

Working *the* Web

Is your spa's website doing
all it can to make your
business more profitable?

By Liz Barrett



BY NOW YOU KNOW HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO HAVE AN ONLINE PRESENCE.

Most people these days have trashed their bulky telephone books and opted for researching information on their trusty home computers. If you don't have a website for your spa yet, your missed opportunities are piling up. If you do have a website, your goal should be to make it work

as hard as you do. This is why many spas now offer booking capabilities as well as options to purchase products and gift certificates, all online. An Internet door is always open, so seize this opportunity for your clients to do business with you even when your spa's door is closed.

Online Booking Software

Start researching your options with this list of online booking software providers.

CMJ Designs (Salon Iris, Orchid Software),
www.mysalononline.com

Contemporary Web Plus (Appointment-plus),
www.appointment-plus.com

Crimpers Management Software, www.crimpers.com

Extended Technologies (SalonBiz, SpaBiz),
www.extendedtechnologies.com

Harms Software (Millennium.Net), www.harmssoftware.com

Hercinia Software (RTSalon), www.hercinia.com

Interactive Designs (SalonTouch), www.idi-usa.com

International Expert Systems (ComeAgain RSVP),
www.iesco.com

Milano Systems, www.milanosystems.com

Salon Director, www.salondirector.com

SalonMaster Software, www.salonmaster.com

The Mikal Corporation, www.mikal.com

VirtualSalons.com, www.virtualsalons.com

YellowTip Software, www.yellowtip.com

The Booking Debate

Is it really a good idea to let clients book their spa appointments online? Some spa owners believe that online booking is a convenient, win-win option for both the clients and spas. Others wonder if the practice might detract from the personal touch expected of spas. Despite the debate, online booking is gaining in use: According to Boonton, New Jersey-based Harms Software, maker of the popular Millennium.Net booking program, hundreds of spas and salons have purchased this software in the

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six years it has been offered. “Each year we hold a User Group Conference to help educate people on our software and the industry,” says Harms process manager Matthew Scudder. “In 2005, 35 people signed up for our online booking class, and this year we had 110 attendees.”

Whether the process involves having clients book their own appointments, or having them request a time and await a call back, spa owners are seeing the benefits of making their spas in some way accessible to clients when no one is manning the phones. “We’ve found that many of

our clients think about their hair in the evening or early morning when we aren’t open,” says Roger Peter, Millennium.Net user and co-owner of Peter Conte Salon and Spa (www.peterconte.com) in Matawan, New Jersey. “Having an online booking service available to clients 24 hours a day helps them avoid having to leave a voice mail message that can turn into a game of phone tag and result in client frustration.”

Still, online booking has its glitches. Edee Hoffmeister, owner of Celebrity Day Spa (www.celebritydayspa.com) in Medina, New York, says that though her existing clients love the convenience of online booking, it comes with a slight learning curve for new clients. “Some clients don’t know the difference between highlights, color

The screenshot shows the website for Peter Conte Salon and Spa. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, About Us, Services, and Online Booking. The main content area features a large image of the salon interior with the slogan "The journey is the destination." Below the image, there is a section titled "Peter Conte Salon and Spa" which includes text about the salon's location and services. The Peter Conte logo is visible in the bottom right corner.

Peter Conte Salon and Spa's website captures after-hours bookings.



Oasis Day Spa invites website visitors to contact the spa online, but actual bookings take place on the phone.

retouch and full-head color,” says Hoffmeister. “This can sometimes cause timing issues when they arrive at the spa.”

Angela Cortright, owner of Spa Gregorie’s (www.spagregories.com) in Newport Beach, California, is onboard—“Online booking gives our web audience instant gratification, even when we’re closed,” she says—but reminds that the process must be scrupulously monitored. “We check each appointment that’s booked online for accuracy,” Cortright says. “We make sure someone hasn’t booked a waxing and a body scrub for the same day and that the treatment order is correct. We also check that the client’s phone and credit card information is on

file. On occasion we call the client back and ask her to come in a little earlier or later for optimum productivity.”

