

Get on the road to success

by Linda Whitney

A MOBILE franchise can make setting up a business much more affordable. They involve working from a van, therefore you don't need to invest in expensive premises and pay crippling business rates.

'Mobile franchisees can operate from a lower cost-base, leaving a decent profit margin,' says Tony Bowman of the etyres franchise.

His franchisees offer a mobile tyre-fitting service to customers who buy tyres online. Franchisees start out as tyre fitters and as the business grows they employ fitting staff and move into management. Investment is £35,000.

But there is more to a mobile business than driving.

'You are not just buying a van-driving job. All franchisees have to sell products and services, and must be good at dealing with people,' says Sean Derrig of Chemex.

'You need to be thinking about long-term relationships with customers, not just the order in which you will do your deliveries.'

Chemex franchisees deliver hygiene products to corporate customers such as hotels and care homes. They are also trained in hygiene regulations and standards so they can give advice to custom-



Picture: DAMIEN MCFADDEN

ers. Investment is £24,500. Mobile franchisees also come with a marketing advantage — the van's livery provides a mobile billboard that advertises the business.

'We encourage our franchisees to use their vans when they do their supermarket shopping or to park in places close to roundabouts, because potential customers can then write down their number,' says Mr Bowman.

Franchisors commonly provide

mobile franchisees with flyers to distribute to houses or businesses close to where they are working so they can do their own marketing.

Mobile franchisees typically start out on the road themselves and grow their business to take on drivers while the franchisee manages the business.

John Feeney, who runs PVC Wizard, a franchise that involves cleaning conservatories, says: 'You do the cleaning yourself for the first

■ **MARK HERMAN** is a Phat Pasty Company franchisee and has four Phat Vans on the road, each with a distinctive surfboard on the top, delivering snacks, Cornish pasties, soups and drinks to businesses in Milton Keynes and Northampton.

'Mobile franchisees can save you money,' says Mark, 47, a former catering manager. 'We work out of one production unit, which keeps overheads to a minimum. Being mobile means you can reach far more customers and create new business opportunities daily, rather than relying on a fixed outlet where you must wait for business to come to you. However, fuel costs have a big impact on a mobile franchise, so you have to plan your van routes carefully.'

'Punctuality is important — customers must be confident that the van will arrive at the same time every day.'

Paul Clark of the Phat Pasty Company says: 'A distinctive van helps create customer interest, but you must have quality products and a professional service to back it up.'

The Phat Pasty Company is looking for more franchisees to deliver food to workplaces on weekdays and to cater for events such as festivals and fetes at weekends. Investment is £25,000 plus vehicle leasing or purchase.

■ PHAT Pasty Co: 07775 764454.

motor vehicles. Dan runs two vans and looks after the practical side of the service, while Gill runs the office.

'It's useful to have a second head thinking about the business, especially when you are mobile, because it is hard to get time to consider where the business is going,' says Dan.

'I am out meeting clients, but Gill is looking ahead and keeping the business on track.'

The Revive! franchise investment is £19,995.

ONE OF the downsides of a mobile franchise is the inevitable high fuel bill, but franchisors can often help reduce this with careful route planning.

'First, choose a franchise area that is close to your home, otherwise you face extra fuel bills just to get to work,' says Janet Walmsley of Oscar, the pet foods and accessories franchise that offers a direct-to-the-door delivery and advice service.

Ask the franchisor if they offer route-planning software to help you work efficiently.

'We have a customer management system that the franchisees can access, which helps them run the franchise and also puts customer addresses into an optimal route pattern to keep fuel costs to a minimum,' says Mrs Walmsley.

Investment in an Oscar franchise is £14,995.

■ etyres: 0800 028 9000. Chemex: 0121 565 6300. PVC Wizard: 0800 012 2501. Revive! 0800 056 2999. Oscar: 0800 068 1106.

two to three years and then you take on employees and move into management.'

Franchisees do local marketing, but the franchisor provides a web presence, plus advertising in Yellow Pages and local press advertising. Investment is £15,000.

Many mobile franchisees might suit couples. Dan Milner, 39, and Gill Margetts, 43, run a Revive! franchise in Exeter in Devon, providing small-area repairs to