

Using Mailing Lists Effectively

By: Nanette Miner

Do you wait for your clients to call you for an appointment? Or do you proactively contact them to offer new products and services, or to remind them it's been awhile since you've seen them? If you chose the latter, you're probably doing more business than 50% of your competitors. If you identified with the first question, and you don't proactively contact your clients, now is the time to start.

First, you'll need a list. Hopefully you have the mailing address of each of your client's – if not, you'll need to start collecting them and the process of proactively contacting them will have to wait until you've accumulated the list. If you don't have a list already, there are three opportunities to start collecting addresses:

1. When a client calls to make an appointment, have the reception ask for their mailing address.
2. When the client comes in for an appointment, have a pre-made form for them to fill out, much like a guest register.
3. As clients are leaving and paying for services, have the receptionist ask for their mailing address at the time.

The approach you take will really depend on what the busiest interaction –point is in your salon – the phone, greeting, or payment processing. Collect addresses at the *least* busy point, so that your employees won't skip doing it because they are too busy. Some of your clients might balk at giving out this information and ask how you intend to use it. Train your staff to tell client's that they will only receive periodic mailings for things that will be of interest to them – such as promotions and discounts – and that you will NOT sell or share the list with anyone.

Once you have your client's mailing addresses, you'll want to start contacting them on a regular basis. Two "rules" should be applied here:

1. Make sure you have something of value to offer. Don't fill their mailbox with junk mail – they get enough of it already. Your clients should get a little thrill when they see *your* return address on a piece of mail in their box.
2. Conduct your mailings on a regular basis. You'll actually want to spend some time giving thought to how regular you think you can be in your mailings. If you start off sending out mailings on a monthly basis and then you find you run out of time – or money - one month, your marketing will look haphazard.

Think about whether you'll have the time to create, address, stamp and mail something on a monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, annual or some other frequency basis. It might be best to start small and just acknowledge your client's birthday each year. If you're more ambitious, you might think about promoting a different service each season - promote tanning in the spring, pedicures in the summer, etc. Even more ambition would require you to think of a valid reason to contact your client's each month. Truly spend the time considering how you will administratively and financially pull this off *before* you start regular mailings – your reputation depends on it.

Some other administrative considerations include:

- How will you maintain your list and address your mailings? Word has a Mail Merge feature that allows you to create and maintain mailing lists and print them to labels or

envelopes. There are also software programs that do the same thing, but why buy an additional piece of software to do the very same thing?

- If you'll be affixing stamps yourself – make sure you get the self-adhesive kind! You don't want to be licking 200 stamps.
- Will you mail letters or postcards? Letters are more expensive (.37 vs. 23 cents) and they also require the additional expense of an envelope and stationary, while a postcard is a self-contained marketing piece. Also, it's hard to not read a postcard. You run the risk of your marketing piece not being read if you send it in an envelope – what if your client doesn't open it? You can also use postcards as 'coupons' requiring your clients to bring in the card in order to take advantage of the promotion – this is a great way to gauge the successfulness of any promotion.
- There are a number of commercial postcard printers who can print custom-made cards for you at great prices for a minimum of 500 cards. Visit www.ModernPostcard.com and www.web-cards.com for starters.
- Make *sure* your return address is on the mailing piece and don't be surprised at the number of returned pieces you'll get – especially for the first 2 – 3 mailings. It's amazing how frequently people move. Be sure to update your mailing list by eliminating the returned pieces each month, so that you aren't fruitlessly sending mail to an invalid address.

Finally, think about what types of promotions you'd like to contact your client's about. Here are some ideas:

- Birthday greetings/discounts
- New product announcements
- New staff announcements
- New operating hours announcement
- Remind notices if you haven't seen a client in 60 or 90 days (believe it or not, sometimes they just forget!)
- Holiday specials
- Seasonal specials
- New services being introduced

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