

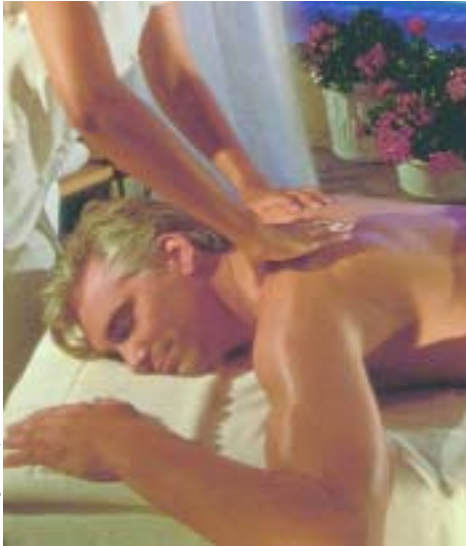
By Dana Dratch

# 14 Business Builders

“Long-range planning is the key to a successful marketing campaign,” says spa consultant Erica T. Miller, author of *Salon Ovations’ Day Spa Operations*. As owner of Erica’s—A Spa in the City, Miller would literally sequester herself in a hotel room each fall and plan promotions for the next 12 months. Now, as owner of Dallas-based consulting company Expertise by Erica T. Miller & Associates, she advises owners and managers that to develop a lucrative marketing plan, they need to take time out to look at the big picture.

“The problem with most salons and spas is the tyranny of the urgent,” says Miller. She suggests that if you really want to boost your bottom line, you need to identify your long-term goals and work backward. Look at each goal individually—whether it’s more hair appointments, a 10% increase in gift certificate sales or a thriving male client base—and develop a plan to make it happen.

Courtesy The Spa at the Four Seasons Hotel



**Develop a marketing strategy for men's services and watch your revenues climb.**

**He pitched a wedding tent in the salon's parking lot and moved the gift certificate business outside.**

Here are some original and proven promotional ideas to get you started:

**1. Bring a friend.** Spas could pick up a marketing trick or two from the health club industry, where customers are encouraged to bring along friends at a discount. "The best sources of new customers are referrals from happy, existing customers," points out Deborah Smith, president of Smith Club & Spa Specialists, Aspen, Colorado. Elizabeth

Arden Salons & Spas offers a complimentary spa lunch to customers who bring a friend for services. "This has generally worked out well because people like coming to spas together," says Kelly Weber, senior vice-president of marketing for the chain. Manicures, pedicures and massages are offered to two clients at a time and the program is very appealing to professional women, who like the idea of a little pampering on their lunch hour. Weber estimates that the spa's cost for the free lunch is \$7 to \$10 per person—not a bad investment considering that 30% to 40% of the program's first-time guests become regular clients. An added bonus: Clients are less likely to cancel at the last minute when they're meeting a friend.

**2. Pitch a tent.** Four years ago, when the Christmas gift certificate crunch began to impinge on the relaxing atmosphere of his spa, Adam Broderick, owner of the Adam Broderick Image Group in Ridgefield, Connecticut, held a brainstorming session with his staff. They decided to take a new approach. Broderick pitched a white wedding tent in the salon's parking lot and moved the gift certificate business outside. Now billed as a drive-

through service, the heated tent—decked out in greens and stocked with refreshments—has become a seasonal tradition that has helped the salon and spa double its six-figure gift certificate trade. Broderick estimates that the tent—which goes up three weeks before Christmas and comes down after New Year's—costs his salon \$8,000 to \$10,000. It's especially popular with men, who may be reluctant to go into a spa and love the idea of fast, efficient shopping. "When you run into obstacles," concludes Broderick, "that's where you find opportunities."

**3. Develop a reasonably priced signature treatment.** "Signature treatments don't have to be expensive," says Jim Cox, president of Cox Consulting in Pasadena, California. "A moderately priced treatment can be a really potent marketing tool." Cox cites the Kuyam treatment at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, Ojai, California, where a single-gender group is treated to a mud application while basking in relaxing herbal vapors and soothing light. During the session,



Courtesy Elizabeth Arden Salons & Spas

**Attract media attention with appealing images and timely story angles.**

Vendors might be willing to pay for part of an ad if it mentions their product by name.



Courtesy Ojai Valley Inn

Offer a low-priced signature service like Ojai Valley Inn's Kuyam mud treatment for single-gender groups.

they're led through a calming meditation routine. Afterward, clients shower off, apply a chamomile lotion and enjoy a cup of herbal tea on the spa's loggia. Cost: \$35 to \$50 per person.

