

The Art of Selling in the Spa: How Healthy Retailing Feeds Your Business

by Erin Carey Ferraro (as seen in *Dermascope*)

Once upon a time, professional skin care thrived upon mystique. Experts who called themselves facialists and estheticians were great at keeping secrets – it was their stock in trade. They applied mysterious products to the client's skin with the authority of true ritual, commanding that they return frequently to produce lasting effects. This was back in the days of heavily perfumed creams, a profusion of French-sounding brand names, and glitzy pink and gold packaging.



The millennial customer, primarily due to the new wave of digital technology, knows more and wants more. Knowledge is power, and today the customer's literacy in health, wellness, and skin care ingredients has the potential to empower skin care businesses through a new urgency and agility in retailing.

The key is to create an engaging and immersive experience. When this is accomplished successfully, the customer never feels pressured or manipulated, and your team does not exert pressure. The sale feels like an easy and organic aspect of the visit to the spa.

Clients do not have time for long, leisurely days of beauty at the spa. In fact, this was probably always more of a "Mad Men"-era advertising agency fantasy than a fact – women have always been busy! This means that at-home regimens command new respect between professional treatments. Clients know that maintaining skin health is a partnership between themselves and the skin care professional; they need good information and the right products to make it happen.

Getting Over Retail-Phobia

Increasing retail sales often strikes fear into the hearts of owners and skin care professionals alike. Owners naturally keep an eye on profitability and may fear for the bottom line as they watch clients come and go all day without making a meaningful buy. Likewise, professionals often either fear losing a client by being too pushy, or they consider the retail sales process an afterthought.

To build sales successfully, it is essential that spa owners explore what is missing. Perhaps it is the product line being carried or that the lead professional has not received any product education in years. Perhaps the merchandise has not changed since 1980. Explore the following techniques to see where clients can be engaged, how to immerse them in an irresistible buying space, and ways to grow retail revenues.

Create Clear Goals and Useful Tools

Teach the team selling tips. Because skin care professionals are not typically seasoned retail salespeople, they will need more training; it is important to invest in them. Once the professional begins to view retailing as a legitimate extension of their professional service and an added benefit to their client, rather than as just a part of their job, they will begin to find satisfaction and enjoyment in the process.

Position the art of selling in this way: Professionals are not just selling products, they are selling results and it is these results that are at the heart of a successful sale. The professionals, as well as their clients, will benefit from knowing that proper homecare adds value to the professional service and allows the benefits to last longer. The client must be reminded that homecare is just as important as professional treatments, and is key to achieving desired results. Make sure the skin care professionals have clear and defined goals to reach. It is important that they have reasonable, attainable targets that are easily tracked. They should receive clear daily, weekly, and monthly goals to which they are held accountable. This also gives spa owners the opportunity to coach employees and provide tools and ideas to help increase their sales if they are struggling. They will then have the opportunity to congratulate and provide valuable feedback to those who achieve their goals. This praise will continue to motivate and inspire the team.

Know When to Sell

No one has a better understanding of the client's skin care needs than the professional immediately following a treatment. For this reason, it is essential that the professional introduce the recommended, prescribed at-home regimen to the client. Do not leave this crucial move to the receptionist. Here is a sure-fire method to decrease retail sales: allow the professional to leave a basket of products at the front desk for clients with no discussion. It will feel like an impersonal disconnect or even a dismissal. The client will have no idea as to the reasoning behind the product assortment that has been selected. Nine of 10 times, the client will walk away without making a purchase.

The end of the treatment has the potential for being the critical, revenue-building moment, and the skin care professional must seize it. Before the client leaves the building, every minute counts, and throughout the treatment the professional can introduce how the benefits of the professional experience will be enhanced and prolonged by proper homecare. During weekly team meetings, discuss and role-play when and how to mention to clients that retail purchases are recommended as a follow-up. In the last moments of the treatment, clients may be in a blissful, semi-conscious state, therefore it is important to sow the seed of suggestions into their mind throughout the entire hour.

Manage Team Time and Resources Strategically

Hold regular store meetings and educational trainings as a way to ensure consistency with treatment protocols, product ingredients, and ongoing product knowledge. Incentivize the team to build their careers by presenting them with ongoing opportunities to enhance their skill set. Learn and earn more is the

ultimate motivator.

Never be too busy to retail! Sure, many skin care professionals are in and out of the treatment room all day, every day, but do not let retailing or education go out the window. Team huddles to discuss daily goals should be held each morning along with a monthly product focus. Hold a mandatory educational training once a month if possible, or at least quarterly. Owners or managers often put off trainings or meetings after one successful training, but to build a bottom line and create ease with the selling process, trainings must be consistent and ongoing. This is especially important when new professionals come on board, new treatments are launched, and product lines change. A quarterly training should cover areas such as treatment protocols, customer service, and retailing tips. Trainings are another great way to ensure consistency and that all protocols are being followed properly. High retail sales cannot be expected without making the initial investment in every team member.

