

## Four chains link up to find franchisees

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They are four chains that want the same thing: more North Jersey franchisees.

So rather than go it alone, Nathan's Famous, Saladworks, Carvel and Philly Soft Pretzel Factory are teaming up and sharing the costs of seminars designed to get out each of their messages.

Combined, the chains hope to open about 240 new locations in North Jersey within the next five years. Executives see their "road show" partnership -- which comes to Teaneck tonight -- as a more cost-effective way to make their pitches.

With marketing and advertising expenses, holding a seminar alone might cost around \$35,000, said Randy Watts, vice president of franchise operations for hot dog icon Nathan's Famous. Instead, he's spending about \$5,000. "We're basically leveraging our dollars against media ad purchases ... to get people into the room," he said.

Bob Purvin, chairman of the American Association of Franchisees and Dealers, sees the approach as a variation on a theme -- franchise "packagers" sometimes broker similar groupings, he said.

"I don't see it to be unique but I think it's a good idea," he said. "The guy who wants to do Nathan's might not be as into doing salads as someone else, but they're both interested in quick service concepts."

Small-scale seminars can offer advantages, said Angela Harrington, a spokeswoman for the New Jersey Small Business Development Centers. "Instead of being a pea in a pod at a large expo, a road show puts four franchises center stage in their targeted geographic regions," she said.

In addition, chains with better brand recognition in a particular area can help draw people out, said Paul Steck, senior vice president and chief operating officer of Saladworks. Nathan's, for example, has a stronger presence in New York and North Jersey, while Saladworks has more locations in South Jersey and Philadelphia.

The 7 p.m. event at the Teaneck Marriott at Glenpointe follows others in Long Island and northern Virginia, where attendees get an orientation to franchising and a chance to hear about each franchise model.

From the initial meetings, Watts said he expects to close two deals and has six other strong possibilities. Steck said he had signed up one new franchisee and had three other candidates.

So does the collaboration ever strain under the weight of competition? No.

"We go into this understanding ... that some are going to be interested in Saladworks -- God bless them -- and some will be interested in Nathan's," Steck said in a conference call.

"If they go with Saladworks, that's great," Watts said. "Hey, at least we got a deal done."