

Putting a New Face on Aging

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It is not polite to ask a lady her age, but just in case someone does, I am now armed with a battery of replies that do not contain a number, and yet somehow get the point across. A few of my favorites: I am on AARP's permanent mailing list. I haven't been carded in a really long time. I take almost daily rides on the mood swing. My favorite pants have a stretchy waistband. Need I go on?

As if I need them, reminders are everywhere. It's an average day and I am driving through Anytown, USA, when suddenly, there it is – that icon of the American obsession with youth. It is a billboard featuring Madison Avenue's idea of a woman in need of wrinkle cream. She is 21 and heavily airbrushed. Sigh. I drive on, but I am heartened, being in this industry, to know that there are much better things than this or that drug store cream at my disposal. Twenty-one? Pfeh. Fifty rules.

The unrelenting pressure on women to stay young is no different now than it was in our mother's day, with one exception. When women of past generations hit "a certain age," their only recourse was the scalpel, a feeble excuse for their several weeks of absence, and a feigned look of modest surprise when someone said, "You look wonderful! Have you had a holiday?" Not exactly. Surgery is never fun, but today, thanks to technology, there are alternatives that are non-invasive and astonishingly effective. They are routinely featured on TV news reports and in magazines, and there starts the stampede to the local spa for a lunchtime facelift or another treatment that will turn back the clock.

Business is Baby-Booming.

Why is it important to offer these services? Lorraine Park, Vice President of Spas for Remington Hotels, puts it simply: "For many woman, it is the number one reason why they come to the spa - they want to look and feel 10 years younger."

Katherine Mearns, Spa Director of Spa of Colonial Williamsburg refers to results-oriented services that will encourage continuing treatments. "Our guests, whether local or visiting from another area, want results with their facials. As a leading spa, we must meet their needs. Although these services may not be viewed as totally relaxing like many other spa services and facials, guests are able to reap the benefits of the intensified service and relax during other times of their visits."

"Everyone wants to beat the clock and people in their early 30s are starting to pay more attention to delaying the aging process," says Tina Berger, Senior Vice President of Operations for WTS. "Boomers want to turn back time and are looking at products and services to do that." Holli Beckwith, Director of Spa Concept Consultation for WTS adds: "The Gen.X and Gen.Y men are also paying more attention and having anti-aging services as well as medi-aesthetic and plastic surgery on a more regular basis. There is a huge trend with the Boomers now to 'prevent and preserve' the body, and develop better health and balance. There is also an increase in anti-aging services in the salon sector, with peels for the hands and feet and upper arms and legs to counter the damaging UV effects of the sun, not just for the face, but the entire body."

Let's face it, aging is a runaway train and we can't stop it, but the trend now is a more gentle, natural approach to beating Father Time. Surgery is certainly not losing in popularity, but on its heels and perhaps even overtaking it in some ways are the more gradual, far less invasive and generally far less expensive options offered by the newer aesthetic, rejuvenating skin care equipment and treatments being developed to keep up with the demands of a giant generation.

Discretion is another desirable factor in keeping oneself young-looking, and these less invasive treatments eliminate the inconvenience of hiding out for 6 weeks and worrying about scars. Maureen Schumacher, Director of the Aqua Star Spa at the The Beverly Hilton sums it up: “The phrase ‘grow old gracefully’ is a wonderful idea that we all cling to, but the fact is, when your skin begins to sag and wrinkles take shape, you can no longer deny that the image of yourself immortalized at age 25 is not how you actually look in the mirror. We all want to fight to preserve our youth. The trick is, most women want to fight the signs of aging in private so we can maintain the image of ‘growing old gracefully’ to the rest of the world. So offering anti-aging services in a spa setting instead of a doctor’s office is a valuable part of any spa menu. These days, anti aging services are being booked by women in their 20s who feel that it is never too soon to address the issue of aging.”

Smart move, 25. It comes at you fast, and the sooner one starts, the better. Spas need not limit their marketing of these services to the baby boomers. With the graphic representation of what plastic surgery really entails on popular television shows in recent years, even younger clientele are taking steps to avoid having to go through surgery at a later age. And with the advanced options available to this younger generation that was raised on technology, staying young might become as easy as a text message before we know it.

