

Marketing on a

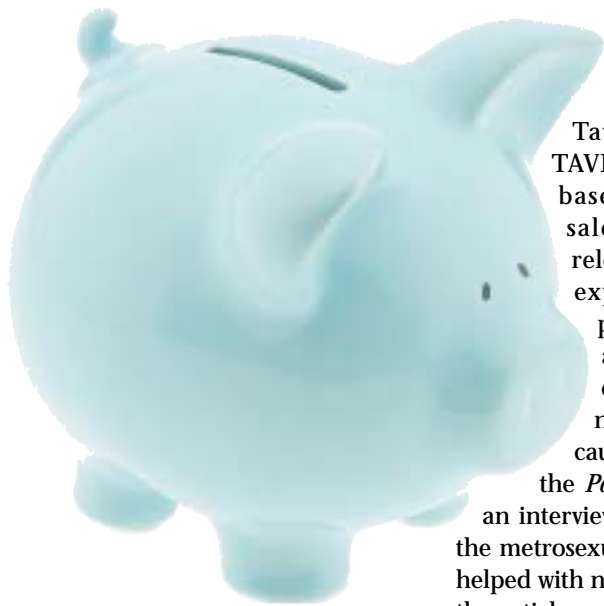
Shoestring Budget

Follow these cheap marketing tricks for tight budgets.

By Sabrina Mehra

If only reeling in new clients was as simple as setting up shop and plugging in a phone. In a society overcrowded with competing messages, snagging the attention of today's jaded consumer has become increasingly difficult. "Our salon's advertisements have to stand out against all of the other commercials and magazine ads that bombard the market every day," says Bob Pointe, co-owner of Razor's Edge Hair & Nail Salon in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

But breaking through with your marketing message is easier said than done, especially when you're on a tight budget. Many nail techs and salon owners simply don't have the funds to splurge on flashy marketing schemes. However, according to Dr. Rachna Jain, a Maryland-based guerrilla marketing coach, money doesn't guarantee marketing success. "Many nail technicians and salon owners feel that they need a huge marketing budget for their businesses, when in reality marketing can cost much less money than people think," says Jain. "The guerrilla marketing premise is that you trade your creativity, time and ingenuity for dollars. You can save money and get the same results as you would if you spent tons of cash."



Tavin Moore, owner of TAVIN, a Portland, Oregon-based skin- and nailcare salon, sent out a press release to local media that explained both her interpretation of the trend and her salon's experience with men's skin and nail care. Moore's release caught the eye of editors at the *Portland Tribune* and led to an interview for a feature exploring the metrosexual trend. "This exposure helped with name recognition, because the article put my name in the public eye once again," says Moore.

In fact, salon owners and nail technicians on shoestring budgets are just as capable of reaching new clients through inexpensive marketing strategies as are those with pocketfuls of cash, says Joan Komorowski, principal of JOAN PR, a public relations firm in Redondo Beach, California. "The money isn't what gets their messages across," says Komorowski, whose firm serves the beauty industry. "Success depends on *effective* and *consistent* marketing schemes."

Before they launch an inexpensive marketing scheme, Komorowski advises nail techs and salon owners to first determine their annual budgets and then, with that budget in mind, plot out exactly what they'd like to accomplish. "You need to ask yourself questions like, 'Am I trying to increase my pedicure bookings? Or am I looking to bring in more people on weeknights? Do I want to accept more walk-ins and new clients? Or would I rather offer more incentives to my current clientele?'" she says. With the answers to these questions in mind, nail professionals can implement cost-effective marketing strategies that will bring them closer to their goals.

And there's more than one way to promote your nail business without breaking the bank. You're likely to save a bundle of money—and reach your target audience—with any of the following money-saving marketing ploys.

Extra! Extra!

In 2003, when the term *metrosexual* first injected itself into popular culture,

Moore's approach to media exposure is bang on, according to Komorowski; a magazine or newspaper article might not pull new clients into your salon the day the piece appears in print, but it definitely helps plant a seed in the readers' minds. "When you read a statement in an article it's worth so much more than if it were printed in an advertisement," says Komorowski. The reasoning? Readers/viewers listen to the media. Having a professional journalist recognize your work has a profound effect on potential clients because the journalist notes your talents. With an advertisement, you sing your own praises—a fact that potential clients acknowledge. "Media attention is one of the best ways to market yourself. The media put you in the public eye as a professional and as part of the community. People will remember your name because of this publicity and be more inclined to visit your salon," says Komorowski.

Nail techs who crave a little ink or face time should approach local media with a story angle in mind. "A story angle could be: Clients often don't realize that pedicures serve a larger purpose than pretty, painted toenails, but they also help prevent corns and calluses," says Komorowski. "The media might find a story in your pitch, so why not call and talk to them?"

Assignment editors are usually crunched for time, so when you call them, provide only the information that's pertinent to your pitch—and

have a press release ready that includes the facts and your contact information. "Often, if the editor likes the story, she wants it right away," says Komorowski. Once you establish yourself as a reliable information source, you're more likely to be approached by local media when they have another story in mind, and not the other way around.

For Moore, who credits her Web site as her primary tool for attracting new business, the publicity she receives adds to her credibility. "While I think that my Web site accurately portrays my salon, posting on the site any media attention I accrue grants me a little more backup," says Moore.



"Potential clients may visit my Web site and say, 'Well, this is a nice site, but is the *salon* any good?' Media mentions show that other people think I do a great job in my profession and will turn to me for advice and insight." Moore lists her media mentions on the home page of her Web site under the heading Gossip; Komorowski suggests preparing a book of press clippings that clients can flip through while they wait in your reception area for their appointments or for their nails to dry.

