



Welcome to the World of franchising

Now, about that website of yours...

As we approach the conclusion of our Franchise Development Programme, clients inevitably turn to me for guidance on their website

Tony Urwin reports

With franchise package defined, business systemised and in writing, legal agreement done and dusted and marketing materials in the hands of prospective franchise owners, it's time to tell the world: a new franchisor has arrived. What better place to start than on your corporate website?

Originally designed to market products or services, your website must now promote a franchise. Can this be achieved in a single site? What should be the focus of the site? What kind of information should be made available?

Web designers cannot help you because these are not technical issues. They are questions related to your brand development and marketing strategies. There are no one-size-fits-all answers, but I can offer some essential truths and best practice that can help.

If you were my client, I would have made clear to you at the outset that you were going to be in a different business by the end of our franchise development process. It is a fact that many aspiring franchisors fail to appreciate. Regardless of whether you are vending freshly squeezed fruit juices, providing job recruitment

services or repairing dents in cars, franchising your business puts you in the business of selling both a franchise and a brand.

Franchise owners will sell your products or services. You will sell them the opportunity to do so, while encouraging the world to patronise their business. Your website must reflect as much. Stop selling products and services per se. Start selling the brand and the franchise.

Just as politicians pose as servants in order to become the masters, businesses must appear as idealists to make good material gains. A corporate website that over-promotes a franchise reveals a company motivated by nothing more than its own commercial benefit. A corporate website proudly vaunting a brand with a mission and values is the mark of a company that stands for something - a cause to which others may rally.

Use your website to introduce your brand to the world. Get people excited about what it is your brand represents and make clear what it can do for them. Tell them what they can expect when they see your brand, what motivates your network and to what standards its members work. Help visitors to your website find their local branch, outlet or representative and then offer the 'right individuals' the opportunity to join you. The promotion of the franchise should be secondary to the promotion of your brand.

A good general guideline: if the sales pitch for your franchise detracts from the 'magic' of your brand, erect a separate website for franchise sales.

What may have 'done the job' when you were a local business may cease to do so when you are

a national or international organisation. If your choice of web designer was based largely on convenience or price, now is the time to apply more stringent criteria. If you or your staff wrote the content, now is also the time to ensure that it is professionally edited if not rewritten.

Franchise owners are paying good money to licence your brand. In this day and age your website is the public face of your brand for many consumers and potential franchise owners. A well designed and well-written website projects a reassuring, possibly inspiring, image of professionalism and success. An amateurish website exposes you, rightly or wrongly, as an amateur organisation. Consider investing in the services of high calibre web designer and copywriter. The rewards are more than aesthetic.

When deciding how much information to include, there are three important considerations. Firstly, on the internet everyone is watching. Share only information that will not give your competitors the ability to replicate your success. This means excluding any extracts from your Information Memorandum and any details about how your franchise actually works or is packaged.

This brings me to the second point: never lose sight of the action you wish site visitors to take. You will want them to contact you so that you can get to know them better and deliver your polished sales pitch - therefore, don't answer all their questions on the site! Give just enough information to whet their appetite. If you plan to offer your prospectus on your website, ask them



Never lose sight of the action you wish your site visitors to take. You will want them to contact you so you can deliver your polished sales pitch...

to provide contact information before enabling the download. Simple mechanisms for this exist.

Finally, be careful what you promise. The internet used to be the digital equivalent of the Wild West, but today you are as accountable for the claims you make online as you are for those you make in print. Avoid indefensible statements and unjustified promises. Misrepresentation on the internet is just as culpable as it is in print. Qualify your claims and never assure - or appear to assure - prospective franchise owners of specific returns. As I've explained many times before in this column, franchising is about building long-term relationships. Keep that in mind as you compose your selling text.

If you would like to know more, I invite you to contact me. I am a franchising consultant, not a website or marketing consultant. However, FDS Northern is committed to promoting high standards and good practices in franchising and can put you in touch with very capable marketing consultants, web designers and other professionals. •

FOR MORE INFORMATION:



Tony Urwin is the Regional Director of FDS Northern and is a British Franchise Association Affiliated Franchise Consultant with eight years' experience helping Northern franchisors to develop fair, mutually beneficial franchise systems.

Find out more about FDS Northern at: www.fdsnorthem.com

View Tony's archived columns online at: www.thefm.net/58086



EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS THROUGH FRANCHISING



If you're based in the North England or Scotland and looking to franchise your business, contact FDS Northern to find out how we can help you achieve success.



For companies looking at franchising as a means of expanding their business effectively and profitably, FDS provides an intelligent evaluation of your potential for franchising and works with you to implement a carefully structured Franchise Development Plan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL:

0161 926 9882

email: tony@fdsnorthern.com

web: www.fdsnorthem.com

www.fdsfranchise.com



For other areas of the UK call 01603 6301