

AWNINGS: THE FINISHING TOUCH FOR YOUR FRANCHISE



THE FINISHING TOUCH

You've spent endless hours poring over franchise opportunities. You've found exactly the right business. The ideal location. It's all coming together, and you can't wait to open your doors. One of the final steps will be to install your awnings. Those awnings might be the finishing touch, but they're far more than icing on the cake.

Awnings don't simply shade your windows or decorate your façade. They make a visual statement about your business. If your place doesn't look inviting on the outside, no one will go in. So the choices you make now as you choose your awnings will affect how your business looks and how well you're able to attract customers.

Or maybe you're not a franchisee, but an architect or construction manager working out of franchise corporate headquarters. Your job is to provide awning specifications that assure brand consistency throughout your enterprise. But those specs should also guide franchisees toward the most appropriate choices, so they can use their awnings to maximum advantage.

If you're directly responsible for any corporate stores, those specs can guide you, too.

Superior longevity and visual presence are dual goals for franchise awnings

Awnings might be the final step in your store's build-out, but they should be a primary consideration, not an after-thought. It's smart to set funds aside strictly for awning construction, so you won't be tempted to scrimp on them if you experience budget overruns in other areas. Your awnings are just too important.

When it comes to franchise awnings, quality counts at every step. The right design + the right frame + the right fabric is the formula that ensures top quality. Follow the formula, and you'll arrive at awnings that can provide an outstanding visual presence to promote your business as well as the long-lasting performance that will bring you the strongest return on your investment.

Combine the right design, frame and fabric with imagination, and you'll get franchise awnings that build your bottom line as well as your image.

Read on to learn how, as we discuss:

- The types of awnings most appropriate for your franchise.
- Achieving the awning life expectancy you require.
- Capturing every marketing advantage.
- Choosing the best awning company.



TYPES OF AWNINGS

Commercial awnings can be constructed entirely of metal or they can consist of a frame covered with fabric. While all-metal awnings can be a good choice for certain applications, fabric styles are far more versatile. They're also less expensive, making them a more cost-effective investment for your franchise.

Fabric awnings can be stationary or retractable. However, your franchise store awnings should present a permanent display, making retractable styles an impractical choice. Nonetheless, you might want to consider using retractable awnings for auxiliary seasonal use.

Chances are you're looking for multiple awnings, to highlight your entrance, cover your sidewalk or shade individual windows. Within the parameters of your corporate franchise specifications, these awnings can be a simple design, or they can be more elaborate. Creatively designed awnings can convert even the ugliest building into something that's truly eye-catching yet entirely in keeping with corporate standards.



Awnings come in all shapes and sizes

When we think of typical awnings, we think of a structure that mounts on the wall and angles downward. Canopies are similar, but they also have support poles, or legs, and their shape can be angled or domed. Beyond those traditional styles, though, there are several other types of awnings you can use to augment your business seasonally or for special purposes, on-site or off-site.

Think of them as finishing touches – shade structures that can help you make better use of your outdoor space to increase your visibility and even generate revenue. Free-standing canopies and tension membranes, also called sails, can cover any size area for seating or activities. And umbrellas are a perennial favorite for providing temporary shaded seating.

Awnings can provide finishing touches to your store's interior, as well. You can use them to highlight merchandise displays, today's dessert offerings, your cashier or pick-up counter, etc.



“Think of them as finishing touches”

The key is coordination. You can combine different awning styles, materials, shapes and colors -- as long as you maintain a consistent look that meets your company's guidelines for performance and appearance. There's no reason you can't have an interesting, irresistible exterior instead of something run-of-the-mill, as long as you insist on quality.

Perhaps surprisingly, a professional awning company can produce a top-quality custom awning for you in just a few weeks, once you've obtained your permits. As you work with them to determine exactly what you want, keep two things top of mind: your awnings should last a long time, and they should help market your business to the fullest extent possible.

CONSTRUCTING AN AWNING THAT LASTS

You want awnings you can count on to provide the ultimate in performance, with the least maintenance. You'll achieve that by remembering the success formula: right structural design + right frame + right fabric. The longer your awning lasts, the greater your return on investment. The less you have to fiddle with your awning, the lower your cost of ownership. You've made a sound business decision.

With a typical franchise agreement duration of ten years, you should expect your awning to last about that long as well. Choosing high quality components will help you reach that goal.



The right structural design

Your primary awnings will be permanently attached to the exterior of your building. To ensure maximum durability, factors like these help determine the most suitable structural design:

- Municipal codes or building-specific regulations.
- Historic Designation.
- Façade requirements – your building's physical ability to support the weight of your awning over time.
- Wind, snow load or other environmental conditions such as dampness or salty coastal air.
- Location -- even different neighborhoods within a large city can present different challenges.

Other factors can affect your awning's lifespan, including any type of lighting you plan to incorporate and issues such as heavy vehicle traffic that could indicate a need for more frequent cleaning.

