

Think only the Hollywood elite can achieve superstar status? Think again.

# BIG NAME BEAUTY

Salon owners all over the world are using their expertise and authority to propel their brands into the stratosphere, gain guru-like followings and become the most sought-after in the business. You don't need to start off rich, powerful or well connected—just media savvy.

BY KELLY SVOBODA

**W**ANT TO SHOW OFF YOUR STYLE ON TV or see your work in the pages of a fashion magazine? It doesn't have to be a dream. Scores of salon owners have used the media as a tool to display their creativity and talent, establish themselves as an authority, extend their brand beyond their salon and enrich themselves creatively and financially.

The secret to their success? Knowing how to gain media attention for their businesses. The right PR campaign may require time and money, but it can be the best way to create a buzz, gain the trust of customers and the community, and instill pride in your staff.

According to **Bryan Durocher** of **Durocher Enterprises**, which represents salons and salon

manufacturers, "The real advantage in PR is that an agency advises a third-party source to promote your business. For a small business owner, this is an opportunity for them to get exposure and be mentioned in articles, which adds to their prestige." Adds **Pierce Mattie** of **Pierce Mattie Public Relations**, which also has salon industry clients, "The right PR can really make the telephone ring."

## THE PR PRIMER

All businesses can benefit from public relations, even those with limited funds. Most PR agencies offer packages that can be customized to fit your desired expenditure and level of exposure when you sign a yearlong contract.

**continued**



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If you're not ready for that type of commitment, you can go the do-it-yourself route, which is what Mattie recommends for smaller salons. "As long as you have 10 hours per week to dedicate to the job," he says, "you should be able to do it." **Larry Oskin** of Marketing Solutions, which has several salon clients, suggests another alternative: "Look in newspapers and magazines and see who is writing about hair and beauty trends. Often they are freelancers and you can hire them on an as-needed basis."

The first and most important step is developing a media kit, which will contain information about your business, and press releases that pitch story ideas relating to your salon. (For examples of stellar press kits, turn to

media list, says Oskin, one that includes local style, fashion and business editors, depending on your story's angle, as well as a list of national consumer and trade titles. **Durocher** also recommends asking clients which publications they read to find out where your potential clients are most likely to be. When you are ready to send out the kit, create personalized cover letters to draw editors' attention.

**Heather Jordan**, marketing manager of **Debbie's Day Spa & Salon** in St. Augustine, Florida, helped her salon stand out by publicizing a unique salon service. A press release on their pres-sotherapy boot treatment, which



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"Publicity Shot" on page 32.) Experts suggest including background about the salon, a "fast fact" sheet on what it offers and a brief bio on the owner. And remember pictures are worth a thousand words, so add interior shots of the salon and headshots of any staff who are quoted.

When putting together your kit, consider the mission of your salon and what sets it apart from all the others. Contends Mattie, "A lot of people think because their salon is beautiful they should get press, but you really need a platform or hook, whether national or regional." And think outside the box: "Don't just say 'great customer service'—everybody says that," says Durocher. Whatever your salon's angle, be sure to update your local and national media regularly with releases that focus on different services or trends in your salon.

To do that, you need to develop a target

was later used to treat a child with a rare form of cancer, landed them a segment on a local morning talk show. Says Jordan, "Every spa does a deluxe manicure. Pick something that no one else has, that the media would want to cover."

### BE A RELIABLE SOURCE

Keep in mind that releases shouldn't read like an ad for your salon, says Oskin—they need to have meaning and relevance for the media's audience. One easy way to do that is to tie them into larger, national trends. For example, when Jordan read in *USA Today* that pedicure services spiked during summer sandal weather, she wrote a release about her salon's new high-tech pedicure thrones that were cleaner and safer than the old system, and tips to help clients choose a high quality nail salon. A TV station picked it up for a news segment because it was timely and interesting to the audience.

The real key to becoming a regular media source, agree experts, is to be proactive and think about what editors need and when they need it. Editors work months ahead, which may mean pitching stories about summer waxing services in February. Request editorial calendars so you can better time your releases.

And when editors follow up with you, make yourself available. **Chris Duello**, marketing director of **The Face and Body Day Spa** in St. Louis, Missouri, has a strategy in place.

"We make sure we train all new staff to be aware that a media call isn't something to take lightly," she says. "If I'm not there, they find an owner or manager. There is a hierarchy for who can take the call." Her salon team also creates current message points so they always have something to talk about with an editor; for example, gift certificates at holidays or sun protection at summertime.

If your media campaign gets to be more than you can handle, or if you find you want to broaden your range of contacts, it may be time to enlist an agency. Mattie advises going this route "if you start losing stories because you didn't have time to send a release, or you start seeing your competition is getting press." But do your research, he says. Ask PR agencies for several client case studies of salons similar to yours and check for measurable results over a one-year period. Inquire about the campaign focus and areas of improvement, and obtain a list of current clients whom you can contact.

Finally, be optimistic about your hard work. "Little salons have great success," says Durocher, citing a client in a small Colorado town that has received national magazine coverage. But it didn't happen overnight. "I tell my clients not to expect miracles with the first release. Give it six to nine months, and you will see your efforts pay off."

