

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR FRANCHISE OPTIONS AND HIT THE ROAD TO Success



Two former corporate executives share their experiences about evaluating and investing in a franchise system – and they outline some lessons that have helped them flourish.

A lot has to go right for a franchise business to succeed. The right industry. The right time. The right city. The right people.

In Australia, where franchising is omnipresent, choosing a target market can be a make-or-break exercise for potential franchisees. Silvio Del Vecchio understands the gravity of the decision and can rest easily in the knowledge that he got it right.

As franchise owner of Laser Clinics Australia clinics at Erina Fair on the

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Central Coast and Charlestown Square in Newcastle, the former Macquarie Bank executive runs two thriving businesses after opting to “hop off the hamster wheel” of corporate life. Rigour in assessing his options five years ago is now paying dividends, and he recalls that a brief wish-list steered his mind. Although he was prepared to work hard, he wanted freedom, flexibility and, most of all, to work in a sector that continually stimulated his business instincts.

Del Vecchio is achieving those goals with Laser Clinics Australia, a franchise that since its launch in 2008 has grown into a 50 plus clinic operation that made the BRW Fast 100 list in 2014, and placed 1st in the BRW Fast Franchise 2013 rankings.

“I love having my own business and feeling like I am in control of my own destiny,” Del Vecchio says. “I work harder today than I’ve ever worked and I love to challenge my own boundaries – to keep testing new ideas, to keep learning, to keep growing as a person.”

Del Vecchio says the experience of running his first clinic at Erina Fair, which opened in 2011, has been instrumental in an even smoother ride for the Charlestown Square clinic, which opened a year later.

“There were a fair few mistakes made the first time, which of course we learned from and didn’t make the second time around.”

Those lessons include fine-tuning the recruitment process and allocating more of the budget for extra staff – a relatively modest expense that has driven superior customer service and repeat business.

“As with any new business to some extent I was counting my pennies,” Del Vecchio says. “I learnt that having an extra staff member actually adds to your bottom line because it frees their time up to spend more time with customers, which in turn makes people feel comfortable to make purchases.”

For wannabe franchisees considering their options, Del Vecchio advises choosing a franchisor such as Laser Clinics Australia that has robust systems and processes in place to assist with the big business issues such as recruitment, training, human resources, technology and marketing.

“It gave us a huge springboard into the efficient operation of the clinics,” Del Vecchio says.

Go for growth

During the past seven years, Laser Clinics Australia has tapped into the booming demand in Australia for its three key service areas: laser hair removal, cosmetic injections and skin treatments.

The provision of affordable, accessible and results driven cosmetic treatments has generated significant interest from a diverse range of franchisees – from corporate executives wanting to make a career switch to couples and individuals seeking to run their own small business with the backing of a proven franchisor.

In upmarket Neutral Bay in northern Sydney, new Laser Clinics Australia franchise owner Micky Bittoun is relishing the day-to-day challenge of running a small business after opening her clinic in late August. Following a 20-year corporate career spanning executive roles with IBM, 3 and Apple, she brings a wealth of business experience to the clinic. In determining which sector to pursue, Bittoun narrowed her choice down to two preferred areas: technology led aesthetics and childcare. She also insisted on joining a business with a strong brand and track record.

“It’s incredibly important for me to be with a brand leader,” Bittoun says. “I’ve always worked for companies that have had a huge market presence.”

Finally, she wanted to enter an industry that focuses on service, not products, after being involved in stock management at Apple for high-profile products such as the iPad and iPhone.

“I was keen on a service-based business, one that I could scale up and down as I needed,” she says. “I then looked at areas that I knew would be in high demand and I started basically calling different franchises that fitted the categories I was interested in.”

By setting clear parameters, it made Bittoun’s final choice easier. She adds that it is critical for both the potential franchisee and franchisor to put each other through a rigorous assessment process. For her, that meant ensuring Laser Clinics Australia could provide the requisite back-office support, in addition to best-practice in-clinic products and services.

“I have found all of that incredibly valuable and it’s made life so much easier.”

Just as significantly, according to Bittoun, Laser Clinics Australia put her “through



Silvio Del Vecchio



Micky Bittoun

the wringer” with an intensive application process that put the onus on her to check out competitors, present best-case and worst-case financial scenarios and outline possible marketing plans. With her clinic performing well, she can now reflect on the importance of that process.

“It wasn’t just about signing the paperwork and then opening a clinic,” she says. “If all the other owners are going through the same process, I have faith that the brand will stay strong.”

Cut the clutter

Courtesy of his NSW clinics, Del Vecchio has years of experience in the Laser Clinics Australia fold. One of the key lessons he

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has learned – and which he advises other franchisees to take on board, regardless of the sector – is to concentrate on what is important, and what is not, for business success.

“For me, it’s about reducing the clutter and focusing on the key things that drive business success – look after your staff, look after your customers and look after yourself.”

The latter is crucial given that life as a franchisee is incredibly busy.

“This business is seven days a week... You need to build in rest and recovery because without that rest and recovery you do burn out.”

Building the right culture is also important, not only within the clinic but also more broadly throughout Laser Clinics Australia’s operations, according to Del Vecchio.

“As franchisees across different parts of the country we embody the culture of Laser Clinics Australia the corporation, but at the same time we also create and foster our own culture at a local level,” he says.

“For me, it’s one of care and love and family and looking after each other.”

Enjoy the rewards

As she welcomes a steady flow of customers into her Neutral Bay clinic, Bittoun can vouch for the value of nine months’ of due diligence and business planning that went into her decision to join Laser Clinics Australia.

While the commitment is significant in terms of up-front investment and hours on the job, the mother-of-two appreciates the work-life balance that running her own business offers. She now has the ability to better manage work and a vast array of family duties such as getting her children to soccer on time.

“I wanted a bit of flexibility with the hours I work, but also I was a bit over making other people a lot of money and wanted to make some money for myself for a change – and

it’s absolutely possible to do that with Laser Clinics Australia.”

Bittoun is enjoying the chance to use her considerable business skills and interact with her team and customers.

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For Del Vecchio, his background in the financial services sector meant he was well-equipped to ask the right questions and calculate the risks and returns of his investment in the Erina and Charlestown clinics. Nevertheless, he says franchisees

still have to trust their instincts.

“At the end of the day you still need to pull the trigger and sometimes, when it comes to the crunch, it’s gut feel that overrides all of the analysis.”

LCA first opened in 2008, and has since established a dominant position in the cosmetic clinic market. They have carved a new niche, creating an exceptionally strong brand and large customer base through the supply of affordable, accessible and reliable cosmetic treatments.

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