
SPA OF THE MONTH | STRATEGIC SETTING NOVITÁ SPA ON THE SQUARE GEORGETOWN, TX

by Janet McCormick



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THE LOCATION OF NOVITÁ SPA ON the Square is what every potential owner dreams of for their new spa. It is located in a beautiful Texas town that is quaint and friendly. The spa is on a busy historical town square that attracts constant traffic. Housed in a historical building with industrious neighbors and the proud and stately county seat located across the street, clients still manage to find ample parking. It is the epitome of location, location, location. Megan DiMartino, owner of Novitá Spa on the Square, says that she knew it was perfect the first time she saw it.

"I was living in Fort Worth and visited Georgetown. I immediately fell in love with the town and mentally began planning a move."

Of course there were other reasons she considered the move, but immediately she knew it was the right place for her future spa. "This town had it all for me as well as for a spa," she says, "and opening the spa became part of my planning process for moving here."

She moved to Georgetown and has since gone through a strategy for meeting her goals: establishing herself in the community, opening the spa and moving her other business there also (Novitá Clinicals, a professional product line). First, she opened a facial room in a local salon on Valentine's Day in 2004 and came to Georgetown part time to work in the room. She knew no one in Georgetown and drove from *continues*

photos courtesy of Novitá Spa on the Square

Fort Worth, TX (a two and a half hour commute), working a solid Thursday through Saturday schedule. In July 2005, she officially moved to Georgetown, and was in Fort Worth only part time. Next, she moved her facial business to the town square, opening a spa in an already well-established business.

"Believe it or not, I opened my little 900 square foot spa in the loft of a popular furniture store on the square! I know some people thought I was crazy, but it was the first step of opening a spa on the square. I knew that was where I was supposed to be," she says.

On the square

In late 2007, the location next door became available. "We stayed in the loft, working with some pretty interesting logistics for a while—the desk and 600 square foot boutique area was finished out first, so clients were greeted there, and mineral makeup, home care products and other products were showcased there. The clients were escorted over and up to the loft next door. It was a challenge, for certain, but it worked during the transition. Construction

of the remaining spa could be done as it should be, with the boutique and the loft spa paying its way, and the entire spa was brought to the new location, with the launch in December 2009," she says. Last, she brought Novitá Clinicals, her product line, to a location in Georgetown. She is now a happy full-time resident of this quaint Texas town, with surrounding businesses situated in prime locations.

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The "new" Novitá Spa on the Square has six treatment rooms: three are massage rooms (one a wet room with a shower) and three facial rooms. There is a spa manicure and a pedicure sanctuary with three pedicure and two manicure areas. The amenities include a steam room, a Serenity-Relaxation Room and separate ladies' and men's locker rooms with showers.

Location, location, location

DiMartino does not recommend that a potential spa owner go in search of a loft in a furniture store as a location for their business—this was an exceptional situation with its unique challenges and would not ordinarily be a good choice. She believes location is a very important aspect of success, and its choice must be made carefully.

"Many lovely, even well-run spas have failed because of compromising in this aspect of the start-up," she says. DiMartino recommends no compromise on certain aspects in the choice of a location. First, honest evaluation of potential traffic is imperative—take off the rose-colored glasses.

"I know there are exceptions, but for most, traffic is the life blood of a new spa," she says. Evaluate the following in a location: traffic to surrounding businesses and their types of business (Upscale gym? Upscale restaurant? Upscale furniture? Upscale coffee shop?), ambiance marketing (as in the appearance of the surrounding businesses and the overall condition of the area), other marketing advantages (in DiMartino's case, "on the Square"), and the economies of rent and remodel costs.

Client economies

Over the years, DiMartino has watched many new spa owners jump right into a spa without having a developed clientele, or going "big," setting themselves up for a very stressful business development or even failure. That is why she first went into the community small, into a lease station.

