


Cards and Flowers

By Karen Edwards



“Today’s world has become increasingly impersonal,” says Gillian Christie, owner of Christie Communications, a Santa Barbara, California-based marketing company that works with day spas. “Spas counteract that. They treat each person as an individual. By sending cards and making them as personal as possible, you’re extending the caring environment that so many people want but find largely nonexistent in the service sector today.”

Cards and flowers sent from your spa can be powerful client-retention tools or business generators—it all depends on what cards you send and to whom you send them. Christie sees cards functioning primarily as a client-retention tool, a grace note for an industry that’s built around an atmosphere of caring. “After all,” she explains, “the reason many clients are drawn to spas in the first place is for the experience.”

Larry Oskin, owner of Marketing Solutions, a Fairfax, Virginia-based marketing firm that specializes in the beauty industry, has a different take. While he agrees that cards are useful in retaining clients, he believes they’re most beneficial when used to bring in new business. Spa owners might do well to heed the advice of both experts—and send cards of both types.

Card Photography by Brooks Ayola

Client Retention

When the experts speak of client-retention cards, they're referring to those cards that mark a special occasion in the client's life or commiserate with a misfortune—the types of cards you would send to family and friends. Examples include:

- Birthday cards
- Get-well cards
 - Graduation cards
 - New-baby cards
 - Sympathy cards
 - Retirement cards
 - Wedding/engagement cards
 - Year-end holiday cards

suggests that on their first visit you ask clients to complete a form that includes the month and day of birth—though it's generally a good idea to omit the year.

Learning of other occasions, however, is going to take some staff effort. The service professionals who work at your spa are your best sources for what's going on in clients' lives. Encourage them to share news about clients with you, says Christie. Oskin recommends that receptionists fill idle hours reading through birth announcements, engagement/wedding announcements and obituaries in local newspapers for client names. Cox adds accident reports to her receptionist's reading list, so a "speedy recovery" message can be sent when appropriate.

Once you learn of the occasion, take action immediately. Cox keeps a supply of greeting cards on hand so she can dash off a quick note and drop the card in the mail.

"We try to react as soon as we hear the news," she says. But she'll send belated cards rather than no card at all.

One card Cox does not stock is birthday cards. She doesn't send them. "I feel they've become too impersonal," she says. "Everyone sends them. Even your insurance agent sends you a birthday card." Some spa owners say they steer clear of birthday cards because they don't want to risk offending clients for whom birthdays are a sensitive subject. While other owners say their client database is too big to track birthdays.

If you do decide to send birthday cards, there are software programs that can help you track which cards to send when, says Oskin. (Mikal and Harms are two companies with tracking software.) If you prefer the low-tech approach, develop tickler files—one for



Clients of Darin Jon Studio receive a handwritten thank-you note from their service providers.

Cindy Cox, owner of the Hair Artists Salon and Day Spa located in Columbus, Ohio, has been sending cards to her clients for years. "It's a natural thing to do," she says. "We treat our clients like family, so when there's an occasion to send a card, we do."

Of course, the challenge for Cox and other spa owners lies in discovering when these special events occur. Birthdays are fairly simple. Christie

each month of the year. Purchase or create the cards you'll need for each client, address them and drop them into the appropriate monthly folder. Each month, mail the cards in that month's tickler file.

tions of thank-you cards exist. The typical thank-you card is traditionally sent to first-time spa visitors to encourage a second visit, sometimes with coupons inside. Darin Jon Studio, a Santa Barbara, California, salon and day spa, sends elegant handwritten thank-you notes to clients. "The staff handwrites them from a script," says owner Darin Jon. And Kenneth Anders, owner of the Spa at Kenneth's in Columbus, Ohio, has created a unique thank-you card that markets more discreetly. "When someone receives a visit to our spa as a gift, we present them with a thank-you card, addressed to the gift-giver," says Anders. Clients sign their name to the card, and add a personal note if they wish. Then, the spa collects the cards and puts them in the mail. "Our clients love it," says Anders. "They want to send a thank-you note, but how many actually get around to buying the card, writing a message, addressing it, putting a stamp on it and mailing it? We take care of those details for them." In return, Anders says, the person who gave the spa visit as a gift is subtly persuaded to give it again. "The thank-you card acts as a reminder that this is a gift that won't be returned or go unused," he says. There's more. Anders also makes sure that the thank-you card for the gift-giver includes a smaller thank-you card for the visitor as well. "Now that you've enjoyed a gift of our spa treatments, give them to yourself, too!" says the card. A \$5-off coupon adds an incentive.

