

20 to Watch: franchise trend-setters in 2015

Who will make news in franchising in 2015? Franchise Times presents 20 people, brands and trends we expect to make an impact, and we thank the many readers who answered our call for nominations so we could consider a deep pool. As always, the number of newsmakers vastly outstrips our space for this feature—*which is why we'll* keep bringing you new names all year long.

20. In the tank

They're calling it Cincinnati's "Shark Tank," a version of the popular TV show in which aspiring entrepreneurs vie for investors—but this new group is all about funding the next generation of franchises. Called the Franchise Funding Group, it's led by a small cadre of franchise-industry veterans who have built franchises such as Sylvan Learning Centers, Sport Clips and Pizza Hut. Entrepreneurs chosen to participate will receive up to \$150,000 in financial support, training and marketing, no upfront fees required. The Franchise Funding Group will help map out the "best and most direct way for the businesses to meet their franchising goal," as they put it. To be considered, business owners must participate in a four-round process, from completing an application, providing financial statements and traveling to Cincinnati for a meeting with the company's advisory board. The Franchise Funding Group will own 25 percent of the new franchise system and be entitled to 10 percent of the revenue the new system generates. The business owner will retain 100 percent ownership of the original business concept. "It's a win-win for everybody, because it gives them an opportunity they wouldn't normally be able to have. And we enjoy it. There's nothing more gratifying than to help somebody be successful," says Gary Green, a board member of the new group and CEO and founder of Strategic Franchising Inc. In 2015 the group hopes to back a half-dozen brands, and then seven to 12 a year thereafter. "Within a couple of years we'll probably start our own fund," he said. "There's a good possibility." But don't look for Green to fund the outlandish. "If you have to explain to people what you do, then you'll probably educate a lot of people but you'll not make a lot of money. I like businesses I don't have to explain," he says. "There's always demand for it. People want it, and I just build a better mousetrap."

