Small Budget Upgrades

by Mara Shorr, BS, CAC II-XII and Jay Shorr, BA, MBM-C, CAC I-XII

When most skin care professionals first opened their spas, they were probably in one of two situations: everything was shiny, new, and top-of-the-line, or they made due with what they had on a limited budget. Years later, most spas are ready for an upgrade that will make it look modern again, while maintaining the essence of the business that was built. Here are a few points to consider when in the market for a product and spa makeover.

REEVALUATE RETAIL

Take note of which products are selling quickly and which are sitting on the shelves, and those that are in great demand, but not offered at the spa. Talk to the spa's staff and clients to get their feedback and consider sending out a survey in regard to bringing in new products. When it comes to looking at what is selling and what is sitting, go by the numbers and check the books for the cold, hard facts.

Upgrade the product display area. Make sure that testers are available so that clients can see, smell, and touch the products. Also, simple organizational additions, like a well-lit, glass display case can make a huge difference in overall appearance.

Make sure employees are trained and educated when it comes to talking about the skin care lines carried at the spa. If the skin care professional recommends a product that the receptionist cannot answer basic questions about, like its daily use or price point, the spa could lose the sale. Have skin care vendors assist in providing additional training.

CONSIDER COMPETITION COMPARISON

Call local spas to see how they answer the phone and respond to questions about treatments, hours, booking appointments, hiring, and so forth. Compare and contrast what the spa is doing well and what could be improved, and consider how the experience is relatable.

Have a trusted friend, family member, or, better yet, a consultant, call the spa to see how the team answers the phone, books clients, and answers questions about treatments. For example, does the team sound miserable when they answer the phone or can the caller hear their smiles and enthusiasm for what they do? Can they recommend the best solution to a caller inquiring about back acne? Can they explain the difference between a facial and microdermabrasion? Do they offer up the next available appointment slot to the caller or wait for the caller to request an appointment? If any of these things are an issue, ongoing phone training skills could be in order to help take the spa to the next level.

CHANGE PERSPECTIVES

Owners tend to put on blinders when it comes to their own location. But remember, clients do not see things the same way.

Start with the parking lot. Think about if clients can easily find the location from the street or if a new sign may be in order. Is it easy to find a parking spot? Is there a safe way to get from the parking lot to the front entrance if it is dark? Is there construction nearby or is there snow, rain, or ice that could present a hazard? Would a valet service be helpful? Is there a conveniently-

placed trash bin that a client could use to throw something away on their way into or out of the building? Small things like this are easy to remedy and go a long way.

When clients walk in the front door, what is their first impression? Look for cosmetic things, like chipped paint, towels that look worse for their wear, or overflowing trash cans in the treatment rooms and restrooms. All of these things can, and should, be fixed in order to improve client experience.

What is the average appointment like for clients? Are they walked back to the treatment room? What is conversation like on the way back? Is the team constantly engaging the client?

Review client surveys to see where clients see opportunities for improvement. If the professional is not sending out surveys after each treatment, they should implement this process as soon as possible. Ask no more than 10 questions in order to keep the survey from becoming a burden and pushed to the wayside. Include questions about the visual aesthetics of the spa and atmosphere, quality and pricing of treatments, reception area experience, and skin care products. This data will help guide professionals as to what is important to clients and what they see that the professional does not.

SIZE UP THE STAFF

Professionals should use their schedule (and gut) to guide the spa's staffing situation, looking at both hiring, training, and firing. It happens: most professionals are bound to keep a staff member on just a little too long at some point. Maybe they became negative over time, and now their poor attitude affects both other staff members and clients. Maybe they have started taking advantage of lenient policies, utilize personal social media during the day, extend lunch breaks, or no longer complete tasks in a timely manner. Whatever the reason, evaluate which staff members are helping the spa and which staff members are hurting it. Letting staff hold back the spa is toxic. They may have worked at the spa for a few weeks or a few decades, but letting a negative employee run the business is deadly. Some employees are able to be coached into better habits, but, more often, an unsatisfactory employee needs to be let go in order to make room for an employee who can contribute positively to the spa.

Take a look at the schedule and list of current needs to see additional help is needed. It could be that it is time to work with a full-time marketing employee or agency. The spa might be ready for an office manager to help manage the business side of the spa. The schedule might show that another provider or two is needed for evenings and weekends, for instance, because they are consistently booked one to two months out. Professionals tend to think of upgrading their spas in terms of a fresh coat of paint or new floors, but, in reality, staffing is just as, if not more, important.

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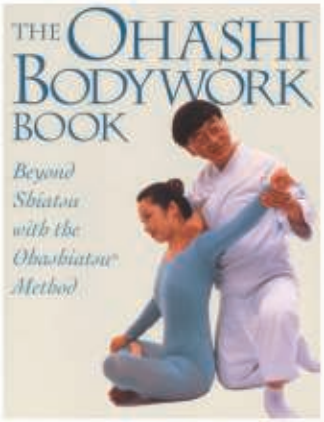

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MAXIMIZE MARKETING

Over time, marketing efforts get stale and need refreshing. A lot is included in the modern realm of marketing, but a few simple actions to evaluate can be a good place to start.

Perform a social media audit. Look at which staff member is posting about the spa, which channels they use, how often, and if these efforts are worth it. Is social media driving business? Why or why not? Consider bringing in a professional for a tutorial to jumpstart efforts.

Look at what people are saying about the spa on the internet. Check out everything from the spa's Facebook page to Yelp. Professionals can even perform a Google search on themselves and the spa to see what people are saying. Do they love the spa but find the receptionist rude?

Utilize internal marketing once people are inside the spa. Make sure to have customized brochures in the reception area, customized treatment suggestion cards to give to clients when suggesting new skin care lines, and appropriately branded art on the walls. Ensure the spa's messaging, logo, colors, and verbiage are always consistent throughout all materials, as well.

Provide uniform business cards for each staff member to distribute to friends, family, and anyone they come in contact with on the street, in the supermarket, or at their child's daycare. Having their own business cards makes it easy for staff to refer clients to the spa.

This is not an exclusive list for spa upgrades, but with time, effort, attention to detail, and a little elbow grease, each spa can be on its way to achieving next-level goals!

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