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# Miamisburg sports advertising firm signs latest franchisee

Dayton Business Journal - by [Joe Cogliano](#) DBJ Staff Reporter

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A local sports marketing company is gearing up to saturate the country with its brand and business model.

Miamisburg-based [Sports Image](#) recently signed a deal with its seventh franchisee — which straddles the Dayton and Cincinnati markets — and looks to more than double its franchise tally by the end of the year.

Eric Horstman, president of Sports Image, which began awarding franchises about a year ago, said several deals are in the pipeline.

Inquiries are coming in from across the country, driven by exposure on Web sites, social media and professional organizations, such as the [International Franchise Association](#), Horstman said.

Launched in 2002, Sports Image focuses mainly on high school and youth sports programs, brokering sponsorship deals with local, regional and national companies. In exchange for cash, companies can get everything from an advertisement on a scoreboard to being included as part of game day promotions and public address announcements. Sports programs mainly use the revenue for big ticket items, such as scoreboards and scorers tables, but also use the funds for everything from shoulder pads to paying for travel.

For its work, Sports Image gets a cut of the sponsorship dollars, which varies.

Horstman likens Sports Image to a professional ad agency brought down to a grassroots level. He said it has worked with about 1,000 organizations, generating more than \$8 million in equipment and revenue for schools.

Across the country, Sports Image uses its own personnel as well as about 10 independent contractors to broker deals in territories not covered by a franchise. The company has three employees and Horstman expects that number to grow as he adds franchises.


Sports Image charges a \$25,000 franchise fee plus monthly royalty fees, which Horstman




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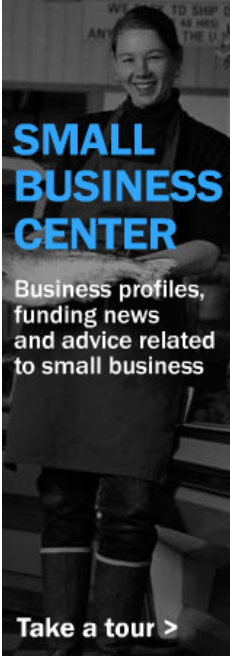
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declined to disclose. In addition to exclusive territory, franchisees have access to contacts and other information in Sports Image database.



On July 30, it signed a deal for its seventh franchise to Kevin Shellberg of Cincinnati.

Shellberg, who has a banking and consumer finance background, will be covering Greene, Butler, Warren, Brown, Clinton, Clermont and Highland counties. Across those counties, there are about 85 high schools, several small colleges and throngs of youth sports leagues.

Shellberg said he bought a franchise because he was intrigued by the business model, which addresses a common theme of budget constraints in athletic departments and provides an opportunity to help local organizations. He looks to secure \$500,000 in sponsorship deals in the first year and at least double that by the end of the second year.

Regional and national corporations these days are working to reach consumers at the local level — going after a Main Street feel — so Shellberg saw a lot of potential in the area.

“That’s where the Sports Image model is very powerful, especially as this recession continues to drag on for way too long,” he said.

Horstman started looking into franchising about two years ago. After a year of work, and an investment he said approaches six figures, Sports Image was sanctioned to sell franchises in 43 states.

He figured others across the country shared his passion for local sports — and could do a better job of marketing in their own area — which inspired him to franchise the business model.

“It came down to, how can we better serve the customer, these schools that are in such dire straights out there?” Horstman said. “We’re doing our part but we could be doing so much more if we were just familiar with the area.”

Horstman said the company is slated to be mentioned in [W Entrepreneur](#) magazine this fall.

Peter Titlebaum, an associate professor and coordinator of the sport management program at the [W University of Dayton](#), said companies like Sports Image have the potential to do well in today’s sports climate because of what they can do for over-worked athletic directors on increasingly tighter budgets.

By having a relationship with equipment manufacturers, such as scoreboard companies, sports marketing companies eliminate the need for athletic directors to scour for the best prices. And selling sponsorships frees up the athletic department personnel from fundraising.

“They’re solving a problem,” Titlebaum said. “We’re in a different era, so if every dollar counts how can we eliminate some of that expense?”

In addition to the latest Cincinnati-area franchise, Sports Image has franchisees in Chicago; Atlanta; Lexington, Ky.; near Baltimore, Md.; near Orlando, Fla.; and Fayetteville, N.C.

Sports Image also founded and manages Flyin’ to the Hoop, a local high school basketball event that attracts some of the top teams and college prospects from around the country. The event pumps more than \$1.4

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