Franchising typically involves a contract between a franchisor and a franchisee, in which the latter agrees to adopt the former's business plan in exchange for an upfront fee and a percentage of revenues. Though franchisees own the property rights (as opposed to licensees that only lease those rights for a finite period of time), they are also either contractually bound to or economically benefited by following the franchisor's rules of conduct and/or stewardship, which might involve purchasing raw materials from particular vendors, adopting marketing materials, and standardizing merchandise, prices and other iconic franchise elements (logos, uniforms, architectural and interior design). While franchisees often take their cues from a centralized corporate entity, they are allowed (in some instances) a modicum of differentiation from other outlets to account for the geographic and cultural specificities of their particular locations. Importantly, while franchisees are expected to follow the franchisor's lead, it is very rare that the opposite occurs, when headquarters seeks the advice or adopts the on-the-ground practices of its franchisees. Franchising is envisioned as a top down operation. The advantage for franchisees is buying into a recognizable brand with a pre-established reputation and formalized infrastructure. The advantage for franchisors -- in addition to collecting revenue – is the extension of their brand name into new territories. Troubles arise when franchisees vary the formula without permission, diluting or misrepresenting the franchisor's image, or when franchisors fail to provide the necessary guidance, infrastructure and/or marketing for franchisees to incorporate. These practices and concerns hold true across different types of franchises, from restaurants and coffeeshops to clothing outlets and door-to-door sales.

According to Henry Jenkins, narrative franchising entails "the coordinated effort to brand and market fictional content within the context of media conglomeration" (285). This definition maps well onto the processes described above. The centralized conglomerate franchises its intellectual property (stories, characters) to its various media divisions in an effort to extend its reach into new markets and exploit synergistic possibilities through coordinated marketing practices. The conglomerate will also provide each division with criteria detailing how these properties can and cannot be used in order to ensure brand coherence. Where franchisors like McDonalds operate like octopuses, with separate tentacles connecting back to the body of the beast but disconnected from one another (unless the octopus so wills that they become entangled), narrative franchises look more like spiders webs, with each thread connecting both vertically and horizontally. Each thread assumes a unique and strategic connection to the web as a whole. While this allows the conglomerate spider to move content in multiple directions across its domain, it also requires that each movement be tailored to ensure the integrity of individual threads. Narrative franchises do not simply aim to reproduce the central brand, but link together in ways that shape and define its parameters, occasionally requiring a radical re-centering of the brand in response to a particularly strong (successful, profitable, popular) narrative outpost.

For example, *Battlestar Galactica* not only exists as an on-going television series on Sci-Fi, but also as a series of comic books published by Dynamite Entertainment, telling stories set both before the Cylon attack as well as "in between" and "alongside" the television narrative, filling in gaps and deepening reader understandings of the *BG* universe. A series of webisodes produced in between TV seasons are also designed to fill in temporal jumps. Finally, *BG* exists as a swath of fan-produced stories and videos, both sanctioned and unsanctioned, mapping the cultural geography and history of the brand in canonical and contradictory ways. All of these elements are franchise outposts, whose connections to one another are either tightly knotted or loosely threaded, each capable of existing on its own, but more valuable for their ability to deepen consumer investment in it.

Meanwhile, properties like *The 4400* and *True Blood* have moved beyond *BG* in their efforts to extend creative participation to fan communities and establish new franchise outposts. These properties have launched online campaigns that encourage creative participation in the form of integrated character creation, where fans inhabit existing storyworlds, self-narrating as if they were characters in these universes. *The 4400* encouraged fans to upload videos and blog about their experiences with Promicin, a fictional drug that either gave its users powerful abilities or produced painful deaths. *True Blood* has set up an online dating site where fans can create detailed profiles that identify them as either vampires seeking human mates or vice versa and then interact with one another as these characters. Such practices serve corporate promotional purposes transforming free creative labor into buzz, while also increasing fan investment in these storyworlds through social interaction and by providing a degree of creative authority over these fictional universes. They also pose interesting challenges to the maintenance of corporate creative authority, as fan-chisees are not contractually bound by the same rules as other media producers and do not always share the corporation's vision for the property. And yet, fans often self-police their creative embodiments to ensure conformity with existing brand architecture, ceding creative authority to the corporation.