



INFERNO GROWTH · 2026 EDITION

Stop Making Them **Fit.**

The owner recruiting playbook for home services franchise and dealer programs.

Built from thousands of reps and hundreds of dealers recruited, and hundreds of real conversations from buyers about brands like yours.



5 strategies

To bring your team fewer, better owners



Your first call

What to listen for, in Rodney's words



10 questions

A self-audit for your program

00 BEFORE YOU START

Selling the dream to the wrong person.

I've spent 31 years in home services sales, with \$200M+ in revenue created and counting. My companies have recruited thousands of sales reps and hundreds of dealers. In one year alone, we filed tax forms for more than 900 sales reps.

Most of them didn't make it.

So I've been there, many times. Here's what I've learned goes wrong more than anything else. Everyone wants to close a franchise or a dealer program. But they don't do enough qualifying before the person actually starts. They start people too soon.

That person really isn't a good fit, but they kind of make them fit. And this is where failures happen.

If I ran your sales team tomorrow, I'd do two things first.

- 1 Go deep on qualifying.** Money, timing, work ethic, and whether they'll follow the system.
- 2 Tell the truth about how hard it is.** There are going to be lonely nights. There are going to be stressful days. If they power through, and the system is right, and they follow it to a T, they will be successful. The right people hear that and lean in. The wrong people walk away before they cost you anything.

One more test I'd hold any program to. Does your system work with a mediocre owner? Anyone can make money with a superstar. If an average owner who follows the plan can't make money, it's not a recruiting problem.

This playbook is built on those ideas, backed by what buyers are actually saying about brands like yours.

Rodney England

FOUNDER, INFERNO GROWTH

01 THE COST

What one wrong owner costs you.

You already know the industry numbers. Here they are in one place.

\$271

per lead
\$155 in 2022

2.3%

of leads close
3.5% in 2022

\$13,757

to find one owner
Before broker fees

\$48,900

through a broker
About, per owner



The one number going the right way: referrals bring in 15% of new owners on 5% of the budget, because they come in warm and already qualified.

What most brands never add up is the cost of signing the wrong one.

Fill this in with your own numbers.

Cost	Your number
 What it cost to find them (marketing, broker fee)	\$
 Your sales team's time (about 20 weeks per deal)	\$
 Training, launch support and field visits in year one	\$
 Royalties you counted on that never come (yearly royalty x years left)	\$
 The next deal you lose when a candidate calls this owner as a reference	\$
What one wrong owner costs you	\$



And one cost you can't put a number on: one more closure in your Item 20, for every future candidate to read.

Industry numbers: 2025 Annual Franchise Development Report, 2024 data.

02 THE RESEARCH

What buyers believe before your first call.

We read hundreds of recent conversations between franchise buyers, owners and former owners, from 2023 to 2026. Your next candidate has probably read them too.



They expect to be sold.

"Also realizing the people selling you the franchise are literally salesman, is probably the biggest thing I learned."



They think some brands will take anyone.

"I worked for a brand, if you were writing a check, you were approved."



They blame the brand when an owner fails.

"Why hand out a franchise to someone who can't do the job? At least vet your franchisees! It could hurt the whole brand!"



They notice when nobody asks them questions.

"Also seemed too willing to get me on board without really asking me questions etc."



They want to know where the customers come from.

"What's the benefit you're getting with the franchise? Don't say systems and marketing...."



Every one of these is a chance. The brand that qualifies hard, shows real numbers and tells the truth stands out from everyone else in the candidate's inbox.

Quotes are from public Reddit threads, 2023 to 2026. We don't name the people who wrote them.

03 THE RESEARCH, RANKED

What buyers worry about, ranked.

We read about 110 recent conversations where people were deciding whether to buy a franchise or join a dealer program. These came up most, in order, with how the best brands answer them.

