

What does it take to run a mobile franchise?

1 November 2010 | by Donna Bennett

Life experience and positive personality traits are often more important than the technical skills when it comes to managing your own mobile business.

Snap-on

"Some of the most successful franchisees are not mechanics," says Newcastle franchisee, Phill Blease. It's all about being the type of person who enjoys interaction with people on a daily basis and building relationships. It also helps to be enthusiastic about the tools because clients get caught up in a franchisee's enthusiasm.

"Our franchisees see the same customers every week so relationship building is very important," explains Nick Hudson, national franchise manager, Australia-New Zealand. "We only want to sell our customers something that's going to be beneficial for their business."

Hudson believes a franchisee of any system needs to be disciplined, motivated and determined to succeed, but even more so in a mobile operation.

"If you have a conventional retail franchise, then you need to have it opened at the same time every morning, whereas with a mobile

franchise, time is not so sensitive. However, to be successful at Snap-on, you need to have the discipline to make sure you make the most of every hour of every day. Customers are only available in a short window, so we need to be able to utilise that time to its maximum potential," he stresses.

Blease understands effective time management is critical. "The more people you see, the more money you make; it's as simple as that," he says. "You can do as many or as little hours as you want but it's the weeks where I put in more effort and see more people that have the biggest turnover. The franchisees that do well are outgoing – they're not afraid to walk into a workshop and spark up a conversation with a stranger."

Snap-on franchisees that want to be successful should be good at following a program, instead of attempting to reinvent the wheel.

Blease admits he's someone who finds it difficult to take orders, but since he paid for a proven system, he thought he would follow it and "see what happened".

"Low and behold it worked," he says. "I've spoken to other franchisees who've dropped bits and pieces and they just don't get the turnover that I do. It's a 90 year-old system – it works!"

Cafe2U

"When you're in a mobile business, people need to be very self-motivated because generally it's just you," says Lerida Grant, Cafe2U marketing manager. "Our franchisees are providing an on-time service for people's coffee breaks. Customers are relying on you arriving at a certain time, so time awareness and punctuality are paramount."

This fast-paced business means that once franchisees finish at one location, they're quickly on the road to their next stop. "There's no opportunity for down-time in between," says Grant. "It does take a particular style of personality – some people love that rush but some don't at all. Generally our most successful people are highly motivated multi-taskers who do it all themselves and thrive on the theatre of it all.

"We tend to look at personality and people's attitudes as opposed to their past skills set – we can help you do the rest but we can't teach you how to smile," Grant adds.

Andy Lynch, Cafe2U business owner in WA, worked as a chef for 20 years so he is well accustomed to pressure and time constraints.

"After I had long service leave, I didn't want to work weekends and long evenings anymore," he says. Having a genuine interest in people and their stories, both good and bad, is very important for his business.

Lynch is a good listener. "I have 31 stops on my round and have between two and 12 people at each. Most people tell me they want their 'usual' – everyone's amazed at how I remember but I just do," he says. "I don't see it as a job and I don't see them as my customers either – they're more like friends because I get to know them and hear their news every day."

Touch Up Guys

Previous experience working with motor vehicles is not required but franchisees must be reasonably fit and enjoy working outdoors.

"One of the key things is to be able to deal with people," says Peter Darnell, franchise sales manager. "They have to go out and promote themselves; they need to meet people and do quotations on vehicles. They need some self-confidence and a get-up-and-go attitude."

A key marketing tool for Touch Up Guys is shopping centre displays. A franchisee will book a space near an entrance to a shopping centre, set up the van and display materials, and speak to people that walk by. It is therefore imperative that all Touch Up Guys have good communication skills and present themselves well. They must also have a burning desire to succeed and a determination to overcome any potential problems.

Although it's not essential, most franchisees possess an interest in cars. However, all have pride in the appearance of their own

vehicles.

Darnell says apart from newcomers that initially work longer hours until their speeds improve, most franchisees work a five-day week, finishing around 4pm.

"We have people from all walks of life join us – from school teachers to bank managers," says Darnell. "In fact, we find that people who have been, say, spray-painters before, we need to re-train them to operate in the way that our business works, which is quite unique because it's not in a fixed premises, it's a mobile business."

Soccajoey's

Jose Bello was playing professional soccer in Spain for nine years until he bought his business last year in NSW. "In terms of acquiring the knowledge, I've been involved in soccer since I was very young. However, what's great about Soccajoey's is that it's such a well structured program - it's quite simple for somebody without a soccer background to come in and learn."

Franchisees need to be able to interact well with preschool-aged children. "You have to be very patient and have good communication skills," says Bello. "You have to be assertive and very direct with children that have a minimal concentration span – the soccer knowledge is not as important."