The largest market, however, remains the huge pool of baby boomers who are now realizing that tanning with baby oil on the beach in July may not have been such a great idea. Sun damage, age spots, Rosacea, and for teens and younger adults, even acne can now be tamed with some of the incredible advances in anti-aging skin care. Airbrushes be damned – we have the technology.

Boldly Go

“Clients can now experience a multitude of technologies like microcurrent, ultrasonic infusion, ultrasonic exfoliation, and even LED in one single treatment. These technologies can dramatically improve the appearance of skin in a single treatment, and they have significant anti-aging benefits in a series of treatments. This is important because many clients would prefer not to ‘go under the knife,’ yet are unaware that these non-invasive technologies can produce significant improvements for far less investment. It is important that we, as a spa community, educate clients about all of the technologies available so they can make an educated decision on how they would like to battle the aging process,” says Lisa Henry-Jacobs, Senior Spa Consultant for Blu Spas/ Collier and Collier in Erie, Colorado.

As these treatments and their efficacy become widely reported, the demand will be felt in every corner of the country, and the boost to your business can be quite significant. The average cost of a photofacial, for example, runs anywhere between \$100-\$300 depending on your location, and the largest segment of the current population is your audience for this kind of service. Add in acne treatments for the teens and early prevention for the 20-30 year olds, and serious revenue is a probability by including these treatments on your menu. Many anti-aging skin treatments are sold in a series, and once the initial series is completed, the results are usually so compelling that repeat business is all but assured.

Lorraine Park: “These services allow the public to know that you are serious about the menu that you offer and that your team is educated in more than just “feel good” and “pampering” types of services. It brings a level of expertise to the playing field.”

If given a choice between straight pampering and looking years younger in a few weeks, most women will not have a hard time with that decision. “Anti aging services are at least 50% of the facial and body work requested in our spas,” says Tina Berger. Holli Beckwith adds: “By doing regular promotions and incentives, you can also boost your guests interest to book these services and to make purchases. The product line companies can provide guest events that target this area to boost service bookings and retail sales as well as providing a social and educational experience.”

Maureen Schumacher: “Anti-aging services are most effective when booked in a series. Series bookings are pre-paid services that your guests intend to use at a later time, usually at a discount when purchased as a package. This promise of future business is good for any industry and knowing that these services are much more effective when performed over multiple sessions, the delivery of results will win you loyal patrons.” Even when traveling, repeat bookings by clients are not unusual, and a great way for them to return from a vacation outwardly looking like they had a restful, relaxing time. “Because non-invasive technology is so effective and clients see & feel significant immediate results, they are more likely to return for additional treatments during their stay. Many resort guests who receive an advanced anti-aging treatment using microcurrent will be open to returning the same week for two additional treatments. We go from one treatment to three, which significantly boosts the spa’s profits. Additionally, guests receiving a traditional facial can be offered upgrade services to enhance the benefits of the service. An “eye lift,” product infusion or ultrasonic exfoliation adds no additional time to the treatment, but can add \$50-\$150 to the cost of the service,” says Lisa Henry-Jacobs.

Pampering is still the unspoken subtitle attached to the word “spa,” but when it comes to “age management” menus, as they are coming to be called, different clients will need different treatments, of course. Some may have both sun damage and Rosacea. Some may have sun damage and a touch of acne. Some may just have redness due to overuse of chemical products. To make treating diverse skin conditions easier and more profitable for spas, some manufacturers have built customization into their equipment, and certain photofacial equipment is built in such a way as to allow an esthetician to deliver treatments to two clients at the same time. There is a spate of new equipment on the market, all of which deliver results for different skin conditions, including and especially aging skin. The end result can rival or even beat the results that can be had with traditional surgery, rendering a more natural, fresh look rather than obvious manipulation of the facial skin and musculature.

