

PR on your own

By Stephanie Stephens

You manage a successful day spa in a small to medium market. Business is good but it could always be better, and you know you're competing with lots of other businesses for a diminishing block of disposable income. In many parts of the country, clients are already cutting back on spa services.

What can you do to ensure that your spa, and not the one down the street, continues to attract the remaining clients able to purchase spa services? You wish you possessed the financial resources to hire an advertising or public relations agency, but you don't.

Take heart, for there are ways to get your name out there for less money than you might think. Get creative with your own marketing, and you *will* realize results.



Stacey Burris

Before you begin to develop specific promotions, review the basics. Do you have a logo that works for you? Is it on your stationery, business cards and brochures? Always be cognizant of your image, which includes your distinctive logo, colors, typefaces and photographs or illustrations. Consistency is critical!



A radio-sponsored contest with your spa's services as the prize can have far-reaching effects.

Develop a strong, appropriate image and use it on every marketing piece you produce.

Develop a strong, appropriate image and use it on every marketing piece you produce. Branding is essential. Your business should have a "look" that remains constant and reflects the design and feel of your day spa. This is the primary function that a good marketing and promotions firm serves and you can provide it for yourself.

Work the Media

At Allure Day Spa in Anchorage, Alaska, manager Rhonda Buring figures that when it comes to media, "We've done it all. Radio has been especially effective around the holidays, and the station's account rep has helped us in an 'official marketing' capacity, even providing useful information about other stations."

Kenneth Anders of Kenneth's Salons and Day Spas in Columbus, Ohio, judiciously zeroed in on socio-economic factors to guide his media buys. "The

upper half of the city is where we need to be. I do magazine and newspaper marketing locally that covers the smaller communities. I think people read articles and then keep the publication: more shelf life, you know?"

Anders has wisely requested editorial considerations when signing a print media contract. "One paper we buy does five articles a year on us, on subjects like indoor tanning and mother-and-daughter makeup. I'm emphatic about the type of advertising I do, being careful not to go above people's heads. I try to figure out what a 'regular person' wants and then offer what my market understands."

Barter services for publicity. Even though you may not have hard dollars to spend on advertising, you can offer something just as valuable: your services. By practicing the fine art of barter, you can gain media exposure for your business and keep cash outlays to a minimum.

You may not be able to trade for a regular series of print ads in your local daily newspaper, but smaller community newspapers will be more flexible. Call the owner and ask whether you can trade services for ongoing placement of a print ad. Suggest that the publication run a contest to increase readership and offer your spa services as a prize. In return, your day spa gets free print exposure through a complimentary ad and perhaps as a co-sponsor of the contest.

Radio stations are in constant need of great prizes for listener giveaways. In larger markets stations often require businesses to buy an ad schedule before they'll work with you to do a promotion, but in smaller markets management can be less rigid.

Offer your services as prizes, perhaps for morning show giveaways. Expect

Offer local radio and television personalities a visit to your salon or spa.

the on-air talent to announce your name and location, like this: "Mary Smith just won a day of beauty at Somebody's Day Spa in the Uptown Mall where she'll be pampered with a facial, massage and manicure." Television stations, especially in local markets, may also conduct contests. The station sales manager is your contact to research this.

A word of caution: When you do trade for print space or broadcast mentions, you want to control the way your business is presented. For a print ad, insist that your logo be included, as well as your name, address and phone number. Ask for proof of your trade in the form of a newspaper clip. In broadcast, ask the radio station to verify, via affidavit, that you received the agreed-upon airtime.

Stations especially welcome day spa service prizes during holiday periods, which is great for you because publicity then serves as an excellent reminder for listeners who may be wondering what to give their sweethearts for Valentine's Day or Mom for Mother's Day.

If your salon employs a hair or makeup professional, contact local television news personalities and offer to do hair and makeup for their newscasts or for local "specials" they produce themselves. In small to medium markets, anchors provide their own personal care services. Even if the station provides services, you might be able to strike a deal with station management that would provide you actual commercial time on the station, plus credits after the news, if you provide beauty services for their most visible personalities. After all, the challenge of looking consistently perfect can be tiring for those in the public eye.

Does your city have its own magazine? Invite the beauty editor to try your services. Offer to do the cover models' hair and makeup in return for magazine credits.



Provide makeup and hair services to local news personalities in exchange for a free on-air mention.

Court "free" publicity. Don't be afraid to offer local radio and television personalities a visit to your salon or spa. There's nothing more valuable to your business than having a top media personality, such as a radio morning show host, gush about his or her fabulous experience at your spa. "I had such a wonderful massage at Somebody's Day Spa!" is a great endorsement that's bound to prompt bookings, and you didn't have to write a check. Ask your liaison at the station to arrange for these celebrity visits or send an invitation directly.

Sell Your Expertise

Have you noticed the trend in media toward using "experts"? Talk shows, especially local radio or television talk shows, have a constant need for experts willing to share their knowledge with audiences. You are an expert in your own field and you probably have other experts on your staff. Send out press kits that include short biographical sheets on the experts in your organization and offer their services for on-air comments or participation in appropriate talk shows.

“Tune in to the community, donate and connect. You’re giving something back and getting something too.”

Develop a distinctive logo and use it on all marketing materials to strengthen your spa’s public identity.



