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Franchise show stoppers

by Joan Szabo

Franchise Expos not only bring in solid sales leads, but they help boost brand awareness. Franchisors take big marketing steps at these events to gain serious interest in their concepts.

Franchising Sunset Tan, for example, one of the newer, sexier kids on the franchising block has been stopping prospects in the aisles. The franchise is part of the health and beauty segment of the industry, offering a host of luxury tanning services and unparalleled pampering. Some of its buzz comes from the E! Network reality series aptly called "Sunset Tan" that delves into the happenings at the salon. Thirty-two million people watch the show that features surprise celebrity guests and outrageous storylines.



Sunset Tan's busy booth

"The E Network show helps win business and entertainment interest for the franchise that spills over into the Expos," says Marc Kiekenapp, vice president for franchise development. In addition, one of its LA locations located on Hollywood's famous Sunset Strip attracts a lot of celebrity clients like Paris Hilton, Carmen Electra and Daisy Fuentes.

Sunset Tan puts effort and money into the Expos. Sunset's booths replicate the reception area of an actual salon. "In addition, we try to give potential franchisees a celebrity experience by playing the show on a big plasma TV in the booth," Kiekenapp explains. "We have cast members there to sign autographs," he adds. Staff people who work the booth provide daily demonstrations on sunless spray tanning, a safer way to get a beautiful tan. "Our booths are always crowded and the cost per sale is better through the Expos than it is from the Internet," says Kiekenapp.

Another Expo show stopper is Play n Trade, the franchise that sells new and used video games, accessories, and consoles from leading manufacturers. Play n Trade also hosts local and national tournaments, offers disc and console repair services, and has a "try any game before you buy" policy. The franchise is seen as a major alternative to big box retailers and other video game stores. To date, it has sold more than 425 franchises.

The concept helps create the buzz. Crowds of attendees are drawn to its booth, where they have a chance to experience Play n Trade, says Charles R. Franklin, the company's vice president for franchise development.



Play n Trade booth gets lots of play at show

"We have a big booth, with a lot of lights, four flat screen TVs, and guitar hero playing," he explains. Prospects can also view testimonials on the TVs and they come away with a good idea of what a Play n Trade franchise is all about. "For us, it's about having fun and engaging prospects," Franklin adds.

The effort is paying big dividends. The franchise gets from 600 to 1,000 sales leads from the three-day experience. Play n Trade also invites prospects to attend an informational presentation about the franchise right after the Expo. These presentations are a new addition to the company's Expo approach and help close sales. No matter what your budget or concept, Franklin believes it's possible to make a big Expo impact by going the extra mile with strong marketing steps.