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FEATURE

A GUIDE TO
PURPOSE-DRIVEN
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ACCOMPLISHING A HOME CARE BRAND'S GROWTH GOALS

Most franchises, regardless of industry, quickly come up against the challenge of meeting annual expansion goals while also maintaining a brand's value proposition—as seen by both existing franchisees and customers.

These dual goals can create friction between growth and ongoing operations, especially when a franchise organization's infrastructure is not fully built out with talented professionals on both sides of the business. You run the risk of depleting the quality of the brand if you focus too much on one side at the expense of the other.

The home care industry is no different – as a home care franchisor, we must protect the equity we have built in our business as trusted providers of caregiving services, yet also be fully invested in our franchise development. In fact, to reach our franchise expansion goals it is crucial

we achieve excellence on both sides of the business.

As a home care company with nearly four decades of experience behind us, we, like many others in our sector, are in a unique position to blend our growth with the benefits of our operations. Businesses like ours have an incredibly strong emotional appeal; franchisees can enter the business of care and make meaningful differences in the lives of others. Additionally, demand for home care will only continue to rise—more than 75 percent of the roughly 10,000 people who will turn 65 each day want to age at home.

So, how do we distinguish ourselves from other franchisors trying to leverage the same aspects of the home care industry to grow their companies with qualified franchisees? The key lies in finding the balance between brand differentiation and franchisee support that facilitates growth system wide—tools that can be applied to brands across the franchise industry.

Identify what sets your brand apart

Above all, a home care brand needs to prove that its value proposition is a better fit for a prospective franchisee's business aspirations than all the other franchise opportunities out there.

Value to franchisees is determined by how well franchise brands administer training programs, personal development opportunities and annual franchisee conventions. Although nearly every home care franchise offers a similar stable of at least rudimentary supportive benefits meant to ease a franchisee's entrance into the system and to cultivate their experience going forward, an interested franchisee is looking at what makes your franchising experience unique, and hopefully better, than the competition.

It's not about finding a secret, previously undiscovered method of franchising home care services. Prospective franchisees are technical, and they are looking for the details that set a brand apart from the competitors. This means a brand is best served by taking a thorough assessment of its existing care standards, franchisee support systems and other benefits and quantifying just how much they distinguish a home care franchise from all the rest.

I recommend home care franchises emphasize differentiators such as promoting decades of brand equity, creating upper-tier quality metrics and implementing annual improvements of franchisee support methods. Robust processes and systems at the franchisor level can make it easier to reinforce these differentiators and utilize them as tools for growth on a local level. If you can show a prospective franchisee that he or she is investing in a business opportunity

with measurable benefits, your home care franchise will already be setting itself apart from other concepts that are not as strategic in their messaging and execution efforts.

Think local, grow national

The key to franchise growth for a national home care brand may seem counterintuitive: think local. There should ideally be little to no national sales drivers, or national advertising efforts. Instead, a system modified to support referrals and targeted lead generation on a smaller scale can pay off in meaningful, long-term franchise development.

A local model recognizes that every market is different and every franchisee has their own unique set of strengths, providing the flexibility for a franchisor to more precisely target potential franchisees that are the best fit for a specific market. With a more locally focused growth model, a corporate team can work directly with a prospective franchisee and walk through the opportunities that particular owner has in their market. That same staff can then help a new franchisee execute his or her plan to get their business off the ground with a strategy put in place for ongoing success.

Make existing franchisees strategic partners in growth

As any growing home care franchisor knows, often the best validation for a brand is its existing network of franchisees. Sustained growth results from a franchisor prioritizing the needs of a franchisee throughout the life-cycle of his or her business—from when an individual is only a soft lead all the way a franchisee making a succession plan for retirement to pass on the business to a family member. Rather than getting lost in the numbers of percentage sales and increases, a calculated commitment to franchisee support can make franchisees true partners in growth for a franchisor.

Home care companies create those partnerships through support teams that are separate from franchise development specialists. A true support team is primarily focused on supporting an existing franchisee or location, not



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on exclusively developing franchise opportunities. Establishing support systems such as peer groups allow existing owners to share best practices and wisdom with a group of franchisees that have similar challenges and different expertise. It also shows the corporate support center is committed to providing the best tools and processes to strengthen its franchisees' businesses.

