Doug Wong, founder & managing partner, CS5 Global Franchise Service.
- “The New Horizons Computer Learning Centers IT training franchise encountered an unusual challenge in Saudi Arabia, where cultural norms require separate buildings and classrooms for men and women students. Our innovative master franchisee in Riyadh turned this apparent obstacle into an extremely successful and dominant market share. They located the NHCLC IT Ladies Training Center in a ladies-only building along with a franchised ESL training center and their own non-franchised ladies fitness center and French-styled café.”—Rob Shaw, president, Shaw Meridian.
- “Tutu School, a boutique-style ballet school that caters to children 18 months to 8 years old, has a location in the U.K. in Salisbury in a converted granary. It is a beautiful place for young children’s magical introduction to the joy of dancing.”—Alison McElroy, founder & CEO, Kaleidoscope Growth Advisors.







## UNIQUE SITES

Over the years, Build-A-Bear Workshop has operated stores in major tourist locations, including Downtown Disney. Two of the most famous stores outside the U.S. and Canada are in Copenhagen in the Tivoli Gardens, the world's second-oldest amusement park. There is also a large Build-A-Bear Workshop store in the famous Shanghai Disneyland Park.

In Manila in the Philippines, there are twelve Randy's Donuts shops. On a busy street corner in downtown Manila is a miniature kiosk version with a large donut on top, similar to the original Randy's Donuts shop with the 30-foot-wide donut on top near Los Angeles International Airport.

Several years ago, my company helped Round Table Pizza enter the Middle East. The licensee had a global construction company that was building a new town near the capital city, Ulaanbaatar. They opened a wildly successful Round Table Pizza restaurant that was the only Western F&B brand in the country at the time.

In the 1990s, the AlphaGraphics quick-print chain opened its first store in China in the basement of the World Trade Center in Beijing. It took 10 Chinese people to carry a 2,000-pound Xerox digital print machine down two sets of escalators to the store basement because it was too long to fit in the elevators.

In Dortmund, Germany, a Subway restaurant was built inside a former church. The building retains many original architectural features, including stained-glass windows, giving it a unique ambiance quite different from the typical Subway location.

A Taco Bell on a floating barge in Dubai provides a novel dining experience with views of the Dubai Fountain and the Burj Khalifa.

In Barcelona, a Dunkin' shop is located in one of the city's historic buildings, featuring traditional Catalan architectural elements, blending the old with the new in an unusual setting.

Near the Giza pyramid complex in Cairo, Egypt, there's a KFC location, along with other QSR chains, where visitors can enjoy modern fast food while gazing at the ancient pyramids.

A McDonald's in an airplane in Taupo, New Zealand, is known as the "McPlane." This McDonald's restaurant is housed inside a decommissioned DC-3 airplane, offering a novel dining experience with an intact cockpit for visitors to explore.

Starbucks adapted a centuries-old Japanese teahouse in Kyoto, Japan, preserving its traditional design elements, such as tatami mats and wooden décor, to offer a serene and culturally immersive coffee-drinking experience.

Never underestimate the ingenuity of franchisees worldwide! Where there is a will there is a way. ■

**William (Bill) Edwards**, CEO of Edwards Global Services (EGS), has five decades of helping more than 40 companies successfully expand their businesses to other countries. Having lived and worked in virtually every corner of the world and across 12 business sectors, he is uniquely qualified to steer senior executives successfully through the complexities of taking their businesses global. Download the EGS quarterly GlobalVue country ranking chart at <https://edwardsglobal.com/globalvue>. Subscribe to his biweekly global business update newsletter at <https://insider.edwardsglobal.com>. Contact him to discuss taking your franchise global at +1-949-375-1896 and [bedwards@edwardsglobal.com](mailto:bedwards@edwardsglobal.com).



# Recruitment Guardrails

Structure makes signings more predictable

Written by **ART COLEY**

In franchise recruitment, we all want to move swiftly toward our signing and revenue goals. Of course, a straight line is the shortest and fastest distance between today and our goals. Yet, without a structured recruitment system, this path often becomes a winding road filled with unnecessary detours and obstacles.

This is the reality for brands navigating the recruitment cycle without guardrails, the strategic boundaries that keep the process on track.

This lack of direction leads to thrashing, a cycle of highs and lows in signings and revenue that can disorient even the most seasoned recruitment team. This instability affects the brand's momentum and brings about a sense of unpredictability that can be frustrating at all levels of the organization. The wider your guardrails, the further you'll sway back and forth between signings and revenue.

## Ups and downs

The reality is that a straight line would be perfect, like batting 1.000 or bowling a 300.

Since life doesn't work that way, the trick lies in establishing systems that reduce the back-and-forth motion and help you move forward more linearly and efficiently.

To put it another way, use a system that tells you how far away you are from that perfectly straight line.