“The challenge with online scheduling is that software isn’t as intuitive as a live person,” says Heidi Lamar, owner of The Lamar Everyday Spa (www.thelamar.com) in Scottsdale, Arizona. “Often, a person who calls the front desk to book just a massage will end up booking an all-day package once she hears more about it. If

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this person had booked her appointment online we would have brought in significantly less revenue. Because of this, we’ve opted to offer online appointment *requests* that give clients the opportunity to request a preferred time, but still give us the chance to call or e-mail them back and connect with them personally.”

“Regardless of the booking process, there has to be an interaction between the spa and the client,” agrees Bruce Schoenberg, owner of Oasis Day Spa (www.oasisdayspanyc.com) in New York

What’s in Store?

Before setting up your first online store, take note of these tips from web experts:

1. You’ve heard the phrase, “Keep it simple.” The same goes for Internet stores. Too many dynamic graphics can slow down your pages and send away clients in frustration.
2. When you’ve completed your site design, get opinions from people not related to the project (employees, clients, friends, etc.). You need honest outside feedback about the look and functionality of your site before going live.
3. Make sure your site is compatible with Internet Explorer, Apple’s Safari, Netscape and Mozilla’s Firefox. While it’s true that most people use Explorer, you don’t want to lose the clients who don’t.
4. Install safety features that protect your clients’ information. (See “Keep It Secure” on page 96.)
5. Offer customers multiple shipping options if possible, and never overcharge for “handling.”
6. Don’t assume to know what clients want to see in an online store. Schedule surveys and focus groups to save yourself time in the long run.
7. Keep your online store fresh and updated with new products, images and content so frequent visitors will see something new each time they log on.

Keep It Secure

Visitors to your website need to know you can ensure the security of their information, and that's where a Secure Socket Layer (SSL) comes in. Simply, SSL technology encrypts information and authenticates it. Without SSL encryption on your website, vital information such as visitors' credit card numbers travel over networks in full view of anyone with access to it. The SSL Certificate also verifies for your clients that they're doing business with you and not someone posing as you. For maximum security, 128- or 256-bit encryption is suggested.

Here's a list of the top SSL providers:

- Comodo, www.comodogroup.com
- Entrust, www.entrust.com
- Thawte, www.thawte.com
- VeriSign, www.verisign.com

City. "We have a contact form on our website's home page that enables guests to request an appointment, but clearly states that we'll need to contact them to review our reservation and cancellation policy." Leisa Ruiz, owner of Pura Vida Day Spa (www.puravidadayspa.com) in San Juan Capistrano, California, has a similar strategy. "We offer online appointment requests rather than online booking so we can speak with the client and be sure we're accommodating all of her needs," says Ruiz. "It's as simple as checking our e-mail and calling back."



The Lamar Everyday Spa sells half of its gift certificates online.

"When we do introduce online booking, we'd like it to be for our established clients only," Schoenberg concludes. "We'll also be using a company that doesn't require the use of an outside server so that all of our client information will remain under our control."

Cyber Sales

Whenever you participate in any new venture, there are sure to be a few snags along the way. This certainly holds true for selling anything over the Internet, where a number of things can go wrong, from simple lack of response to supply-and-demand problems. "I love being able to reach local and out-

“What has worked best for us is focusing on making repeat sales to existing clientele through our website.”

of-state clients while I sleep, but keeping up with all that an online store entails isn't always easy," admits Ruiz. "One time, a vendor went out of business without telling us and we had to credit back all of the money on orders for their products."

Obviously, browsing products online isn't the same as getting to hold and smell them in an actual retail setting. "The biggest pitfall is that your customers aren't able to physically test your products before their purchase, so it's vital to provide as much information as possible about each product to make the purchase easier," says Tanya J. Kimmey, co-owner of Pacific Quest Day Spa (www.pacificquestdayspa.com) in North Dowagiac, Michigan.

