

Shopping for a Franchise?

What to Look for in Franchise Training

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The role of training in franchising is critical from both the franchisee and franchisor perspectives. In order to impart the details of the concept and operation to a franchisee in such a way that the integrity of the brand is maintained, the franchisor must have a structured program of training classes and materials in place. And, of course, as a franchisee, your end of the bargain is to scrupulously follow the roadmap provided. When you're shopping for the right franchise, a close examination of the available training is essential to evaluate. After all, training is a substantial part of the franchise package that you're buying.

Following are the essentials to look for when researching the franchise that's right for you:

Training Manuals: Whether you're frying chicken, selling financial products or providing home services, training manuals hold the "secret sauce" for success in a franchise. As a potential franchisee, you should ask to see sample manuals to assure yourself that all aspects of the business are clearly documented in easily understandable terms. These manuals will certainly be proprietary. If the company is reluctant to share these until you've actually been awarded a franchise, at least inquire if they are willing to copy the table of contents for your perusal while you're visiting their office. Whether they're organized as separate binders or all in one, look for content in the following areas:

Site Selection – Your location is critical to your business performance. That's why it is especially important to receive clear guidance from the franchisor regarding criteria for site selection, including the franchisor's role in site approval. Look for forms to complete that help you assess potential locations.

Start Up - Look for specific information that provides guidance about using contractors, and building out the facility including specific kinds of equipment, recommended vendors and timelines.

Operations - The Operations Manual should provide pertinent details about service offerings, policies and procedures, hiring, performance standards, job descriptions and scheduling, among other topics that are key to operating your franchise.

Finance – Here, you should find guidance about business metrics, reports due to the franchisor and additional details clearly laying out the franchisee/franchisor relationship.

Local Marketing and Advertising – Look for rules of thumb for marketing and promotions. You should also ask to see sample ads and ad campaign materials and inquire about public relations support from corporate.

Thanks to the miracle of modern technology, many franchisors post these materials on their secured Intranet websites for exclusive access by franchisees, which allows you to tap into these materials without requiring a pack animal to tote your binders.

New Franchisee Training: As you prepare to possibly launch into the system, you will want to know that the system experts are on the agenda. Ask who will be conducting the training and what their role and history has been with the company. Traditionally, various department heads contribute to the training program, providing direction in each of their areas and reviewing pertinent materials from the manuals.

Ask about the duration of the training program and where it's conducted. Some programs are weeks long and combine on-the-job training in a unit, as well as classroom programs at the corporate office. Programs this robust can provide some of the best training available. However, if family or other commitments prevent you from this type of lengthy training, you might want to consider that this may not be the right franchise for you.

Store Personnel Training: If your personnel are to provide travel services, haircuts, pest control or tacos, how will they learn to do it? Find out if you will be responsible for providing instruction of your employees, and if so, what training aids and tools will be provided to you by the franchisor? Will you receive videos or DVDs, or perhaps a manual, quick reference cards or on-screen cues on the POS system?

Also, you will need to find out what role field personnel play in training your store personnel. Do they perform demonstrations of new services to employees? If they provide core training, how often and where is it delivered? Are there local training centers, or will you need to send unit managers to regional or corporate offices for training? Find out what the typical turnover rate is for units. Consider the costs involved if you send your people out of town.

Unit Manager Training: After location, the unit manager is probably the most critical ingredient to your operation's success. In many cases, that manager is promoted from the ranks of the unit employees and may have little supervisory experience. If the franchisor does not have training in place to develop your manager in this critical area, plan on investing your time. If this isn't strength of

yours, you will have to consider building the cost of outside management training into your budget projections.

Multi-Unit Franchisee Training: If you're considering a franchise opportunity with visions of owning multiple units, inquire about specific training geared to multi-unit owners. The challenges and opportunities for the multi-unit owner are different than a single-unit owner. Therefore, when you arrive at that juncture, you will want to know that the franchisor has carefully developed strategies and programs designed to support you. . If a franchisor is new, they may not have developed this level of programming yet. In that case, you will need to consider the extent of this level of support that you will require.

Ongoing Training: Ask how frequently the business provides new training offerings to franchisees and general managers. How do they introduce new services or procedures? What role do field personnel play in rolling out new programs? Ask for examples of how this has been done in the past.

Franchisors often use annual franchisee and manager conventions to roll out new initiatives and training. Frequently, outside speakers are brought in to share expertise specific to your industry or to provide training in general areas, such as management and leadership. Are these conferences conducted with any consistency? If so, where are they held? You should plan on attending so ask questions about who bears the cost.

Leveraging Your Investment through Training

If you've been awarded a franchise, congratulations! You've researched it, you've analyzed the opportunity and you've done the appropriate soul searching about the commitment of money and personal time. You've put your dollars on the line – so *take full advantage* of what the franchisor has to offer. Some of the common pitfalls that occur in the training arena include the franchisee or unit manager leaving the corporate training materials on the shelf, not keeping current with new training programs and not continuing to invest in their own development by attending franchisor sponsored conventions. Franchisees that consistently participate in new training and provide training for their personnel on a regular basis out-perform those who don't. The best operators are those that make professional development for themselves and their team a top priority.