Franchisee support in turn endorses the franchise opportunity being offered by the franchisor. Validating a franchise opportunity with existing franchisees is a well-known component of the development process for many prospective entrepreneurs. So when an existing franchisee can confidently say a home office is dedicated to supporting their business, he or she may convince a prospective owner better than any other franchise development tool in a franchisor's arsenal.

With a strong growth strategy that emphasizes brand differentiators and is rooted locally, a home care company will unquestionably have the ability to facilitate its expansion. Meanwhile, by prioritizing franchisee support on a local level, existing franchisees will support new growth with powerful brand validation.

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www.franchise.org/homewatch-caregivers-franchise

THREE WAYS HOME CARE FRANCHISES CAN IMPROVE INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALISM, STANDARDS AND SERVICES THROUGH ADVOCACY

All home care companies have a vital role to play in shaping policies and standards of the broader industry.

Each home care brand can be instrumental in establishing best practices that raise the industry to new heights to increase the professionalism and quality of care of all



Leann Reynolds

providers, but only if the home care brands make advocacy a priority at an industry level. This includes home care company executives taking a more active role in representing the entire industry with their expertise and principles to more clearly define industry-wide standards.

From caregivers who visit clients' homes and the support staff that keeps local offices running, to the franchise owner who provides services and the corporate team on the brand level, professional private duty home care franchises have a responsibility to provide care that is high quality, affordable and professionally delivered.

Professionalize caregivers with education and training

Caregivers are in a unique position to provide extraordinary care that can truly make all the difference for aging or ailing clients and their families. In order to provide that professional level of care, many home care brands have come to rely on training and extensive education for caregivers. Companies who employ caregivers directly often reimburse employees for those training and education expenses, and oversee training schedules to ensure staff are current on all training requirements.

Related to education and training, the impact of home care advocacy is clearly illustrated by the industry discussion around the strengths of the employer-based model. Many home care franchises believe in a business model where senior care is provided by caregivers who are employed directly by the franchise owner, rather than by registries of privately contracted caregivers. When franchise locations employ caregivers directly, they provide oversight and supervision. This training and education allows franchisees to better protect both their employees and their clients because their staff is trained regularly on relevant topics related to the care they are providing.

Helping clients to understand the difference between the two models is important because it can be a significant deciding factor when choosing between multiple home care providers. By advocating for more transparency when disclosing hiring and training processes, home care companies are able to provide potential clients with a clearer understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of both contracted and directly employed caregivers. A more informed decision can lead to increased client satisfaction.

Use standards of care as a tool to keep step with the broader industry

Thanks to the growing advocacy of a larger group of home care companies than ever before, there are broader standards of care available in the industry that have gone a long way in strengthening the services delivered by all providers. There are many tools available, like improved training and education technology, background checks and rigid hiring requirements, and quality assurance processes. Plus, the best part of being involved in advocacy in the home care industry is seeing more companies recognize the market demand for high quality care. More companies are working together to pool resources and make sure as many providers as possible are adhering to the same care standards, making those important tools even more accessible and mainstream for local franchise owners.

Franchisors are also in a position to take advantage of these advances in industry care standards. Both franchisees and their clients benefit from incorporating these industry tools and standards into daily operations.

Become an involved voice in the industry

Once training and standards of care have been established, the next step as a franchisor is to act as a unifying voice in the industry. Home care company executives must realize their roles as advocates on behalf of franchise owners, and even as a group of competitors; it would be great to see brands come forward and advocate for their owners, who are busy serving their communities and don't always have the ability to advocate at the federal or state level for national policies or practices. However, franchisors can encourage local owners to advocate on a grassroots community level, and educate their friends and neighbors on what home care is and why it's important.

In the end, the futures of all home care companies are linked. It's essential for everyone to have a good reputation, through caregivers and the services each



“Home care providers, especially franchisors, should be active participants in the advocacy conversation, because of the often-vulnerable populations that are served and for the caregivers that are employed.”

brand provides, because one bad seed can harm the reputation of the entire industry. Home care providers, especially franchisors, should be active participants in the advocacy conversation, because of the often-vulnerable populations that are served and for the caregivers that are employed. Home care services improve the lives of thousands of people in need each day and it's the industry's responsibility to advance these.

Leann Reynolds was promoted to CEO at Homewatch CareGivers in March 2016 after serving as president for almost 10 years. She is responsible for the strategic direction of the company, and acts as an advocate for the employee-based home care model. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Home Care Association of America.

www.homewatchcaregivers.com