

A Deeper Bench: Soccer Shots Franchising Expands its Executive Bench, Aims for 30 New Territories this Year

By Jason Scott | March 11, 2019



After selling more than 200 franchise territories over the past 14 years, Soccer Shots Franchising CEO Justin Bredeman still sees a lot of ground for the intro-to-soccer provider to cover in the U.S. and potentially overseas.

Bredeman set a goal this year of 30 new territories, with an eye on filling out the Midwest and big cities such as Detroit,

Milwaukee, Chicago and Kansas City. Each designated territory covers a population area of at least 500,000 people.

To get there this year — and the ultimate goal of one million children ages 2 to 8 participating in its programs each year — Lower Swatara Township-based [Soccer Shots](#) has added depth to its administrative bench. The company has hired new executives and formed an advisory board to bring in fresh perspectives and hopefully speed up the company's next period of growth.

Soccer Shots is one of many youth development programs, including other sports and fitness franchises and STEM-related activities, competing for a family's time and money.

Bredeman is optimistic that the team building will help Soccer Shots stand out in the crowd.

Team work

Soccer Shots Franchising CEO Justin Bredeman hopes a deeper roster of executives and support staff at the company's Dauphin County headquarters will help boost national franchise growth. - (Jason Scott)

As Soccer Shots has matured, its owners have been dedicating more money to building out the team, including adding operations support specialists to work closer with individual franchisees.

“There is an ongoing need to provide more support,” Bredeman said.

He believes early leadership training and more one-on-one communication with franchisees will not only help those partners reach more families and hit their business goals, it also will boost referrals for the company to add new territories.

More than half of the company’s new territories last year came through referrals from existing partners.

Soccer Shots is also investing more money to survey participants on things like communication preferences and program locations to help franchisees improve customer service and retain children from one season to the next.



Bredeman also wants to convert more outside marketing leads to new franchise territories, which could help the company reach its goal of 30. Indeed, Soccer Shots has ramped up its use of third-party marketing firms while also beefing up its internal team.

The company last month hired Michigan native Ashley Mitchell as vice president of marketing and communications to expand outreach in regions like the Midwest. She previously worked in a similar capacity for a youth swimming franchise called Goldfish Swim School.

At Soccer Shots, the marketing and franchise duties on the leadership team were split into two roles when Matt Kurowski, who oversaw both, was promoted to COO in late 2017 and that team grew to six people from five.

Mike Mercado would fill the role of vice president of franchise operations in early 2018. Mitchell now leads the marketing effort.

Bredeman, meanwhile, added CEO to his title of president.

In all, Soccer Shots has grown its administrative staff to 30 people. The company had 26 people last March when it opened its new headquarters off Eisenhower Boulevard. Bredeman believes more roster additions will follow as new franchise partners sign up.

'Scattershot'

The founders of Soccer Shots started the company in North Carolina in 1998, originally calling it Soccer Pals. The idea, which was duplicated in the Harrisburg area, was to teach basic soccer skills and promote character development in a noncompetitive environment.

The youth program caught on at local preschools and day care centers and Soccer Shots would begin selling franchises in 2005.

Bredeman came on as a franchise owner in the Lancaster market when the company began selling territories. He was franchise owner No. 4.

Bredeman, who worked in national franchise support for soft pretzel giant Auntie Anne's, became a partner in Soccer Shots in 2009, alongside co-founders Jason Webb and Jeremy Sorzano. Webb and Sorzano remain owners.

Soccer Shots serves about 330,000 children in the U.S. annually. The company has been adding about 15 territories each year.

But Bredeman admits much of that early growth was more of a “scattershot” approach. Soccer Shots is taking a more targeted approach to fill in openings on the map, hoping that past accolades and recent partnerships will drive more franchise opportunities.

At the end of 2017, Soccer Shots was named the official partner for US Youth Soccer's program for 2- to 5-year-olds, which has boosted the company's exposure to families with younger children. The company, which partners with local preschool and day care centers, in addition to its public programs, also has consistently ranked among children's fitness brands and as one of the top franchises in the country, according to Entrepreneur magazine.

Dan Haines, part of the advisory board, believes the growing national recognition will help Soccer Shots stand out in new markets. But Haines, the vice president of marketing and advertising for Lower Paxton Township-based Ollie's Bargain Outlet, said it will still take time and increased marketing in new cities to attract families and investors.

“They still have a lot of white space to fill (on the map),” Haines said. “But they have stuck to their knitting and know what they are good at.”

Expansion

Bredeman often gets asked about expanding the programming above the 2 to 8 demographic. But he said the owners are committed to entry level soccer and this age group.

“There are 30 million children ages 2 to 8 in the U.S. and we have access to 11 million in our territories,” he said.

That doesn't mean the company won't eventually explore other soccer opportunities and smaller communities with populations of less than 500,000. The five-member advisory board was added to help explore expansion possibilities, he said, including international opportunities.

Soccer Shots is a low-cost franchise at \$34,900 compared with many restaurant and retail concepts that have large real estate and equipment costs.

“The idea was to have a group of individuals interested in helping us over the mountains,” Bredeman said.

The leadership restructuring also helped free up the owners to research the next phase of their growth game.

Navigating the peak is the million-dollar question for any growing franchise, said Don Schin, a midstate franchise consultant and business coach.

“You have to watch and see what the competition is doing. At some point, you have to hire good operators and have the innovative leader who is trying to stay on the cutting edge,” said Schin, CEO of North American operations for Nevada-based ActionCOACH.

Schin said most franchises typically struggle the most during the climb to 100 territories. But he said larger concepts often plateau and hit their goals of opening franchises in all of their big target markets.

Those mature franchises usually begin to reinvent their model to sell into smaller surrounding markets. He said that may mean the franchise company hires less employees to service the market and they could reduce the franchise fee.

“I think once you hit the 100 mark, it is more about where does the leadership want to take it,” Schin said. “Do they want to be 500 franchises or is it a 200 or 250 territory business?”

As of January, Soccer Shots had 127 franchisees and 207 franchise territories in 37 states and Canada. Some owners have more than one location.