



Kendlebell PAs answer calls and process messages for clients

One million calls & counting

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Milton Keynes franchisee David Morris

Kendlebell, the UK's number one provider of personal telephone answering services for small businesses, now takes over one million messages a year for its growing portfolio of customers.

And that's not the only part of Kendlebell's business that is growing.

With 20 offices in the UK and Ireland, Kendlebell is the single largest service provider of its type and it plans on opening more franchised offices in 2007. "We are experiencing strong demand for our service throughout the UK and Ireland and, consequently, we expect to appoint more franchisees to help meet the demand in the coming year," says managing director Simon Carter.

Dominant

Established nearly 10 years ago, Kendlebell has grown steadily to become dominant in its market. It is the only company in its field that has attained Full Member status of the British Franchise Association and it is unique in providing a highly personal level of service to its clients, not from a large call centre, but from franchise-run small offices spread throughout the UK.

Kendlebell's philosophy (what it likes to call 'The Kendlebell Way') is to empower owner-manager franchisees to run a small, friendly team of five or six call handlers to answer calls on behalf of other small businesses as though

they were actually employed by that company. Franchisees can run their Kendlebell business from a small office anywhere in the country, providing they have access to the internet.

Whilst franchisees are responsible for selecting their office and providing the necessary furniture, Kendlebell head office provides all the telephony and computer equipment that is required. "We like to ensure that as much as possible is done to help the new franchisee set up their office," says Carter.

This state-of-the-art set-up includes the Perfecta Message Management system, which effectively drives the whole business. Developed by Kendlebell over several years, this online system enables franchisees to answer calls on behalf of their clients, log the details and then automatically send the message to the client via email, fax or SMS.

Perfecta also generates invoices automatically every month and provides franchisees with a wealth of management information about their customers and staff. Furthermore, because this is an internet-based system, franchisees can access their own records from their desk in their office, from their own home or even whilst on holiday.

"The whole system has been designed to provide the customer with the most professional service, whilst helping the franchisee to do everything smoothly and efficiently," says Milton Keynes franchisee David Morris.

Applications

Every year, Kendlebell receives hundreds of submissions from prospective franchisees via its website. They are provided with a detailed prospectus telling them all about the service Kendlebell provides and what is expected of a successful franchisee. Those who perceive they have the right qualities are invited to submit an application form, which includes a brief questionnaire designed to identify the essential traits that Kendlebell looks for in its franchisees.

As Simon Carter explains: "We work in the customer services sector, so quality and reliability are the two most essential characteristics we are looking for. Our franchisees are the foundation stone of our success and each one is carefully assessed before they are appointed."

Kendlebell insists that a prospective franchisee talks to existing franchisees, and they are invited to visit one of their offices so they can see exactly how everything is done.

Kendlebell expects franchisees to recruit their own call handlers - or personal assistants (PAs) - to answer the calls and process the messages. As you would expect from a leading franchisor, Kendlebell provides its franchisees with a comprehensive suite of documents and information in the human resources section of its company intranet.

"Whilst we acknowledge that franchisees must be responsible for selecting the staff they are going to work with, we endeavour to ensure that all the necessary forms and guidance is available to them to help them in this process," says Carter. Kendlebell has also invested in a technologically advanced, online prospective employee assessment system to help franchisees identify the best possible team members.

The system is based around a questionnaire that potential recruits applying for the role of PA are asked to complete. The process takes about 20 minutes and is designed to identify certain characteristics and traits that Kendlebell knows are essential to provide a first-class level of service.

It also flags up any potential weak points applicants may have. In these cases, the franchisee's attention is drawn to the matter in a report that is automatically generated for them once the applicant has completed the questionnaire. The report helps a franchisee conduct any subsequent interview with a series of recommended questions, including some additional questions that focus on any areas of potential weakness identified by the questionnaire.

The system is now being used by all franchisees when they recruit new PAs. It means that staff selection is carried out by all franchisees using a uniform system that helps them recruit only the best calibre of staff.

"In our industry almost everyone, including the dreaded call centres, pay lip service to only employing the best people to provide the service the customer is paying for," says Carter. "But the truth is that Kendlebell is probably the exception in actually doing something to substantiate this claim."

Kendlebell sees this system as a crucial step to cementing its already excellent reputation for

providing a highly personal, very professional level of service. The system is also used by Marks & Spencer, which, like Kendlebell, had it modified by its American authors to meet the company's specific needs.

Responsibilities

Kendlebell franchisees are responsible for the day-to-day provision of the service. They are also responsible for local sales and marketing, although Kendlebell head office has generated over half of the customers that its franchisees look after through its own national marketing activity.

"We don't expect our franchisees to sit and answer calls themselves," explains Carter. "The franchisees are there to manage the business. This involves ensuring that the quality of service the PAs provide is second to none and talking to other local business people to explain how our service can help them develop their businesses."

The Kendlebell service is one with broad appeal. It has clients in almost every line of business you can imagine. Most are small businesses that want Kendlebell to help them create a first-class impression each time a new potential customer calls.

Typically, they are professional people or small businesses that want to provide their customers with a level of service they would find difficult to offer without employing full-time staff, which may not be practical or economical. The Kendlebell service starts from just £35 (plus VAT) per month and every client is given the names of the two or three women assigned to work for them.

They answer their calls when they are busy or out of the office so that every caller is greeted in the appropriate company name by a friendly and helpful voice. Clients can call their own PAs whenever they want to, so a rapport soon develops between Kendlebell and its clients. The client pay a monthly subscription, which means the business enjoys a regular cash flow.

Kendlebell has franchise opportunities available all over the UK. The franchise fee is £19,950 (plus VAT) and franchisees are advised to make sure they have access to a further £10,000 to £20,000 working capital. Successful franchisees will earn over £40,000 a year from the second year onwards.



Simon Carter (standing): "We are experiencing strong demand for our service throughout the UK and Ireland"

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Full Member of the BFA
- Only company of its type in the BFA
- Franchise opportunities available throughout the UK and Ireland
- Master franchise licences available for overseas territories
- Owner-manager franchise
- Office based
- Business-to-business
- Computer and telephony equipment included in franchise fee
- Eight days of training also provided
- Monday-Friday working hours
- Full-time role

To find out more about Kendlebell you can download a franchise prospectus at www.kendlebell.com. Who knows, this time next year you may own your own Kendlebell franchise and be helping it to take the next million messages.

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