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Bring Them in With Seminars

By Cheryl Whitman

Educational seminars are among the best ways to bring in new clients. Medspa consultant Cheryl Whitman shares what she has learned from working with her clients about making these events effective, efficient marketing tools. She covers everything from attracting attendees to preparing the program and converting guests to patients.

Bring Them in With Seminars

You've heard the buzz surrounding educational seminars. Everyone is talking about them—but should you dive in? If you want to build your business with maximum exposure for minimal dollars, yes. If you want to set yourself up as the expert in your community and distinguish yourself from your competition, yes. If you want to market your medspa without looking “salesy,” yes. But, how do you accomplish this without throwing away time and money—or making a total fool of yourself? It's all a simple matter of knowing how to get people to attend, where to have the event, what to say and how to convert attendees to clients or patients.

Assuring Attendance

What's the point of giving a party if no one comes? And “giving a party” is what you are going to do. Your seminar should be promoted and executed as you would a gala event. Everyone wants to come to a gala event! Offer canapés and champagne at an event titled “Subtle Changes for a Younger You” or high tea at a seminar on “Aging Elegantly.” Roll out the red carpet and extend your invitation to everyone you want as a client.

Which brings up a critical question: Who do you want to attend? You are looking for the woman who is confused about the myriad of medical aesthetic choices available and would like some help figuring out which choices are best. She wants to put her appearance in the hands of an expert, but there are so many who claim to be experts. As a result, she has done nothing yet, except cut out advertisements about the latest “solutions” and kept them in a file marked “skin care.” One day, she looks in the newspaper (or in her mailbox,

“We sent out fancy invitations to a list we purchased from a local women's organization. The invitations were handwritten, calligraphy-style, by one of our office staff members. Our phones started ringing immediately!”

K.J., MD, Dallas



▲ Refreshments can add a note of elegance to the event.

or in her e-mail box) and there it is—an invitation that describes an unthreatening informational event she can attend. It's at a convenient time and in a convenient location. It's free and refreshments are being served. What has she got to lose? Just her wrinkles and brown spots!

Don't overlook newspaper, radio and television coverage. Depending on your marketplace and the time of year, you can get a lot of exposure for relatively little money by using these media effectively. No matter what kind of advertising you choose to do, remember you will need to:

- ◆ Advertise your event at least four weeks in advance, once a week for the first three weeks

and then every day during the week of your seminar.

- ◆ Choose more than one advertising medium (newspaper and radio, invitation and newspaper, TV and newspaper).
- ◆ Prepare your staff. Staff members who are answering your phones must be prepped to answer seminar inquiries. A pre-written script that gives responses to commonly asked questions like “What is the seminar going to cover?” “Can I bring a friend?” and “Are you trying to sell something?” is a good idea. The better prepared and trained your staff is, the more likely it is that people will actually make and keep their reservations.

Picking a Place

One of the most important decisions you can make is where to hold your seminars. People tend to judge the worthiness of an event partly on where it's held. There are two obvious choices, and each has merit.

Choice No. 1: Your medspa or laser center. If you have a fabulous location and you want to show it off, this is a great way to do that. Make sure that you have plenty of comfortable chairs, with room to walk around and lots of accessible parking. The advantages of holding your seminar at your place of business are obvious. You don't have to pay rental for the space, your employees are there already to answer questions and sell retail, and you can pop out between treatments to do a quick seminar.

The disadvantage, while less obvious, is important. Experience suggests that fewer people will attend your seminar because they will assume that you are holding it solely to hook them into buying an expensive series of treatments. They may feel they will be "trapped" into buying something.

Choice No. 2: Off-site. If your facility isn't large enough to hold at least 25 attendees comfortably, then you should have your seminar off-site. Meeting rooms are always available in upscale hotels, but they are usually expensive. A less expensive option is to work with a local women's club or charitable organization that has access to a meeting room or to barter with a local country club, community center or school. There is always someone who would gladly make their space available to you in exchange for some kind of service trade-out (like low-cost services for employees or placing their brochures on your counter). In either case, make

sure the space is attractive and that there is ample parking available.

Holding your seminar off-site makes it more like a legitimate educational event and less like a sales ploy and, therefore, less threatening.

Preparing a Program

Keep it simple. The more complex you make your seminar, the less likely it is that people will get excited, according to Wendy Lipton Dibner, president and director of education for Professional Impact, which specializes in motivational training and leadership consulting (www.pro-impact.com).

"The secret to giving a great seminar is to write it so that it speaks to every possible attendee. Different people need to be talked to in different ways, so flex the style of your delivery and your slides throughout your presentation. Remember that your attendees are not educated in aesthetics and they are not looking to be trained as technicians. In fact, most of your attendees are entry-level buyers who are looking for someone to tell them 'this is safe and effective and it really is OK to do it!' Do not try to sell them on 'wellness.' Instead, teach them about all of their aesthetic options as simply as possible. Explain the benefits of the multi-treatment approach versus à la carte selections and distinguish temporary solutions from permanent ones. Teach them about downtime and the critical importance of home care. Tell them about things you don't do, and tell them why you won't do them. Be honest and real. They will respect you and want to hear more," says Lipton Dibner.

How long should your seminar be? According to Lipton Dibner: "Your seminar should be 60 minutes long, scripted to take your attendees on an emotional roller coaster that is peppered with in-

formation, humor and passion. It should begin with your audience politely listening and end with them sitting on the edge of their seats, motivated to make a change in how they care for their skin. If you help every attendee make a firm decision about looking and feeling their best, then you will be the expert they'll come to for help in making that change. Why? Because you are the one they'll trust."

Reaping Rewards

Converting attendees to bookings is the easy part! If you do a great job of delivering your seminar, conversion is the most logical outcome of the event. Remember, people who attend your seminars are already expressing interest in your services.

Set up a table at the door and have your staff assist you with registration. Then, at the end of your speech, refer everyone to the same table to reserve a time for their complimentary skincare analysis and to pick up their gifts for attending. Make sure your giveaways are well-branded. If you make your gifts type-specific, each attendee will actually have to talk to someone on your staff in order to receive the gift. Have plenty of menus of your services and fees available, along with well-posted notices about the availability of financing options, such as CareCredit. Make sure they know that your services are accessible to everyone and that they can pay for their procedures over time.

Instruct your staff not to push your services. According to Lipton Dibner, "The biggest mistake our clients make is when they try to sell at their seminars. This is a gift you're giving to your community. Don't mess it up by trying to sell them something. Inform them about the possibilities, and

"The first time we did it, we thought 'how hard can this be?' Then we got our answer—it's only hard if you don't plan and prepare for it! The second time we used the script and trained our front desk. We had zero no-shows!" *L.T., MD, Chicago*



▲ Your presentation should motivate as well as educate.

show them your heart. The rest will happen as a result of your well-scripted presentation, your tasteful, entertaining slides, and your helpful staff who are available to answer their questions after your presentation.”

Seminars are becoming popular marketing tools all over the country. Done well, they can establish you as the authority in aesthetics in your area, and set you up with a steady flow of new and loyal clients and patients. ♣

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