

Marketing Guidelines for Successful Spas

Identifying Initiatives That Work

Web-Based Initiatives

The web is everywhere – it's impossible to escape and moreover the statistics that accompany it are staggering. Eight million people a day search online for health and wellness information and almost 60% of those agree that website content influences their buying choices. Meanwhile magazine, radio and newspaper sales are down by roughly the same percentage. This means in the simplest terms that any business not maximizing its web potential is looking at reduced revenues and ultimately possible failure.

This may sound overly dramatic but Laura Walker, president of Spa-Solutions.net says, "It's a simple fact that the move to the web is currently accelerating in quantum fashion and spas with neither a web-presence nor actively pursuing web-based marketing initiatives will undoubtedly stagnate."

Continuing on this point, Walker, a member of the Advisory Board of the New England Spa Association, adds, "A great website is one on which every online initiative you have built, including chat rooms, message boards, podcasts, blogs, news releases, and other online media intersect. A content-rich website organizes your Unique Selling Point (USP) or "DNA" as a tool to educate and inform, as well as entertain, whomever is browsing your information so that she or he will engage with your business and spend money with you as a result."

She continues, "Remember, the best message you can publish online is not about you ... it's about what each visitor/client/guest or patient is looking to 'buy' from you. Are you selling luxury, technology, experience or ambiance to women, men, teens, mature adults, couples, groups, brides, etc.?"

With over 20 years of experience as a spa consultant working with a significant number of clients including major hotel chains, wellness centers, medspas, salons and destination and day spas, Walker has a wealth of experience on which to draw and offers advice on all aspects of web business development. Her overriding message is simple – if you shy away from using the web, you're missing out on one of the most effective and least expensive ways to market your business.

Walker says it's imperative that any spa-related business must maintain a website. The site should have a clean, professional look that reflects the USP of the business throughout. It should display prominently all current offers and promotions, and ideally should offer online reservations or bookings. Details of the business hours and location should also be easily accessible and accurate, while photos of the business must be up-to-date and not generic.

Interacting with clients via the website is an essential ingredient of web-marketing success. Not only should you be selling products and services through your site, but, as the business owner, you need to know who is visiting your site; plus, if you can always obtain the name of an additional potential client from someone who is already visiting, you'll be continuously expanding your client base.

These two objectives can easily be met by always requesting the visitor's contact information in a fast, effective manner and also offering incentives to the visitor to add a friend's name. These simple steps go a

long way in building a database of clients and potential clients. Obviously, details of everyone who actually steps inside the spa, regardless of whether they are only making an inquiry or actually enjoying a service, should be added to the database on a daily basis if possible.

A comprehensive database is critical to web-marketing. As Walker spells out unequivocally, “Your database is your single most important tool for creating, building and keeping your clients.” She sees a database as a number of tiers stacked on top of one another: at the highest level is the minimum information that you should have from every client - name, address, telephone number and (absolutely essential) e-mail address. The next level down includes the client’s personal history – the date of the last service, the nature of the service, a promotion used; and the lowest tier adds additional details regarding the client such as her/his personal likes/dislikes, allergies, and wish list services.

Walker stresses the upper level data represents the bare bones of information you must have but points out that the more data you record, the more robust – and hence valuable - your database will be.

How do you put your database to work? Some of the ideas Walker suggests involve automated marketing by which every confirmation email to a client offers an “added value” service before they arrive and similarly, when they leave, suggests a re-book date and additional services.

E-blasts and E-newsletters are extremely effective marketing techniques according to Walker, as they not only go directly to the client, thus maintaining a high visibility profile for your business but also communicating concise promotional messages. Individual emails acknowledging, for example, a client’s birthday or anniversary also have surprisingly strong marketing impact.

Walker offers a service whereby she prepares a comprehensive, individualized marketing plan using only your business’s database content. Implementing the plan, she says, will increase the number of clients coming through your door and then - having established a relationship with them and maintaining it through her proposed web-initiatives - keep them returning to your spa.

Returning to a spa’s online presence, Walker cites a multitude of ways a spa can “get noticed,” which in the online world includes consistently coming out at the top of search engine listings, being linked to as many related – and unrelated businesses – as possible, and using the Google Ad Words service to drive web traffic to your site. She also suggests employing a Site Engine Optimizer (SEO) to ensure your site is structured in a manner that maximizes sales, and identifies techniques to see that your spa ranks in a prime position on sites such as Google Maps, Trip Advisor, and YahooTravel when your spa’s location or business type is searched.

Other online techniques that Walker favors include social networking. While you still may be thinking Facebook, MySpace and Twitter are sites for your teenage son or daughter, she says firmly, “Wrong!,” adding, “A business needs to be on sites of that nature these days because it enables your clients to link with one another.” Walker explains that this process, “builds intimacy,” but it also allows you to post a profile of your business on the site at no charge along with regular updates, which, to put it another way, represents free advertising.

Walker also says blogging, which again many business owners are still resisting, should also be considered. She points out that in economic terms, blogging is an excellent way to increase your search engine rankings and also, in her words, “Sends an implicit message of transparency and accountability and builds trust in

customers, partners and potential clients.” Explaining other ways in which a business blog is valuable, she adds that it can serve as a knowledge base for not only employees but also existing and potential clients and recommends updating your blog at least two or three times a week to keep it fresh.

If you feel your business needs either a review of its current marketing initiatives or the creation of a completely new program for your business, contact Laura Walker for a free initial consultation at 401-667-7187 (office) or 860-227-3398 (cell), or e-mail her at lwalker@spa-solutions.net

Spa Solutions Copyright 2009 Innovative Answers for an Expanding Industry