Maureen Schumacher: “We offer several different types of anti-aging services to combat the different signs of aging from peels to microdermabrasion to galvanic microcurrent to the use of specifically formulated products. First, the skin should be carefully analyzed to determine what treatment is best suited to target the most prominent signs of aging. Often we recommend a combination of the different services we offer to best meet the needs of the guest. Something as simple as the hydration of the skin can produce dramatic instant plumping and firmness in some guests. Each person’s skin is unique and ages in its own way. It is up to us to determine the best plan for that individual and customize and personalize their treatments.”

Traditional microdermabrasion is a popular choice that noticeably evens the pigmentation and softens the texture of the skin, giving the client instant gratification and a fresh glow. “A newer alternative, called ‘vibradermabrasion,’ uses stainless steel paddles and 600 MHz of vibration instead of traditional abrasive crystals, to remove up to 80% of the stratum corneum with minimal trauma to the epidermis. This method can be more comfortable for the client, and it stimulates new cell growth and collagen production, as does traditional microdermabrasion – without the crystals,” says Darlene Davison, Director of the Spa at Ritz Carleton Sarasota. “It is very comfortable for the client and they love the instant, significant improvement in the appearance of their complexion.

Cellulite is also very common in women of advancing age, and there is a new treatment for cellulite reduction as well. Ionithermie is a detoxifying treatment using clay and electrical current that tenses and relaxes the muscles repeatedly while the clay draws out impurities and toxins that are trapped in the skin structure, allowing it to be broken down and passed out of the body,” says Davison.

Desiree Dosanjh, Spa Director of the Alluvian Spa in Greenwood, Mississippi adds: “An anti-aging service should entail treatment of the face, décolleté and hands. It is also important not to forget the skin everywhere else on the body. We offer anti-aging peels for the arms, legs, feet and back, as well.”

Tina Berger takes an holistic approach: “Anti-aging services should include results-driven products, education on home care, lifestyle adjustments and may or may not include microdermabrasion or oxygen treatments in our spas. We are not currently providing any borderline medi services. With the new microdermabrasion, laser, oxygen, and ultra-sound equipment these days, you can have positive results without injectables and plastic surgery. More and more people, including men and those who want to be on a preventative facial care program are opting for these services with equipment that is more often ‘building up the skin’ instead of ‘tearing it down,” says Holli Beckwith.

Lisa Henry-Jacobs: “With all of the advanced technologies available in both products and equipment, anti-aging services should address multiple issues including thorough and deep cleansing, exfoliation, intensive treatment masks as well as product infusions. Each treatment should be customized for each individual client’s needs. The term ‘aging’ means something different to everyone. The texture, tone, clarity, fine lines and wrinkles are the most common complaints. A good anti-aging treatment will be capable of addressing all of these things.”

Given that baby boomers number over 78 million in the US and make up over 25% of the population, and given that 100% of them are often being stared at by 21-year-olds selling wrinkle cream in magazines and on billboards, it is not a stretch to expect relatively easy marketing and sales of these treatments. A few well-placed and very convincing before & after photos, and you may begin to hear the thunder of that stampede mentioned earlier. In addition to the basic “day of pampering” item on the menu, offering a “youthful glow” option might include a full body exfoliation and moisturizing massage, a micro- or vibradermabrasion treatment and a photofacial, as an introduction to the process and the immediately visible results, thereby encouraging the client to sign up for a series of treatments for maximum benefits. Add a specialty treatment to the mix and each spa can tailor a “signature” treatment specifically to their clientele of advancing years.

Who, then, is the target market?

“There are 2 groups - the ones in their 30s who want to preserve the look that they have, and the 40-50 year old baby boomers who want to slow down the aging process,” says Lorraine Park. The most important thing is not to over-promise and under-deliver. That is why the descriptions within the brochure are so important. We use terms like “minimize the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.” We do not use terms like ‘anti-aging.’ We know people must age, but we want to help them to age gracefully,” says Lorraine Park.

Desiree Dosanjh: “Everyone!! Market to younger women as a preventative measure. Market to older clientele as a corrective measure.”

“Everyone but teens, for age management services,” says Holli Beckwith. “State the effects and benefits in a clear simple message. You can be cute with Fountain of Youth-type promos, but a direct approach to this serious skin care issue is best. Education is a good marketing tool, either at the time of the treatment or enhanced with guest events.”

