

Direct Results By Larry H. Oskin

ARE YOUR SPECIALIZED SPA, WELLNESS AND BEAUTY services among the best-kept secrets in town? If so, that's unfortunate. It's unlikely you want your business to be a secret—the more the good word gets to the right potential clients, the more likely they'll pay you a visit. Take heart, spreading the word isn't really that difficult, and your spa doesn't have to remain a secret.

Regardless of a spa's chosen focus or theme, there will always be something new to promote. Progressive business owners know that they must pro actively market their business with a variety of advertising forms. With so many beauty and wellness options available to consumers, it's important to carefully target your message to the right potential customers, and the most effective way to do this is through a coordinated direct mail advertising campaign.

At approximately 3 to 4 cents per home, direct mail is extremely affordable, especially if you partner with a national resource that has local programs targeting homes in your community. Solo direct mail efforts, created from your own spa database and mailed to current clients, can also be quite effective, although the costs may range higher - from 30 cents to \$1 per home, thanks to slightly higher graphic design, printing and postage costs, the return on your investment can be huge - when they opened Solace Day Spas in Alexandria and Chantilly, VA, owners John and Michelle Nguyen offered a free \$ 20 gift card with any gift card purchase of \$100 dollars or more through a national direct mail magazine. Thanks to the

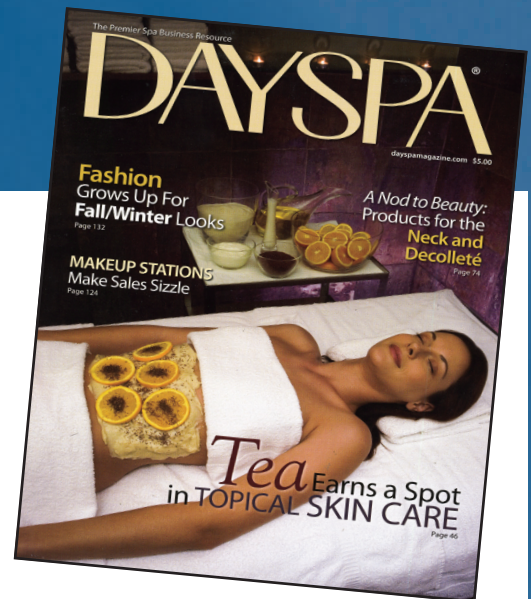
targeted ad, the Nguyen's sold more than \$50,000 in gift cards during their first six weeks in business!

The professional beauty industry is highly visual, and full-color, direct mail marketing offers spas the opportunity to share a message in a very creative way. There are nine tricks of the trade you can use to make your spa mailings stand out from the general crowd of businesses trying to attract consumer discretionary spending. Using some of the following suggestions can help lower your mailing costs and increase your rate.

“ Thanks to the targeted ad, the Nguyens sold more than \$50,000 gift cards during their first six weeks in business!”

1. Develop a direct-mail marketing calendar. Examine your spa's seasonal sales peaks and valleys with an eye toward developing an annual direct-mail marketing calendar. The calendar should include all of the dates you wish to promote or you spa's services and retail products, including mailings centered on gift-giving holidays like Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Fathers Day and Christmas. You may be able to turn traditionally “soft” months like July, August and October into strong profit centers with extra direct mail and advertising support.

If you'll be creating and sending the direct mail yourself, you may want to consider planning a bimonthly or quarterly mail schedule to keep the work manageable. If you're using an external



source like Clipper magazine, Val Pak of Money Mailer, you may want to advertise more frequently. Ask for in-home mail dates and maps that show the targeted homes surrounding your spa to better plan the timing of your mailings.