Miss-you cards. These cards are sent to clients you haven't seen in six months or more, says Oskin. Diane Fisher, owner of Eclips Salon and Day Spa in the Washington, D.C., area, doesn't wait that long. Clients who have been missing from her salon for only four months receive a card. Fisher

The Spa at Kenneth's provides thank-you cards for gift certificate recipients to send to the gift giver after services are received.



Generating Business

Retaining accounts is one-half of your business. Acquisition is the other, and Oskin believes most spas should focus the bulk of their marketing dollars on cards that will generate new business. "There are always clients dying, moving or maybe having a problem with you, so you should always have something out there to bring new clients into your spa," he says. Examples of business-generating cards include thank-you cards, miss-you cards, congratulations on marriages or births, and courtesy promotional cards.

Thank-you cards. Endless varia-

says different versions of these cards leave her salon every month. “We’ll include a \$10-off coupon or we’ll offer a free shampoo and conditioning treatment to bring them back in,” she says.

Lori Taylor, owner of the Artisans Gathering Salon in Lawrenceville, Georgia, makes her holiday cards serve the same purpose as a “We miss you” card by including former clients on her holiday card list. “The end of the year is an appropriate time to tell clients you haven’t seen them for a while,” says Taylor. “My cards include a note inviting them to schedule next year’s visits.”

Congratulations on

with the congratulations, suggest services for the bridal party, the new bride and the stressed-out new mom.

Courtesy promotions. Cards introducing a new service or product and those promoting gift certificates through wish-list services are direct-marketing efforts to inform your clients of services that are new to your business, or maybe new to the client. “Most clients use only one, maybe two, services in a spa,” says Oskin. “And the rule is it’s easier and less expensive to sell more services to an existing client than to bring in new business.” That’s why he encourages spas to look at their databases to see who’s using which services and then cross-promote.

Fisher says her day spa has just started cross-marketing. When a client comes in, the receptionist checks to see which services the client uses, and before she leaves, she receives a dollars-off coupon for services she has never tried. Hairstyle clients could receive a coupon for a facial, for example, or a manicure client could receive a coupon for a haircut.

The wish-list card is a popular holiday promotion that works like a gift registry, says Oskin. Clients complete a form expressing which spa services they would most like to receive as a gift. The spa then sends a card to a spouse, partner, family member or friend designated by the client with the client’s wish clearly marked.

Card Etiquette

Whether you’re sending client-retention cards, business-generating cards or both, there’s a certain etiquette involved in the creating and the sending. Christie and Oskin provide tips on card dos and don’ts.

- **Do** send cards that reflect your



Miss-you cards sent to former clients of Eclips Salon and Day Spa include a dollars-off coupon for return visits.

marriage or a new baby. These cards serve both as client-retention tools—since they celebrate special moments in your clients’ lives—and as tools to bring in new business. To enhance new-client potential, Oskin suggests sending them to people whose engagement, wedding or birth announcements appear in the newspaper. Along

What Do I Say?

Looking for the perfect sentiment to add to your card? Adding personal, handwritten notes can leave a favorable and lasting impression on your clients—and the sentiments don't have to be elaborate. Simple notes are often best. Here are a few suggested messages you can add to your cards.

Sympathy:

- The staff of the (your name) Spa send you their deepest sympathy.
- You are on our minds and in our hearts.
- Please extend our condolences to your family.
- We share your grief.

Get well:

- Best wishes for a speedy recovery.
- We were so sorry to learn of your illness.
- We're thinking of you and hoping you'll be better soon.
- We hope you're as good as new in no time.

Congratulations:

- Good news travels fast—congratulations!
- Best wishes from all of us.
- (Wedding/engagement) Just a note to say how happy we are for both of you.
- (New baby) Congratulations on your little one—may (she/he) know health, happiness and love throughout life.

