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How To Survive A Tough Economy

Brittany's Spa Salon of Jacksonville, Florida

By Hannah Mayo

The tough economy has not been nice to our wallets or our businesses over the past year or so. While every industry has suffered at some point, the salon and spa industry has definitely taken a big hit and a lot of businesses are still struggling. Brittany Molina, owner of Brittany's Spa Salon in Jacksonville, Florida shares some of her tips on how to overcome the economy. These successful guidelines are transferrable, whether you own a salon or any other business. Her salon has seen a 300% increase in business over the past year.

Staff Recruitment & Retention

When recruiting new staff, it is important to put yourself in their shoes. Try to think about what they are really looking for in a job, try to pick out perks and advantages that you offer that no one else does, tell them about your local and national media honors and tell them how you can help advance their careers. Remember to remain positive and tell prospective employees what you can do for them, not what they'll be doing for you.

Your staff is what holds your business together. They are your glue. Without a loyal staff, you risk losing your valued clientele. In order to ensure staff retention, it is important to continuously educate, train, reward and appreciate your staff. Having incentives for your team members is one of the best ways to get and keep them excited about their jobs. Some options for showing your staff that you appreciate them include rewarding individuals with gift certificates to local restaurants if they increase their clientele, throwing a staff wide party if retail numbers go up for the quarter and verbal acknowledgement in staff meetings of individuals who have worked exceptionally hard recently. Don't forget to make your work environment as fun as possible while still remaining professional.

Client Recruitment & Retention

Just like your staff, your business would not exist without your clients. Always remember that top quality customer service will remain key in client recruitment and retention. Men and women visit your salon or spa to escape their everyday lives, to be pampered and to relax and rejuvenate. Create a stress free, low key environment that caters to them. Be sure your receptionist acknowledges their entry into the salon within seconds. If they have to wait for their hairstylist or spa professional, be sure your waiting area is quiet and don't forget to offer them a beverage. The hairstylist should try to have the guest in the chair within five minutes. Hairstylists must be prepared for each client's visit. If it is a first-time client, be ready to share a complete consultation so you really understand what it is they're looking for as well as what they do not want. This will ensure that the client leaves feeling like you really listened to her, so she can trust you. Before she leaves, ask her to rebook in six weeks for a trim or root touch up. If it is a return client, it is important to remember her and her previous services. This will make clients feel like they really matter to you.

Staff & Client Education Programs

It is important that both your staff and your clients remain educated on your current services and products. Clients are more comfortable when they know details about the advantages of the services and products they're experiencing. They also want you to help them stay up-to-date on the latest looks and trends. In order to do this, it is important to first educate your staff. It is up to them to educate the clients. To help educate your clients, try having themed open house nights for your staff and clients. Offer free consultations, free demonstrations, special educational events and product gift bags. This

helps create an open communication channel for your clients. They can ask questions and your staff can educate them on the services and products they're recommending based on the consultation.

Marketing & Promotions

There are many marketing concepts, tools and pieces that you can use throughout your salon and spa that you may have never thought of. For one, visibly promote a different service or product every month or so. Announce this by placing counter cards and mirror cards throughout your salon or spa. If you have a salon and spa, try cross promoting. For example, "Receive 15% Off A Manicure With Any First Time Haircolor Service" or "Receive \$10 Off A Haircut With Your First Time Facial". You should also try to do seasonal promotions. For example, "Spring Spa Sampler – Receive A Facial, Massage & Manicure For Only \$99 – Usually \$125". To attract the attention of your guests, be sure to use professional, clean photographs in these counter and mirror cards.

Try to send out email blasts on a bi-weekly schedule. These can be the same as your mirror cards but do not have to be. Make sure you have the email addresses of all of your clients. You can attain these by offering them a small discount in exchange for their email address.

Create a Facebook and Twitter page and update it daily with tips, funny stories, promotions, recent media honors and upcoming events. This creates a community for your salon and will create a direct communication channel between you, your staff and your clients.

Local Advertising

Your budget may not be high, but if you are able to spare a few bucks, advertising in local magazines and newspapers will increase your exposure. Research the type of readers of each local publication and decide which market contains the largest number of people that would be interested in your services. Once you've done that, negotiate rates with an advertising representative. If you can only afford a one-time insertion, your money is probably better spent elsewhere. If you can advertise at least four times in one year, it's worth the investment. If you can negotiate to combine free mentions and feature articles in the editorial portions of the magazine, your return on investment is definitely going to show!

Community & Charity Involvement

What better way to meet clients than to go out and be an active part of the community. Visit festivals, shows, concerts and every local event you can. If you cannot afford to be a sponsor of these events or can't afford booths at shows, at least be present. Bring your business card wherever you go and if you meet a potential client, share your information with them. It is important to be a positive, active member of your local community.

Involving your salon in local charities has many advantages other than the obvious one of contributing to good causes. Beyond that, it shows that you really care about the community you're in. It also provides a good opening to get new clients in the door. Host a fundraiser for a local charity. For example, during the month of October – National Breast Cancer Month – offer pink highlights, pink hair extensions or pink lipstick to anyone who wants to donate \$10 to the charity of your choice.

Featured Specialized Services

Specializing in or featuring specialized services such as Expert Haircolor, Professional Hair Extensions or Upstyle Hair Designs is a great way to generate interest in your salon. In all of your press releases, advertisements, marketing pieces and conversations, mention that you specialize in these services. If you offer services that other salons in your area do not, then you have an untapped market that can be all yours. Once you get them in the door, the rest should be easy!

Name Brand Professional Services & Retail Products:

Clients will always be interested in name brand services and products. If they have heard of the brand you offer, they are more likely to trust you and the service you are providing because of the perceived quality control the name brand provides. For example, promoting Great Lengths or SO.CAP. USA Hair Extensions will have more of an effect than simply saying that you offer hair extensions. Telling your clients that you offer Whirl-a-Style Hairstylers will have more of an effect than just saying you have a great tool to create upstyles. We live in a very brand-name oriented society, so take advantage of that when you can.

Successful Private Label Products

In addition to offering name-brand products, it says a lot to your clients if you have your own private label line of signature products. It shows that you have the finances to support your own line and that you've taken the time to customize your own specific system of professional products that cater to your clientele. Make sure your clients know that your private label products are just as high quality as name brands, but allow them to pay lower prices with the exact same results.

National & International Media Honors

Acquiring positive media honors helps in a few ways. It gets your name out into the community without a financial contribution on your part. It also tells the community that your salon, services and staff are above average. If the media is acknowledging you, they're more likely to feel comfortable making that first visit to your salon or spa.

If your salon or spa is struggling right now, try out some of these tips from Brittany Molina, owner of Brittany's Spa Salon. As the salon, spa and beauty care industries anxiously awaits a better economy, there is no harm in trying a new approach to growing your business!

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