These treatments, while gentle and cumulative, can sometimes give dramatic results after just one session, and word of mouth is still the most effective promotion. “We see guests in their 20s booking anti-aging services because they read that if you wait until your 30s to start fighting aging, it’s already too late. Our philosophy is that it’s never too late to start making a difference,” says Maureen Schumacher. “We had one guest in her late 50s who had never had a facial before and had been going through a rough time with the loss of her husband. We performed a galvanic microcurrent facial for her. When we showed her the results in the mirror, she was so astonished that she started crying and told us that she had forgotten all about the young woman looking back at her in the mirror. Reactions and results like that are rare but they are the best form of marketing; the very next day, her best friend came in for the same facial.”

Aging skin takes on many forms, and newer treatments address everything from wrinkles to muscle tone to pigmentation and texture. Lisa Henry-Jacobs: “We used to think of aging as wrinkles, but signs of aging (discoloration, uneven texture, etc.) can begin to show up in your 20s. This means that almost every single client should consider an anti-aging treatment. Whether it is to prevent, address or correct, treatments should be custom tailored according to the client’s concerns.”

Taking It Home

When a client enters the treatment room, the tech becomes her teacher in many ways. The client trusts in the tech’s knowledge of the treatment benefits and in the efficacy of the products being used. That relationship of trust between the client and the tech is the best selling tool to market create retail sales, and to encourage the client to continue her regimen at home. Again, because many of the treatments are delivered in a series, encouraging the client to keep up the skin’s optimal condition between treatments will generate retail product sales and give the client the knowledge that she is protecting her investment.

“The techs have the experience to educate the client, and that is the best way to sell retail products for home care. The client looks to the tech for advice and they are really a captive audience to which the tech can encourage home care for continued benefits,” says Darlene Davison.

Lorraine Park: “Retail products tend to be at a higher price point, but they tend to address many areas, like wrinkles around the eye and lip area, or products that ‘maintain that youthful glow.’ We all have a youthful glow, you just need to slough off some dead skin cells to find it!”

Spas can fashion an entire event around retail sales or new product introductions. Desiree Dosanjh: “We like to have product launch events. We recently had a Sonya Dakar Red Carpet Event with champagne, food and complimentary skin analysis. We make sure to send the client home with plenty of samples and present how important a twice daily facial care regimen is to the maintenance of younger looking skin.”

Tina Berger: “You should have a sell through of 50-100% if the technician is trained and believes in the product.” Holli Beckwith: “The investment for the spa is educating its staff. We all believe someone that we have trust and confidence in. The home care recommendations start as a totally soft sell at the beginning and end of every service. With the technician or spa reception pulling the recommended products and ‘closing the sale’ at the point of check out coupled with a simple ‘samples’ program, you have a well educated, well attended and happy guest who will return for like services - a series, hopefully - and make continued purchases of refills at the spa or the spa’s online boutique.”

Maureen Schumacher makes a very sensible analogy: “The retail side of anti-aging services is not a hard sell. Usually if the guest likes the results she has achieved and would like to continue to see these results improve over time, it is essential that she follow up with home care. It follows the same prescriptive philosophy of a doctor’s visit. If you go to see a doctor to resolve a problem, they may be able to give you a shot to make you feel better, but they also send you home with a prescription. If you were to only have the shot and not the prescription, you would spend more time at the doctor and it would take you longer to get better. Your skin is the same way. We can perform the best facial ever, but if you don’t care for your skin through a daily regimen, you will not be able to achieve the results you want.”

Aging is not something we can or should try to prevent - we can only move through it as gracefully as possible. Until our society follows the suit of many other cultures in the world that actually revere their elders, there will be an ongoing demand for anything that belies Mother Nature and tries to erase from view the very lives we have lived. And if that makes a client able to face the world with more confidence, then we have done a good thing. The lines in our faces have been earned, however, through laughter and tears and the simple triumph of

making it through all that life gives and takes away. It seems a shame not to leave at least a trace of that hard-won experience. Lorraine Park could not have said it better than this:

“Our age should not define us, it should be celebrated as the wisdom that we bring to the table.”