Good Deeds

Most people would rather do business with friends than people they suspect might be only interested in taking their money. One way to inspire trust is through volunteer work. Charity work effectively promotes your services and develops community bonds at the same time, according to Komorowski. "Volunteering shows that you care about the community and, as a result, makes people regard you as a friend," she says.

"All yourself with worthy causes, or volunteer for an organization you really support, even if you end up giving away

some of your services for free," says Jain. "Quite often, if the cause is well-publicized, your salon's name or picture will appear in the paper and people will want to know more about your business."

In an industry rooted in helping people feel beautiful, nail techs and salon owners are equipped with a wealth of volunteer roles from which to choose. Jain suggests performing manicures and pedicures on women recovering from serious illnesses; Komorowski recommends providing free hand massages in conjunction with church fundraisers or other local events. You could even take your benevolence on the road; all

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kinds of organizations eagerly invite speakers to address their memberships on a variety of topics. These same organizations often look for event sponsors or donations for raffles. "Even contributing a gift certificate to raffle off puts your name in front of 50 to 100 people, and with other modes of marketing that feat alone can be very expensive," says Komorowski.

However you decide to help, make sure you can commit to it. Always involve yourself in causes you actually care about; insincerity is easy to sniff out. "If you volunteer only because you want your picture in the paper or your salon on television, obviously this attitude sends the wrong message," says Jain. "But when you feel passionate about a cause, your conviction really draws people to you"—and your salon.

Smart Partnering

When seeking out new clients, try dipping into the client pools of other businesses. Partnering with local businesses for marketing purposes is both cost-effective and resourceful. You'll be tapping into another market that you might not have had access to before; however, choosing businesses

with which to conduct cross-promotions takes some thought. According to Larry Oskin, president of Marketing Solutions in Fairfax, Virginia, your cross-marketing should link with two or more noncompeting businesses, and any promotions you market together should be mutually beneficial promotions that serve to attract one another's clientele. Says Oskin, "You can get a lot of mileage out of bartering your services because cross-promotions bring in a new clientele that would have never come in otherwise," says Oskin. Cross-promotions work to benefit you because referred clients often will take the advice of businesses they regard as reputable.

What businesses make good cross-marketing partners for a nail salon? Almost any business, Oskin says, provided it serves the type of client you'd like to reach and isn't your direct competition. Contact florists or grocers, dress shops or sports shops, and embark on creating mutually produced handbills, counter displays, gift certificate exchange programs, jointly hosted educational seminars and discounts to clients referred through the cross-promotional partner. Your marketing production costs will be cut in half (provided you split the expenses) *and* you'll be reaching a broader consumer base.

Sometimes you don't have to step out of your salon to cross-promote. In salons that offer more than nail services, Komorowski suggests nail professionals invite their salon colleagues to collaborate in some internal cross-marketing. "Often, salon employees don't sell their co-workers' services," says Komorowski. She recommends introducing this proposition by offering a free service to one of the hairstylists or massage therapists with whom you work. "While you have your co-worker at your workstation, tell her your plan," says Komorowski. "One marketing tactic you could employ: Give her some of your business cards with her name on the back of them.

Every time a new client visits you for your services with one of those referral cards, you can give your co-worker \$5 for the referral." The \$5 incentive works in your favor because the co-worker will send you a client and, chances are, the client will return. That's a small investment for a big payoff!

Enlist Your Clients

Where marketing is concerned, Razor's Edge Hair & Nail Salon has tried practically everything under the sun, but nothing has worked quite as well as client referrals. "I constantly remind the staff to ask their clients to tell their friends and families about the salon," says Pointe, who offers a \$5 discount to both the client doing the referring and the new client who's been referred. Convincing his nail technicians to ask clients for referrals, however, is where Pointe often encounters difficulties. "We used to give employees \$100 bonuses for every six referrals they solicited, and this method worked for a while," says Pointe. "The problem today is that most of our nail techs aren't always willing to ask."

Some techs shudder at the thought of asking for referrals, but, according to Jain, techs should treat the request like any other topic of casual conversation. "If you feel that you have to convince someone to do something for you, you're going to come across as stressed-out and fearful," says Jain. "If you tell yourself, 'I'm simply going to have a conversation with my client; maybe she knows a referral, maybe she doesn't—I'm OK either way,' this type of mind-set alleviates some of the fear."

The first step to referrals success: Feel comfortable about asking for them. Jain recommends looking for certain signals your client may give that let you know she's open to the discussion. "When a client admires your work—whether it be a nail enhancement service or handpainted

nail art—you can be at ease saying, 'I'm so glad you liked what I offered you, and I do have some openings in my schedule, so if you know anyone who would also like this service, I'd appreciate your passing on my name,'" says Jain.

Speak Up for Yourself!

Perhaps the easiest and cheapest marketing tactic of all is tooting your own horn. "Many of us grow up with the idea that we shouldn't ask people to give us anything," says Jain. "More likely you'll find nail techs giving away their services or products at first—especially if they're uncomfortable with marketing—rather than their telling you, 'I do great nails; you should come and try my services.'"

Pointe is no stranger to the effectiveness of casual discourse as a marketing tool; he'll often strike up a conversation with a complete stranger and, in the course of the discussion, he'll mention what he does for a living and hand her a business card. As he points out, it certainly doesn't hurt to try this method and, best of all, "it doesn't cost me anything."

Whether backed by tons of cash or implemented on a shoestring budget, marketing efforts are especially successful when they're performed consistently, according to Jain. "Marketing doesn't work after just one or two attempts; it has to be something you commit to regularly," she says. After all, these days marketing is practically essential to a business's survival.

"I think you could exist in business without marketing," says Komorowski. But, she's quick to add, "You might not do that well. Marketing is essential to becoming as successful as you want to be." ↓

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