Thank-you:

- Your business means so much to us. Thank you!
- Thank you for being our client.
- (With premium) Because we appreciate your business, we are extending to you this offer.
- You are a valued customer. Thank you for your business.

Need more ideas? Check your library, bookstore or online bookseller for books that can give you the right words for the right occasion. Good ones include: *How to Say It* by Rosalie Maggio; *When Words Matter Most* by Robyn Friedman Spizman; *How to Write It* by Sandra Lamb; and *Just a Note to Say...* by Florence Isaacs.



image. Both marketing experts suggest you customize your cards by featuring pictures of your spa, your services or your logo. "Repeat messaging is important," says Christie. "You want all of your correspondence to look as similar as possible so you build your brand." If you don't want to produce customized cards, Christie suggests you keep a supply of high-quality stationery on hand, preferably with your logo on it, so you can write notes as needed. Neither expert recommends buying cards from the local card shop, although if that's your most practical course, choose cards that have a heavier stock and a quality feel. Remember, it's your business you're representing.

- **Don't** sign cards "from the spa." Christie says, "Cards should always be from an individual—whether that's the spa owner or an individual service professional is up to you and your policy. Just don't make the card come from a place of business. It's too impersonal."
- **Do** include a handwritten signature. While both experts favor handwritten signatures, Oskin is less enthusiastic about written messages. "Handwriting is not always readable," he says. "So I'm not crazy about adding notes." Christie disagrees. "It's the handwriting that will get the client to open the card, and it's the note that will make it memorable," she says. She agrees that handwriting has to be legible, and that may take some extra time, but emphasizes that it will be worth it for the good impression it leaves. She also encourages spa owners to write their signatures and notes in blue ink, which is less likely to be confused with computer-generated signatures that are most often done in black ink.

• **Don't** send e-cards ...yet. "Frankly, it may come to the point where all correspondence is electronic," says Christie. For now, however, she urges spas to stick with conventional, printed cards. Not only does it preserve that caring image, but it's also practical—e-mail addresses change frequently, and "spam" is not a word you want your clients to associate with your spa.

Flower Power

Flowers can be used the same way you use cards, although from an economical standpoint, experts suggest that they're better used for client retention than to generate new business.

"Flowers are a must for any spa," says Christie. She recommends that spas keep fresh bouquets, either from a florist or the local farmer's market, in the reception area at all times because they have such client appeal.

Flowers do make an impression, agrees Jon, who set buckets of Gerber daisies in his salon last April in observance of the spa's first annual "Daymaker's Day." Jon subscribes to Jut Salon owner David Wagner's "daymaker" philosophy—which is to make a simple gesture of kindness to others every day. On a scheduled day in April, Jon handed daisies to every client visiting his salon—male and female. "The men were surprised, but thought it was cool," says Jon. He didn't expect the reaction he got from one of his female clients: "She asked me why I was giving her a flower, and I told her 'just because.' She started to cry. She told me no one had ever given her a flower before."

That's a good example of how flowers can serve the client-retention func-

tion. Another way is to send flowers to a client who has lost a spouse or close family member—or to a new mother who just delivered twins. Fisher says she always sends flowers to grieving clients or to families of clients who have died. So does Cox.

Cox has also created a way that flowers can serve as a business-generator. She sends flowers to new businesses that have just moved into the area. "It can generate great word of mouth," she says. Recently, for example, she sent flowers to an obstetrical practice that opened within a mile of her salon. "Some of their staff came down to check us out and made appointments," she says. "And now they're passing the word on to patients."

Because flowers are so much more costly to buy and send than cards, however, Oskin recommends staying with cards if you're looking for a way to bring new clients into your business. You can produce and send a number of cards for the same amount it costs to send a bouquet, he says.

Money for cards and flowers should be included in your annual marketing, advertising and publicity budget. Experts generally recommend that 3% to 5% of your spa's gross annual sales should be spent on generating new business and building your brand. The cost of cards and flowers will take up only a small portion of this budget. Most of the spas interviewed for this article fall within those guidelines, and all of them say the money is well spent. "It's inexpensive PR," sums up Cox. "It really doesn't cost that much to buy a card and a stamp. But the impression it makes can be worth millions." ♦

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