

## Pest control franchising Love it or loathe it?

*In this second article about franchising, the options available in the pest control industry are explored. Who are offering franchises, is this the way forward for the industry, what exactly is involved?*

Like most things in life, your opinion regarding an issue depends very much on which direction you are approaching it from. The whole subject of franchising in the pest control industry certainly seems to stir-up some pretty strong reactions. Some view it positively as an opportunity to expand the pest control industry, whereas others take a very negative view and feel it will only increase competition and encourage the better staff employed by one of the existing companies to pack their bags and set-up on their own. As ever, the true picture probably lies somewhere in the middle. *Professional Pest Controller* explored what options are currently available – readers are left to form their own opinion.

To recap, business format franchising, as it is more correctly called, is the granting of a license by one person (the franchisor) to another (the franchisee). This entitles the franchisee to trade under the trade mark/trade name of the franchisor and to make use of an entire package, comprising all the elements necessary to establish a previously untrained person in the business and to run it with continual assistance on a predetermined basis.

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The franchising model is well established in the USA and Australia but not in the UK. If you mention franchising and pest control in the same breath, most people hark back about ten years to the days when Dyno-Rod unsuccessfully tried, with one exception, to extend their empire into the world of pest control with the Dyno-Kill franchise. Since then franchising in the pest control industry went quiet. But now several companies are trying the franchise formula to expansion once more.

### What's on offer?

Franchises in the general pest control area are actively being promoted by Bouremouth-based Prokill and also Surrey-based The Pest Company. As is the way with franchises, the franchisee has to pay the franchisor an initial fee plus an on-going management service fee – details of how much is involved is shown in the table below. In essence, the initial fee makes you an operational part of the organisation. Jim Mills, managing director for The Pest Company explained: "The fee covers access to the franchise name plus initial training, the supply of a fully equipped and liveried Pest Free van including the first three months lease charges, an equipment starter kit, opening stock of control products, the required paperwork to make the business function plus marketing support for their territory launch." Prokill works in a similar manner – an initial franchise fee of £20,000 plus up to a further £30,000 payment to cover training, equipment, van (including its financing for the first three months) dependant on each individual's needs.

The type of training on offer varies – The Pest Company pays for the franchisor to attend the BPCA General Pest Control course which leads to the sitting of the RSPH/BPCA (Level 2) Certificate in Pest Control exam. In addition, there are two weeks spent out on practical work plus another week getting to grips with the business management activities. Prokill offers a six week in-house office and field-based course, followed by taking the RSPH/BPCA (Level 2) exam. "After competing their training, the franchisee is equipped from day one with the Prokill name behind them," explained Geoff Whittle from Prokill.

By signing-up to a franchise, one of the most important parts to the equation is the business support element. Prokill has invested heavily in this area, capitalising on their experience within the industry. Not only is there access to a wealth of



Franchising your business requires serious investment as Prokill demonstrated at the BFA exhibition at Olympia.

support information via an intranet system, but also an impressive digital operating system. For example, this system allows the information from a surveyor signing up a contract, or a technician undertaking a treatment to be recorded digitally – via a digital pen and special sensitive paper. This is down-loaded via mobile phone to the franchisee’s office initially and thereafter to head office for logging onto the databank or for credit control to raise the invoice. As Geoff Whittle describes it: “This is a package of knowledge. By taking a Prokill franchise you buy into the Prokill reputation and company dynamism.”

**Is this for you?**

Anyone reading the promotional material for some of these companies could be forgiven for feeling tempted. Prokill states that they are looking for individuals who should have a turn-over of approaching £800,000 by their fifth year of trading. But don’t be fooled, the franchisor may provide the tools to create such a turnover, but making it happen is entirely up to the individual. It’s very much a case of – you get out what you put in.

So what type of people are these companies looking for? Is the ideal candidate a pest technician or surveyor who fancies the challenge of being their own boss, or is it more of a business person looking for a profitable opportunity? Geoff Whittle explains that Prokill primarily looks to recruit outside the pest control industry. “These are management style franchises. They are way beyond a man with a van. We are searching for people with entrepreneurial flair and the right attitude. The technical aspects of the business we can teach them,” he concludes. The position is similar at The Pest Company – in fact their latest franchisee is a soldier previously stationed in Iraq who has now left the army.

As with all franchises the potential of the territorial area to be awarded is carefully examined. Prokill estimates that a territory requires 250,000 properties to be viable. From this one can calculate the number of franchise territories for the UK – which Prokill estimates to be around 100. So selecting an appropriate candidate to award the franchise to is a key decision. Prokill reckons that for every 50 serious enquiry it enters into discussion with, only one is converted into a fully-fledged franchisee. “We are not selling franchises” states Geoff Whittle, “we are awarding business opportunities.” For the franchisor the initial investment in setting up the franchise programme is not cheap. Prokill has joined the British Franchise Association which required considerable investment in time and money prior to being awarded Associate status.

# Master Franchise Opportunity

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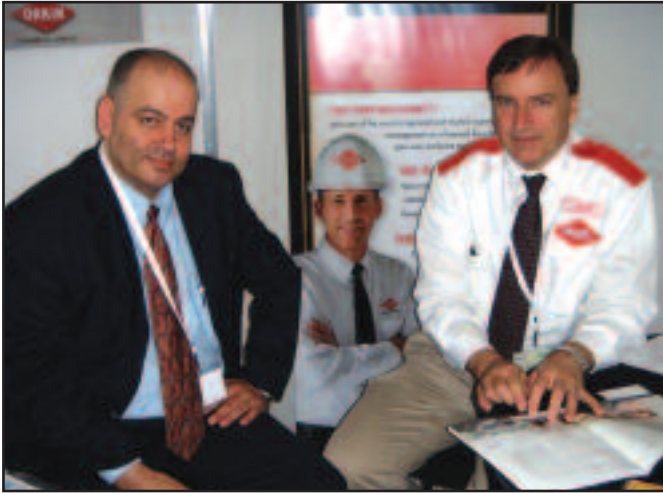
**New arrivals**

Franchising certainly seems to be a growth area. Soon to join Prokill and The Pest Company with franchises in the UK are US-based Orkin and Truly Nolen. In addition, Dyno-Rod is once again planning to reintroduce its franchise programme in the UK. Branded as Dyno Pest Control, the launch is to be later this year and will be modelled on the successful Dyno Pest Control business in London.

