

## How to Find Your Franchise Fit



The secrets to franchise SUCCESS may be read between the lines.

### Break Off a Little Piece of a Business for Yourself

franchisees say three straightforward steps can narrow the field: identifying your passion, getting to know people in the system and carefully reviewing disclosure documents.

The stress and long hours of being a manager in American Airlines' corporate benefits strategy group made Walden step off the corporate ladder after her first child was born. Now after spending five years as a stay-at-home mom, she runs a 10 til 2 franchise to help others find part-time, long-term jobs. "I'm passionate about people having work-life balance," she says. "I'm passionate about giving employees the flexibility that produces good work." The excitement and meaning she finds in her work makes the hours of candidate recruitment and screening, client relations and administrative tasks fly by.

In addition to connecting with a franchise's concept, it's also important to get to know the franchise founders, corporate executives and other franchisees well. Barbara Elliott got the inside scoop on Interiors by Decorating Den from her sister who was working in the franchise in another city. Elliott opened her Atlanta unit of the franchise in 1997 and still appreciates "being able to have partners we can communicate with on a daily basis if we need help and having a network of people we can rely on that help to broaden our experience and knowledge considerably."

Amy Cheng, an attorney with Cheng Cohen LLC and co-chair of the Chicago chapter of the International Franchise Association's Women's Franchise Network, says carefully reading disclosure documents also is crucial. "Most franchisees who don't succeed

didn't fully understand the requirements," Cheng says. "I find a lot of people who are willing to spend \$200,000 to \$300,000 to buy something that is governed by a document they've never read."

Disclosure documents, which are mandated by the government, devote hundreds of pages to detailed descriptions of the franchise's history, ownership and costs. The documents include contact information for current and former franchisees and details on related litigation and bankruptcies. A third of franchisors even disclose how much revenue the system's franchisees have earned, Cheng says. The secrets to franchise success may be read between the lines of these treasure troves of information. ♥

*Maya Payne Smart covers business and education from her sunny perch in Florida.*

by maya payne smart

**T**he word "franchise" often conjures up images of major chain restaurants with start-up costs exceeding a million dollars and training programs that rival the military in their intensity and duration. But many women are finding their niches in less expensive franchises—from day spas to interior design firms—that allow them to go into business for themselves but not by themselves. Franchising is a form of business that gives owners the benefit of an estab-

lished company's trademarks and business systems for a fee. It often provides an easier, less risky and more affordable path to business success.

"They give you a leg up in that you get to hear how they did it and what worked for them," says Ramona Walden, owner of a 10 til 2 part-time placement services franchise in Dallas.

Franchise start-up costs range from \$1,000 for some commercial cleaning businesses to millions for luxury hotels. In between, there are thousands of franchise options to consider. But women