If the spa sells more than one skin care line, keep the message clear by focusing on one line at a time, or by assigning a specific skin care line to one skin care professional and offering them a specialist title. The feeling of ownership of a product line can help motivate selling. In addition, the focus on education will, in turn, increase retail sales. Professionals who do not know the product line inside and out are incapable of selling effectively. Conversely, when a professional truly knows and loves a line, their passion and expertise will close the sale without pressure. The goal should be for the team to invest on a personal level. Regular trainings keep the professional motivated. If they are excited about retailing, this will show and also excite the client! The goal should always be to empower clients with knowledge of their specific skin care needs and with how the prescribed at-home products will help clients meet their skin care goals. When clients truly understand how a specific product will benefit their skin and how the key ingredients work, the sale is seemingly made effortlessly.

Know What to Sell

Selling the benefits, not simply the features, is at the core of effective selling. This is especially true with regard to skin care product ingredients. It is not enough for the professional to rattle off the list of peptides, vitamins, botanicals, and other actives in the tube or jar. They must have an accurate, detailed knowledge of why these ingredients are important, how they work, and how they benefit the skin. It is not enough to say, "This product contains green tea extract." It is also not enough to say, "This product contains green tea extract, which is a powerful antioxidant." Does the client really know what an antioxidant is and does the professional know how to explain it? A lot of jargon is taken for granted, so be sure that ongoing, in-house education makes sense of all terminology used. The professional must be able to say with authority, "This product contains green tea extract, which is a powerful antioxidant. Antioxidants offset the damage created by free radicals such as ultraviolet radiation, sunlight, cigarette smoke, and other environmental stressors that can age the skin."

Engage the Power of Personal Touch

Clients are literally in the hands of the skin care professional during a treatment, relying upon an intimate sense of trust. For a successful sale, carry that trust into the sale at the end of the treatment. There is a

personal and powerful impact when retailing in a spa atmosphere. You would not go to a doctor's office and expect to leave without a prescription. The treatment must include a prescription for homecare to ensure optimal results! Professionals must learn to sell and educate clients during treatments, if appropriate. This can be a very effective link to sales as they can reference a topic discussed in treatment when retailing.

The treatment is a very personal experience. As clients see and feel the health and vitality of their skin improving, they feel better about themselves. An increase in the client's confidence and self-esteem can be very rewarding for the skin care professional. After a treatment, the professional has spent roughly an hour, or perhaps more, literally touching the client. This time and intimacy shared in a small space is their ticket to integrate selling. Knowing the client on a deeper level forms the basis for meaningful homecare recommendations.

Sales Begin with Consultations

Offer complimentary consultations as the gateway to retail sales and future treatment bookings. Even if the client does not book a service immediately, a consultation can open the door to a high retail sale on the spot and establish relationships with new clients. The key to retail sales is education and exceptional customer service, which should exceed the clients' expectations every time they visit.

Every professional should not, following a treatment, leave clients to wander off on their own toward the exit. To make the sale, the skin care professional needs to meet the client at the point of purchase and explain the product recommendations, ideally via a personalized prescription sheet. This may also be the perfect time for the professional to recommend the next visit and offer a rebooking incentive. It is important that treatments are scheduled in a way that allows the professional enough time to answer any questions. Timing is equally important in a day spa environment where a client may have a treatment at 9 a.m. but will not actually leave the spa until later in the afternoon. Make sure to have a proper system in place where the professional and client interact before the client exits. Recommended items should be pulled and ready for clients as they check out.

Offer Unique Incentives

Lure them in! Train the skin care professionals to regularly promote all series packages, gifts with purchases, and incentives after their treatment. Create signage that draws attention to specials in the checkout area, lobby, and treatment rooms. Encourage upselling opportunities by promoting add-ons with gifts with purchases. Set up hot spots in high-traffic areas with promotional displays and encourage impulse buys by keeping travel sizes and best-sellers in the checkout area. Select a product as a staff favorite once a month and feature it with a therapist picture and quote to make it unique, personal, and relatable.

Clients always love a gift when they make a purchase, even if it is small. It can really make their day. Offer tiers of gifts depending on how much they spend. A small gift could be a sample of a new eye cream while a larger gift could be a complimentary service, such as an eyebrow wax. If a gift with a

purchase is offered, promote the message at the front desk or on a door or window. This will help draw in new business, and if clients know they can usually get a small gift or sample with a purchase, this incentive will keep them loyal and coming back to the spa exclusively.

