

FRANCHISE PLAYERS

This Franchise Took 'Work at Home' to a Whole New Level



Amy VanderMolen loved helping friends and family sell items on eBay. She'd been doing it since the late 1990s. So, she reasoned, why not make her hobby a business? In 2006, VanderMolen opened her own iSOLD It store. Her part-time "hobby" quickly turned into a full-time career. And her store climbed the ranks to become one of the top-grossing stores of its kind in the nation -- even as her franchisor suffered financial problems at the top and, eventually, new ownership.

What's particularly interesting about VanderMolen is that she took the "work at home" concept to new levels, transitioning her initial iSOLD It retail storefront to an iSOLD It@Home business operating completely out of her home.

Name: Amy VanderMolen

Franchise owned: iSOLD It@Home, in Elmhurst, Illinois

How long have you owned a franchise?

I have owned my iSOLD It for nine years. The first six years, I owned a retail location with a physical storefront. I then transitioned my franchise into a home-based

model -- iSOLD It @Home -- and have operated my business for the past three years from the comfort of my home.

Why franchising?

I had been selling my own items on eBay since it first came around in the mid-to-late 1990s. My friends and family took notice and eventually started asking for my help selling their items online, and that's when I realized I could make a career out of what was previously just a hobby.

I knew there were existing businesses in place that did exactly what I was looking to do, so I started looking at franchise opportunities. I liked the idea of franchising because it provides proven processes, relationships with vendors and an existing business model in place that works -- instead of having to start a business from scratch.

What were you doing before you became a franchise owner?

Before launching my iSOLD It store, I worked in finance and as a payroll manager.

Why did you choose this particular franchise?

iSOLD It appealed to me for numerous reasons. At the time I was searching, iSOLD It was by far the most successful in the online reseller industry. It had the most locations nationwide and great systems in place to help me launch my business and aid its success.

How much would you estimate you spent before you were officially open for business?

I spent approximately \$88,000, broken down as: store build-out, including computers and exterior signage, \$58,500; franchise fee, \$15,000; lease deposit and first month's rent, \$3,500; other business startup costs, \$5,000; and working capital, \$6,000.

Where did you get most of your advice/do most of your research?

My husband has an MBA and many years of business experience, so he assisted in my decision greatly. We visited and spoke with other franchisees in the area where we were looking to invest. Based on our own research and projections, we made our decision.

What were the most unexpected challenges of opening your franchise?

Transitioning from working for a company to owning and running my own business, I had to find a new way to balance my work life with my private life. The business can be all-consuming -- if you allow it to be. Although I want my business to be

successful, personal priorities such as faith and family need to be honored. That's still a practice I hold to today.

Another challenge we encountered was taking the iSOLD It business model and adapting it for our specific business and market needs. It took some trial and error, but we were able to adapt the franchise model to how it best fit us.

What advice do you have for individuals who want to own their own franchise?

You need to love what you'll be doing and whom you are doing it with, as you will be investing a great amount of time and energy into the business. Like many people who are self-employed, you can expect to work much more than with the traditional 9-to-5, Monday-through-Friday job. But, for job satisfaction, nothing beats owning your own business. You get out of it what you put into it. Your work ethic, decision-making skills and integrity with the customer will impact your level of success.

What's next for you and your business?

We are going to continue on with our current model and practices, as we've seen a lot of success. We're also going to continue to stay up to date with and research new industry trends as they apply to the industry.