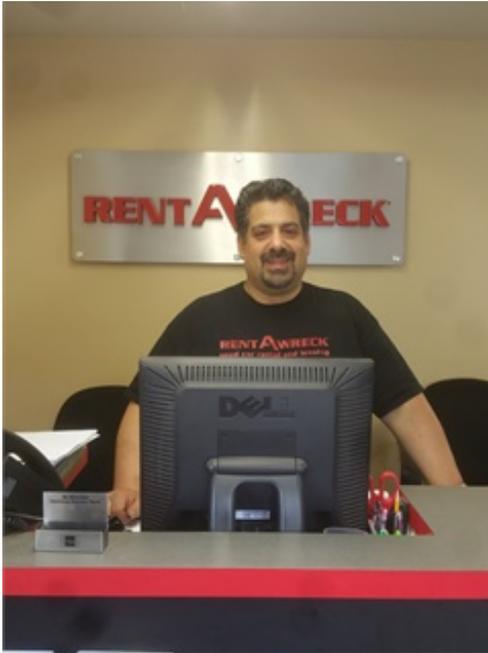


How One Rent-A-Wreck Franchisee Became a CNBC Star

Ernesto “Sonny” Mongillo, Jr. wasn’t even sure what the fuss was about. After filling out a questionnaire sent from International Franchise Systems, the parent company of his Rent-A-Wreck and Priceless car rental business in Southern Conn., he took a follow-up phone call with more questions.



Ernesto “Sonny” Mongillo, Jr. is part of the Rent-A-Wreck and Priceless franchise systems serving Southern Conn.

Then CNBC called, asking more questions. “But they still didn’t tell me what it was all about, just that it was a story on franchises,” Mongillo said.

When Mongillo finally saw the link online, he realized he had been named one of [CNBC’s Star Franchisees for 2016](#). “Yeah, I was surprised and excited,” Mongillo said. “It was a little overwhelming. It’s a battle every day, so it’s an honor to be picked.”

Criteria for Selection

Mongillo found out later he was part of an exhaustive selection process that starts with the franchisor.

[To be considered for the CNBC distinction](#), franchisors must submit data to the Franchise Business Review (FBR), a franchise industry market research firm that conducts an annual survey of franchise satisfaction and performance.

FBR evaluates franchisors based on their proof of concept in multiple markets, a review of franchise disclosure documents, the franchisor’s financial performance, franchisee satisfaction, and opportunities for its franchisees to make a return on investment, as well as how the franchisee community regards management.

These criteria narrowed the pool of franchisors in this year's survey from 900 down to 68, which included Rent-a-Wreck. At that point, CNBC started to look for individual franchisees from those 68 systems and narrowed them down further based on responses to another survey. The survey gauged components of a successful franchise operation, including financial health, franchisee satisfaction, and growth potential.

Responses to the survey were evaluated to create a new list of 1,700 franchisees, from which CNBC selected one representative from each state. "It's really pretty awesome to see Sonny and Rent-A-Wreck hold up through such an exhaustive process," said Jason Manelli, vice president of Interfranchise Systems. "We had to demonstrate that we have very satisfied franchisees, and then Sonny had to demonstrate strength within our system and compared to other franchise systems and their franchisees."

"For our companies, what I really think is working right now is the mutual commitment and accountability from both sides with us and the franchise owners in our system," Manelli said, adding that the FBR surveys helped to foster that commitment. ([Rent-A-Wreck participates](#), though other car rental franchisors do not.)

"We preach to our franchise owners to listen to their customers — from reviews to surveys, at the counter, and over the phone," he said. "The customer will tell you everything you need to know if you listen. I feel the same about our franchise owners as our customers, and it's a constant exercise in listening and adjusting and weighing everyone's interests against the greater good."

All in the Family

Ernesto Mongillo, Sr. started selling used cars in 1978 and expanded the business to auto repair, towing, and retail fuel sales. In 1991, after responding to a flyer in the mail to "put your used cars to work," the younger Mongillo opened up as a Rent-A-Wreck franchisee with five cars. "We decided to give it a shot," Mongillo said. "We're proud of starting from nothing out of a used car lot, and we've been building it ever since."



Started in 1978, the business performs auto repair, towing, and retail fuel sales in addition to car rental.

The rental business claims 80 to 90 rental units today, with a mix of insurance replacement, local rentals, and

vacation rentals. Mongillo predicts his five locations will do \$1 million in revenue for 2016.

As part of the fabric of the local community for so long, Mongillo's business is dependent on its customer service. "With the name Rent-A-Wreck they expect a 'wreck,' and we over deliver on our promises," Mongillo said. "We know a happy customer will tell two more people but an angry customer will tell 10."

As for the founder of the company, "Dad comes in every day and puts his two cents in," Mongillo said.

But in terms of [the CNBC distinction](#), "He doesn't care too much about that," according to Mongillo. "If I sold a car and showed him the check he'd have a better reaction. He's from Italy, the old school."