The right design, coupled with quality construction and installation, help ensure your awning will remain safe and secure throughout its life.

The right frame

You want materials that are tough and durable because framing that's not strong enough for the job virtually guarantees you'll have problems and frustration later on. Galvanized steel is tough, but it's also heavy. And it rusts, so it requires regular upkeep and painting. The best choice is staple-in aluminum framing.

Aluminum is preferable because it's lightweight yet very strong. It's versatile and easy to maintain because it won't deteriorate, and it accommodates "egg crate" liner for the underside of your awning, which won't rust and can be easily replaced in the future. Eggcrate grid is actually made for outdoor use, so it's up to the task, and it's white, so it's unobtrusive. The alternative -- ceiling tile grid -- isn't intended for outdoor use, so you'll have to keep painting it.

Although aluminum frames work well with several fabric attachment methods, stapling has proven to be the best choice, especially if you plan to use high-end top-coated or eradicable fabrics.

The right fabric

Every material has advantages, though nothing is perfect.

Fabric that comes from questionable sources is never a good idea. It may not hold up, and a manufacturer located far away isn't likely to care. It's smarter to stick with top brands from well-respected manufacturers – fabrics already proven to perform well for a long time. The last thing you need is to set yourself up as some company's awning fabric guinea pig.

Woven acrylics are difficult to clean and they can stretch and sag when wet. But there are more advanced alternatives on the market that can give you the same look and much better performance. Lower-priced vinyl tri-laminates fade and can crack under ultraviolet light, so they aren't a good choice for your franchise awnings, either. It's important to note that vinyl used to make banners is an entirely different product than awning vinyl.

On the other hand, the latest high-tech fabrics now offer warranties of eight or even ten years. They also offer superior resistance to mold, mildew and fading, which contributes to extended lifespan. Some are especially flame-retardant or provide nearly 100% UV protection – important if your awnings will cover areas where people congregate to eat or socialize.

Higher end fabrics can also have a special urethane finish, and you'll find Eradicote top-coated material which is specially designed for backlighting.

At 19-20oz. weight, both of these products are particularly good for backlight applications, and their protective finishes increase UV and fade resistance while keeping maintenance to a minimum. The most durable awning fabrics created for backlighting can last 7-10 years.



Other factors that affect longevity

While hardly the most prominent part of your awning, thread used to sew the seams can significantly affect your awning's durability. However, it's possible to construct your awning without stitching, by combining heat-sealing with stapling to achieve a reliably durable result.

Ink quality makes a difference, too. Inks have their own warranties -- the best tend to run about five years – and reputable awning companies regularly test ink life themselves on various fabrics to verify manufacturer's claims. It's the combination of ink and the fabric it's used on that ultimately determines longevity.

Because it's so important to match quality and lifespan expectations of ink and fabric – both have to be good to produce a good result -- fabric manufacturers conduct weather-machine tests to understand how fabric and inks work together. Even the equipment used to imprint fabric can affect the final result.

Ultimately how long your awnings last depends on the quality of workmanship, not just the raw materials. It's the total package – the right design and the right materials, brought together in the hands of skilled, experienced technicians and installed by professionals. That's why it's so important to entrust your awning production to people are trained in the latest techniques and using state-of-the-art equipment.

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You can “save” money on your awnings up front, but the product you receive won’t last. Long before you want it to, your awning will begin to fade, deteriorate, create safety problems and look, well, unbusinesslike. Your customers won’t be impressed, and neither will the folks at franchise headquarters.

Warranties speak for themselves. Product manufacturers and an awning company that stand behind their work will give you the greatest peace of mind, knowing you’re getting what you’re paying for – quality awnings that will look good and function well for years.



USING YOUR AWNING TO SELL

Commercial awnings are amazingly versatile. They reinforce your corporate brand, which is especially important for franchises. And they help establish your store's individual brand, too – consistent with corporate standards and yet distinctly “you.”



Awnings help people find you, by announcing your location in a big, bold way that's unmistakable. They serve as architectural elements, providing a finished look for your entrance or your entire exterior. They show off your store's personality, with curb

appeal that attracts people, invites them in and welcomes them through the door.

Awnings promote your business, around the clock. That's why you can't afford to settle for just any awning. This is your chance to create a visual presence that makes an unforgettable statement about your business.

But awnings offer an array of valuable marketing benefits beyond branding and helping people find you. They actively sell your store and whatever is inside.

You need awnings that really pop

Graphic design is just as important as structural design when it comes to creating commercial awnings. You can customize your awning just about any way you want, not just physically, but visually. If you own several franchise locations, your awnings can be identical, but unless your physical space is exactly the same at every location, you'll probably want and need some variation.

No matter how general or detailed your franchise specs, consistency and individuality are both important. So of course you'll want to incorporate your official logo and colors. But consider them a jumping-off point. Then get creative.