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"I became acquainted with the community and developed a clientele. While doing that, my mind was seeing what I needed to do to go into my own spa." Next, she developed a spa that could be financially supported by her current clientele, though large enough for multiple services. It had three treatment rooms (two facial and one massage), manicure and pedicure areas, and a Serenity-Relaxation area. The front desk was on the first floor in the furniture store.

services. "Statistics show that a current clientele will only sufficiently support a new location if it is within a short distance of the prior location," she says. "I've known new owners to lose as much as 60 percent of their clientele because they moved over 7 miles to a new location—studies reflect that is the key number. Or have moved across a mental barrier, such as across a river or a major highway. Support of the current clientele is crucial for the new spa, as they are the immediate revenue resource."



Ladies' Spa Night is held every Thursday night. The spa hosts a chamber lunch yearly and DiMartino is involved with the G-town Chamber of Commerce events.

"I was especially careful with the décor of the loft, designing it with high luxury and ambiance," she says. "No client felt she was in a little start-up spa when she entered and relaxed there."

DiMartino also mentions that the new spa location must be a place where the current clientele will actually drive to for

Marketing

DiMartino is not a believer in the "build it and they will come" philosophy. Instead she focuses on marketing strategies that work to attract particular clients. The Novitá Spa on the Square is in Georgetown, TX, a bedroom community approximately 20 miles to the north of Austin, TX. Georgetown is home to Sun City, an age-restricted community (55 and over) with approximately 7,000 homes. It is also the home to Southwestern University with its younger crowd. It is north of Fort Hood, a military base, and a short distance to the south of Round Rock, TX, which is the corporate headquarters of Dell Computer. All these areas are client resources, though some are much closer than others.

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"With this diversity, we have done and do it all in marketing," she says. Examples of her marketing encompass TV and print advertising in the local newspaper, e-blasts, loyalty memberships, donations to all philanthropic groups, events such as the Sun Cities Vendor Fairs (held twice a year) and more. They also have special Sun City and other specialized web packages such as a Couples' Retreat with a local bed-and-breakfast. Ladies' Spa Night is held every Thursday night. The spa hosts a chamber lunch yearly and DiMartino is involved with the G-town Chamber of Commerce events.

The "signature" internal marketing for maintaining clients at Novitá Spa on the Square is the Miracle Bag, a sample kit of products that is given to every new client. "This kit is our key to maintaining a high percentage of new and current clients," she says. The client's skin is rejuvenated during the service, then the products produce an obvious improvement in the skin within five days; these are the springboards of the spa's client loyalty.

"None of this would really work without products that work and service providers [who] are trained in protocols

DiMartino has always been great at establishing "need" within a client in other business aspects (acne care, anti-aging, massage) through programs that succeed, such as the free Miracle Bag given to each new client.

that produce results," says DiMartino. Training is tandem to every aspect of success, she believes, so ongoing education is provided for the professionals that work for Novitá Spa on the Square. "Training must never stop," she says.

They need us

One new service strategy has resulted in the amazing growth of the business. DiMartino took the advice of a friend who suggested marketing to clients who must have a safe pedicure.

"My friend suggested I develop a strategy to bring in clients who are not (or should not be) going to salons that are not performing obviously safe infection control. My technicians took the Advanced Nail Technician Program to learn how to safely work on these special clients and I am using it as a spring board to also feed the rest of the spa services." These new clients are given coupons for facials, massages and other services after their pedicure.

"The trust they have developed through our safe pedicure marketing is bringing them back for other services," she says. Several local podiatrists as well as a large hospital refer clients to the spa.

Marketing revolves around the education and certification of the spa nail technicians who perform safe pedicures on physicians, clients who have diabetes or other chronic conditions and clients who are afraid of getting pedicures due to the illnesses and deaths caused by poor infection control. The response has been amazing.

"The proof of certification of our nail technicians through the courses (Medinail Learning Center, www.medinails.com) has proven to be a great springboard for new pedicure clients, and for introducing new clients into the other services," says DiMartino. "These people (and their physicians) see our safe pedicures as necessary for maintaining health, and then, having established trust in the spa, they move into other services."

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"But first you must get them into the spa," she says. She finds that the introduction of trust through the need for healthful foot care carries over into the other departments and expands the client base.