### NETWORKING KNOW-HOW

The best way to build upon your PR efforts is by networking within your community. **William Wesley Grand Salon & Spa** in Davenport, Iowa, got its start in the spotlight by submit-

ting editorial clippings to a local TV talk show and suggesting a makeover episode. Two months of persistence finally got them on the air. Afterward, the salon nurtured the relationship by inviting in the show staff for complimentary services. That small investment served them well: When producers of TLC's "A Makeover Story" contacted the station about salon references for an episode set to film in the area, William Wesley got the reference—and the air time.

Owner **William Wesley Keck** recommends networking any time you can, including volunteering your services at local fashion shows or charity events. He also suggests getting on the Rolodex of photographers in your area.

"Contact photographers who may work for companies in your area—for example, shooting corporate brochures. Ask if they have any accounts that you can do the hair and make-up for," says Keck. "Your name starts to grow and you'll be known as the person to call."

To increase your on-air odds, Wesley recommends listing your business with the Chamber of Commerce (which referred another makeover program, "Home Delivery," to the salon). Also, says Keck, "put your name in at the film office in every state. These places get contacted by production companies and MTV all the time. It even got us doing freelance work for films."

When **Gjoko Shkreli**, owner of **Gjoko Hair Salon/Day Spa** in Larchmont, New York, got inspired to start his own TV show, he first called the local cable company's education department and asked about the requirements to submit a video. Then he used networking to find a cameraperson within his budget. "You can ask the cable company for recommendations; a lot of students will be interested in doing it," he says. With creative thinking, Gjoko's return on his show far outweighs his investment. His educational program, which is not designed to be an advertisement, creates viewer interest just the same. Over the years, his first local program enabled him to branch out into larger markets, expanding his exposure.

Get mileage out of your media time, agree owners and PR experts. "Using it after it appears is more important than getting the coverage in first place," Oskin says. "If you make the SALON TODAY 200, put it in your ads. If you're mentioned in a magazine, hang it in the salon and create 'a wall of fame.' Put it in your press releases. Too many salons just rely on people watching a TV show or reading the paper that day."

**De Jensen Salon & Spa** in Sea Girt, New Jersey, lets their coverage speak for itself. "We take stories from a publication and use it to create an ad in the newspaper, like an advertorial," says owner **Mark de Jensen**. "Then we don't have to toot our own horn. Our accomplishments have been acknowledged and we can promote that."

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

When you've finally started to get recognition, you may think the hard work is over—but it's really just beginning. **Chris Duello** of **The Face & Body Day Spa**, which has been featured on several TV makeover shows and in local publications, says salons should be aware of the challenges in being a media star.

First, publicity opportunities can interrupt your business, so it's important to keep clients placated. "We've learned over time that, generally, salon customers don't mind if there's filming or photography going on," says Duello. "They think it's fun. But in the spa, it's different. You need to be more careful. We close down treatment rooms adjacent to the filming to keep clients away from noise and lights, and put up signs to notify clients about what's going on."

A successful media experience ultimately depends on the owner's attitude. On one occasion, The Face and Body received a phone call from a reporter wanting to come in and take pictures of men receiving salon services that afternoon. "We didn't even check our books, we just said yes," says Duello. "As it turned out, we happened to have no men scheduled to come in that day. But we weren't worried. We just walked across the street to the fire station and rustled some up." When you have confidence in your business, the media will too. **St**

# PITCH PERFECT

There are no boring stories, just boring approaches to interesting stories, says **David Frey**, president of Marketing Best Practices, Inc., a small-business marketing consulting firm. We've adapted his suggestions for publication-worthy pitches below. Visit [www.marketingbestpractices.com](http://www.marketingbestpractices.com) for more advice.

- 1. DO A CUSTOMER SURVEY** Ask your clients their opinions on plastic surgery or about their biggest beauty splurge.
- 2. CREATE A TOP 10 LIST** just as we've done here. Try "Most requested salon services" or "Customer service tips."
- 3. PIGGYBACK OFF A NATIONAL STORY.** When **Heather Jordan** at **Debbie's Day Spa & Salon** read about pedicures' rising popularity, she created a release highlighting her salon's superior pedicure thrones—it landed them on the morning news.
- 4. TIE YOUR BUSINESS IN WITH HOLIDAYS.** A no-brainer. Tell the media how massage therapy helps reduce holiday stress and invite them in to see for themselves.
- 5. BE FIRST.** Think about what no one else is doing: Be the first to offer a personal portrait with every makeover package. Be the first to give your employees ownership in your business.
- 6. RUN A "SILLIEST THING" OR "DUMB MISTAKES" CONTEST.** What was your clients' worst home-color disaster? What happened when they tried to do their own brow wax?
- 7. HIGHLIGHT YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS.** Did your stylist just win a prestigious award? Did your client take home the crown at a local pageant?
- 8. GET INVOLVED.** Open your salon for a great cause that is fun and rewarding for your entire team.
- 9. SURVIVE TRAGEDY.** If you've rebuilt after a disastrous fire or doubled your revenues after recovering from the recession, you're an inspiration to readers.
- 10. SOLVE PROBLEMS.** Can you groom clients who are jumping back into the job market? Offer babysitting for stressed-out parents who've come to relax in your spa?