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FRANCHISE PLAYERS

Franchise Players: I Grew My Business Through Co-Branding



Richard Helme was in the printing business long before he was a FASTSIGNS franchise partner. After more than a decade of owning a printing company, Helme took advantage of a co-branding program with FASTSIGNS to expand his business. Here's what co-branding has meant for Helme as an entrepreneur and franchisee.

Name: Richard Helme

Franchise owned (location): FASTSIGNS in Houston (Midtown South)

How long have you owned the franchise?

We have been FASTSIGNS franchise partners for over half a year.

Why franchising?

We took advantage of a special co-brand program that FASTSIGNS offers to independent printing companies. While we had been in the wide-format business for some time, we felt that there was a greater opportunity that we were missing out on. We evaluated expanding the product line internally, but felt that we would need help to be effective in both production and marketing. Since the co-brand

program allowed us to separate the businesses for royalty purposes while providing access to the resources and tools we needed to really build this space, it was a natural decision to add the powerful branding of FASTSIGNS to drive incremental gross profit.

What were you doing before you became a franchise owner?

I have owned a printing company that has been operating on college campuses in the Houston area for over 10 years. Prior, I was a senior executive in the Coca-Cola Companies juice division.

Why did you choose this particular franchise?

Superior branding and franchisee support as well as a great synergy with our existing printing business.

How much would you estimate you spent before you were officially open for business?

Because we were adding the FASTSIGNS franchise location to our current printing location, the cost of entry was very affordable. Altogether, we spent about \$85,000 to purchase the franchise, necessary equipment and complete the build-out at our existing location.

Where did you get most of your advice/do most of your research?

I completed the research on my own.

What were the most unexpected challenges of opening your franchise?

Integrating the systems and processes into our current business. While very similar, there were also some key differences that we needed to focus on. For instance, FASTSIGNS utilizes their own business management or point of sale (POS) system to run their stores. We had a similar system for our printing and postal businesses, so this meant introducing a third system into the operation. However, this was primarily a training issue.

What advice do you have for individuals who want to own their own franchise?

Our venture through the co-brand program was almost like a conversion. Also, if you're new to the field and are opening a new center, a background in business or marketing would be beneficial. I have spoken with prospective FASTSIGNS franchisees over the past few months and it seems like those with a marketing background understood the issues related to a business' success better than others.

What's next for you and your business?

We feel like we have a business base that we can build on. By using outside sales, we plan on attacking client verticals that are the best opportunity for growth. The printing and sign businesses have a lot of synergy and we are optimistic about using one product line to support the other.

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