- 1** **“Show me numbers I can check.”**
One buyer said the disclosure document “told vastly different stories than the development rep did.”
How to answer: Walk them through your Item 19 median, not your best owners. Give them the full owner list and let them call anyone.
- 2** **“Why pay you? What do I get that I can't do myself?”**
How to answer: Show where your owners' customers come from, with numbers. Leads, national accounts, buying power.
- 3** **“Am I buying myself a job?”**
How to answer: Yes, at first. Say so. Then show them what year two and year three look like for an owner who follows the plan.
- 4** **“Is this brand in trouble?”**
Closures, lawsuits, brands that collapsed and left dealers unpaid.
How to answer: Get ahead of your Item 20. Explain your closures before they ask.
- 5** **“It costs more than they told me.”**
How to answer: Show real all-in costs, including operating cash to get through the first year.
- 6** **“Can I trust the broker?”**
How to answer: Be easy to reach directly. Buyers trust the brand that picks up the phone.
- 7** **“Can I actually get customers?”**
How to answer: Be honest that sales is the job. Then show them your plan for the first 90 days.

04 IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Five owners who didn't make it.

Real home services owners who told their stories in public. We don't name them or their brands.



The career changer

A former software engineer opened a senior care franchise. Four months in: two clients, 80 to 100 hours a week, every dollar of savings in.

“I’m learning customer service, hiring, firing, management, biz ops, and probably most difficult for me — sales & marketing.”



The part-timer

He bought a home services franchise planning to keep his six-figure job and become a “semi-absentee” owner. Eight months later the business was going backwards. Then he talked to the brand's top owners:

“they’re all owner operators, meaning they work in the business every day.”



The one who had to become the salesman

A former IT worker put his retirement savings plus an SBA loan, about \$350,000, into a bathroom remodeling franchise. Six months in, \$130,000 in the red. Sales only started moving

“as I took over the sales role.”



The one who was promised clients

A home care owner borrowed and spent \$400,000. In his first seven months, his ads brought in one inquiry.

“I was told I should reasonably expect a certain number of new clients each month.”



The one the fees caught

A home services owner closed after a year.

“When things get slow, and you have thousands a month in franchise fees and royalties... you start to hurt financially very quickly.”



And the one who made it

A former corporate sales rep with no trade background bought a restoration franchise, went all in and worked the business himself. He's on pace for \$2 million in year two.

S1 STRATEGY ONE

Qualify before you start.

Every one of those five stories could have been caught before the agreement was signed.



What they had in common

The owners who struggled were career changers with no sales background, a part-time plan, and every dollar they had in it. The one who made it was a salesman who went all in.

Most of them weren't the right fit. A couple were also sold expectations that didn't hold up. Both of those are fixable before anyone signs.

What the best owners have in common

Out of the thousands of reps and hundreds of dealers I've recruited, the ones who made real money rarely stood out for their trade background. They stood out for their history.



They've done hard things. Sports, farm work, labour jobs. A different work ethic than most people.



They'll sell, or learn to. Most home service companies are sales companies that happen to do the work.



They leave their comfort zone. They make the call they don't want to make.



They improve every day. On purpose, without being told.

Anyone can make money with a superstar. Recruit for the owner who will follow the plan.

S1 YOUR FIRST CALL

What I listen for on a first call.

1 Their history.

What have you done? What are you doing now? And what's driving you to look at another line of business?

2 Growth owner or lifeline owner?

I'm looking for people with a growth mindset who've built a decent business, in revenue and in profit. When an owner is struggling, I take a deeper look. But struggling doesn't mean a bad partner.

I call some of the best ones PHDs: poor, hungry and driven. They have no choice but to go all in, and for some it's a life-changing moment. That's my story. I was on the tools, wondering how I was going to make it. My opportunity came from a national dealer program. Within 15 months, I was their biggest dealer in Canada.

But if I'd had to put up \$100,000 plus operating cash at that point in my life, it never would have happened. So the question isn't whether they're struggling. It's whether your buy-in fits where they are. With a low buy-in, a PHD can be your best recruit. With a big investment, do the deeper financial dive first. When money gets tight, decisions get desperate. I know, because mine did.

