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Home Improvement Franchising Can Offer An Economically Resilient Franchising Choice

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When the economy is sagging it forces many people to tighten their financial belts. It's often a time when buying and selling a home becomes much less of an option - consider the recent housing market debacle - and as a result, more people choose to stay where they are and simply do a little minor home improvement or remodeling.

In an industry that has historically been plagued by poor customer service and shoddy workmanship, home improvement franchises have much to offer. And franchisees like Charlie Rose are the face of this growing, and more reputable, market segment.

"I grew up in the construction and home building industry before going to college and earning a degree in engineering," says the 35-year-old Tennessee native. "But the corporate world was a high pressure, high stress existence that demanded a lot of time and energy." With the desire for a family and a little more personal freedom, Rose discovered Handyman Matters and signed on as a franchise in 2004. His territory is in Nashville, Tenn.

"One of the factors I considered was how home improvement-related franchises have a strong economic resilience. They tend to do well in good and bad times."

Rose says franchising has been a great choice for him because although he has an eye for detail, he was lacking some basic business skills that he has learned from the franchising model. He says he's picked up skills ranging from hiring practices and basic management techniques to a deeper understanding of software and accounting. He's been so successful with his Handyman franchise that he recently added a ShelfGenie franchise to his portfolio. A logical move that has helped build his handyman business and customer base.

In an industry haunted by poor customer service, Rose says he's challenged in finding and retaining quality craftsmen who do consistent work. That same call-to-arms is facing Jesus and Estefani Walls at their Dallas, Texas-based Fresh Coat painting franchise.

"No question about it," says Jesus Walls, "finding good painters who do quality work is tough." He currently has seven carefully selected and assembled painting crews who are carrying out jobs for him throughout North Dallas and its suburbs.

"We do paint and color consultations, and about 80 percent of our clients are residential while the other 20 percent are commercial." He says he's actively pursuing more commercial accounts and would like to see that ratio rise to about 50/50.

The Fresh Coat franchise was a natural fit for Walls who had been working in drywall sales prior to joining the franchise world in the summer of 2006. "I really got tired of

working for someone else," he says. "This franchise offers me the opportunity to work in the service industry, which is not known for good customer service, with my background in sales and customer service." He says that's one of his advantages. "I can provide the service that others do not." And the Fresh Coat brand is backing him up.

Fresh Coat offers customers a 24-hour answering service where a live person takes the calls and schedules the appointments. That's unique says Walls. As are other spiffs, like the fact that the business does color consultation and is fully insured. "I don't see these things at other painting companies."

Walls says he handles the marketing and sales end of the business while his wife handles the administration and the back office. A project manager and the paint crews get the jobs done.

"We get probably 70 percent of our business through referrals," he says. "So we have to do the job right or make it right because all of the sales smarts in the world are no good if you can't deliver quality work."

And quality work is just what Walls and Rose are serving up...home style.