



Monkey Puzzle Day Nurseries

In this section of 'Get Connected', we'd like to focus on our rapidly expanding client base through our regular case study feature. In this our first issue, we thought we'd highlight a recent contract win, Monkey Puzzle Day Nurseries.

Monkey Puzzle are unique in the provision of Childcare to the UK market, as they have adopted a franchise approach to expansion as opposed to the more conventional approach of creating a nursery chain.

Mark Crosby of Monkey Puzzle explained the reason behind this decision, 'We wanted to expand but we didn't want to go down the conventional route of employing managers which most large companies use.

The reason the model is successful is because parents can talk to the owners of the business and we wanted to keep that contact yet develop onto multiple sites. Franchising was the answer since it maintains standards, provides expansion and keeps the owner involved at a local level!

The decision to opt for franchising as the expansion route was taken in 2004, with the first franchisees being recruited a year later. There are now 13 nurseries in locations as far away as Cheltenham, Essex and London. Franchisees are responsible for the day-to-day running of their own individual businesses. What Mark and his team provide is the know-how and the skills.

'We help find locations and assist in the planning process. We provide training so that the franchisee can pass the suitable person inspection by Ofsted.

Help is given in recruiting staff, setting up the nursery, and we provide ongoing support. We do frequent inspections to make sure that all our policies are being adhered to and this maintains standards. It also ensures that everything is up to scratch when Ofsted do their inspections,' comments Mark.

Franchisees are given all the help necessary: plans for daily routines, room layouts, menus and equipment and now through the relationship with Connect Software, the provision of a dedicated management software program to aid and assist in day to day administration.

Faced with stiff competition from other software vendors in the childcare arena, Connect were successful in winning the software contract in July 2007.

Mark explained the reason behind the decision, "We recognised at an early stage that increased government legislation in the childcare sector coupled with the fast paced environment that our franchisees often work in, pointed to a requirement for a more integrated and 'joined up' approach to the management of the business.

Running a childcare company involves changes to booking patterns on a daily basis, and these changes subsequently need to be reflected in a myriad of other areas of the business e.g. registers, occupancy, invoicing, legislative reporting etc. This poses a potential administrative nightmare for our franchisees who need to spend their time working 'on' the business as opposed to 'in' it, and a dedicated software system that provides solutions to this 'paper-chase' was seen to be imperative.

We were aware of a number of software systems in the market that had been designed specifically to manage the changing needs of the sector and started to review the applications available.

Connect Software had been recommended to us through an existing franchisee, Mark Bates, who had already purchased the software to help manage the growth and success of his two existing franchises in Leamington Spa. The review was very favourable so we invited Connect down to our head office for a demonstration of the system.

We were impressed by the *ConnectChildcare*™ suite of software and we eventually selected Connect for a number of reasons. The primary drivers for the decision were based around ease of use, functionality, value and the option to network all the sites together for easier implementation as the franchise develops. Connect ticked all these boxes and more so we decided to purchase a branded version of the software and commence the rollout.

All of our sites now have the software installed, with full support being provided through telephone helplines, online training and regular upgrades, and we look forward to rolling the software out to future franchisees as the business continues to grow!

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