

LearningZen Supports the Best Franchises in the Nation

by LearningZen Marketing | Feb 5, 2020 | Franchise, Online Training | 0 comments



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LearningZen Works with the Best Franchises in the Nation

The ability to build and maintain consistency across a brand can make or break a franchise. Franchises that learn how to do it right grow exponentially and dominate their segment of the market. Unfortunately, when franchises are spread out across the country and operated by franchisees with varying leadership styles and personalities, maintaining that brand consistency can become a major challenge.

Doug Mark, president of LearningZen, has worked with more than 100 franchises over the years, and he has found that there is one thing that helps determine the success of a franchise — their training program.

In an article [published by Forbes last summer](#), it laid out the best franchises to buy in the U.S. The top franchises, Freddy's Frozen Custards & Steakburgers (No. 1) and Christian Brothers Automotive (No. 2), have both developed and implemented comprehensive training programs across their franchise locations. Their powerful training programs were both developed with the help of LearningZen. The top franchise list was based off of the franchises that provide the best opportunities for investors.

Freddy's has more than 340 locations, and the franchisor generated \$474.7 million in system-wide sales in 2018. It has partnered with LearningZen for seven years. Likewise, Christian Brothers Automotive has worked with LearningZen for eight years before recently parting ways, as its current inventory management system now includes the automotive-specific training they need.

Mr. Mark said that a robust training program was critical for franchises because it helped maintain brand consistency, brand awareness and brand protection across all units. Franchisors own the brand and needed to protect it, and consistent training helped ensure the same concepts, procedures, and brand values were taught at all locations.

"A learning management system gives you the ability to duplicate your training efforts across a dispersed community," Doug said.

LearningZen has partnered with franchises for the last decade to help them "duplicate their training efforts."

The Impact of Training on a Franchise

Doug Mark said one of the reasons consumers choose to visit franchises over other businesses is because of the franchise's reputation. Consumers have expectations for that franchise, and they trust that those expectations will be met. When one franchise location is not in line with the entire brand, Mr. Mark said the effects can be damaging.

"If there is a unit you have that is not performing up to your brand standards, that unfortunately reflects poorly on the entire brand," Doug said.

With the proliferation of social media, franchisees that aren't performing well can truly tarnish a franchisor's overall brand. A single negative Tweet about one franchise location can be shared thousands of times in minutes, spreading a negative, harmful perception of the entire brand and all other franchise locations. Negative reviews on Google and Yelp can also cast a negative light on the brand, dissuading consumers from purchasing from the brand.

Negative reviews also impact the selling potential of the franchise brand. Small businesses who are looking to purchase a new franchise pay attention to negative reviews. Mr. Mark said franchises can either get "hammered" or "praised" on social media.

Doug Mark said that in order to combat the threat of a negative reputation, franchises need to put work into training their frontline staff. A strong training program that is clear and easy to understand can improve the quality of service, the customer experience, and the entire franchisor's brand.

Freddy's Frozen Custard & Steakburgers has placed a large emphasis on training its employees, and Doug Mark believes that there is a correlation between its strong training program and the success of its franchises.

One of the LearningZen recommended strategies that brands like Freddy's has implemented is to create short explainer videos that show and tell employees exactly what they need to know. After the video concludes, employees are quizzed to test their knowledge.

When franchisees or their employees have questions, they don't have to call corporate and wait for a response. They can simply open the learning management system and find the answer. They can rewatch a video and see things being done the right way in minutes, problem solved.

"Any franchisee that opens up with Freddy's has got a world-class training program that can answer almost any of their questions. I do think this highly contributes to their success," Mr. Mark said.

For that reason, Doug Mark said that he wasn't surprised to see Freddy's and Christian Brothers Automotive at the top of the list.

"Both Freddy's and Christian Brothers Automotive put a very high price tag on the value of training," Doug said. "There is no doubt in my mind that the reason why these brands are successful is because of the training they provide their franchisees."

He said these companies' messages and missions are clear to all employees, and they enforce that their franchisees to go through all of the online courses.

Other franchise brands that Doug Mark said are doing a good job at training are Aroma Joe's Coffee, Hokulia Shave Ice, and the Global Franchise Group (owner of Round Table Pizza, Maggie Moo's Ice Cream, and Hot Dog on a Stick, among other brands). He said these brands pay attention to detail, and they provide all the support franchisees need to succeed.

What he finds in common with all of these brands is that they understand the value of the customer experience, and that leads to a greater emphasis on training.

