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by Jenifer Hunt

# A Case For Light Therapy

Time marches on; however, today's advancements in skincare mean the signs of aging don't need to be so visible. Your customers come to your salon to look great and relax, and you provide this service by giving them a beautiful, golden tan as well as some relaxation time.

However, customers are looking for the eternal Fountain of Youth and are willing to pay for extra services that will help them combat the signs of Father Time. While the Fountain of Youth hasn't been discovered, scientific advances in light technology are providing salon owners with solutions to help customers fight the signs of aging.

## Let There Be Light

Light therapy has long been used in Europe cosmetically to treat skin conditions, and is rapidly gaining acceptance in the United States for the treatment of acne, psoriasis and several age-related cosmetic concerns. In the salon industry, light therapy is fast becoming an important weapon in the fight against the visible signs of aging.

"Providing light therapy as a salon service shows that your salon is the place to go for high-end skin rejuvenation and anti-aging solutions," says Rick Vellell, owner of Irvine, Calif.-based The Tanning Spa. "We use our Lumière light therapy machine as a promotional piece to get positive press about the therapeutic services customers can now get in a tanning salon, and secondly, as an additional revenue stream."

The benefits of the type of light therapy include increased skin firmness and hydration, improved tone and texture, reduced hyper-pigmentation, and diminished fine lines and wrinkles. The therapy also is useful for treating acne and reducing pore-size, two common concerns for young people.

"The acne clearing effects of light therapy are phenomenal," says Cindy McKee, owner of Andover, Minn.-based

Body Image Tanning. "Not only does the special light range destroy acne causing bacteria, but it works without using harsh chemicals. Why would anyone want to put something harsh and stinging on their delicate facial skin when they can use light therapy and gain the same benefits?"

Because this type of therapy has both anti-aging and anti-acne applications, the target consumer market is diverse and filled with profit potential.

"Many women are concerned about fine lines and wrinkles and constitute a key part of the cosmetic industry's billion-dollar market," says Rick Rooney, owner of Colorado Springs, Colo.-based Sun Spot Atlantis. "That's our primary customer base and where we target our marketing efforts. Our secondary market is younger people who want to achieve clear skin."

## What Is Light Therapy?

Not all types of light therapy are created equal. Photorejuvenation and photomodulation are two types of light therapy used in tanning salons. Photorejuvenation uses intense pulsed light (IPL) of red and infrared lengths to induce skin healing by penetrating to the dermis to help repair collagen while erasing a number visible signs of aging.

## Light therapy services are attractive because they can fit into a salon's current operating model.

There is limited employee interaction, and some machines even integrate into the salon's time system.

Photomodulation activates skin cells with pulses of low-level, non-thermal light energy from light-emitting diodes (LEDs). This procedure has been shown to reduce wrinkles, redness and pore size around the eyes. LED treatments give skin a "light bath" that targets specific cells that absorb a specific wavelength of light.

Photorejuvenation and photomodulation works with the body's own natural processes to convert light energy photons into cellular energy to energize the skin cells responsible for collagen and elastin production. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved both these therapies for use in cosmetic applications.

Unlike the types of light therapy treatments more commonly administered by dermatologists, these treatments are non-invasive because they are non-laser, non-thermal and non-ablative; therefore, they do not require operator licensing or certification.

"You don't have to be a doctor to provide the type of light therapy treatments we offer because the technology is gentle," Rooney says.

Because photorejuvenation and photomodulation are non-invasive, treatments do not entail post-procedure "down time" or cause pain and discomfort commonly associated with some of the more intense light therapies performed by medical doctors.

"Finally, there is a light therapy treatment a salon employee can administer that gives amazing results," McKee says. "At Body Image we use the Lumière machine. The results look expensive without being as expensive as other cosmetic procedures with comparable results."

Light therapy treatments often are used in conjunction with specially designed topical skincare products to provide the skin

with nutrients to enhance effectiveness. These products can have additional profit potential for salons. Sales of complementary skincare products are yet another way salons can diversify their revenue streams and establishing a retail relationship with existing clientele can increase revenue dramatically. One way to draw attention to homecare products is to merchandise them on a counter in clear sight.

"When customers purchase light-therapy sessions from us, not only do they get the light therapy, we sell them a homecare skincare kit," McKee says. "The nutrients in the products improve effectiveness."

Light therapy services are attractive because they can fit into a salon's current operating model. There is limited employee interaction, and some machines even integrate into the salon's time system. Because there is minimal service involved, costs are low for consumers when compared to similar treatments. However, that does not mean selling light therapy is a cake walk. Customers are accustomed to paying tanning session prices. Because this new service is more expensive, it requires sophisticated selling techniques.

"My staff is educated on the benefits of our light therapy treatments and they, in turn, educate customers," Rooney says. "The cost-benefit to consumers of using it as opposed to Botox® injections, microdermabrasion, chemical peels or other expensive treatments becomes obvious when we explain how the therapy works. Our services are less than half what these other services cost. Our goal is to explain to customers why it's reasonable to pay \$79 for an EFT membership that includes light therapy or \$500 for a package of sessions."

At the Tanning Spa, Valelli has found the key to selling light therapy is to market

outside of the tanning environment to reach his target demographic.

"We've created a Web site devoted entirely to our Lumière services, and we designed the advertisements to look completely unrelated to tanning," he says.

He also provides customers with an incentive to try light therapy by giving the first session free. "This type of procedure is not well-known to the point where customers are coming in the door asking for it, and a trial session demonstrates that it works," he adds.

McKee also has found that offering free treatments generate sales. "Ninety-nine percent of the time my customers purchase a treatment package within three days of their initial free treatment," he says. "Everybody notices the positive effects of the treatments at different speeds, but generally my customers see improvements in tone and texture within 14 days. Some fine lines diminish after just two sessions."

However, Valelli notes that light therapy may not be an appropriate revenue stream for every salon. "Light therapy is only for salons that are about as profitable as they can be with tanning," he says. "For those salons that think they've gone as high as they can go offering basic tanning services, offering these high-end treatments can take them to another level of profitability. Revenue potential is sky high, but it takes a major effort from the top down to make it successful."

If enthusiasm is indeed catching, then it may be a good idea for interested salon owners to become light therapy's greatest fans. After all, showing off newly radiant skin may be the best selling technique of all.

"When you are a business woman you feel the wrinkles come on early due to stress, and these treatments make me look and feel better," McKee says. "I love light therapy and use it often."

According to Valelli, his happiest customers are our light therapy customers.

"The most beautiful tan in the world can't hold a candle to the joy a woman experiences who feels that she just took a decade off her appearance." ▲

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