3 The buying signal.

Big ambitions to add more trucks or more people. That's a buying signal, and potentially a great partner.

4 Bandwidth and sales.

If they're still on the tools running every job themselves, I wonder about bandwidth. Then it comes down to their sales ability, or at least their leadership to hire and train salespeople.

Green flag or slow down?

	● Green flag	● Slow down
Why now	Wants to grow	Needs to be saved
Money	Buy-in fits where they are	Every dollar they have, with nothing left to run on
Ambition	Talks about more trucks, more people	Talks about getting out of the work
Time	Has room, or a plan to make room	Running every job alone, no plan to change it
Sales	Sells, or will hire and train people who do	"I'm not a sales guy"

S1 STRATEGY ONE, THE CHECKLIST

Qualify on six things before anyone starts.

Use this on every candidate, before discovery day. Tick each one you've confirmed.

Area	What to confirm
☐ Money	Liquid capital and a 12-month cushion, not just the minimum
☐ Timing	A real start date, not "someday"
☐ Work ethic	Something hard they did by choice. Ask about it
☐ Sales	Will they sell? If not, who will?
☐ Family	Do the people at home know about the long days?
☐ Coachability	Will they follow your system, even when they disagree?



Fails two or more? Slow down.

Starting them anyway is how good brands end up with bad Item 20s.



Then tell them how hard it is

"There are going to be lonely nights. There are going to be stressful days. If they power through, and the system is right, and they follow it to a T, they will be successful."



Also seemed too willing to get me on board without really asking me questions etc.

A FRANCHISE BUYER, ON A BRAND THEY WALKED AWAY FROM

S2 STRATEGY TWO

Recruit owners, not job-leavers.

The best candidates in home services often aren't looking for a franchise at all. They already own a business in a trade next to yours.



Techs, trucks and a license

Your biggest constraint is often skilled labour. They already have it.



They sign payroll

No confusion about capital or cash flow.



Lenders like them

Industry experience makes financing easier.



They have customers

Their current customers are often the first customers for your service.

Their first question is always the same



What's the benefit you're getting with the franchise? Don't say systems and marketing....

AN OWNER WEIGHING A FRANCHISE

They already have systems. What they don't have is the work your brand can bring: national accounts, brand leads, partner programs. Show them that, with numbers.

Answer "can I keep my business?" before they ask

The fastest way to lose an owner-candidate is to make them choose between your brand and the company they built.



He already had a successful carpet cleaning and mitigation company. Now everything was 10%. He either had to sell the other business or roll it into the franchise...

PUT IT IN WRITING, UP FRONT

If your agreement allows an owner to run your brand beside their existing business, say so:



Their current company keeps its own name.



Royalties apply only to your line's sales.



The non-compete doesn't reach their existing business.

If your agreement doesn't allow it, know that before you recruit from adjacent trades.

S3 STRATEGY THREE

Show where the customers come from.

Every serious candidate will call your owners and ask one question:

"Where do your customers actually come from?"

Your royalty is worth it when the answer is "the brand." Make sure your owners can say that, and make sure you can prove it before the call.

Source of work	What to show candidates
Brand leads	Leads per owner per month, by market
National accounts	Which accounts, and how much work they send
Partner programs	What share of revenue comes through them
Buying power	Real savings on equipment and parts

Royalties carry real value when you have a proven way to bring in customers. Say it plainly, and back it up.

S4 STRATEGY FOUR

Give every candidate their market numbers.

Most home services brands never answer the most important question a candidate can ask:



"In my market, how many customers can I actually sell to?"

Not the population. The real number:



How many households fit your ideal customer in that territory?



How many own their home, and in what income range?



How many competitors already serve them?



How many jobs a year does a profitable owner need, and is that realistic here?

