

# Quality Prospects on the Rise at Franchise Trade Shows

New concepts and original forums added energy to the West Coast Franchise Expo.

BY JOEL GOLDSTEIN



**T**he paradigm has shifted and exhibitors are no longer looking for warm bodies to fill the expo floor. Time is too precious and they need to speak with qualified, serious prospects and it's International Franchise Association-sponsored trade shows that provide just such a prospect. That was the perspective shared by numerous

West Coast Franchise Expo exhibitors.

The West Coast Franchise Expo, which just completed its fifth year, continues to bring franchisors quality leads and a unique opportunity to speak one-on-one with multiple prospects over the three-day event.

Held at the Los Angeles Convention Center Oct. 2-4, Expo attendees were met with a wide variety of concepts, ranging from fast-casual restaurants to home repair, remodeling and video games.

While the economy continues to struggle, trade shows remain one of the soundest investments available to franchisors. Not only are attendees met with numerous concepts in a variety of categories, but franchisors and franchisees alike have access to a strong representation of suppliers.

Tom Portesy, president of MFV Expositions, producer of West Coast Franchise Expo, Franchise Expo South and the International Franchise Expo, said the quality of the visitors at WCFE continues to be impressive. "Only serious prospects travel to downtown Los Angeles on a Saturday or Sunday and spend their valuable time visiting with franchisors," said Portesy. "These are people who are serious about investing in a franchise. And even though financing is still tight, we saw ample visitors who had the means to buy a concept."

As soon as Day One kicked off, Cody Sorenson, Southern California-area developer for Always Best Care Seniors, saw attendees head straight for his booth and steady traffic continued until the end of the day. "It was a Friday, so either these serious visitors had taken time off work or they had been researching franchises and had an idea what they wanted," he said.

Sorenson noticed the Saturday morning crowd seemed very interested in investing in a franchise but many had not decided on which concept, allowing exhibitors to engage new prospects and introduce them to their brand.

"Saturday evening ended with Expo security giving us the boot because we were talking with prospects past closing

time," said Sorenson. "Sunday afternoon ended similar to Saturday with people talking with us while we packed our booth."

To attract the qualified crowd, producers MFV marketed the Expo to business leaders, the Hispanic business community, and launched an aggressive, multi-media advertising campaign throughout greater Los Angeles.

"West Coast Franchise Expo delivered exactly what show producers promised," said Sorenson. "And that's serious people interested in franchising and ready to start their own business. From there it was our job to sort through these leads, pique their interest and develop those relationships."

## Discover Day Theater Launches at WCFE

The West Coast Franchise Expo saw the launch of the inaugural Discovery Day Theater, a gathering place on the Expo floor where franchisors were able to present their concept in a theater-like environment, including time for in-depth discussion and a question and answer session with potential franchisees.

This forum allowed attendees to receive valuable insight into presentations from exhibitors including, Aaron's, Church's Chicken and first time exhibitors Oxi-Fresh and Valpak.

To increase networking opportunities, show producers also hosted an exhibitor networking reception at the convention center. Nearly 300 exhibitors attended the event which was sponsored by CallCap, Greenbaum Marketing, *Entrepreneur*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

And similar to past events, the Expo featured a conference program that offered a something-for-everyone educational experience. Seminars and symposia ranged from basic how-to sessions to advanced in-depth examinations of the franchisor/franchisee relationship.

## Expo Attracts First-Time Exhibitors and Suppliers

While there were numerous returning exhibitors at the Expo, 32 concepts were introduced to the West Coast Franchise Expo for the first time, including Chick-fil-A, Cici's Pizza, H & R Block, Miracle-Ear, Inc. and Smokey's House of BBQ to name a few.

Eleven new suppliers were also present at the Expo including RecruitMilitary.com, Latin Business Association, Process Peak and Hope4Heroes.org.

"We exhibited for the first time at the West Coast Franchise Expo and the results were fantastic," said Kevin S. Drudge, CFE, for Valpak. "We spoke with hundreds of people over the three days that were truly interested in business opportunities and many directly interested in Valpak. As a result we are already in serious discussions with several people for franchise opportunities."

Exhibiting at MFV Expositions events has proven to be extremely beneficial to suppliers in the industry.

"These franchise shows provide an invaluable opportunity to network face-to-face with potential and existing clients. I'm able to develop much stronger relationships through these events than I can over the phone and e-mail," said Jon Carlston, director of franchisor development for Process Peak, LLC. "I've been exhibiting with MFV for six years and based on the results that those shows have generated, I'll definitely keep coming back."

Repeat exhibitor Sorenson claims

he has yet to find a source of leads that delivers the high number of qualified potential candidates, in a one-on-one environment as quickly and cost efficiently as does the WCFE. "MFV delivered the people and now we have quality leads that we are working through. It looks like we will exceed our goals from the show."

Drudge noted that the value for attendees was great concepts in all categories and a good representation of suppliers.

"The staff at MFV works diligently to market the show and bring people through the doors and then also to make sure everyone has a great experience both attending and exhibiting," he said. "I'm sure that is why their events are always the best attended shows in franchising. Valpak will definitely utilize the family of MFV events in the future."

Jeff D'Arcy, host of The Franchise Show, an online radio program dedicated to the franchise industry, broadcasts live from the Expo on Friday and Saturday. D'Arcy interviewed numerous exhibitors

throughout the event.

"The West Coast Franchise Expo is a tremendous opportunity to not only interact with literally thousands of franchise shoppers, but franchisors and suppliers from throughout the franchise industry," said D'Arcy. "I look forward to being a part of WCFE next year and in the years to come."

Plans for the 2010 West Coast Franchise Expo are already under way. It kicks off Nov. 5 to 7 at the same location, the Los Angeles Convention Center.

Next on the docket is Franchise Expo South at the Miami Beach Convention Center Jan. 15 to 17. This show specializes in connecting numerous leading domestic and international concepts with the Southeast's and Latin America's most qualified entrepreneurial audience. For information, visit [www.franchiseexposouth.com](http://www.franchiseexposouth.com) or call 201-881-1666. ■

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