**4. Team up with a partner.** Look for businesses that serve an educated clientele with disposable income. "Health clubs, country clubs and upscale athletic clubs are a natural connection," says Smith. Share client lists and do some cross-promotion. One really good idea: Let a club use a half-day at your spa as an incentive for purchasing club memberships. The club pays for the half-day and you give them a good deal on the price. The Aspen Club & Spa in Aspen, Colorado, tried a variation on this approach while Smith was general manager. The spa designed a "Passport to Vitality" booklet with \$400 worth of free spa services that new club members received when they joined. "It was a strong closing tool for the membership salesperson," Smith said. "For the new member, it was like receiving a stack of Christmas gifts."

**5. Reach out to men.** To attract men, you may have to repackage your message slightly, says Raoul Andrews Sudre, president of Aspen Spa Management Corp., a training, staff management and consulting firm in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Tone down an overly feminine décor or create separate areas and entrances for men. Emphasize the health and anti-stress aspects of your services—but don't overstate what you can do—and offer classes or seminars aimed at men, such as stress reduction, smoking cessation and fitness.

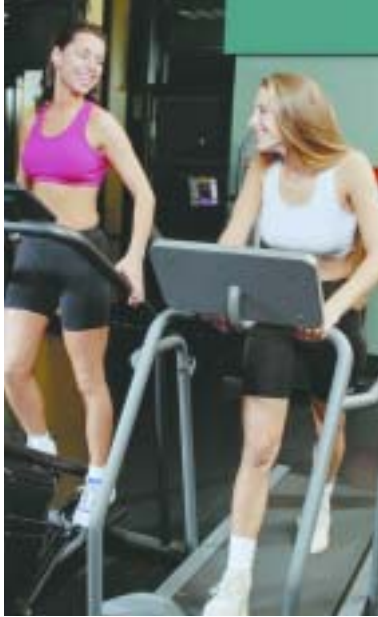
Make sure you are open for the after-work crowd. Advertise in male-friendly publications—like a business magazine or the sports section of the local paper.

You can also reach out to men by creating promotions geared for couples. "Men have to be educated to use spa services," says Sudre, who has been in the spa industry since 1961. "Get them hooked, serve them well and you will have them forever as clients."

**6. Tap your vendor's ad budget.** When spa vendor Pevonia Botanica began offering products developed to ease the appearance of rosacea, the company backed the move with a national advertising campaign, using one consistent image in national print ads. It also offered brochures, posters, counter displays and postcards featuring that same image to the more than 17,000 spas carrying the line. Result? "We can't keep it in stock," says Maritza Rodriguez, a spokesperson for The Cosmopro Group, parent company to Pevonia. "Tying in an image with all the material really made it easy for the spas."

Even if your vendors don't launch an extensive ad campaign, they might be willing to pay for part of an ad if it mentions their product by name, says Judy Colbert, co-author of *Big Bang Marketing for Spas* (2001, Tuff Turtle Publishing, Crofton, Maryland). Many manufacturers, distributors and credit card companies have an ad budget for just such a contingency, but the onus is on business owners and managers to inquire about it.

**7. Make it a family affair.** Today's teenagers are your next generation of spa clients. "Educate the young person to take care of his or her face and body," says Sudre. This has been going on for years in Europe, where spa visits are often family outings. Many of these spas devote large sections of their facilities to teen services. In America, you might try 15-minute versions of your regular facials or massages, semi-



Partner with a local health club to secure fitness-conscious clients.

Corporate America is now discovering spa services as a great alternative to traditional company perks.

nars in health and wellness focused on teen needs, and mother-daughter days.

**8. Start a club.** Airlines, hotels and bookstores have used incentive programs for years. Now, Elizabeth Arden Salons & Spas is testing the idea at several of its Red Door spas and plans to extend the program to all 14 Red Door locations. “We’ll give clients a beautiful red credit card and allow them to earn spa dollars,” explains Weber. “We’ll have a lot of fun with it and the guests will love it.”

**9. Put on a show.** Whether it’s a 30-minute fashion show and gourmet lunch at your spa facility or a daylong seminar on health and beauty at a nearby hotel or convention center, an event can help you bring in a lot of new faces. Lynn Kirkpatrick, owner and director of the With Class Spa in Tyler, Texas, has hosted an annual daylong seminar for four years. The events, held before Valentine’s Day, have become so well known that people drive in from all over the region to attend. Session topics have included everything from menopause to beauty product ingredients.

