

# The Right Place, the Right Time, The Right Match

IFE celebrates another year of franchise matchmaking.

By Joel Goldstein



Wondering who attended the 17th annual International Franchise Expo? Actually, a better question would be who didn't? After nearly two decades, the Number One franchise event in the country

continues to attract the largest, most qualified international and domestic prospects in the industry.

From April 11-13, the nation's preeminent franchise show franchisors, master franchisees, prospective franchisees, franchise lawyers, suppliers and consultants, will all be looking to make a connection and find that perfect franchise match.

How does the show manage to maintain its popularity? Well, there is no substitute for meeting with a prospect face-to-face.

"It's important for companies to exhibit at shows like the IFE because you have a chance to connect with the prospects you've been speaking to," said Shane Connell, franchise sales director for Jan-Pro. "So many times nowadays people visit Web sites, submit an inquiry, but you never have the chance to put a name and a face together. At the IFE, we'll spend as much time as we need with each candidate and they have a chance to touch and see the concept, so we really get the chance to connect one-on-one."

## Franchising: Providing the framework

When the IFE doors opened and nearly 11,000 entrepreneurs spilled through the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, odds were that the majority of attendees were searching and thinking the same thing: How do I start my own business with as little risk as possible?

"Franchising is a great way to start your own business because you're not in business by yourself," said Peter Holt, COO of Tasti-D-Lite. "With franchising there is a team here to support

you. We have a whole system to help a franchisee get started. We show them how to lay out the store, how to market, we give them the training and ongoing support. It's everything they need to make their store more successful."

In today's economy where everyone is looking for a foolproof plan, a franchise opportunity allows an entrepreneur to follow a proven system which takes some of the guesswork and apprehension out of opening a business.

"Franchising is a great way to build your own business because you're in control," said David Huether, chairman of GamerDoc. "It gives you the ability to leverage proven concepts and ideas and build into something exciting for you and your family."

Connell added that attending a franchise event like IFE helps a potential franchisee understand what concepts are available across the entire system.

"As a candidate it's critical to attend these types of events and understand what's out there, aside from just the concepts you have under consideration," he said. "Take a look around, see what's out there and make an informed decision."

## The right timing, the right fit

From a master franchisee looking to expand their investments, to a first-time attendee just testing out the water, the 2008 IFE delivered a range of highly-qualified prospects and proven concepts.

"The IFE continues to be a strong event," said Gamer Doc's Huether. "It's packed with qualified entrepreneurs and produces great potential results for us, and that's why we do events like this. The people who come here are looking for franchises. We can really do eyeball-to-eyeball interviews at shows like this."

To find that perfect franchise fit can be a long, arduous process, for both franchisees and franchisors. But IFE provides an opportunity to

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bring all the right people together at the same time in one location.

“The International Franchise Association and MFV Expositions put the show together with the right timing, the right space in an excellent facility and it’s convenient and comfortable to interview prospects here,” added Huether.

Paul Kramer, director of franchise development for Jody Maroni’s Sausage Kingdom also appreciates the chance to meet one-on-one with a potential franchisee.

“With so much information available on the internet, the face-to-face, handshake approach to attracting prospective franchisees is alive and well at trade shows,” Kramer said. “That’s why it’s important to exhibit at these events.”

### Going International

The Washington D.C.-based event also drew its largest international audience to date, with 51 international delegations and visitors from 85 countries represented. As a result, for a company focusing its expansion efforts on the international market, there is no better place to exhibit than the International Franchise Expo.

“We spoke with a number of qualified candidates at the Expo, and many of those were international visitors,” said Connell. “That’s a benefit for our company as we focus on global expansion. We’re placing an emphasis on our international growth and needed to be here to meet with the decision makers that attend the IFE. It’s a big part of why we exhibit.”

Eliza Kendall, president and CEO of ElizaJ decided to exhibit at the IFE because of a great experience with Franchise Expo South in Miami.

“The Mid-Atlantic is a market we want to grow in,” she said. “So it was a natural choice to participate in the International Franchise Expo. We had a great deal of interest from show visitors and spoke with a number of international visitors.”

### Pre-show marketing, post-show follow up

With thousands of attendees at IFE, how do exhibitors draw in prospects to discuss their concept? Many franchisors start with pre-show marketing and

## 2008-2009 IFA franchise event calendar includes:

### Arizona Franchise & Financing Expo

Oct. 4-5, 2008

Phoenix Convention Center

### West Coast Franchise Expo

Nov. 7-9, 2008

Los Angeles Convention Center

### Franchise Expo South

Jan. 9-11, 2009

Miami Beach Convention Center

### International Franchise Expo

March 20-22, 2009

Walter E. Washington  
Convention Center  
Washington, D.C.

### Atlanta Franchise & Financing Expo

May 2-3, 2009

Cobb Galleria

### Boston Franchise & Financing Expo

June 6-7, 2009

Hynes Convention Center

### West Coast Franchise Expo

Oct. 2-4, 2009

Los Angeles Convention Center

### North Texas Franchise & Financing Expo

Nov. 21-22, 2009

Dallas Convention Center

reaching out to contacts that have expressed interest in the concept prior to the show.

“Before the show we actively sent invitations out through our Web site and invited prospects from the area to visit with us at the IFE,” said Huether.

“We took advantage of the invitations provided by MFV and invited our prospects through direct mail and our web site,” added Kramer.

Tasti-D-Lite took advantage of its existing leads to help spread the word.

“We did quite a lot of pre-show marketing,” said Holt. “For us a trade show is just one component of an overall

strategy when we’re trying to penetrate a market. So we use our existing lead base, we tell them that we’re here, we send them invitations and we use the Expo as just one tool in our efforts to get our deals completed.”

Kaffee Hopkins with Housewarmers received strong feedback on her company’s pre-show efforts. “Before the show, we sent out an e-mail invitation inviting our prospects,” she said. “In fact, it worked out great because several visitors stopped by to thank us for the complimentary admission, and it provided yet another opportunity to continue the qualifying interested entrepreneurs.”

For a successful show, it’s also imperative to create an effective follow-up program to reach out to attendees after the event.

“After the IFE, we host an online interview and Webinar with all the prospects that are interested in our concept,” said Gamer Doc’s Huether. “We answer their questions, discuss some of the details we may not have been able to cover on the show floor, and then hope to close a franchise deal.”

“Our post show follow up includes an e-mail to all of the prospects we’ve spoken with along with a package of materials,” added Housewarmers’ Hopkins. “It’s important for them to have the information they’ll need to make an informed decision.”

### Upcoming Events

The date is already set for next year’s IFE, March 20–22 in Washington, D.C. and many concepts have already reserved space.

“The MFV and IFA folks that put the IFE together have done a tremendous job,” said Connell. “From the pre-show planning to making sure we had everything we needed, they’ve been phenomenal. This is our first time exhibiting at the IFE, and the customer service is truly extraordinary. They’ve been an integral part of our success and we’ll certainly be back again next year.”

*Joel Goldstein is the group director of marketing for MFV Expositions. He can be reached at [jgoldstein@mfvexpo.com](mailto:jgoldstein@mfvexpo.com).*

*Learn more about upcoming IFA-sponsored events by visiting the Events section of [www.franchise.org](http://www.franchise.org).*