

How to boost franchisee relations through digital communications

With the franchising sector contributing close to 13.9% to the country's GDP and employing close to a million people, according to a FASA 2019 survey, at its heart, franchising is all about the spirit of entrepreneurship. The last year has created immeasurable hardship for small and medium-sized franchise businesses, but many in the sector have adapted the way in which they train and communicate to keep business going.

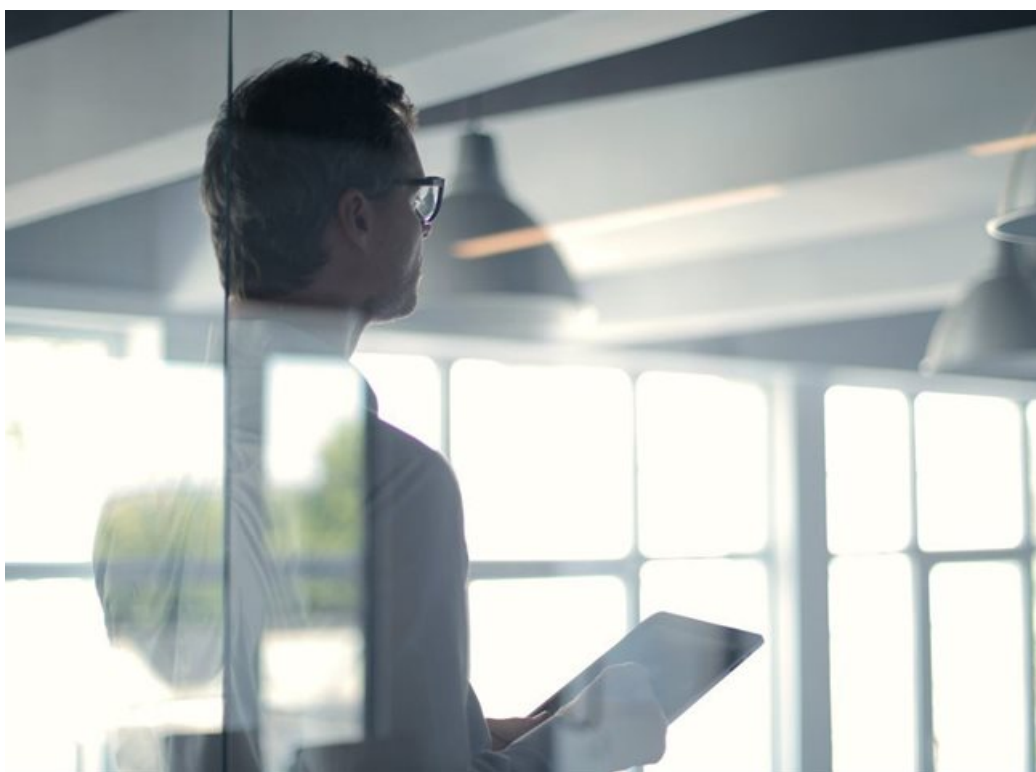


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According to Russell Berkman, franchise director at Jawitz Properties, having transparent and open communication within a company, especially a franchise business, is essential.

“Franchisees need to collaborate with one another for support, and share their successes and challenges, especially through the trying times we’ve had in the last 12 months. It’s a boost to know you have a network of franchisees out there who are in the exact same boat as you are,” says Berkman.

The three channels that have proven most effective with franchise brands are:

1. Instant Messaging

Instant messaging (IM) apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram or WeChat have become highly effective channels of communications within franchise businesses, where Group Chats are created to share information and receive feedback.

FreshStop created a Covid-19 assault Team group as soon as lockdown was announced to share critical trading and health-related information with their franchisees. “We needed to make sure that FreshStop would be able to trade, and trade within the law,” says Joe Boyle, managing director at FreshStop. Furthermore, one of FreshStop’s most popular Instant Messaging groups shares food training content, videos and photos to maintain food standards across the group.



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Another franchise business whose Covid WhatsApp group remains a key source of information and upliftment among franchisees is Jawitz Properties. Their internal IM group has evolved to feature short videos from their CEO, Herschel Jawitz, and trainers with relevant market updates, motivational messages and company business updates. “It’s about sharing what is possible and we have found WhatsApp communications are more effective than emails as people tend to read, react and action them faster,” explains Berkman.

2. Webinars and e-learning

With travelling scaled down extensively, physical one-on-one training has pivoted towards webinars and e-learning platforms. Training and sharing of industry knowledge and expertise with franchisees is crucial in competitive franchise sectors, such as property and retail.

Berkman says their webinars have proven very popular with “healthy engagement and sharing of information encouraged via chat, expert speakers and Q&A facilities; and we’ve found that franchisees truly appreciate an e-Learning platform where they can access video training and coaching as well as physical tools to achieve greater success”.



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Similarly, FreshStop’s webinars include the input of industry experts, such as economists, trend forecasters, health professionals, and risk specialists sharing information about the wider view of the country and industry. Additionally, webinars are used by FreshStop Franchise Forum members to communicate about successful marketing and sales initiatives. When it comes to training, YouTube videos have filled the gap of one-on-one training.

3. Videoconferencing

Prior to Covid-19, video meetings were often seen as a last resort but since then, it has become essential to running a business. Berkman says platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams bring their franchisees and head office teams together. “It’s a productive environment for knowledge sharing and information exchange but also for relationship building between the franchisees. Video meetings are now rated as one of the most valuable company exchanges based on feedback from our franchisees”.



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For franchisees, access to training materials, expertise and general support is crucial in running a successful business and maintaining morale. Covid-19 brought about a complete mind shift in how franchise operations could run without the need for face-to-face meetings and by all accounts, the change has been positive on all fronts.

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