Commercial awning fabrics come in literally hundreds of colors, and you can dress them up in almost unlimited ways. With digital printing, you can literally put any artwork anywhere on your awnings. Whatever methods you use, your awnings should portray the same sort of visual presence as all your other marketing materials, from your website to your point-of-sale to your delivery vehicles.

That includes temporary items such as your Grand Opening banners, or signs you might use to promote sales or seasonal specials. Unlike your awnings, those items don't need to last a long time, but they still need to reflect the highest quality graphic design and craftsmanship. Your awning company can help you match everything up, maintaining consistency. Highlighting individuality.



You'll want to seriously consider lighting for your awning, especially backlighting, which can really make your graphics stand out. Lighted awnings are welcoming as well as practical. They support increased safety and security. They promote your business after dark. But remember that energy costs money.

Awnings can expand your space and increase your sales.

That's because you can use different styles of awnings to create shade structures. And that turns outdoor space into usable space, seasonally or all year round. Shady spaces can enable you to generate more revenue, with expanded floor space for merchandise display or more seating for food and beverage service. And covered areas make your customers more comfortable, shading them from the hot sun, sheltering them from inclement weather and protecting them from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays.

You can use free-standing awning structures for specialty projects, too – an ice cream cart or portable sales booth for special promotions or off-site events. The possibilities are endless.

The more appealing your space, inside and out, the more people will want to check out your business and become repeat customers. Awnings make a positive, lasting impression customers will share with their friends.

Even before you open your doors, you can consider how you might use multiple types of awning structures to broaden your visibility and promote your business. Stand-alone canopies, intriguing sails and umbrellas all have specific appeal and serve useful purposes.



You may choose to defer purchasing these additional tools, but understanding your options will help you think ahead as you're making future business plans. You'll always appreciate new opportunities to promote your franchise store and increase sales.



As a franchisee, you have to actively work your marketing to meet prospective customers. You can't just sit back and rely on corporate name familiarity or franchise-paid advertising to grow and prosper. That's why you can't afford to settle for just any awning. This is your Big Statement, not just a piece of fabric that carries your name or address.

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CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORKING PARTNER

You wouldn't hire someone with little experience in commercial building construction to build out your facility. As a franchisee, you have to meet a higher standard, and your awning company should, too. You should expect solid advice and personalized assistance, from professionals who know the realities of designing and building awnings for franchises.

Comprehensive capabilities

You're hiring a working partner. So look for an awning company that has demonstrable product knowledge and proven expertise working with your type and size of project and physical location.

The right company will have highly-skilled, creative staff in every department, from the project manager to structural and graphic designers, to the production floor and the installation crew. They should be able to produce detailed renderings. Even more important, they should be able to read your corporate specifications and understand how they will affect your

project in real life. They should have state-of-the-art production equipment to produce your awnings precisely as conceived. And they should willingly work within your budgetary limitations.

Insist on a company that's well-established, with a reputation for superior work and superior customer service.

Dependable liaison

Good communication is essential for success when crafting franchise awnings. Especially if you're a new franchisee, there's a lot going on and you need someone you can rely on to manage the job for you. So look for an awning company that will take the time to answer your questions and explain the "whys" behind their recommendations. Someone who can translate your technical specs into a vision of the final product.

Look for a company that understands the behind-the-scenes requirements and processes involved in getting approvals. You want a working partner who can communicate knowledgeably and effectively on your behalf with your corporate representatives. This could become critical, if you need or want to make alterations to official specs that could require special approval from the home office.

Pick an all-in-one company

Your awnings will be completed faster, with no communication glitches or resulting delays. Having a deadline you can count on will give you greater peace of mind, knowing you'll be comfortably ready to go by the time your grand opening day arrives. With just one company handling your entire project, you'll get more personalized attention throughout the process, too.

The cost of awning failure is far greater than the cost of doing it right to begin with. And quality, hassle-free execution starts with hiring a quality company.



FRANCHISE AWNINGS: HAVE IT YOUR WAY

Whatever type of franchise you're operating – food and beverage, lodging, retail, personal care or something else – you want to bring your awnings to life in a way that's uniquely yours, even as you remain true to the spirit of your corporate guidelines.

You can have exactly what you want, including individualized touches, by choosing the right awning styles and structural design, the right frame, the right fabric. And by choosing quality that ensures longevity and design ingenuity that sparks marketing excitement.

Your awnings are the visual representation of your brand, so they have to showcase your business in an appealing and consistent manner. And they have to last for many years, without a dip in performance or appearance. This is no time to short-change yourself. Investing in quality now ensures a long and trouble-free future for your awnings. And pride of ownership for you.

“You can have exactly what you want”

You can't always see quality, but you'll know it's there, working hard to you get off to a great start and grow your franchise business.

