



Putting Service First

How four commercial and residential services franchises have provided protection and comfort for Canadians at home and at work

BY STEFANIE UCCI

While the world around us seems to change every day, the importance of putting the safety and comfort of Canadians first remains the same. Over the past year, restaurants, retail stores, and more commercial spaces across Canada have faced extended closures, changing the business landscape.

For Fire-Alert Franchising Ltd., fire prevention is an essential service that's top of mind to protect residential and commercial spaces. Indoor Air Quality Canada continues conducting indoor air quality assessments in residential and commercial properties.

The Prep'n Sell franchise allows homeowners and real estate agents to call in services to prepare a home for selling. For regular upkeep, residential and commercial clients can request the services provided by Neighbourly and their 28 brands that perform a variety of repair and maintenance services.

Read on to learn more about these four franchises that provide commercial and residential services!

Check out franchises across the country that provide residential and commercial janitorial services in the Online Exclusive: Cleaning Services Across Canada at **FranchiseCanada.Online!**

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Sylvain Houle, co-owner and director of franchise development at Fire-Alert

Fire-Alert Franchising Ltd.

Behind the scenes of most businesses are the companies that work to keep employees and customers safe. This includes Fire-Alert Franchising Ltd., specializing in government-regulated fire prevention, inspections, and service.

Sylvain Houle, co-owner and director of franchise development at Fire-Alert, explains that the brand provides mobile fire extinguisher services for residential homes and commercial/industrial businesses. “[Fire-Alert is a] mobile concept where franchisees can work 100 per cent out of their high-top commercial vans that we upfit with all the tools and equipment necessary. It helps keep the cost low in terms of overhead when starting a new business.”

The Fire-Alert brand is over 40 years old and was an existing, local company before Houle’s father, Yvan, acquired it in 2003. The brand has been franchising since 2009, and Houle and his father teamed up as equal shareholders to grow the business.

Today, the father-son duo provides training and ongoing support to their franchisees through a 1-800 number that can be accessed during the day to answer technical questions, and additional training is available at the head office in Ottawa, Ontario.

When reflecting on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Fire-Alert, Houle says “Being that fire protection is essential, we have been fortunate to remain open and feel for those who have been negatively affected.” He adds, “We have felt some ripple effects, being that we

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conduct inspections in retail stores, and the retail sector has suffered greatly. However, there are a lot of stores that were able to remain open and do curbside pickups, and their mandatory fire safety inspections must continue to be done on a regular basis. Even a lot of the restaurants that were able to transition to an online takeout system still require to have their fire protection equipment inspected regularly.”

Houle recommends that prospective franchisees have resilience and focus on their small business endeavour.

“It is crucial to have a positive attitude and stay motivated, as these franchise systems have proven to be successful. Most importantly, have fun and enjoy the ride!”



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Shawn Rankin, founder and CEO of IAQC

Indoor Air Quality Canada

Since 2003, Indoor Air Quality Canada (IAQC) has been conducting indoor air quality assessments to test for mould, smoke, asbestos, lead, mercury, and silica in residential and commercial properties.

“The IAQC franchise concept is to build a team of air quality investigators across Canada sharing expertise, experience, and business development,” says Shawn Rankin, founder and CEO of IAQC. “Our air quality consultants provide the identification of the air quality concern, but more importantly, using building science and construction knowledge. We provide effective, permanent solutions.”

Rankin says the business is 90 per cent dependent on website advertising and Google ad campaigns to drum up customers. “All franchisees share the existing IAQC website, marketing, and SEO benefits,” he explains. “Each region would receive a kickstart Google word ad campaign from IAQC. Networking initiatives, PowerPoint presentations, and marketing materials provided.”

Franchisees receive training in the form of online

courses, seminars, and Zoom meetings. Rankin says they also have access to one-on-one training performed by IAQC staff that involves four days of in-house training on equipment use and calibration, as well as three days of fieldwork conducting real-time inspections. During COVID-19, IAQC also completed online courses for infectious disease vectors, transmissions, and cleaning protocols.

Plus, franchisees are able to work from home at their own pace while “providing solutions for families and workers who are in distress,” says Rankin. “Every investigation is in response to an indoor environment causing harm to the occupant. Every investigation completed by IAQC improves the client’s health and well-being. There is a great deal of satisfaction in that.”