## Bracing for impact

The consequences of not having any guardrails in place are felt deeply within the organization. At the C-suite level, CEOs and directors face the stress of fluctuating revenue and the volatility of their recruitment efforts. For the recruitment team, this instability translates into unpredictable highs and lows in performance, making it difficult to plan for the future. Recruiters who rely on signings for their personal income may find that they're bouncing back and forth from feast to famine, which isn't a great way to make a living.

This cycle of uncertainty can leave everyone involved feeling uneasy and out of sync. The whiplash gets even worse when you think of

the millions of dollars spent on lead generation, staff, team, discovery days, and all that goes into recruiting and finding new franchisees.

The long-term implication of being guardrail to guardrail—not having any process and standard for adjusting when there's a problem—is failing to return shareholder value, whether you own 100% of the company, are publicly traded, or are owned by a private equity firm.

## Stability

You want a world where your brand operates within a stable framework, recruitment's ups and downs are minimized, and you can confidently make plans for the next 90–120 days. This is the promise of a well-implemented system.

With this system, annual budgeting becomes less daunting, C-suite executives are happy with accurate forecasting, and the HR team can approach recruitment team hiring with a clear strategy.

The result? A brand that moves forward confidently and a team that feels secure in its path to success. If we don't throw gutter balls, we might not become a professional bowler, but we'll see our averages go way up. Guardrails keep us from consistently rolling gutter balls.

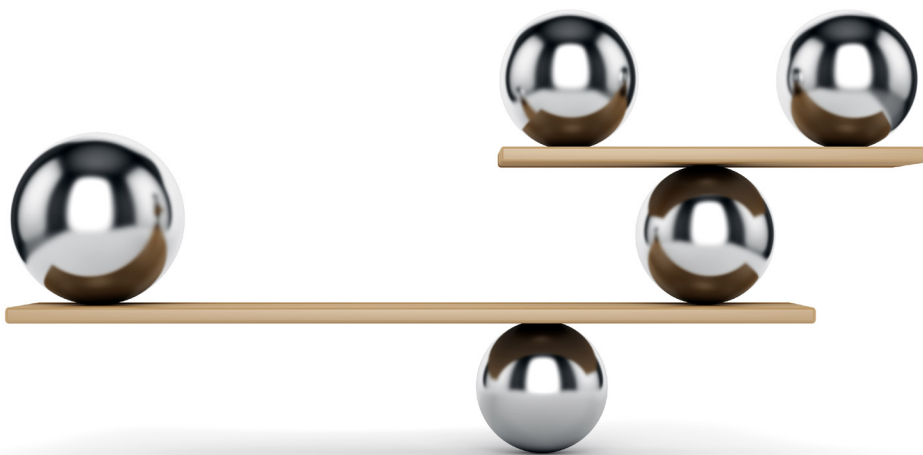
Without guardrails, you risk wasting money, experiencing high turnover, and failing to achieve your brand vision.

Implementing the right recruitment system can bring efficiency, effectiveness, and excitement to the recruitment process, aligning it with the brand's goals and keeping your brand in the right lane.

Let's go to work! ■



**Art Coley** is CEO of CGI Franchise. Using the proven Recruitment Operating System (ROS), he and the ROS Support Team help franchise companies implement and execute a predictable, repeatable, and sustainable franchisee recruitment program. The company is based in Temple, Texas, and works with brands worldwide. Contact him at 281-658-9409 or [acoley@cgifranchise.com](mailto:acoley@cgifranchise.com).

