



STOP THE SLUMP

PLAN NOW FOR POST-HOLIDAY SUCCESS

You don't have to do the old-school Britannica-balancing strut. But to prevent a midwinter slump, fill your head with one thought: pre-booking. The salons that have the smoothest Januarys are those that schedule appointments in advance. "If one technician doesn't pre-book, it can mean each of her clients misses one or two salon visits a year," says **BRYAN DUROCHER**, salon success coach and founder of **DUROCHER ENTERPRISES** in Miami, FL. "If no one in the salon pre-books, that's thousands of dollars lost annually." Especially in colder weather, people will keep the appointments they have, but they won't make new ones. "To encourage a client to pre-book, offer her a reward for doing so," says

Durocher. Try a price incentive of 10% off January services. Or, give her a nudge by offering a free product that has never crossed the threshold of her shower - just as long as she schedules that highlight session in advance. "Any time you have the opportunity to introduce a retail item a client hasn't tried before - take it," says **MELINDA MINTON**, spa consultant and founder of **MINTON BUSINESS SOLUTIONS** in Fort Collins, CO. "It isn't labor intensive and doesn't cost you much." By the time the client returns for her pre-booked appointment, she'll be running low on the new product, and will buy more to replenish her stock. So you set yourself up for both a January service sale and retail purchase in one fell swoop. And no one gets a seventies-style encyclopedia dropped on her toe.

Do Card-io Yoga

Regular sessions of aerobic asanas are the latest way trendsters stay energized and elongated. To keep your salon's chi flowing, promote gift card sales. One way to increase your numbers is to market the cards as gifts for groups such as corporate employees. To reach the upscale office crowd, Durocher suggests sending decked-out front desk coordinators or junior stylists out to professional buildings in the community. "Have them drop off brochures describing the gift cards, along with salon or spa menus," he says. You can also boost card sales with a 10% discount on them during the month of November - or a few targeted days in December. Minton suggests offering small or large gift baskets to go along with the card. They can hook recipients on retail products.

To ensure that your big gift card sales pay off right away, offer rewards to encourage people to use them during the first month of the year. Durocher suggests letting a recipient who redeems her gift card in January bring a friend along for a free companion service. "Give the friend a few things to choose from, like a half-hour massage, pedi, or express facial," he says. "She will usually book additional services beyond the complimentary one." So you end up with extra

By Kate Hahn

If you want great posture in January, you have to hit the Pilates mat or ballet barre in December. It's the same for your business. To avoid a midwinter profit slouch, fill this month with promotions and other sales boosters that will help your salon or spa stand tall in the New Year. Savvy pros share tips on things you can do right now to align your business for success.

Put a Book on Your Head



business. Durocher also recommends December point-of-purchase displays and other signage to boost awareness of the bring-a-buddy program.

Unfortunately, gift card clients can be nightmares who skip tips and ignore retail. "Plan how to treat the clients who receive gift cards," says Minton, who is executive director of The Spa Association. "So often they are first-timers and they might have preferred a nice pair of running shoes. Make them happy they visited your business by exceeding their expectations." She advises coming up with a strategy that all staff can use to make the newbies feel welcome. This includes embracing them when they call to make the appointment, and telling them about what to expect. When they arrive, give them a tour. After the service, offer a free sampler kit of everything they used in the spa, along with a card that says "We'd love to see you again." And try to pre-boo them. "If you treat them right, they might show up in two weeks for a pedi, and you have a loyal new client," says Minton.

Get Some Back Support

Forget those Velcro-closure lumbar support devices. When you need someone to watch your back, turn to manufacturers. Your distributor can help you design enticing specials that will perk up your January. "Something that always works is the 'buy two, get a third of equal or lesser value free' promotion," says Durocher. Keep this kind of promo top secret. Then send a postcard mailer to your entire database so it arrives just after Christmas, announcing the January special. "Don't talk about it before then, because it will delay purchases," Durocher says. "You can negotiate on back bar too, not just retail," he adds. This allows you to create January service specials, like a 15% discount on all perms for the month or "Five Foils for \$25" every Saturday. Durocher recommends planning an entire year of promos in advance, and reviewing them with your rep. That way, vendors know you will be looking to buy larger amounts of certain products - and they can stock enough to get you a discount. Minton says that since most clients have all their cut and color done in December, one of the best ways to entice them to visit you in January is to offer something different, like a special spa package. So see if your rep will give you a deal on body scrub or massage oil. Manufacturers can also help you host a January educational event. "They have a lot of clearance items, but it isn't in your best interest to hold a sale with product prices slashed too far down," says Minton. It will train customers to wait for sales instead of buying at regular price. A better idea, according to Minton, is to get manufacturers to partner with you to host a party. Invite just the top 20% of your clientele. "They love the exclusivity of belonging to a select group, like a country club," says Minton. The event should be absolutely free and could focus on facials, hair, spa treatments - or all three. "Christmas mailings get ignored. People receive so much mail that time of year," says Minton. "They will really appreciate an invitation to a soiree after the holidays."

Focus on the Horizon

Look ahead and you won't be able to slump. If you create programs that entice clients to commit to not just one follow-up visit, but several, you will not only have a great January but a very good year. Minton suggests a "New You" package that focuses on a year-long makeover, a slower approach that lets clients make changes at a comfortable pace. For example, their color service might progress from a temporary shade in January, to highlights by December. Create a calendar that shows how the services will be spread out over 2004. "Another promo you can offer is that if they commit to six skin-care rejuvenation services, they get all their home care products for free," says Minton. "Make a hook to get them to come back - beyond pre-booking. Focus on the future." But it isn't just clients who you want to see stick around until the next time you hear Auld Lang Syne. "The staff should be looking forward to great year as well," says Minton. She recommends sitting down as a group and individually to analyze how the last year went, and establish new goals for the next one. "Employees are exhausted in January," says Minton. "This is the month that some will even quit because they are just so burned out from the holidays." Take preventive steps by bringing in a motivational speaker, or doing something inspiring (like handing out bonus checks.) "I have clients who have done almost as much business in January as in December because of promotions," says Durocher. "Build promos around pre-booking, retail and referral, and you are set." You can get more advice from him, and Minton, in the BTC bookstore. With these ergonomic economics, your salon won't need a chiropractor this January.