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Brad Stevenson, chief development officer at Neighbourly

Neighbourly

For the past 40 years, Neighbourly has provided home services to clients with 28 brands and more than 4,500 franchises across nine countries. Brands include Mr. Electric, offering electrical repairs; Mr. Rooter, providing plumbing services; Mr. Handyman, performing handyman solutions for homeowners; and The Grounds Guys®, a lawn care and landscape company, among many other familiar brand names.

“Experience taught us that success comes from evolution and change, which are especially important in franchising,” says Brad Stevenson, chief development officer at Neighbourly. “With one of our key organizational values revolving around customer focus, we recognize that it is critical to keep the Neighbourly experience as positive as possible for both our customers and our franchise owners despite marketplace circumstances such as a global pandemic.”

Stevenson explains that the brand’s initial challenge during COVID-19 was adapting and managing the business as it shifted to working remotely, while changing operations and procedures to keep everyone safe. “Neighbourly’s biggest questions revolved around which of our home service verticals were allowed to operate in which markets,” says Stevenson.

Fortunately, Neighbourly’s technology and communications system made for a smooth transition to working remotely. The brand implemented innovations including virtual estimates via video chats and phone calls, PPE equipment for franchisees, contactless paperwork and payment methods, dispatching professionals to jobs directly from their own homes, and more.



Franchisees are offered extensive training that includes webinars, in-person visits, group meetings, and Neighbourly Summits (large events where they can connect with fellow franchise owners). Stevenson notes that ideal franchisees have a strong business acumen and a desire and reason for franchising, with a “traditionally unmatched” grit and drive, and a willingness to follow proven systems.

“The biggest benefits franchise owners receive from Neighbourly are the resources to grow. Thanks to our relentless focus on innovation, there’s a long track record of same-store sales growth across our network,” says Stevenson. “Franchise owners are assisted with top-tier employees and talent so they can grow their businesses and get ongoing training opportunities.”



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“We provide services such as estate makeovers, kitchen and bathroom upgrades, painting, decluttering and cleaning, staging, curb appeal, landscape cleanup, exterior fixes, and more – any combination that the homeowner needs – all with just one call.”

David Collier, president of Prep'n Sell

Prep'n Sell

Back in 2002, David Collier, president of Prep'n Sell, saw a need for a unique new business to renovate and prepare homes for resale.

Fast forward to today, and Prep'n Sell is now a home-based franchise that offers their “One Call Does It All” service for homeowners and real estate agents. “We help sell homes faster, for more money,” says Collier. “We provide services such as estate makeovers, kitchen and bathroom upgrades, painting, decluttering and cleaning, staging, curb appeal, landscape cleanup, exterior fixes, and more – any combination that the homeowner needs – all with just one call.”

With the tag line “Prep'n Sell: It Pays,” the family-oriented business provides franchisees with the name and brand, a full marketing package including a truck wrap, plus ongoing digital marketing, one-to-one coaching, virtual training, and most importantly, the feeling of being part of one big team working towards the same goal.

“A lot of people want to be self-employed and own their own business, but it takes a lot of commitment, drive, persistence, and dedication,” says Collier. “You have to want to work hard, be able to follow a system, communicate openly, be organized, and really enjoy helping other people.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought challenges, but it sure hasn't slowed down Prep'n Sell's success. Collier says the brand introduced the Sani-Home and Sani-Biz

services, which use ozone to mitigate pathogens and eliminate COVID-19 in interior spaces, after an open house, at closing, or when businesses reopen their doors.

While listing the brand's accomplishments in 2020, Collier notes: more frequent franchisee team meetings, waived minimum royalties starting in March 2020, and updated websites. He also invested in new virtual quoting capabilities, an improved sales program, a virtual Learning Management System, more social media tools for digital marketing, and a new simpler yet technologically advanced CRM software. On top of all that, Prep'n Sell sold four franchises last year – three of them during the pandemic.

A Prep'n Sell franchise also includes a sister brand called RENOMagic, which provides services to new homeowners or those looking to renovate their home without intentions to sell.

“I think this year is going to be a real good growth year for us,” says Collier. “I think we're going to put on a lot of franchises and we're going to make Prep'n Sell and RENOMagic an even stronger national brand.” 🍁



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