

## Women in Franchising: An Enthusiastic Minority



BY KATE TAYLOR | October 31, 2013

Women may be the minority in the franchising world, but whether they are breaking into existing industries or franchising their own companies, many of them are paving the way for others to do the same.

"Women are amazing executers and we're also amazing collaborators. If done correctly, franchising is an amazing community of collaboration," says 20-year franchise industry veteran Nancy Bigley, the CEO and co-owner of Bottle & Bottega, an art instruction franchise. "You're coming into a family. That's super attractive to women, who always want to be a part of something bigger."



*Image credit: wonderbranding.com*

While the latest figures on the gender breakdown in franchising are from 2007, they paint a telling picture of the course franchising has taken. In 2007, nearly 21 percent of franchises were owned by women, down 18 percent from 2002, according to a survey by the International Franchise Association. While it may seem like the pool of women in franchising is shrinking, that's not the case. Because the number of franchises co-owned by male and female partners surged 43 percent over the same time, the net result is that the number of franchises with a female owner actually increased to 45 percent from 42 percent over a period of five years.

For many of these women, the franchising community has proven to be one that breeds openness and mentorship.

"I hear people all the time say 'do you mind if I call you and ask you some questions?'" says Bigley. "The response is always 'absolutely.'"

"Because women in general are collaborative and want to create win-win relationships, we make wonderful franchisors," says Stephanie Allen, co-founder of Dream Dinners, a meal-preparation service geared toward busy parents. "But, being a franchisor is completely different than starting and building your own business; you are not in control of your baby."

The openness is, in many ways built into the structure of franchising. While most small-business owners function primarily alone, franchisees are provided with the built-in community of the wider franchising industry as well as other franchisees.

"You're in business for yourself, but not by yourself," says Debbie Blacher, founder of Wholesome Tummies, a franchise that provides children with healthy lunches in schools. Franchisees have the unique opportunity to start a business with access to the experiences of a network of individuals going through remarkably similar processes.

In the case of emerging franchises, relationships between franchisees are especially critical to success. Wholesome Tummies provides franchisees with an online community chat to discuss challenges and successes. Mainstream Boutique, a franchised apparel retailer, encourages franchisees to partner with other successful franchisees, to create a mentorship and model for their own business.

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Many women also saw franchising as uniquely suited for women as it provides control and flexibility.

"The franchise model is appealing to women who are in search of the financial security and flexibility that is becoming increasingly difficult to attain in the corporate world," says Jo Kirchner, CEO of Primrose Schools, an education-focused daycare franchise. "Almost all of our owners say that spending more time with their families and finding a more rewarding career are the driving factors for investing in a childcare franchise."

While running a franchise is time intensive, it allows entrepreneurs to structure their time to fit their needs. "Franchising allowed me to create a system and manage it from my corporate office," says Anna Phillips, founder of eyelash salon franchise The Lash Lounge and mother of two.

Further, franchises allow female entrepreneurs to pursue their passions. Whether franchising preexisting businesses or becoming franchisees, women in franchising reported being drawn first to their product. "You need to look at what you are passionate about, and maybe that is where you first start," says Moran Family of Brands CEO Barbara Moran-Goodrich. Moran Family of Brands runs several franchised auto-related businesses.

Industry veterans report that women are joining the franchise industry increasingly in labors of love. Nancy Bigley, who was a senior director of operations at Dunkin' Brands and regional manager for The Dwyer Group before co-founding Bottle & Bottega, says that she sees women entering franchising by starting businesses in untapped markets. Bigley's own Bottle & Bottega allows individuals of all levels of artistic talent to enjoy a guided painting session and wine. Her business partner Stephanie King-Myers launched the company in 2009 after her own experience teaching a non-artistic friend how to paint while they shared some wine.

Lynn Tomms, a recent Pure Barre studio franchisee, described her and her business partner as "Pure Barre addicts," prior to getting into the franchise. While the company's business structure and franchising formula was critical in Tomms' decision to open her own franchise, the initial draw was her own enjoyment of the Pure Barre workout.

More than anything, women in franchising advise other women not to be limited by stereotypes. "You want to look at all the different options and don't limit yourself because you think, oh that's something for men to do, or that's something that only married people do together," advises Moran-Goodrich, who has mentored women across the industry. "Women know just as much about vehicles as men do. Women have the ability to be empathetic and understanding... and they're less likely to be trying to do everything on their own."