



# The Need for SPEED

Put your spa on the fast track to profits with express services.

By Lola Augustine Brown

IT USED TO BE THAT A TRIP TO THE SPA WAS A CHANCE to take time out from the stresses of the outside world and indulge in an hour or more of rejuvenation. However, these days a pedicure or facial is often seen as less of a luxury and more of a necessity. Time-crunched clients still want those services, but they want them delivered in time slots more suited to their busy lives—hence, the myriad of express services popping up on spa menus everywhere.

“Express services are becoming more popular because we live in an overprogrammed world in which time has become a precious commodity,” says Janet D’Angelo, author of *Spa Business Strategies: A Plan for Success* (Milady, 2005). “Many of our express service clients want to get in on their lunch hours or before going home to the kids,” says Amy Augustyn, owner

and manager of Aspire Day Spa ([www.aspiredayspa.com](http://www.aspiredayspa.com)) in Denver. At Dashing Diva ([www.dashingdiva.com](http://www.dashingdiva.com)), a spa chain with 39 locations worldwide, express manicures, pedicures and facial waxing have become so popular that Robert Cleary, director of operations, says plans to add more express services to the menu are in the works.

The experiences of these businesses may make adding express services at your spa seem like a no-brainer, but there’s a lot to consider before you merge your spa into the fast lane. According to Augustyn, you need a clear idea of what you can reasonably accomplish in the amount of time you allot, and a good training program in place for your employees. If you proceed using the following guidelines, developing express services should be nothing to race away from.

### All Aboard?

Before you add express services to your menu, it's important to be sure that your clients and staff are on board. Is this something that your clients really want? "The client who uses our express services is often the type who's always on the go. He or she isn't necessarily looking for relaxation and doesn't want to spend a lot of time sitting still," says Donna Miestas, co-owner and manager of Casa Verde Spa ([www.casaverdesalonspa.net](http://www.casaverdesalonspa.net)) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "When these people leave the spa after a treatment they want to feel like they've accomplished something."

Also consider what new clients you might attract. Men, who are generally more interested in nuts and bolts treatments than the social experience of the spa, may find express services very appealing. Miestas says at Casa Verde express facials are a popular way for mothers to introduce their teenage daughters to skin care.

In assessing your staff's interest, remember that the very idea of express services goes against the basic ethos of what many industry professionals believe a spa experience should be. If your staff doesn't buy in to the concept of fast-track services,



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it'll be difficult to make them successful. Your technicians are likely to balk under the increased pressure to get things done.

To ensure that you'll be able to fulfill the promises you make to clients, begin by consulting with your staff about how they think express services could work. D'Angelo says that people are more likely to buy in to something if they're given the opportunity to express an opinion on it, so be sure that everyone gets their say.

### Full Steam Ahead

When it comes to express services, the key to success is scrupulous time management. If you tell a client she'll be able to get her nails done in 30 minutes, the service needs to be finished in 30 minutes. If she's kept longer while waiting for her polish to dry, she'll leave feeling stressed (and you'll probably never see her again). If you set clear guidelines for how express services are to be carried out, it'll be easier for your technicians to comfortably complete them in the allotted time frame.

When working out the practicalities of your express services, says Miestas, it's about getting down to the nitty-gritty of the treatment. Be realistic about what can be accomplished, and simplify the treatment so clients don't feel like your technicians are rushing through anything. "Rather than trying to do every step of a facial in 30 minutes, we focus on the areas the client prefers," says Augustyn.

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Consider offering online prepayment and client intake services to streamline the check-in process.

Following are three suggestions for developing expedited services:

- **Streamline your intake/outtake process.** Have a spa concierge available to check people in, make sure everyone's in the right place at the right time and confirm that all necessary equipment is ready. Another option is to embrace technology; D'Angelo suggests using a computerized check-in procedure similar to that used at airports, or setting up prepay systems online so that express service clients can be all paid up before they even walk in. (An old-fashioned alternative is to have prepaid vouchers that clients can use instead of cash.) However, keep in mind that offering express services doesn't mean scrimping on important safety/comfort issues. You still need to ensure that client questionnaires are filled out, either online or in person, before treatments are scheduled to start.
- **Streamline your equipment usage.** Establish a system wherein all equipment and tools are ready before an express treatment is scheduled to start. Look for products like individual disposable manicure kits to make things more efficient. You may even want to consider upgrading to equipment designed to help in the delivery of your express services. For example, if you plan to feature quick massages, perhaps a massage chair would be a wise investment.
- **Consider the layout of your spa.** The overall design of your spa factors in when trying to create a relaxed environment for streamlined express services. "It shouldn't take five minutes to cross the space," says D'Angelo.

If express spa services are likely to become a large part

## **YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER UPGRADING TO EQUIPMENT DESIGNED TO HELP IN THE DELIVERY OF YOUR EXPRESS SERVICES.**

of your business, consider designing your location around the express concept. As a direct alternative to the usual low-key spa environment, clients could be encouraged to use their treatment time to catch up on the latest fashion and gossip, and incorporating film or music could help promote this kind of experience.

Dashing Diva has used this principle successfully. Here, spa color schemes are light and airy and pedicure lounges are set either in a rotunda or with the seats facing each other so clients can enjoy a social environment.

This arrangement has proven very popular with group bookings and has even become the start of many a girls' night out, says Cleary.

### **Eliminating the Roadblocks**

To achieve optimal efficiency in your express services, be prepared to work out the most common snags. One barrier to faster services is Chatty Cathy-type technicians. "You really have to teach people to talk and work simultaneously," says Miestas. "The solution at our spa is to follow the 80-20 rule: The client gets to talk 80% of the time and the technician 20%."

Another big challenge with offering express services is client lateness. A delay of just 15 minutes can ruin a whole treatment.

A third barrier to truly great express services is poor scheduling. "We monitor spa traffic very closely to be sure enough staff is available," says Cleary. "The formula we use is to cover the

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maximum amount of services previously recorded for any given hour of operation with at least one licensed technician on duty for every service we provide. For example, not every

staff member can perform every service, so that has to factor in when the schedule is made. The manager and receptionist must also be familiar with each service so they can

tell who'll be available for the next client just by looking at which step the technician is performing within any given service.”

Logistical issues can become even more of a headache with group bookings. Express treatments are proving especially popular for events like bridal showers and bachelorette parties, perhaps because express services give the party host more bang for her buck. But if not planned perfectly, these spa parties can be difficult. Getting all those people in the right place at the right time becomes a challenge, especially when alcoholic drinks are involved.

Augustyn prevents problems with a party policy requesting that all guests arrive at least 30 minutes early. They're also asked to choose (and book) their express treatments ahead of time. “That 30 minutes gives us time to check everybody in, get them a drink and adjust to any last-minute changes,” she says. Aspire Day Spa also has a system to keep technicians on track. “We keep individual schedules for each technician, and a master schedule shows where any client is at any given time,” Augustyn adds.

Miestas keeps her parties on track by sending out a spreadsheet for clients to fill out via e-mail, so that all treatments are booked and ready before the party arrives. This method allows her to plan with groups as large as 15 people. Casa Verde also provides mini-consultation forms to help speed up the intake process for parties. ●

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