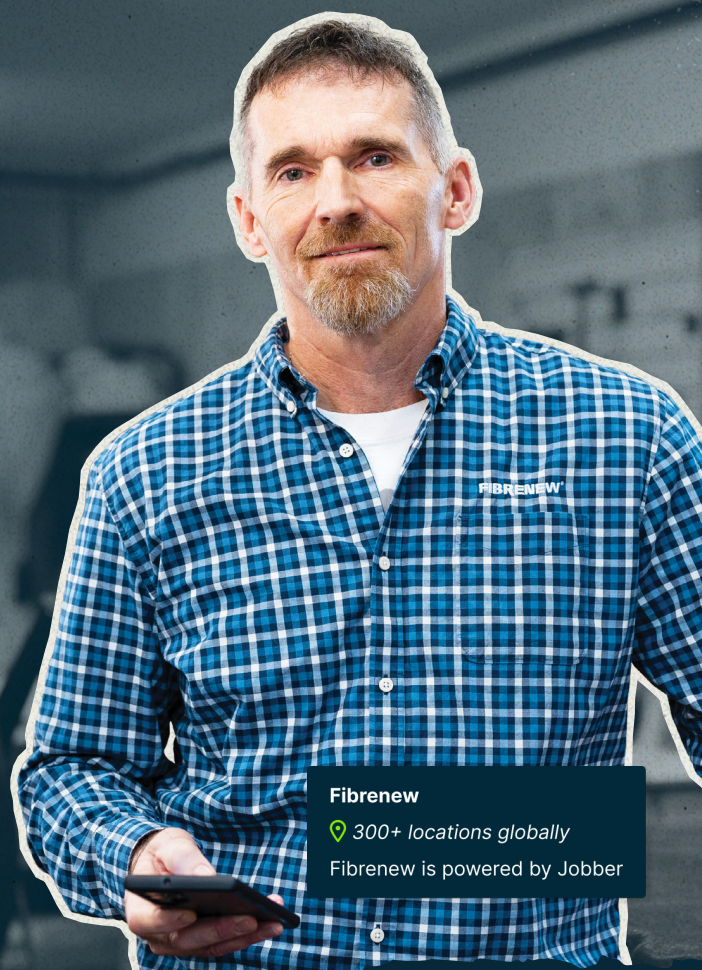






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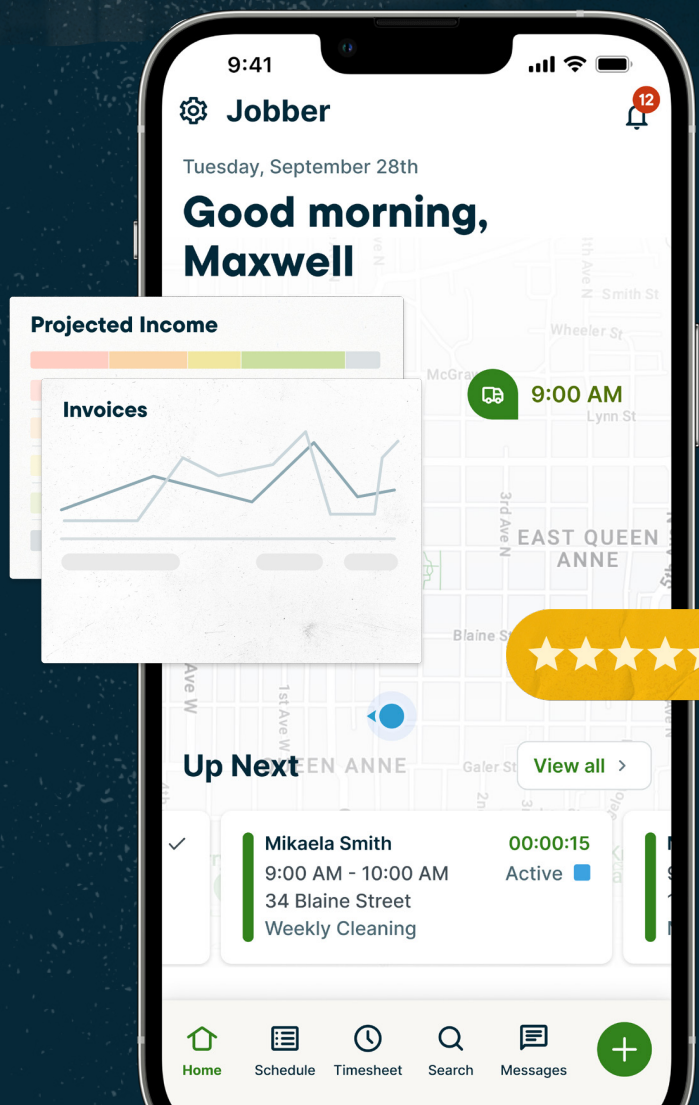
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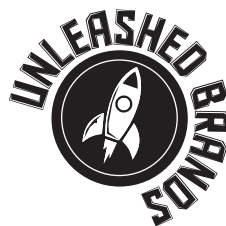
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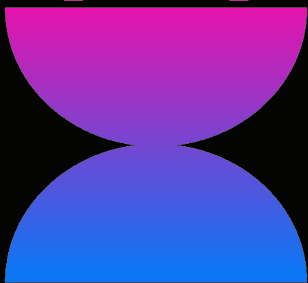
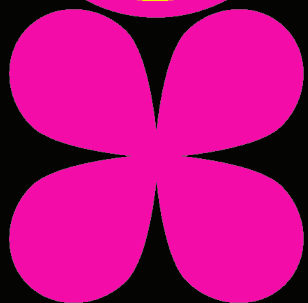
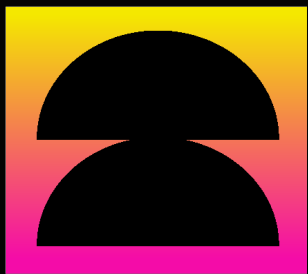
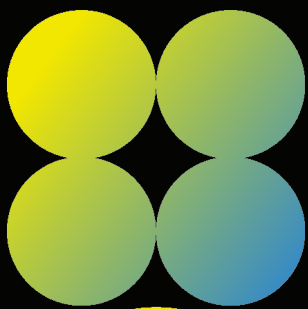
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