Bello employs staff and believes his business background is beneficial, having studied marketing and small business management. He also says his general life skills have served him well, to be able to manage and motivate a group, and to resolve any conflicts quickly. Bello has also been proactive in promoting and marketing his franchise, in order to attract parents and their children.

"We're a very family-orientated program where we like to develop good relationships with parents and children. It's important for parents to know who's running the program. At the end of the day, we're dealing with the most important things in their lives and we try and build that trust and confidence. It all forms part of what Soccajoey's is about," says Bello.

Appliance Tagging Services (ATS) Franchisees come from a variety of backgrounds and are not all men or former electricians. ATS currently has three female franchisees, as well as female staff working for franchisees.

However, ATS does have a handful of franchisees that are qualified electricians. "They've chosen this path because of the benefits of non-seasonal work, and they don't have to crawl around in roofs or work outside in the cold," says Kim Davies, franchise development manager. The most ideal candidates are those with some business acumen, flexibility, and the confidence to get out there and talk to people. "They have to develop some of their own business – that's very important," stresses Davies.

ATS certainly has its own client base, which franchisees benefit from; however Davies says this work cannot always be relied upon and franchisees must supplement that work with their own. "They've got to be passionate about their business and have that drive to succeed, and they've got to be prepared to step out of their comfort zone and go and knock on doors occasionally," she says.

Andrew Renfrey, ATS franchisee in SA, doesn't consider himself someone with the gift of the gab, but he's always listening and continually putting himself out there. He says the national deals that ATS secure are great bread and butter work but he's always working on his own sources. He always puts himself, as he describes it, "front and centre" wherever he goes and recently joined a business chamber group to network with business owners of related industries.

"All you have to do is start talking about their OH&S responsibilities and keeping their employees safe. You just drop a few key words about health and safety and regulations, and their ears will prick up," Renfrey says.

Jim's Antennas

Noosa Heads franchisee Rod Becher had never installed an antenna until he had his training and now he's Jim's Antennas reigning franchisee of the year. "I get along well with most people and I've always enjoyed that element of my work, as well as meeting new people every day," he says.

Becher also sees himself as someone who is confident in his abilities. "The guy who trained me when I started, he was always pretty

confident in the product he was selling and confident in himself. I was impressed with that and it's definitely an element I've taken on board."

Being a mobile business, Becher believes it's more beneficial because he's coming to the customer's environment. He says being adaptable to change is also very important, because any job could either take longer or be completed sooner than estimated.

"You've got to educate people on what digital is and how it works," says Becher. "I always put myself in the customer's shoes, and people really do appreciate it if you take the time to sit down with them." He has also become a Jim's Antennas certified trainer, which adds another exciting dimension to Becher's responsibilities.

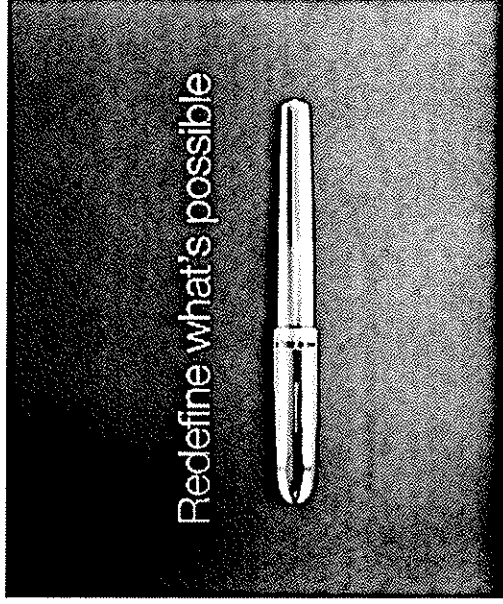
Hydro Dog

Alan Hutchings manages a successful mobile salon in Victoria. His background in sales has helped, along with his drive and ability to work diligently. "Franchising is certainly a good way to hit the ground running," he says.

Being considerate and accommodating means Hutchings will often work longer hours. "I rarely say no to my regular customers," he admits, adding that repeat customers and referrals form 50 to 60 per cent of his clientele. If ever he is running more than 10 minutes late, he telephones his clients to let them know and never rushes a job. Hutchings allows more time for his first-time customers, to gain knowledge about the dog, the client's requirements and property access.

He believes the technical skills of dog washing are easy to learn and that people retrenched from middle management could be quite suitable. "You need a certain amount of mental strength and life experience," Hutchings explains.

Although he owns two dogs, Hutchings doesn't consider himself an animal lover as such; he simply identified dog washing as a massive growth industry. He believes franchising is not for everyone, as it requires the ability to work well unsupervised.



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