Last year Kirkpatrick attracted more than 400 attendees—almost too many for the hotel venue. With tickets priced at \$30 and the total tab for the event—including hotel, lunches, ads and giveaways—costing \$5,300, the spa turns a handsome profit and the PR is invaluable.

At The Spa at the Houstonian, one-time classes in everything from stress reduction to makeup application are very popular, attracting 30 to 50 people per class, reports owner Kathy Driscoll. The spa charges about \$15 per person and provides refreshments. One makeup seminar was so successful that Driscoll invited the artist back for private on-site lessons with interested clients—and kept him booked for three days straight. The private ses-

sions were billed at \$300 each and the artist split the profits with the spa.

**10. Become an event venue.** Corporate America is discovering that spa services are a great alternative to the traditional company perks of resort weekends and expensive parties. Company bigwigs can treat employees or clients to a massage or facial as a way to strengthen relationships. Many spas offer meeting space and catered meals to these clients. When a major pharmaceutical company hosted a seminar for doctors at the Peninsula Spa in New York, they were ecstatic with the turnout, says Kimberley Matheson, president of New York-based Natural Resources Spa Consulting. Not only did the docs show up, but most also wanted to bring their spouses. “It wasn’t any more expensive than taking them to Le Cirque,” she points out. Matheson estimates that at least half of the attendees will return as clients.

**11. Alert the media.** Unless your spa burns down, TV cameras won’t just show up at your doorstep. Seek out angles that might appeal to the



Capture the teen client to encourage a lifetime of business.

media. Try to tie ideas to timely local or national events—what’s known to reporters as a “news peg.” If nearby troops are shipping out and your spa is giving free treatments to the families left behind, that’s a news story. News outlets are also interested in trends. Look for the cutting edge developments in the industry and ways in which your spa is a good example of what’s taking place on a larger scale. (For more low-cost PR ideas, see “PR On Your Own” in the upcoming February issue of *DAYSPA*.)

**12. Take a hike.** When Dixon Collins owned Skylonda Retreat (now The Lodge at Skylonda), a destination spa in Woodside, California, he needed to augment his tourist business with local clients. One solution: after-work hikes through nearby parks and recreation areas. Clients would meet at the spa and board the spa bus to the hiking site. “It was very inexpensive,” says Collins, who now operates

Collins Development Co., a spa consulting firm based in Angels Camp, California. “We’d develop a personal relationship with participants, teach them how to walk, stretch, go uphill and downhill—all the techniques that make hiking fun.”

Collins advises offering unusual activities whenever

possible. Other options for groups might include bike rides, weekend picnics or barbecues, and meditation classes. And when you offer these activities, remember to stock related items in your retail department.

**13. Network with cosmetic surgeons.** Day spas can assist post-op patients with everything from covering bruises to breaking up scar tissue. He advises spa owners and man-

agers to meet with local plastic surgeons and ask what you can do to service their patients, and what kind of training is required. Find out if the doctors or their staff members can brief you on technique. Once these medical professionals are comfortable with your qualifications, education and practices, they can be a great referral source. (For more on how to do this, see “Before and After” in the upcoming March issue of *DAYSPA*.)

**14. Take your act on the road.** During the computer boom of the 1990s, Collins took advantage of his spa’s close proximity to the super-successful and super-stressed Silicon Valley population by arranging on-site visits to local companies. Armed with brochures, spa workers gave massages and talked to employees about nutrition, exercise and stress management. “The corporations appreciated us because it was a perk for employees,” Collins says, “and we didn’t charge too much because it was a marketing thing.” Collins estimates that 20% of these appreciative corporate employees “ended up at our place.”

Whatever ideas you put into action, you must establish a barometer to measure the outcome. “There needs to be some way of monitoring the success of a promotion,” says Melchior Baltazar, vice-president of business development for Steiner Leisure, a spa chain based in Coral Gables, Florida. “A lot of spas fail to do that.”

Most important, throw your spa’s full resources behind the marketing strategies you select. “Pick out one or two good ideas,” says Broderick. “And follow them through to the end.” ♦

*Dana Dratch is a freelance writer based in Atlanta.*

Courtesy Elizabeth Arden Salons & Spas



**Maximize gift certificate sales with innovative and convenient purchasing options.**