Make each person’s area of expertise clear and explain exactly why the person is an expert. Investigate speaking opportunities in front of local groups or organizations to which you belong, as well as others. Consider service clubs such as Rotary and Kiwanis. Remember that most professions have their own clubs: realtors, broadcasters, nurses and more. You can establish yourself as an expert by regularly speaking in front of such groups. Again, don’t be afraid to ask members of the local media to come to your day spa for a demonstration of your expertise.

Work With Charities

From time to time, you may be asked to donate services to various charitable events, such as churches, parent/ teacher associations and the like. Only your heart can dictate how much of this you should do, but realistically, you’ll be better served from a profit standpoint if you can receive some publicity for your efforts.

If the best supported charity in town wants to make your donation a top prize and is planning a major publicity campaign around an upcoming event,

low up to make certain that you receive the promised publicity.

Anders really liked a promotion he did in conjunction with a local hospital in a campaign to fight breast cancer. “They bought discounted manicures from us and offered them to women to entice them to come in to have a mammogram. Since breast cancer is one of our major causes, we were glad to give them a good price on the manicures,” explains Anders, who believes that keeping a pulse on local concerns is smart business. “Tune in to the community, donate and connect. You’re giving something back and getting something too.”

In Brighton, Michigan, Michele Bouhana, owner of Michele’s Salon & Day Spa, is a seasoned proponent of auctions for worthy causes. “We provide gift certificates for auctions, presented in attractive little bags. We believe these events target the upper income clients we seek. And we’re willing to give to almost any group that asks us, because we find we retain approximately 35% of these auction buyers as customers.”

To maximize the publicity potential of any charitable activity, you need to write and disseminate your own news releases to local media. You may wish to target the business editors of your local papers, their health and beauty editors, or both. You don’t need to hire an agency to do this, but you do want to ensure that the releases are in the proper format and appear to be professional, from heading to correct spelling. If you don’t feel confident about preparing releases yourself, ask a college journalism student or teacher to help you in exchange for services.

You can send press releases to local media for a variety of reasons other than to promote your charitable efforts. Perhaps you’ve hired a new well-known stylist or a massage guru for your business. Maybe you’re opening a new location or

then philanthropy definitely makes sense. Ask questions about what you will receive for your donation and fol-

Get to know others in the local business community.

expanding your current one. You can even send press releases promoting special events, such as a free makeup demonstration by a well-known makeup artist or a presentation on stress reduction by a medical expert. But be very certain that what you're announcing is really newsworthy. You don't want to get a reputation among local media managers for sending "empty" releases.

Network With Businesses

Networking offers an opportunity to get to know others in the local business community who may ultimately prove valuable to you, and vice versa. Print a large supply of business cards or brochures, and then get ready to use them. Consider joining your local Chamber of Commerce, for instance, as well as other professional organizations, and then attend their events. Serving on committees allows you to get to know people on a deeper level.

Attend shows and events sponsored by the organizations and, when appropriate, host a booth, where you show a video about your day spa, hand out printed materials and invite booth visitors to enter a contest to win services. This is an ideal way to begin building a mailing list.

"At the local country club, we help out with ladies' days. We also like to offer samples of new services to show prospective clients what they can expect. That works well," says Eileen Donley, owner of Southeastern Hair Design & Day Spa in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Think about related businesses and how your business may interface with them. Personal trainers are a good networking target for stimulating your massage business. Makeup consultants at local department stores may be a good source for recommending future facial customers, since they see a lot of



Medical practitioners can become great referral sources, sending skincare and post-op clients your way.

women with various skin conditions. You might even invite some of your department store contacts in for a complimentary service.

Dermatologists and plastic surgeons—and the nurses who work in their offices—can be great referral sources. Although some larger medical practices may offer facial services and sell their own lines of products, many more do not. Send a letter of introduction and arrange to meet the doctor to discuss mutual referrals. Invite the doctor or a staff member to your day spa to sample your services.

Other day spas have found innovative ways to cross-promote their services with all kinds of businesses, from car dealerships to formal wear rental shops. Donley cites a fun promotion done with a local dinner theater presenting the audience participation play, *Tony and Tina's Wedding*. "We did the hair as a trade-out," notes Donley, who received media exposure for her services. The play was advertised, and her day spa with it.

Work Within

Consider holding an annual open house,

“We e-mail these customers and offer them specials for any open times the next day.”

perhaps around the holidays. Since you're developing and maintaining your own computerized mailing list year-round, when it's time to address your invitations you'll be sure to include those business and personal contacts you've established during the past 12 months.

Your list will also be useful for periodic mailings announcing new products or services or special offerings at your spa or salon. “We also make up little menus or scrolls and hand them out to clients, like flyers, when we offer new services. Sometimes, we've had a surge of new customers standing three-deep waiting for gift certificates. For, let's face it, if they don't know what we do, they won't come in,” says Donley.

Be sure to obtain e-mail addresses from your contacts, and support your “snail mail” campaign with one sent solely via e-mail. Buring has approximately 80 patrons who have signed up to receive e-mail communications. “After we've done confirmations on tomorrow's appointments and assessed the openings, we e-mail these customers and offer them specials for any open times the next day at a discounted rate. With this technique, we fill those slots that normally would go unused,” notes Buring.

As these day spa owners have proven, there are opportunities for expanding your business without a large cash outflow, and you are quite capable of implementing marketing practices that will ultimately serve to grow your bottom line and enhance your presence in your own community. With imagination and persistence, you can make it happen. ♦

Stephanie Stephens is an award-winning public relations professional and journalist based in Los Angeles. Contact her at stephstphn@aol.com.