

Community Works



magazines and TV and radio stations can bring a business thousands of dollars' worth of what amounts to free advertising. Early in his career as a salon owner, DiJulius discovered that doing makeovers on local TV talk shows was a quick way to establish the salon's reputation.

Networking with neighboring businesses is so embedded into the culture at Avant



that even referring clients to other salons isn't taboo. If a walk-in client arrives at a time when no stylist is free, the front desk person simply places a call to a nearby salon. "There are about five salons in walking distance from us," explains Dini. "We call over to them and see whether they have an opening. It's about value-added service. That small courtesy may be the catalyst that brings that client back to us next time."

One small-town salon owner views every competitor as an indication of how much he has contributed to the business community. "When we opened two-and-a-half years ago, we brought a day spa to a community that had never had one," says Nir Zilberman, owner of Kriza Aveda Spa in Northridge, California. "Already three more have opened here. I take that as a compliment. It's always a big risk to be the first new type of business in the neighborhood, and now we've shown that Northridge is a place for spas and similar high-end businesses to make money."

The presence of a high-end establishment like a day spa adds to a community's sense of civic pride, adds Zilberman. He recalls, "When I opened the spa, people who hadn't even come to us would go to other towns and brag, 'Yeah, we have a spa in Northridge now!'"

Back to School

For many salon professionals, the desire to be an integral part of the community leads them to the high schools. When salons take out ads in school newspapers or distribute discount coupons to students, they're marketing to a segment that could become lifelong clients. In addition, a strong high school connection supports a salon's regular recruitment program.

In these times of labor shortages, staff recruitment depends largely on a salon's connections with that other crucial community resource—cosmetology schools. Typically, salons make themselves very available to the schools. DiJulius stays in close touch with the beauty school community, not only "taking" graduates but replenishing the pool by influencing young people who may not have thought of cosmetology as a career. When he expanded his salon over the past 18 months and needed to grow his staff from 30 members to 110, DiJulius says he was so connected and had championed the industry to so many people that he had no trouble attracting qualified candidates.

Portfolio Salon and Renewal Spa in Amherst, New Hampshire, even conducts technical training at local cosmetology academies, according to Portfolio President Steve Izzo, while representatives from the Marilyn Ihloff Salon and Day Spa visit every Tulsa beauty school twice a year. The salon invites all the schools to the rehearsal when it presents its annual fall collection.

"The students can get up close and talk to the hair stylists," says Ihloff. "These efforts pay off in the quality of graduates who apply to be assistants."

From the Heart

Salon owners report that even their purely charitable efforts tend to pay off in some way. No one will deny that doing good deeds in the community enhances a salon's image; DiJulius's Pillar Award for community service in northeast Ohio is no less valuable than his NEO Success Award for the region's top-performing companies. Zilberman believes that "givers always get back," while Ihloff mentions that good deeds "come back to you ten-fold." But the sheer volume of salons' community service, combined with the dollar totals from their fund-raising events, indicates that at the heart of the efforts is more altruism than opportunism.

"Charity is part of our culture," says Ihloff. "It's not something we do for attention. We get something spiritually from it." Others support this attitude.

"We touch so many people every day," says Jennifer Fair, 25-year-old owner of Salon 218 in Huntington Beach, California. "There's no reason we can't make a change."

Connecting is a basic need for humans in general. It's good for business, but also good for our health and well-being.

Echoes Zilberman, "My purpose in becoming a hairdresser was to do hair. My purpose in owning a salon was to make a difference."

In many cases, the most urgent and impassioned efforts frequently are inspired by an ill staff member, friend or relative. Fair recalls when the father of a staff member had cancer. At a regular staff meeting, the staff member pleaded, "I need you guys to donate blood for my dad." Fair estimates that she and at least half of the staff found