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FRANCHISE 500® | ONE OF A KIND

Out of the Ordinary

LOOKING FOR A FRANCHISE THAT VENTURES OFF THE BEATEN PATH? A "MISCELLANEOUS" FRANCHISE COULD BE FOR YOU.

BY GEOFF WILLIAMS

Burger and pizza franchises aren't your thing. You are somebody who can't be pigeonholed. You are a rebel. You are different, unique. You would rather dig for hidden treasure than go for the obvious option. You want something with a little edge.

That is generally what you'll find in the

Miscellaneous categories of the annual listing. These are franchises that may be successful multimillion-dollar conglomerates, or on their way there, but what they do is not easily explained. Rather than following in the well-worn footsteps of their franchising forefathers, they are breaking ground with new entrepreneurial concepts. The franchises under Miscellaneous are so unique, they defy categorization. In other words, they are a lot like you.

Need more reasons to check out these always-interesting sections of our franchise listing? Meet the following franchisors and franchisees, who took their chances on Miscellaneous franchises.

FRANCHISE: Massage Envy

FRANCHISE 500® RANK: #149

ENTREPRENEURS: David and Anne Glover, 48 and 46, respectively, recently opened their fourth Massage Envy establishment in Houston.

BEGINNINGS: The Glovers met when they were both working at the accounting firm Arthur Andersen in the early 1980s. David and Anne fell in love, got married, had two children and assumed the traditional roles of married life. David eventually became part owner of a commercial real estate investment firm, while Anne was the primary caregiver for their children. She calls herself "the volunteer champion of the world—school, community, church, junior league. I enjoyed orchestrating high-level events. It was good practice for organizing multiple franchises."

When David retired from his business in his 40s, he didn't want to retire for



PHOTO COURTESY: MASSAGE ENVY

Rest assured: In their search for a unique business, David and Anne Glover encountered many franchises that rubbed them the wrong way. Massage Envy's membership-based massage clinic was just what they needed.

good, so he and Anne looked into purchasing a franchise. “We could have gone into real estate, but the prices were so outrageous,” says David, “and we wanted to have a business that had cash flow right away—something that was a quick start-up.”

NEXT STEPS: “We went through business brokers,” says Anne, “and looked at a lot of franchises, some that were brand new and others that were kind of scary.” In their case, scary did not necessarily mean bad. Anne had been interested in a sandwich franchise, but once she saw all the food inventory and thought about having teenage employees, she changed her mind. The couple considered a gym franchise but figured it would be clobbered by bigger gym and fitness center franchises, and then they considered a tutoring center. “But we would have gone head-to-head with [competing] learning centers,” Anne points out. “I kept thinking, ‘Where is the niche?’”

They had similar feelings about a hair

salon franchise they were considering. “It wasn’t a new business concept or model,” says David. “Basically, people are already getting their hair cut somewhere.”

Then they found out about *Message Envy*, a massage clinic that operates similar to a gym—customers pay a monthly membership fee and make regular appointments or impromptu ones, usually getting massages the same day they request them, which is a rare occurrence in the industry.

Some risk-averse people would run, of course. It’s still a fairly new business, but the Glovers liked that aspect of it. “It was the only game in town,” says Anne.

And it has certainly worked out. Their three initial *Message Envy* establishments alone bring in nearly \$3.6 million a year.

GETTING THE DIGITS: The benefits of massages are not what the Glovers have to sell people on. The idea that the average person can afford to get massages routinely is. So, they were a little nervous about whether the numbers were there: Were there

enough people clamoring for massages to make a full-fledged business out of it? “That was something we had to weigh carefully,” Anne says. “Do we want to get in on this young franchise? And we were jumping into the highest-rent district in Houston.”

But it’s in the high-rent districts that a massage franchise is likely to do well, and after a visit to the company headquarters in Scottsdale, Arizona, where they looked at figures such as the number of customers and the number of massages given every month, Anne and David were convinced the numbers were there. Says Anne, “We thought, ‘This is almost too good to be true.’ So we went with the assumption [that] if we build it, they will come.”

And they did.

Of course, there’s also something to be said for running a franchise where you can get your own massage whenever you please. It may be the most relaxing sort of business you could ever own.