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How I...Attracted New Franchisees

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By MICHELLE WU



Top, Brian Curin, the president of Flip Flop Shops; bottom, Darin Kraetsch, its CEO

Who: Darin Kraetsch and Brian Curin
What: Flip Flop Shops, a national retail chain selling flip flops and sandals
Where: Atlanta
Web site: www.flipflopshops.com
Year founded: 2004
Employees: 50
Annual Revenue: More than \$4 million

In January 2008, Darin Kraetsch and Brian Curin decided to start franchising a retail store called Flip Flop Shops. The timing wasn't great: Over the course of the following year the recession had set in, thousands of jobs were lost and businesses were struggling. But Flip Flop Shops was growing. Thanks to some innovative thinking, Mr. Kraetsch, chief executive of Flip Flop Shops, and Mr. Curin, its president, were able to expand their business and today the chain has 10 open stores and 22 more locations are underway. "Flip Flop Shops appeals to people because there's a low cost of entry and it's a very simple, relaxed lifestyle," says

Mr. Kraetsch. To attract potential franchisees to their new brand in a time of tough financing, Mr. Kraetsch and Mr. Curin had to think outside the box. This May, they hooked up with retail property giant Westfield Group at a convention of the International Council of Shopping Centers in Las Vegas and hatched a plan to utilize vacant spaces in shopping malls to garner interest in new stores. They created large banners to place over unleased storefronts, advertising franchise opportunities for Flip Flop Shops to passers-by. Within days after banners were put up in two Westfield shopping malls, they had received several calls from potential franchisees. "In this environment, everybody is reinventing themselves and the ways to do business," says Mr. Kraetsch. "At the end of the day, it's a win-win for both Flip Flop Shops and Westfield."

Fast Fixes features an entrepreneur who thinks outside the box to solve a routine problem or a major obstacle in his or her small business. If you'd like to be considered, email your story to Colleen DeBaise at colleen.debaise@wsj.com.