As you examine your schedule, review the advantages of annual agreements, as well as the costs savings you can gain by mailing to multiple of larger targeted areas. Cost savings in just a few places could allow you to create more direct mail opportunities during the year

2. Capitalize on co-op marketing funds. Ask your distributor or your representative, if you purchase direct if cooperative advertising funds are available. If so, don't leave those dollars on the table - they can make the difference in creating more frequent and effective direct mail campaigns. Most co-op programs require you to use the manufacturer's logo and product photographs at certain pre approved size and format in the ad. The manufacturer will then reimburse you for a portion of the cost of the ad, either in dollars or in credits toward your next product or educational purchase. Most companies will reimburse between 25% and 50% of the ad's cost, but a few will pay up to %100 of the cost, plus an equal value in future products or services.

3. The word "free" always works.

Although this is an advertising truism, remember: There's absolutely nothing wrong with promoting your spa services at full price. Instead of discounting, promote a free gift with purchase as an incentive to help persuade current clients to try something new and to capture the attention of first-time visitors. Some examples:

Buy any \$100 spa gift card, get a \$20 gift card **FREE!**

Give a Mother's Day gift of beauty, and receive a **FREE** rose bouquet and box of chocolates.

Buy three XYZ Brand Lipsticks and get one **FREE** (or equal lesser value).

Get a **FREE** skincare product trio (retail value \$xx) with any first-time laser hair removal package.

4. Offer dollars off, not percentages.

If you do decide to offer discounts, remember that spa clients will react better to a strong dollars-off percentage than to a percent-off percentage. Percent discounts aren't perceived by consumers to be valuable unless they're set at 50% or higher; otherwise, they're likely to be ignored. Clients will more readily respond to \$10 off than 10% off - \$10 off any \$100 massage: will garner more response than "10% off any \$100 massage," for example, even though they offer exactly the same savings.

5. Avoid excessive disclaimers. Try to avoid excessive disclaimers and rules explaining what is and isn't included in your direct mail offers, which can muddy effectiveness and make consumers wary. Keep the wording simple: "No multiple discounts. Offer expires xx/xx/2007", for instance. Use expiration dates of no more than 60 to 90 days to keep our offers timely and create a sense of urgency.

6. Use full color to capture attention. Although it's a little more costly, make sure your cold call direct market advertising sources have full-color designs and printing capabilities.

Avoid most black-and-white direct-mail marketing options if you want a more upscale look. Market research has repeatedly shown that full-color advertising can increase redemption rates by 30% to 60%.

7. Explore upscale options. No matter what type of spa you own, your marketing and advertising should always build upon your professional image and reputation. Direct mail is a perfect advertising venue for upscale day spas because well-designed, full-color direct mail resources are considered to be money-saving resources by many upscale consumers. Using the appropriate advertising venue and design for your spa means your direct mail pieces won't be perceived as junk mail. Choose images and illustrations that make your business look elegant and inviting, and try not to clutter your ads with extraneous copy.

If you plan to offer specials on featured services and seasonal promotions, you may want to make your direct mail pieces appear as mini gift certificates, rather than coupons, to prompt a strong response. You may also want to mention specific product brand names that you carry in your spa if they are popular in your area.

8. Go with a quality company. Working with the best local and regional direct mail advertising resources you can find will make a difference in response. Ask to see examples of their work on successful campaigns for other spas and salons. Examine their local mailing area maps to make sure your ads will reach potential clients. It's best to target at least 50,000 to 100,000 neighborhood homes within 3 to 10 miles of your business. Ask for samples and analyze potential costs. Avoid lesser-quality resources, even if they save you a few pennies.

9. Start with realistic expectations. Direct mail really works, especially with strong offers and ongoing, coordinated campaigns. But, direct mail is like any other form of advertising - a long-term investment. Set realistic expectations

for response. Remember: The point of direct mail isn't to bring in hundreds of first-time clients from each advertisement. One new client can result in several thousands of service and retail dollars sales per year, so as few as 20,10 or even five new clients from any one ad can be considered a big success. Tracking is vital. Train your front-desk staff to ask all new clients how they heard about your spa. Although the return of coupons and mini gift certificates are easily tracked, those numbers aren't the full story. A well-executed direct mail campaign will build business.



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