



Connecting franchisors to franchisees – the vital role of field support

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANIKA HESLOP, SENIOR FOOD CONSULTANT, JAMAICA BLUE



A franchise business is made up of many constituent parts - from the franchisor to the franchisee, and the connections in between that keep the system operating to its full potential. Field support and field management are essential to maintaining effective communication between head office and its various franchises, and assist in the smooth operations of the franchise system.

In essence, field support ensures that the values, culture and vision of the franchisor are uniform across the brand. Field support can assist with customer service standards, profit goals, business finance, the general day-to-day mechanism of the franchise, and profitability of individual franchises. As well as helping franchisees, field support is incredibly important when it comes to the franchisor keeping abreast of what's happening in its various outlets - there is plenty that a franchisor can learn from its franchisees.



Danika Heslop



In 2014, the Franchise Council of Australia awarded Danika Heslop from Jamaica Blue Field Manager of the Year, and *The Franchise Review* caught up with Ms Heslop to get her insight into the importance of field support, and how it can best be implemented.

'Essentially, the field manager is the key connection between the franchisee and franchisor,' she says. 'We must be up to date with what's going on in the business, and supportive of the franchisee when they're in need of help. Being a field manager, I think, is one of the most versatile jobs that you can have.'

'As part of our role, we need to have a basic understanding of things like employment relations, business finance, leasing requirements, and the daily hands-on operations of the business. The field managers are the franchisor's connection to what is actually happening out in stores, which is crucial to the success of any franchise.'

As well as being the franchisor's connection to their business, field managers are also instrumental in keeping franchisees attuned to the needs of the brand. 'Franchisees and field managers ultimately have the same goals in mind; to work towards having a successful and profitable business,' says Ms Heslop. 'I think the key to this relationship working most effectively is communication and honesty.'

'[It's important] for the field manager to be able to have frank conversations with the franchisee, when required, to better their business, and for the franchisee to be able to talk to the field manager about the areas they need assistance with, or goals they disagree with. When both the franchisee and field manager can discuss the hard topics openly, I find that decisions inevitably can be made and a plan created to work towards growth and profit in the business.'

Ms Heslop requires a variety of qualities when hiring field support members for her team. 'I look for experts in the field,' she says. 'People who will really benefit our franchisees and assist them with building their businesses.'



It can be difficult to create strong connections within a franchise that has branches across a nation as large as Australia, says Ms Heslop, so she likes her team to keep in constant contact, and to share information with one another. This ensures that support across the system is consistent, and that any challenges met by a field support member can be faced with the support of the team.

'It's important to me that the whole team feels connected, even though we are often working across all corners of Australia, so that we can share stories and help each other with challenging situations. There is no book or guide to "being a field manager" – the best way to learn, I have found, is to listen to the stories of your colleagues and learn from their experiences.'

With this in mind, Ms Heslop believes that frequent field support visits to franchisees are a great way to ensure that the brand retains its strength. 'It is really important to me to be out in our stores as much as possible, and to work side-by-side with our franchisees. In my view, this helps to build a solid foundation in the relationship, and helps to build credibility with the franchisee. Not only can you discuss and brainstorm ideas for their business, but quite often it gives me ideas on what we can improve upon for our whole franchise network.'

Field support is particularly important in the food service industry, says Ms Heslop, as customers come to expect a consistent offering across the franchises. 'A challenge we have working in a franchise,' she says, 'is being able to create recipes that are on trend and suit different markets across Australia. Independent cafes can be much more impulsive and flexible with the products on their menus, and can really tailor them to meet the specific needs of their area.'



Another difficulty that Ms Heslop encounters is getting all franchisees onboard with nationwide promotions. 'Quite often with food, different things are popular in different areas, and for Australia, being the size it is, temperatures play a big part in our seasonal products, as well. For example, our products need to appeal to customers from Melbourne's CBD to Cairns in far north Queensland and Broome in Western Australia, and everywhere in between. It is important to me that our franchisees genuinely support our new products and believe [that they are] a good business decision by the franchisor for their business.'

DANIKA HESLOP'S TOP TIPS FOR FRANCHISE FIELD SUPPORT:

- Nurture the relationship between franchisee and franchisor.
- Work with the franchisee on strategies to grow profit and build the business.
- Protect the brand and its standards. Let franchisees know what the business's expectations are, and then support and train them to execute it in their business.

'How I continually try to overcome this is by visiting our cafes in all areas of Australia, and frequently asking our franchisees and customers what they want, and what products they are looking for. Knowing the regions and demographics helps us to make the right decisions for our brand, and also shows our franchisees that we are in touch with each of our businesses.'

Jamaica Blue is a growing business, so its focus is to keep its team large enough to maintain support. 'The field operations team for Jamaica Blue is continually growing to keep up with our business growth in both the Australian and the international market,' says Ms Heslop. 'Ensuring that franchisees have regular visits from the field operations team is a top priority.'

On top of its field visits for established franchises, Jamaica Blue has mandatory training in place for all new franchise partners. This ensures that the franchisee is across the company's values from the outset, and it equips them with the skills they need to turn their franchise into a success.

'The training program teaches our franchisees everything from poaching an egg to managing profit and loss, stocktake, coffee and local area marketing, just to name a few. They also spend time in a Jamaica Blue training store, where they get some real hands-on experience in operating a café.'

'When the time comes to open their own café, the field managers and operations team assist the new franchisee with everything from hiring staff to setting up the store, placing opening orders, visual merchandising, point of sale set-up, and so on. This is where the franchisee is taught how to manage the key variables of the business; cost of goods and labour, which is fundamental to operating a profitable business.'

And field managers receive just as much attention when it comes to training and business growth as franchisees themselves, says Ms Heslop.

'Jamaica Blue field managers partake in biannual training sessions organised by (parent company) FoodCo to keep our skills in the industry relevant and helpful in assisting franchisees. ● ● ●'