Keep Clients Close

Utilize bounce-backs coupons valid during a specific time period to encourage clients to come back. Offer an on-the-spot rebooking discount to keep them active in the system. Make sure to capture the client's email address and let them know about the spa's social media websites. Send out personalized thank you cards to all new clients and incentives or coupons to clients that have not been seen in a while. Schedule regular email campaigns to keep clients up-to-date with promotions and specials. Be careful not to overdo it, as you do not want them to receive so many e-mails that they stop opening them. Always offer an unsubscribe button in the emails. In terms of frequency, try no more than once a week, but never less than once a month. Make sure the subject line is enticing to increase open rates, and that quality content is included every time a campaign is sent out.

Know the Competition

Often customers have a lot of questions about other product lines the spa does not carry. It is extremely important to never let the skin care professionals badmouth a competitor's product line. Instead, find out what the client does or does not like about another product and use it as an opportunity to educate them on the difference in ingredients and benefits in products. This will help gain the client's trust. If a client mentions that they are using a cleanser from another product line give them a compliment: "I am so happy you are regularly cleansing because it is such an important step to proper skin health!" If details about the line are known, try to point out differences: "One of the differences in our line is that none of our cleansers contain mineral oil or artificial fragrance." The opportunity then arises to educate them on why your product line does not use a particular ingredient. When approached in this helpful manner, the other brand never has to be criticized. This is another opportunity to educate the client and offer samples. It is important for the professionals to always be educated on the latest product developments and technologies in the industry whether the spa offers the newest technologies or not. Quiz the team on their product knowledge and require them to know at least two key ingredients along with their benefits in every product.

Make It a Party

Eventing is a popular concept in branding today. Host retail-focused events in the spa (wine, cheese, music, raffles, guest speakers, samples) while offering complimentary miniature treatments and consultations. Partner with local businesses that compliment but do not compete with the spa, including a gym or florist. The start of a new year is always a great time to introduce a new series or spa package option with the addition of a retail incentive. Do not overlook back-to-school season, the start of fall, the coming of winter, or holiday skin-makeovers.

Offer a discount or credit towards a retail purchase with the acquisition of a service package. Clients are recovering from the winter blues and are usually inspired to start some new, healthy routines. Make sure to offer a selection of packages that will appeal to a variety of different clients, such a bundled package in which clients will receive larger retail discounts as they purchase more. If introducing a new service or add-on, this is a great time to add it into a series in order to promote something the clients may not otherwise try.

Partnering with a yoga or fitness studio can be a great way to attract new business. Each business can offer a bounce-back to each other. For example, with every retail purchase a client makes, they will receive a discount on a yoga class, while the yoga studio can do the same for the spa. Have a couple of different offers available depending on what or how much the client purchases. When looking to cross-promote, look for businesses that focus on similar lifestyle pursuits, such as health and wellness. This is a great way to gain new business and promote the spa in the community.

Sampling Success

Clients love to sample products before buying. Offering samples after a consultation is a great way to build trust and create a feeling that they are in a pressure-free environment. Samples should be offered at the close of a sale so clients are able to try products they were considering or that may have currently been out of their budget. Because clients love to sample merchandise before buying, they should be encouraged to try products out! It is also important to let the client know early on that they would happily be sent home with any samples they would like to try. When clients are able to experience a product in terms of touch, texture, aroma, and feel, they become comfortable, empowered, and ready to make the purchase. Offer free samples of products that provide instant gratification and produce results after one use, such as a makeup primer or cooling eye gel.

Make the Space Irresistible

If the retail area is merchandised cohesively and is well-organized, half the work of increasing sales is already done. To keep the client from getting lost in a sea of bottles and boxes, merchandize skin care products in the sequence order of how they are used. Keeping the space irresistible means keeping it user-friendly.

Additionally, if retail products are in a separate room or area, make sure there is a focal table that pops and leads them to the space. Avoid clutter as much as possible. Less is always more with proper merchandising. Keep the retail area immaculate, sparkling, free of dust, and never over-stack products. Remember that if clients try, they buy! Allow them to touch and feel products by always having plenty of testers available. Always make sure tester units are full, clean, and have not expired.

Keep the products accessible. If products are kept behind the counter, or displayed behind glass in a locked case, there will literally be a barrier between the client and the sale. Make sure the product displays are only enhancing the customer experience, not getting in the way of it. Clients that are resistant to accept help often want to read the ingredients themselves, and keeping boxes behind a

counter takes this opportunity away from them. It is also important to price the merchandise or have prices listed close by! A client may be embarrassed to ask a price if a product is not marked, and a sale may be lost before it is even started.

Great salespeople know that there is an opportunity present and available in every moment. It is not just an opportunity for a transaction of cold cash, it is the opportunity to engage, connect, and form the basis of a mutually rewarding partnership for healthy skin!