Founded in 1938 and to this day a family-owned and run company, Truly Nolen has international franchises in over 40 countries round the world. These are mainly based in South and Central America, Middle East, Europe (Northern Ireland, Portugal & Turkey) and more recently China (Shanghai). The master franchisor for the UK, Leo Stranney based in Lisburn, N. Ireland has been operating a Truly Nolen franchise since January 2000. This pilot operation was set up

**COMPANIES OFFERING PEST CONTROL FRANCHISES IN THE UK**

Company	Initial fee and set-up costs	Annual management fee as a % of turnover	Number of franchisees in UK	UK areas covered by franchisees
Prokill	£20,000 fee plus up to £30,000 set-up	15	8	Herts, Shropshire, Manchester, SW London, Wirral, Cornwall, Dorset and Hampshire.
The Pest Company	£7,900 fee plus £14,500 set-up	12	3	Surrey, Kent, Dorset and SE London
NBC	£15,000	12	17	Nationwide
Orkin	\$25,000	6	-	-
Truly Nolen	£15,000	6	1	Northern Ireland
Dyno-Rod	Details not yet available			



At PestEX 2007 – Tom Luczynski (right) from Orkin in deep discussion.

to test and adapt the American model to suit the UK market place. The franchise package includes initial and ongoing technical and commercial training, operation manuals etc. The master rights are also now available to buy-either for the whole of the UK or by individual country. i.e. England, Scotland or Wales.

Also keen to expand internationally, especially in Europe and in Central and South America, is Orkin. Having been involved in the pest control industry for over 100 years, the company boasts over 1.7 million customers – including top food processing companies, hotel chains, restaurants and airlines. It is these types of customers based in the strong US market who are increasingly looking to Orkin to provide a global service – certainly presenting an opportunity for Orkin.

To raise their profile and to announce their European intentions, Orkin had their own exhibition stand at PestEX 2007. Reviewing PestEX 2007, Tom Luczynski, Vice President of International Franchising and Development said: "The show was way beyond my expectations. The response at the Orkin booth was overwhelming and there was tremendous interest in the franchising concept. As a direct result of PestEX I am actively following-up on over 40 leads around the world."

Certainly with international clients, recognition of the Orkin brand will prove advantageous. Internationally, Orkin offers franchises on a three year period, with three yearly renewals. Master franchises are available for entire countries, but more commonly, franchises are awarded by territory/city. As to be expected, each franchisee is supported by extensive training, three weeks of which is undertaken in the US and then backed-up by training spent in-territory addressing specific individual issues.

### Niche sector blossoms

In a slightly more specialised sector of the pest control market is NBC Bird Solutions. Based at Banham Zoo in Norfolk, the company is best known for undertaking specialist bird control services work, in particular using live Harris hawks. Started 15 years ago by John Dickson with the aid of a grant from the Prince's Trust, his company has blossomed.

As a strategy to grow his business, John Dickson identified the possibilities offered by franchising in addition to organic growth. He proudly revealed that group sales are 55% up on last year with an expected annual turnover for 2007 being £2.8 to £3 million. John identifies this recent growth to reaping the rewards of success from his franchisees.

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All enquiries are kept strictly confidential

NBC already has 17 established franchise operations in the UK involving a total of 68 people. To gauge the level of success, a star franchisee achieved a monthly turnover of £42,000 in May this year. Having recently exhibited at PestEX 2007, it is only a matter of time before NBC has its first international franchisee.

**So what is the secret of this success?**

Like all the other franchises on offer, NBC charges a one-off licence fee (£15,000). For this the franchisee receives a months training, an operational manual based on 15 years experience plus an NBC license to operate. Once trained, the franchisee is equipped with the hawks (hired to them), uniforms, ID card and an introduction to a van supplier – model specified. As managing director, John Dickson explains: “From day one a guy can approach any large organisation and be viewed as a large supplier. The NBC brand is recognised, so this makes starting-up so much easier.”

In addition to the initial fee, an annual 12% of turnover is charged as a management fee for centrally provided services.

John obviously takes pride in what he has achieved, but he admits it has not been easy. “Setting the business up costs considerably more than you think, but this is the easy part, making it work is much harder,” he says. And with success comes the problems of staff – not only does he have to manage his own direct employees, plus his franchisees, but now his franchisees have taken on their own staff too!

So what in his opinion is the ideal franchisee? “We have a clearly defined ideal franchisee profile – usually a managerial type person looking for a lifestyle change, yet wanting an

environment where someone else provides the business support. Most of our franchisees do not come with pest control background – we look for the right go-getting attitude – everything else is teachable,” John details. Perhaps the most revealing point John made was recounting one of his favourite mantras: “Do a job with a smile – enjoy it.”

**Look (carefully) before you leap**

Before signing-up to a franchise carefully examine what the franchisor has on offer. Have they gone to great lengths to ensure that the franchisee buys into a professional, fully operational, tried and tested formula. Any prospective franchisee should not only thoroughly investigate the opportunity offered but also the reputation, back-up, operational support and depth of knowledge that they must rely upon once they embark on their new career.

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