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GOING GREEN PLANS

MEGAN DIMARTINO'S PHILOSOPHY HAS ALWAYS been "keep it simple," so this was the plan for going green in her new spa. "This building is historic so that made green-ing challenging, but it can be done," she explains. Following are some of the first simple and easy steps she incorporated, which she also recommends to her affiliates.

First, conduct an energy audit of the spa. This determines and prioritizes the steps to going green and reducing the carbon footprint of the spa. "This is important to reduce spinning your wheels in reaching the goal," she says.

Reduce water and electricity use. Low flow faucets, toilets and shower heads reduce water usage by as much as 50 percent. Energy efficient light bulbs are important, along with low usage training for water and electricity. Water filtration reduces the plastic water bottle problem.



Affiliate spas

DiMartino has been in the beauty industry for many years, including the skin care business. However, until Novitá Spa on the Square, she had not owned a spa. She has now participated in all aspects of the spa business.

"I am an esthetician, have been a manufacturers' rep, an educator, and I am a product line developer and owner—you name it. Yet, like many others, I wanted to own a spa," she says. She felt it was important that she do this to more fully understand the business. That is why in 2005, she began trimming back on all her other activities to start the trek towards this goal.

Incorporate environmentally friendly infection control. Use an autoclave and an immersion disinfectant that can safely go down the drain. "Most liquid disinfectants cannot go down the drain without endangering the water supply—though they forget to tell us that," she says.

"I feel that owning a spa, hands-on, is the key to my future and that of my Novitá Clinicals clients," she says. "It has been a life-changing experience and opened my eyes to an industry need that, because of my experience in Novitá Spa on the Square, I can provide active support to future, new and struggling owners."

"One thing I know is that the salon/spa esthetician, massage therapist and business owner needs assistance with their business," she says. She hears from technicians who are considering opening or have already opened spas and are struggling. "I was handing out advice piecemeal, meaning an organizational suggestion here, a marketing strategy

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Use only unbleached and post consumer paper products and environmentally friendly ink. Refillable cartridges are also the best choice.

Reduce the use of paper as much as possible. Ask every client if they would like a bag before automatically giving them one, and use computer records when possible. "We strive to use reusable packaging, such as a reusable zippered bag for the Miracle Bag products, and are working towards 'box-less' retail at this time," says DiMartino.

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Recycle, of course. "Aside from being environmentally friendly, clients ask if you are green," she says.

DiMartino gives one piece of advice in going green. "As much as this should be done, it is important you do not overwhelm your staff with what they must do initially," she says. "If you do, resistance will surface and you will never get it done."

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there ... but continually felt they needed more. To provide that, I have started a new Affiliate Spa Program, an organized support system, and Novitá Spa on the Square is the flagship of that support. Now, I am helping others in working toward their successes, supporting them in more organized and positive ways than just pieces of advice here and there." There are reasons why Novitá Spa on the Square's retail is between 30 to 40 percent or more (most spas are at 10 to 20 percent), and new client retention is 60 percent (most spas are at 20 to 40 percent) and DiMartino shares this information as a mentor to her affiliates.

Spas are responding well to the program and moving forward in more positive ways. "The program is simple and has helped us in [the] reorganization of our spa, even in [the] re-design of our menus," says Darlene Abshire, owner of Lifestyles Salon and Day Spa, Houston, TX. "The business and marketing reorganization in tandem with the results produced now from treatments and home care have greatly expanded our spa and re-focused us to where we should be."

DiMartino believes she realized her dream of owning a successful spa by constantly moving forward through planning and commitment. "When one sees success unfold before them through planning instead of rushing into the precipice, it is much more rewarding—and for certain, it's less painful," she says. "We were just honored this fall with 'The Best of Georgetown, 2010!! BEST SPA!'" Not bad for a new location opened one year before (December, 2009). What a journey! ■

Janet McCormick is a CIDESCO Diplomat, certified medical nail technician, licensed esthetician and manicurist, trainer and former spa director and salon owner. She has written more than 400 articles for beauty industry magazines and books. McCormick is the co-owner of Medinail Learning Center, a provider of modular online and school courses to train nail technicians in safe techniques. She can be reached at janetgmcormick@aol.com. or 863.273.9134.

