

Women last in franchise queue

G/B 23 Oct - 5 Nov 2007

BY TERRILIZA FORTEIN

Franchisors in the retail industry are missing out on untapped skills, experience and acumen that women and black franchisees have to offer.

According to the Standard Bank Franchise Factor Survey, only 15% of stores in the franchise retail industry are owned by women and only 24% are BEE compliant. The BEE component of the market has been earmarked as an area for real growth within the South African franchise environment.

Franchise Directions director and research initiator, Bendeta Gordon, says women are perhaps under-represented in the franchise retail sector, because of the demanding hours. Gordon is confident that developments in townships and rural areas will drive the inclusion of BEE and women in the industry.

It does not appear as if retail franchisors actively recruit women or BEE franchisees, or if they have significant initiatives to facilitate the entry of women into the industry.

According to Broddie Oosterhuis, the chief executive of Real Africa Brands, owners of Pick & Build, Bed & Couch, Real Africa Estate & Travel, while they

focus on business skills development and creating more opportunities for entrepreneurs to enter markets, none of their initiatives are exclusively for women or black franchisees. "There is a great deal being done to support anyone with sufficient business acumen and capital to take on the competitive franchise market."

Woolworths has approximately 150 franchise stores in SA, of which one third are black owned. No figures were provided for women owned stores.

This brand also reiterated its commitment to support South African entrepreneurs in general, but they do not have special support systems to exclusively help a woman enter the retail franchise industry. Women specific funding is available in the market, such as Business Partners' Women's fund, which was launched earlier this year.

Kaja Naumann, the fund manager, says it was launched because they identified "a clear gap in the market for a product that understands the needs of a women."

She says women generally struggle to access finance and because their assets are often not registered in their name, it cannot be used as security for a loan.

● For more information on the Business Partners Women's Fund, call 084 (H) WOMEN (469 6636).