Mr. Mark said he has noticed that franchisees often want to follow a set of rules, but they don't have the tools they need. Brands that give proper support to their franchisees are truly able to grow their brand effectively.

Benefits of a Learning Management System for Franchisees

Franchises are attractive to those hoping to start a business because there is less of a risk in opening a franchise location. Franchisees invest in a proven system and recognizable brand that is already in place, rather than starting from scratch.

Franchisors with a strong support system are particularly attractive to franchisees, and a training program should be included in that support system. The franchisee is more comfortable with the purchase if they know that a comprehensive, well-developed training material is part of the support they will receive.

A full training program includes training for the franchisees themselves. Many franchises invite franchisees to visit the corporate office for a few weeks, and then the franchisee never sees the franchisors again, Mr. Mark said. Instead, he recommends bringing franchisees to an in-person training and then following up with an online program that they can watch to review information.

Those looking to purchase a franchise also want a fully built-out training program for their employees. They don't want to spend the time wondering how to onboard new employees or having to create their own training program.

"The notion of online training allows you to put your unique training message into every franchisee. That way, you are going to get greater consistency across the board," Doug said.

A learning management system is also beneficial because it allows franchisees to produce training courses quickly. This comes in handy when franchises want to promote limited time offers.

A traditional training course takes between 200 and 400 hours to develop. With a LMS, franchises can create an online training course in a couple of days. Limited-time offers are inherently time-sensitive, and therefore require time-sensitive training.

Training courses within an LMS can be made and distributed with ease, so that employees at all franchise locations can be uniform in promoting the limited time offers.

What Franchises Can Do to Improve Their Training

When creating a training program, there are some steps businesses can follow. The steps are:

First, perform an analysis on the current training.

Businesses should take stock of the type of training that is currently in place and identify which strategies have been effective and those that are ineffective.

Second, reflect on their employee audience.

Research your employees' average age, education level, and other demographic information. Use this information to craft training programs for your unique audience. "When you deliver training material, you need to think about the audience more than the actual course itself. Who is going to be absorbing this, how do they learn, and how can I best prepare them?" Mr. Mark said.

Franchisees usually hire a younger audience, between ages 16 to 25. Doug Mark said that the Gen. Z and young Millennials expect training to be available online and in bite-sized chunks, and franchises should take that into account when creating training materials.

Third, start filming.

Many businesses are paralyzed because they believe that the filming quality has to be perfect in order for training videos to be effective, Doug Mark said. But many people — particularly teenagers and young adults — are used to learning from selfie videos on YouTube with poor production values. "Businesses should not get hung up on being perfect," Mr. Mark said.

He suggests that businesses should take risks and just get started. All they need is a smart phone, a tripod, and a set of lights in order to create a top-quality training video. Watching videos, he said, has a 65% higher retention rate compared to reading text. Videos are effective and not difficult to make.

With that said, Doug advises franchises to not ditch the in-person training. The back-and-forth benefits of face-to-face training cannot be completely recreated by online training. A learning management system should augment in-person training rather than replace it.

Fourth, measure the information.

If retention is not measured, you will not know for sure how effective your training is. Mr. Mark advises franchises to utilize a quiz or other method to determine whether or not employees are retaining the information properly. Franchises can also measure the sales and training numbers of different locations, then compare them to see which training methods are most effective. Franchisors can then adjust the training to ensure employees are learning.

Businesses should also keep this in mind when establishing a training program. The cost of a franchisor's learning management system can be passed onto the franchisee. Then, the franchisor can use its funds to create great content, and the franchisee can pay for access to the LMS. Since franchisors renew their Franchise Disclosure Document (FDD) each year, it can include the costs of the training program in Line Item 6.

LearningZen's Focus on Franchises

Doug Mark said that LearningZen has focused on serving franchises for the past decade. In order to build up its industry knowledge in franchising, it started hiring people who have worked in the franchise industry.

The industry knowledge includes legal requirements and policies built into the LMS, such as the joint employer law. This law restricts the reach that a franchisor has on its franchisee's hires, essentially stating that franchisors are not allowed to directly interact with the employees of a franchisee.

LearningZen's learning management systems takes this and other laws into account in its product, which means training is always compliant with current regulations in place.

LearningZen also provides knowledge and expertise about learning trends. It offers innovative training products, such as video game learning, and consults brands on which training styles they should be using. Over the last decade, LearningZen has helped older franchise brands stay relevant, and new franchise brands grow sustainably. Contact one of the training experts at LearningZen today to learn more about how they can help your franchise training programs.

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