



What to look for when choosing a franchise

If you are running a successful business, the prospect of replicating that success throughout the country, with a team of crack managers at the helm can seem very attractive, but franchising is hard work, and lots of planning is required to ensure it is a success.

If you are keen to be your own boss, but would prefer not to start from scratch, buying a franchise could be an option for you.

When you take on a franchise, you buy a right to trade under the banner of an already established brand, and benefit from tried and tested business processes in place that help you trade successfully.

If you are considering buying a franchise, you'll probably find yourself tempted from all sides with promises of impressive profit margins, but a good franchise offering is about more than just the bottom line.

Here's a rundown of some of the key features to look for when making your choice.

Make your investment count

Franchises usually require a considerable cash investment to get started. You're not just buying the right to trade under that name; you're buying the reputation that comes with it.

But that doesn't mean that you shouldn't expect to receive help with the hard materials required to do the job.

If you are buying a franchise in the service industries, such as a personal assistant business or telephone answering service, the minimum you should expect to receive is a guide to running your business, plus stationery such as business cards and headed paper to allow you to effectively promote your new business.

A good franchise offering will also provide you with the equipment core to your business, such as a headset, laptop, printer and any essential software. This can add up to a rather expensive outlay if you have to purchase these items yourself, so a franchise that includes them in the package will often prove better value.



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Make yourself known

When you're ready to start trading, a good franchise provider should be there to help you get off the ground.

To do this, you will need to establish a presence both on and offline. The franchise provider might be able to offer you a page on their central website, or you may even be given a branded website specific to your franchise, with the ability to customise content.

Generally, the more you make your own branch stand out, the better.

The level of marketing and PR effort a franchise provider will give also varies widely from brand to brand. At one end of the scale, you may be provided with little more than a brand name; at the other, there are brands that conduct a full PR and marketing campaign in your region to help launch your franchise.

Again, the key is to ask questions and work out what they are offering and how it will work for you before signing on the dotted line.

Some franchisors will also offer a database of contacts and/or leads in your area that may be interested in your offering. This gives you starting point for your first few phone calls as you start to drum up business in your own right.

If a franchise provider isn't offering promotional help, you should think carefully about the man-hours and costs involved in doing it yourself, and remember to factor this in when comparing one offering against another.

Know what you're doing

Of course, it's no good being presented with a flashy website and a hamper of computer equipment and shiny business cards if you don't know what you're doing.

A good franchise offering should provide you with a clear and extensive manual that covers every aspect of your business. It shouldn't be down to guesswork and all the materials should be in place to allow you to feel absolutely confident about running the business by yourself.

There may even be an option to attend a short training course to learn more about running your franchise, which can provide a good grounding and a welcome confidence boost, especially if you are entering a specialist field for the first time.

Make sure support is ongoing

If you are running a franchise, you should feel part of a much bigger team not a loan venture. If you ever get the sense on your hunt for a franchise that all the attention you're receiving will vanish as soon as you hand over your cheque, it may be time to look elsewhere.

A good franchisor should offer ongoing support, ideally in the form of a named account manager who you can call direct whenever you have a question or problem.

You should also ask about their policy of taking feedback on board from franchisees. If you are valued as part of the team, there should be a system in place for franchisees to feed their experiences back to head office to aid the continued development of the main brand.

Be realistic

Finally, whatever your choice, remember that buying a new franchise isn't a ticket to instant success. While you will indeed benefit from some or all of the features listed above, a franchise is still a business like any other, requiring passion, hard work and dedication to make it a success.