

Entrepreneur®

JUNE 2014

FRANCHISEE



Seeing dollar signs

A franchise co-branding program spells growth for an indie print shop

In 2007 Donna Booth was working as a CPA in Seymour, Ind., when one of her more successful clients decided he wanted to cash out of his printing business and retire. Thinking it would be a great mid-career change, Booth bought Prestige Printing on the stipulation that the former owner stick around and train her. He didn't. Then the Great Recession hit, and the lucrative offset-printing portion of Booth's new business took a dive. It was about as inauspicious a beginning as she could have, but Booth soldiered on.

"About two years into it, we were still looking for alternatives to replace that revenue," she says. "We tried everything—making more detailed marketing pieces, printing shirts, but none of them were substantial enough to replace what we had lost."

It was at a trade show that she met representatives of Fastsigns International. They helped her determine which type of large-format printing equipment to purchase so she could get into the sign business. Soon

The poster child for co-branding: Donna Booth of Prestige Printing and Fastsigns International.

after, Booth became one of the first participants in the Fastsigns co-branding program, adding the franchise to her independent printing business last May. Now she's drawing more customers than ever before.

We sat down with Booth to find out what it's like to be an independent and a franchisee at the same time.

—Jason Daley

YOU ALREADY HAD A PRINTING BUSINESS. WHY NOT JUST DO SIGNS YOURSELF?

People always ask, why would you want to be a franchisee and pay royalties when you could do it on your own? With Fastsigns' support, I'm able to jump into areas I wouldn't have, like channel letters, which have a lot of risk and hefty expenses. Fastsigns' [reps] will talk with my customers on the phone to make sure the order is right, then they will consult with me to make sure we're on the same page. The other factor that really excited me was that, as a small-business owner, I'm doing everything from marketing to taxes to production. There are only so many hours in the day. They really help with marketing, and I don't have to do all the research from scratch when it comes to things like looking for new equipment.

WERE THERE ANY UNANTICIPATED ADVANTAGES TO CO-BRANDING?

Definitely. Because we already have skilled graphic designers on our printing side, we're able to offer more creativity than your typical sign shop, which was something I didn't realize in advance. Also, our clients get a lot more excited about signs than they do printed material. Once the marketing directors that use us get so much positive feedback from their superiors for their signs, their wheels start cranking, and they come in with more projects. The other interesting thing is that morale in the business went up considerably with the opening of Fastsigns. It's fun to see how creative everyone's minds are, and it's great to see people chip in and find a renewed energy for their jobs.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT CROSS-SELLING SIGNS TO EXISTING CLIENTS?

We put the branding of both our businesses on all of our invoices and envelopes, and made phone calls to our customers. But it takes people a while to process what we can do. They call up and say, "Can you print a banner?"—which is so simple for us. Once they utilize us and see what we can do, we become top of mind for them. It's a very rare occasion when we're asked to do something we can't, and even then we find a way to do it or find someone who can. Small to midsize companies get really excited. We open up a lot of new opportunities for them.

WHICH HAT DO YOU WEAR BETTER—BUSINESS OWNER OR FRANCHISEE?

I like the franchise end of things. I came from a corporate job, and I was really frustrated with the lack of training when I went off on my own. When I purchased my business seven years ago, I would have given my right arm to have the support of a franchise.