

# BARRY ROBINSON

*CSI Home and Commercial Services and Spring-Green  
Franchise Owner  
Fredericksburg, Virginia*

**Barry Robinson didn't think franchise ownership was in his future until he took a closer look at Spring-Green.**

Barry Robinson thought he had it all figured out. The game plan went something like this: Establish a critical mass of accounts in one section of town, earn his customers' trust by providing excellent pest control, home inspection, and lawn care services, then cross sell to the same customers. They, in turn, would tell their friends and neighbors and the business would continue to grow.

That was the plan and it was working. That is, until the bottom fell out of the housing market, which did a number on Robinson's home inspection business. Then, on the heels of the housing downturn, local watering restrictions made lawn care companies an impractical expense for many homeowners.

"It was a double whammy," says Robinson, the owner of CSI Home and Commercial Services in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

What had been 300 lawn care accounts in a fairly concentrated area soon dwindled to about 120 customers scattered over a greater distance. Robinson also was discovering that many of his pest control technicians didn't enjoy doubling as lawn care specialists and vice versa.

## Franchising 'That's Not Me'

That was about the time Robinson got a call from a representative of Spring-Green Lawn Care, telling him that an existing Spring-Green franchise was available in Fredericksburg. The Spring-Green representative said the franchise company thought Robinson would be an excellent owner. The only problem was that Robinson wasn't interested in the franchise business.

"Typically, the advantage of a franchise is a very structured business procedure that allows someone without a lot of knowledge about a particular business to take over and run it," Robinson says. "That wasn't me. I had been doing lawn care for a number of years. So I wasn't actively seeking a franchise." The more Robinson looked into the opportunity, the more he became interested in it.

The Spring-Green Fredericksburg franchise was well established with a solid base of accounts that happened to be in an area where CSI also had its strongest foothold. Robinson liked the idea of reestablishing critical mass and cutting down on unprofitable "windshield time" (when his service reps are driving from one account to another).

## Biggest Complaint: Too Much Business

He was even more intrigued by the opportunity to receive experienced marketing support. "The age old problem in our business is marketing," Robinson says. "You used to put an ad in the Yellow Pages and wait for



the phone to ring. That's all changed." As business slowed, Robinson continued to invest in traditional forms of advertising, and more recently, with electronic media. He wasn't happy with his return on investment. "There's so much volatility in the advertising world; it's not as predictable as it used to be," he says.

With the prime lawn care selling season approaching, Robinson was looking for new ways to deliver his message and attract new customers.

His marketing needs and the availability of the Spring-Green franchise coincided at about the same time as Spring-Green's national conference. Robinson decided to attend, still not convinced that franchise ownership was in his future.

What he heard from existing franchise owners changed his mind. "Their biggest complaint was that after working in the field all day, they would come back to the office to find all these new accounts that needed to be serviced. That made me laugh," Robinson recalls.

## Marketing Tips the Scales

Franchising was beginning to look a lot more attractive. The Spring-Green National Call Center, which provides inbound customer support and outbound selling expertise, was an especially appealing element of the company's marketing services.

In addition, a suite of sophisticated and cost effective direct marketing programs uses historical local market data to target the most qualified potential customers.

Franchise owners can also view and analyze customer demographics, select mailing lists, promotional offers, and send materials directly to their printer for quick turnarounds. Spring-Green franchise owners also benefit from the collective knowledge of the entire franchise system.

*"The biggest advantage is the marketing.*

*Without that, I didn't see us growing at*

*the rate I wanted to grow."*

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