



How Other Franchisees Can Help You Grow Your Franchise

The appeal of a franchise might stem from the fact that working systems are already in place; that the product or service has been tested, tweaked and perfected; and that the brand is already known and established. But often lost in the shuffle, there's one aspect of a franchise system that may be as important to your success, if not more so: the franchisees.

Beyond the knowledge and resources available to you from the franchisor, you have a whole network of franchisees who have forged the way and are ready to help get you up to speed. They are experienced, skilled and can even add to your work force when extra hands are needed. Take Fibrenew franchisees, Bill Metropol and Stan Zawko, for example. The two are banding together to tackle a project that would have been too big for either of them to do alone.

So how do you tap into your network of fellow franchisees? We asked franchise insiders to share some pointers on how to successfully benefit from the wisdom of other franchisees.

Before buying, investigate existing franchisee relationships. Ask the franchisor for examples where franchisees worked together, ask franchisees about their interactions with other franchisees in the system, and examine the quality of the relationships in the franchise that you're considering. Ollie Parker took two trips to visit franchise locations before he opened his own Speedpro Imaging studio. "That helped me better understand the business," explains Parker. "But more importantly, it helped me develop relationships with other owners so that when I have a problem, there is a wide range of talented and experienced owners I feel comfortable calling."

"One of the marks of a good franchise system is how collaboratively the franchisees work together," says Brian Miller, COO and President of [The Entrepreneur's Source](#), a career and franchise business coaching company. "Whether it is informally or through a franchisor sponsored program, the more the franchisees work together, the greater the chance to grow the brand and market presence."

Be proactive in meeting other franchisees. Make an effort to get in contact with other franchisees early on so that you can better be prepared later when you need advice and assistance. In Northern California's Bay Area, five [Floor Coverings International](#) franchisees have united to form the Bay Area FCI Association. Meeting monthly, they help each other with staffing, discuss pricing, and recently signed a lease together on a shared warehouse that will allow them to buy in bulk and, therefore, be more competitive.

Johnson of Fibrenew recommends meeting others in any way possible even if it's just inviting franchisees in your area out for coffee. Meanwhile, Miller of The Entrepreneur's Source says attending regional and annual meetings and conventions, as well as participating in conference calls and webinars, are great ways to establish relationships with others.

Use the tools that the franchisor has in place to foster and build relationships between franchisees. Speedpro Imaging has a buddy system that originally helped connect Parker, whose Speedpro franchise is based in Boston, with Scott Schoner, based in New Jersey. Parker relied on Schoner to process about 50 orders over a six-month period while he scouted out a location and got the necessary equipment in place. "I would not have been able to start my business without Scott's help," says Parker.

At Fibrenew, franchisees actively ask questions and connect with other franchisees via forums on the

franchise's intranet. "Use the resources available to you," says Jake Johnson, Director of Franchise Support at Fibrenew. "That is the single biggest strength of the franchise model."

Be willing to learn from other franchisees. A huge benefit of investing in a franchise system is the fact that you do not have to reinvent the wheel. Look to other franchisees to help steer you clear of any pitfalls along the way. "When you're starting up a franchise location, don't underestimate how much there is that you don't yet know," says Johnson. "Other franchisees can serve as an excellent source of knowledge, and those near you may even step in and lend a hand when you need it down the road."

Knowledge, ideas, and resources can be found everywhere, even from franchisees belonging to other systems. "There are a large number of franchises out there, so don't limit yourself to talking to folks just within your own organization," says Todd Lafrentz, a member of the Bay Area FCI Franchisee Association. "Other franchises also have systems in place and processes that can easily be adapted to your business."

Find strength in numbers. "I think it is vitally important in today's marketplace that we work together collaboratively," says Lafrentz. "Our collective sum, from both a financial and experience perspective, makes [our franchisee group] exponentially more effective than individual owners. We are already starting to pool resources to provide a larger presence in the online marketplace, which has started to pay dividends to each of us after a very short time. In the future, I think we [will] have additional opportunities in more of traditional media outlets such as radio and television that, as individuals, would be difficult to swing."

Collaborating with fellow franchisees gives your business an edge, so take advantage of the network of support that's available to you.

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