The right market with the right owner can make a profitable business. The wrong market can sink a great owner, and that failure lands in your Item 20.

Giving candidates real market data does three things.



It shows you believe in the territory.



It filters out people in markets that can't support them.



It gives the right candidate the confidence to sign.

S5 STRATEGY FIVE

Tell the truth up front.

Buyers already expect a pitch. Surprise them.



Show the real numbers

If you publish earnings in Item 19, walk candidates through the median, not just the average. Explain sales versus profit.



If a franchise doesn't give you financial data during the discovery process, just avoid it.



Let them call anyone

Including owners who left. Strong brands aren't afraid of that call. And a failed owner doesn't always mean a failed brand. Many weren't the right fit, or didn't follow the plan. Let candidates hear that for themselves.



Pass the mediocre-owner test

Point candidates to your average owners, not just your stars. If average owners who follow the plan are making money, that's your strongest proof.

Drop the words that kill trust

Stop saying	Say instead
Easy	It's hard work, and here's the plan
Passive, absentee	Owner-led. Here's what your week looks like
Turnkey	Here's what we set up, and here's what you do
This territory won't last	Take the time you need. Here are the numbers

D DEALER PROGRAMS

Leads, support and activation.

Dealers judge a program on two things: the work it sends and the support it gives.

“ I would become a heil or other ICP brand dealer in a heartbeat if it meant there were leads here and there.

AN HVAC DEALER, A YEAR INTO A PROGRAM WITH NO LEADS

“ We've bean a Factory Authorized Dealer... for close to the last FORTY YEARS... Tell me why I can't get proper tech support

A 40-YEAR HVAC DEALER

What to fix first



Leads. Know how many your average dealer gets. Dealers who get none start shopping other brands.



Support. When something breaks, a dealer should reach a person, fast.



Warranty pay. Slow claims cost dealers money. They remember it.



Applications. Willing owners who apply and hear nothing are lost recruits.



Activation. Dealers who sign up and never train or sell look like growth on paper. Give every new dealer a first-90-days plan with real targets.



The same test applies to dealers

Does your program work with a mediocre dealer? If an average dealer who follows the plan isn't profitable, more recruiting won't fix it.

10 SELF-AUDIT

Is your program ready to recruit owners?

Tick every statement that's true today. Be honest. Nobody sees this but you.

- ☐ 1. We qualify on money, timing, work ethic and sales before anyone starts.
- ☐ 2. We've turned down a candidate with money because they weren't a fit.
- ☐ 3. Our average owner who follows the plan is profitable.
- ☐ 4. We know what one wrong owner costs us, in dollars.
- ☐ 5. We can show where our owners' customers come from, with numbers.
- ☐ 6. We can give a candidate the real customer count for their territory.
- ☐ 7. We walk candidates through the median, not just the average.
- ☐ 8. Candidates can call any owner, including ones who left.
- ☐ 9. Our sales team asks every candidate why they're looking now, and listens for growth or lifeline.
- ☐ 10. New owners get a written first-90-days plan.

8 TO 10

You're ready to recruit owners at scale.

5 TO 7

Fix the gaps first, or you'll pay for them in Item 20.

UNDER 5

More leads won't help yet.



Our score today: _____ / 10



The first gap we'll fix:

IG INFERNO GROWTH

Fewer, better owners on your calendar.

We find owners who are a fit for your program, and we screen them before they ever reach your sales team.

**We find them.**

Owners of real businesses in the trades next to yours, in the markets where you have open territory.

**We reach them.**

Email, ads aimed at that owner list, and direct mail, with your brand named up front.

**We screen every one.**

A pre-screen call on money, timing, market and fit, using the criteria you set.

**You pay only for held calls.**

If a call misses your criteria, or the candidate is already in your pipeline, you don't pay for it.

**We bring the market numbers.**

Real household and customer data for each territory, so the right candidates can see why your market works.

Book a callinfernogrowth.com/book