

West Coast Franchise Expo: One Path to Western Expansion

By Joel Goldstein



For many franchises, the West Coast is the most rapidly-expanding area of growth. With more than 10,000 attendees expected to walk through the doors of the Los Angeles Convention Center beginning Oct. 19, the West Coast Franchise Expo gives exhibitors the opportunity to focus solely on their western development strategy.

When it comes to growing a brand, companies increasingly are realizing the benefits of trade shows and shifting their philosophies to incorporate franchise expos. A quick review of this fall's list of concepts shows that many are first-time exhibitors looking to capitalize on the hungry audience of potential West Coast franchisees.

In the few years since its inception, the West Coast Franchise Expo has become the preeminent franchise trade show in the western United States. It offers exhibitors a chance to not only generate buzz on their concepts and meet and greet potential franchisees, but also to strategize their company's growth plans in one of the most popular and fastest-growing regions of franchising.

Whether a company's expansion plan includes growth in California, Arizona or throughout the entire western region, the West Coast Franchise Expo offers business the opportunity to reach some of the nation's most savvy and sophisticated franchise prospects.

Building Relationships

Allison McGullion is a franchise development specialist with Dippin' Dots, an ice cream franchise that sells tiny beads of ice cream, yogurt, sherbet and flavored ice. Dippin' Dots offers single-site franchise opportunities and is exhibiting during the show for the first time this year.

McGullion said Dippin' Dots is experiencing a

surge of growth in the West and plans to use the WCFE to build awareness of its brand in the area and create new relationships with potential franchisees.

"We hope to establish relationships with as many potential franchisees as possible," said McGullion. "We find that many of our franchisees always refer back to their first contact with us as an important part of the decision-making process. Obviously we hope to introduce or reinforce our brand and answer questions for as many people as possible."

The mix of exhibitors at the West Coast Franchise Expo ranges from those who are trying to break into a new market to franchised brands that already have a presence out West, but want to expand.

Ken Belleman is vice president of operations for Home Team Inspection Service and House Doctors Handyman Service, two concepts that also are exhibiting at the West Coast Franchise Expo for the first time. House Doctors is a franchise that handles anything from small home repairs to larger jobs while Home Team is a home inspection service that uses a team concept approach while inspecting homes.

Belleman said his concepts are already franchising on the West Coast, but is looking to grow the brand.

"We would like to increase our presence on the West Coast for both our brands," said Belleman. "We have locations in the West but we think there is great potential to develop further."

In addition to supporting franchised concepts with expansion plans, the WCFE also brings in a focused audience.

"This is our first time participating in the West Coast Franchise Expo," said Belleman. "We are

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exhibiting because we want to make our presence known and thought this was the best venue to do that.”

Expansion in the West

Bennigan's Grill & Tavern, the casual-dining chain known for its Irish-influence food and drink menu, is also attending the expo for the first time this year. David Gonzalez, Bennigan's director of franchise development, said the company is increasing its exposure in the West.

“The West Coast Franchise Expo will be a great opportunity to reinforce our name on the West Coast, meet potential franchisees and gain exposure for our brand,” said Gonzalez. He added that Bennigan's is currently franchising throughout the United States and based on previous success in the Western region, thinks the brand will do well at the show.

“We've had some great success with our operations on the West Coast and we hope to capitalize on that success and grow our brand west of the Rockies,” said Gonzalez. “Ideally we will find multi-unit operators for Southern and Northern California, Nevada and Arizona. Washington and Oregon would be great bonuses for us if we were to meet the right franchisee. We are looking at restaurant operators with unique opportunities to do something special.”

For many franchise concepts, the West Coast Franchise Expo means exposure to new faces and a new audience.

Belleman and his Home Team and House Doctors concepts are taking advantage of their presence at the WCFE to debut a new look for the brands.

“We are introducing a new brand logo that was recently unveiled for both our concepts,” said Belleman. “House Doctors also has a new model and both brands have a new CEO. We are using our exhibit at the WCFE to gain a foothold with new potential franchisees and tell them about the changes happening at our company.”

One of the greatest benefits of exhibiting at franchise trade shows is that concepts don't have to be the biggest game around. Smaller companies that are just getting involved in the franchise world can also benefit by being a part of

a nationally-recognized event such as the WCFE.

East and West

So what are some of the differences when it comes to appealing to franchisees in the West versus the East? Gonzalez says the restaurant industry sees a different side to development on the West Coast.

“The attendees are similar on both coasts, but developing new restaurants on the West Coast is definitely a different game than in the East,” said Gonzalez. “On the East Coast a good deal of development involves reusing and refurbishing existing sites or urban projects in reviving neighborhoods. In the West we see a lot of new, planned development with retail anchors and casual-dining pad sites in residential areas. It's a different atmosphere in the West with wide open spaces and more emphasis on exterior finish and environmental issues.”

In its short history, the West Coast Franchise Expo has proven to be highly effective as a venue for growth.

Belleman added his concept is driving toward expansion primarily through trade shows. “We have seen the success that these trade shows can bring to a franchise business,” said Belleman. “This is a new shift for us and the West Coast Franchise Expo will be our first franchise trade show. It's allowing us to introduce a new look in person, rather than in print or online. The one-on-one contact makes it easier to build a relationship with someone. It's a connection you can't achieve by just talking on the phone.” ■

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