

Ask Candee

Your Personal Consultant: Candee Wilde answers questions about the franchise business

Q How can I find a promising franchise opportunity?

One of the most successful entrepreneurs I have ever known had an interesting habit: he constantly observed the world around him. Wherever he was—in a shopping mall, at an airport or driving down the street, he was paying attention to people and what they did, wore, ate, and bought.

He applied these observations to every business decision he made.

I adopted his sharp-eyed style as I went about my business recently and two things jumped out at me. First, I saw lots of ‘older’ Americans in the crowds. Second, an amazing number of people were using or carrying wireless devices.

Franchise concepts involving senior citizens or the wireless communications industry seem to show potential now.

I found out that the fastest growing age group in the United States is those over 85. Plus, the Labor Department says that 54% of our work force soon will have jobs that involve caring for an older person.

Growth statistics in the wireless industry are equally compelling. One industry study projects that by 2010 nearly 95% of the U.S. population will have a cell phone. As emerging wireless capabilities, such as texting, Web surfing, photography, music and games, keep gaining popularity, consumers will upgrade to devices that can utilize them.

Let’s zoom in on one franchise opportunity that stands out in each of these sectors: Seniors Helping Seniors, an 11-year-old in-home care business based in Reading, PA, and Wireless Zone, a retail-store chain that sells Verizon Wireless equipment and services. (East Coast readers might remember its predecessor, The Car Phone Store, Wethersfield, PA, launched in 1988).

Seniors Helping Seniors (SHS) was founded by the husband-wife team of Philip and Kiran Yocum. Ms. Yocum, chairwoman of the 65-location national chain, developed her commitment to helping others during the 14 years she worked with Mother Theresa in India.

Acting on this vow in the U.S., Ms. Yocum created the foundation of SHS: a non-profit organization that matched more active senior citizens with seniors who needed non-medical assistance in their homes.

The organization has grown quickly since becoming a for-profit franchise system in 2006—more than doubling in size over the past year, according to Philip Yocum, president and chief executive officer.

“Last quarter was our best,” Mr. Yocum says. “Part of our success has to be attributed to the market we serve—seniors is one of the best.”

But the market is not their fundamental strength. “That is the compassionate way we do business.

“We see ourselves creating a paradigm shift in business. We are proving that one can ‘do good’ and make money at the same time,” he says. “This business is one of the few opportunities in life where one makes money in direct proportion to how loving and compassionate one is.”

As the population of elder Americans increases, the future looks bright for SHS. And as SHS grows, franchisees will continue to receive extensive sales, marketing, and management support, says Mr. Yocum, who has some 25 years’ experience in the franchise industry.

On the surface, SHS and Wireless Zone don’t appear to have much in common. But looks can be deceiving. Not only are both franchise opportunities serving growing markets, both are steadfast in their pledge to create a tight-knit, familial and successful franchise community, which, in turn, will learn to meet the unique needs of their individual customers.

“The corporate culture here is amazing,” says Kevin Downs, director of marketing. Turnover at Wireless Zone, which received its new name in 1999, is virtually non-existent. “Our first franchisee is still with us and so is the first employee the company ever had.”

For the franchisee, this stability translates into continuity in the support they receive. Wireless Zone’s fundamental goal is to teach its franchisees how to help improve their customers’ lives by matching their requests with the new technologies Verizon Wireless creates.

“This is where the culture of warmth and caring comes from—we are more of a solutions business than a technology business,” Mr. Downs says.

The approach is working: some stores are still serving customers who bought their first car phone from Wireless Zone more than 20 years ago.

Currently Wireless Zone locations are concentrated along the East Coast. That is changing.

“We are carefully moving westward,” Mr. Downs explains. When Wireless Zone considers a new partner, they seek service- and people-oriented people. They value a “passion to own a business” over finances or previous experience.

With a “staggering” number of people showing interest in Wireless Zone, the franchisor expects to add 100 locations this year, bringing the total store count to about 400.

CANDEE’S PICKS

Leading Franchise Opportunities in Expanding Markets

Cartridge World	www.cartridgeworld.com
Country Place Living	www.countryplaceliving.com
Cybertary.com	www.cybertary.com
FasTracKids International Ltd.	www.fastrackkids.com
Home Health Mates	www.homehealthmates.com
Huntington Learning Center	www.huntingtonlearningcenter.com
Ident-A-Kid	www.identakid.com
Seniors Helping Seniors	www.seniorshelpingseniors.com
SightMind, Inc.	www.sightmind.com
Wireless Zone	www.wirelesszone.com

To contact Candee, or to learn more about franchising opportunities, please visit the inc.com home page and look for “Franchise Inc.”