Stephen Strum shares ownership of Sensia Studio and Japanese Day Spa (www.sensiastudio.com) in Houston with one of the city's top makeup artists, Cynthia Christ, who brings in more than \$300,000 per year in makeup sales. Five percent of that money comes from online sales. "Initially, we tried to sell to new clients by putting photos and information about all of our cosmetics on the site, but it just didn't take," says Strum. "Ultimately, what has worked best for us is focusing on making

repeat sales to existing clientele through our website. Repeat clients already know what colors work best for them and they enjoy the convenience of having their cosmetics delivered to their homes.”

Then there are the online selling logistics, like shopping cart software and shipping. “Shop around on other websites for user-friendly shopping carts and check who the host is,” advises Ruiz. “You’ll need something that can be easily changed to show new products and promotions.” Ruiz’s web programmer set up her site’s shopping cart to automatically figure in each state’s sales tax, where applicable. Shipping costs can be kept down by using the U.S. Postal Service but for spas that fill a lot of orders, a service that provides closer tracking, such as Federal Express or UPS, may be preferred.

Selling gift certificates online is proving a lucrative venture for spas. Listen to these reports of online selling success:

- “Half of our gift certificates are sold online—and we just started offering online gift certificate purchases last Valentine’s Day,” says Lamar. “I wish we’d have started earlier because the certificates we sell account for 25% of our revenue.”
- “We’ve been selling online for five years,” says Cortright. “Our online gift certificate sales comprise 10% of all our gift certificate sales, and we’re working on getting the retail portion of our site up to the same level.”
- “Last year was the first year we started selling gift certificates online, and we sold 50. I’m expecting to sell at least double that this year,” says Diane Capobianco, owner of Head Shed Salon and Day Spa (www.headshedsalon.com) in Fairfield, Ohio. “Our goal for 2007 is to educate every client on how easy it is to make purchases and book their appointments online.”

Whether you’re selling products, gift certificates or both, Kimmey reminds fellow spa owners to be aware of the added costs of selling online, such as shipping and maintaining the needed inventory. Kimmey doesn’t directly add any online costs into the prices of her products, so she always has to make sure that the existing prices are sufficient to support her online activities. “All aspects of online shopping need to be accounted for in the established price,” she advises. Kimmey also does comparison shopping on other online shop-

Making clients aware of your website’s features requires your time, patience, tenacity and a multifaceted approach.

ping sites to make sure her prices are in line with the market.

Getting Noticed

It won’t do you any good to add lots of bells and whistles to your website if you can’t make your clients aware of the great features it offers. Doing this will require your time, patience and tenacity, as well as a multifaceted approach. Offline clients who are used to conducting transactions in person won’t automatically go on the Web to book appointments and purchase products, so find every way you can to encourage them:



Head Shed Salon and Day Spa has made online purchasing a priority for 2007.

“The Internet is a powerful tool, but you can’t just put up an online store, then sit and wait.”

1. Announce your online services in all of your company literature (newsletters, e-mails, flyers, etc.).
2. Have staff members who answer the phone tell callers about

any online options your spa offers.

3. Add a message about your website to your spa’s voice mail system for after-hours calls.

4. Include your website address

in the signature of every e-mail you send.

5. Create an e-mail newsletter to promote new updates to the site, new products and special promotions at the spa.

Here’s how some spa owners are seizing every opportunity to promote their online offerings:

- “The fact that we book appointments and sell products online is noted everywhere,” says Cortright. “It’s in every newsletter, on register receipts, all over our website, on signs in the bathroom and outside the spa, in contests and worked into our rewards program.”
- “We hand out new-client bags that contain coupons along with an ID and password for our website,” says Hoffmeister. “We also promote the website in our monthly specials e-mail.”
- “We include the fact that we offer instant gift certificates on everything we can,” says Lamar. “There’s a link on our newsletter, website and every article we post online. We even had special refrigerator magnets made up to advertise it.”
- “We posted signs on all of our mirrors saying, ‘Ask about our online booking,’” says Capobianco. “Now every client gets a customer number and password when she checks out so that she’s already signed up when she visits us online.”

As Ruiz says, “The Internet is a powerful tool, but you can’t just put up an online store, then sit and wait.” An honest look at your spa’s needs and capabilities, along with a proactive marketing strategy, will help make your online booking and/or selling activities work for you. ●

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