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Theater for Kids, Business for Adults: Interview with Drama Kids CEO Doug Howard



Doug Howard, President and CEO of [Drama Kids International](#), interviewed with FranchiseHelp and discussed the [children's franchise](#). Drama Kids is a children's drama program that offers classes and enrichment in locations around the world. Howard describes his franchise models, client base, the [work-at-home franchise opportunity](#), and future plans for expansion. Read on for a franchisor's insight on what it's like to train and support a network of [home-based franchisees](#) and gain new ideas in return.

FranchiseHelp: What makes Drama Kids popular today? What opportunities or challenges shaped the program?

Doug Howard: Today's school systems are overloaded with standard testing requirements and are significantly underfunded in the creative arts. And yet many national studies from educational agencies consistently show that drama participation builds creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative skills that are necessary in college and for successful careers. Drama Kids fulfills a need by bringing its after school classes and summer camp programs into schools and community locations.

Drama Kids is the only after school drama program specially designed as an educational program to improve children and teenagers' speaking skills, creative thinking, leadership skills, confidence and self esteem. We call this developmental drama. We are not focused on theatrical performances for audience enjoyment. Instead we focus each class on preparing and encouraging children to stand up and speak out, and to understand the unlimited potential that each child has. We prepare our students to perform not just on stage, but in the real world.

FH: Please explain the different franchise models you offer, and the differences and benefits of each.

DH: Drama Kids uses a [home-managed business](#) model with classes offered at many schools and community locations. Students attend a one hour class once each week. Our program is an ongoing skills development program with over 500 scheduled lessons, so children can stay in our program for many years and never repeat a Drama Kids lesson or play.

We offer two different franchise models. Our standard Director Level franchise is perfect for a single owner who would like to build a full-time Drama Kids business in a territory of approximately 350,000 in population. Ninety percent of our owners are Director Level owners. Our Executive Level franchise model offers an exclusive territory in an area with approximately 1,000,000 in population, and is designed for an experienced business manager looking to run a metro-wide area for Drama Kids.

FH: Who are your typical franchisees? Do they have or need to possess a background in theater or education?

DH: Drama experience is not required. Typical franchise owners usually have prior educational, teaching or working experience with children, although we have some wonderful owners with business experience. We provide all of the curriculum, lesson plans, plays, teaching techniques, training and support that is necessary to have excellent classes. Owners then hire and train teachers as the business grows. Beyond past experience, it is just as important to have a fun, and energetic personality and good organizational skills.

FH: How do you recognize new needs and opportunities, and then develop and roll out change across franchisees?

DH: The reality is that we have so much business growth in our core programs that this local unit growth keeps everyone focused on maximizing our core business. But we always keep our eyes open for new trends and opportunities as any business should. We are fortunate to have a great network of franchise owners who are always on the lookout in their local communities for new ideas and opportunities as well. I can assure you that our owners at Drama Kids are a very creative bunch! Once we identify a new concept worth

investment, we will utilize our national office staff and franchise committee to create, test, and train owners as part of the launch. We've rolled out new preschool programs, summer camps and administrative and marketing technology tools and systems in this way.

FH: How is franchising different when your franchisees work from home? How do you carry out ongoing support and training?

FH: The advantages of a business that is managed from the home are fantastic and include both great convenience and no [overhead costs](#). However, a [home office can be a mixed blessing](#) if proper discipline is lacking. Distractions are plentiful. We continually educate owners as to how to maximize their daily effectiveness, part of which is leaving the home office to connect to the community. In addition, we only accept franchise owners who will be focused on Drama Kids as a full-time business endeavor.

Regular organization-wide training is done at our national office and at our annual national conferences, but we do make occasional owner house calls! Such local visits are to provide further training, visit local classes and help work with owners on a one-to-one basis. Additional ongoing support is done by telephone, emails, webinars etc.

FH: Who would you makes up most of your client base, specifically? Parents looking for extracurriculars, or to prepare kids for serious acting, or weekend/afterschool/summer activity, etc.?

DH: I need to say all of the above. Parents enroll their children with us for a wide range of reasons. Some parents intuitively understand our mission and what we are doing through drama; others enroll their children for another activity to fill the daily schedule, but these parents then discover what we do with children and how much their children like it, and stay. It's fun to see a child start with us this way, and then when he discovers drama, he ends up being a long-term student of ours. We do open new possibilites for many as they discover themselves and gain confidence. Other children may be more sports-focused but they still attend Drama Kids for the fun and important speaking skills and creative thinking we develop. We have been known to get entire soccer teams enrolled just by a teammate's word of mouth.

It's important to note that we only require one hour per week for a student to participate, which provides enough free time for our students to do sports, music, or other activities. We do not demand a huge time commitment from parents as most other theatre programs do.

FH: What are you plans for Drama Kids' future?

DH: Quality programs and satisfied franchise owners always come first on our priority list, and I think we are doing very well in that regard. We are very focused right now on national unit expansion by adding more franchise owners, as well as on building a strong national brand in terms of reputation and recognition. We have over 8,000 students currently enrolled in the US, and we look forward to reaching 10,000 students next year.

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