

Franchise Consultants turned Our Town America Franchise Owners



John Groppoli and Peter Carlson aren't typical Our Town America franchise owners, but talk to enough Our Town America franchise owners, and you start to get the idea that nobody is typical. Everybody has their own unique tale. That's because Our Town America is a franchise that appeals to entrepreneurs from all different backgrounds.

Still, Groppoli and Carlson's story is different than most. As Groppoli explains it, "Peter Carlson and I are business partners, and we came out of the franchise consulting world. That was the world we lived in. We helped individuals find the right franchise to invest in, as well as guide franchisors with their sales process. That was our background, and that was how we came across Our Town America."

Groppoli and Carlson wound up helping a couple of their clients invest in Our Town America. Thus, they noticed that there wasn't much of a presence in their state of Minnesota. This sparked an idea, and they started discussing the possibility of becoming regional developers. In October 2009, the two purchased the RD license for Minnesota with the vision of developing Our Town America regionally. Today,

Groppoli and Carlson have awarded four territories in Minnesota to franchise owners — and kept one in St. Paul for themselves.

We caught up with Groppoli — Carlson was out of the office, no doubt working hard for Our Town America — and we got his take on, well, just about everything. As you can imagine, Groppoli has a wealth of advice for anybody thinking of buying an Our Town America, or any franchise.

What drew Groppoli and Carlson to Our Town America? “There were several attractions,” says Groppoli. “For one, ‘this is a lifestyle business’. You make your own hours. If there is a sporting event for one of your kids that you want to attend, you schedule around that and make it happen. Given the fact that this is a home-based business and you don’t have to worry about a brick and mortar location, it allows for a lot of flexibility”.

Groppoli also said that they liked that this is a business, “in which you have the ability to develop a recurring revenue stream”. He explains that when you land new clients, business owners sign 12-month agreements, in which they’ll be targeting new movers. “So you aren’t chasing clients every single month and trying to re-up them, so to speak,” Groppoli says. “We have clients that have been mailing with us for eight years.”

He also likes that there’s very little overhead. “You can ramp up quickly. Franchisees can make money after the first client they sign up, which is very unique. With many other direct mail businesses, you’ll need a base of clients to cover your overhead costs before you start making money.”

Groppoli also says that he and Carlson simply liked the fact that it’s a community-oriented business. He imagines that it wouldn’t be fun working in direct mail if you were selling products and services to people who had no interest in them. “But with Our Town America, you’re helping new families and individuals get acclimated into their new neighborhood. People establish purchasing habits after living in their community for a while, new movers are actively looking for businesses that offer products and services in their new neighborhood, replacing the others that they left behind. When you’re new to an area, you *want* to know where to take your vehicle to be fixed, quality restaurants in the area or which dentist to go to. That was a big initial draw for us.”

What makes a successful Our Town America franchise owner? “The people who are

going to thrive with the Our Town America franchise are those who consider themselves social and extroverted. You need to be able to build business relationships. Experience in sales is also a no-brainer, “ Groppoli says.

“The program has a 47-year track record of successfully introducing new movers to their local community businesses,” Groppoli adds. “So as long as you can explain to a business owner how the New Mover Program will help increase their bottom line, you should be successful”.

Advice for people thinking of **buying a franchise** in general? “The most important thing to do, when you look at any franchise, is to take the time to call existing franchisees and make those validation calls,” Groppoli says.

In other words, call people who own a franchise with the brand you’re looking at and ask them if they’re happy with their investment.

“Most franchise owners will tell you the good, the bad and the in-between,” Groppoli says. “They’ll tell you their challenges, successes and struggles. I’d definitely encourage people to reach out to some Our Town America owners. They’re very approachable, and they’ll take the time to answer your questions. Remember, they were once in your shoes, looking at various investment opportunities”.

Groppoli believes that anyone who takes his advice and connects with existing franchisees will likely walk away with the feeling that Our Town America is a ‘family-type franchise system’. He continues, “People are very close – always talking and supporting one another. Additionally, that same mindset and culture exist in the Our Town America corporate office as well”.

“There’s very little turnover. Many employees have been with the company for over 10 years,” Groppoli says. “That tells you a lot about the culture and the type of company you’re working with”.