



Someone Worth Knowing

Advice from four champion networkers

by Monica Schuloff Smith

You've heard it a million times: it's all in who you know. There is an art to networking, whether in person, at a seminar, in your treatment room, a spa waiting room, or on the Internet.

According to four women with long, distinguished careers in the skin care and spa industry, it's an absolute necessity these days.

"Whether companies are looking to do business with you or bring you on as part of their team, they want to know you are worth their investment," says Mindy Terry, president of Creative Spa Concepts. "And, in the new economy, networking has become even more important as there are so many people looking for jobs or promotions." For more than 18 years, Terry has successfully helped establish and grow some of the world's most notable spas. She is a licensed esthetician, certified infant massage instructor, cosmetologist, former spa director, makeup artist, and yoga instructor.

"Just about every job or opportunity I have ever had has been a result of networking," says Terry, who at the age of 25 developed and led a 40,000-square-foot spa in Las Vegas. "I can even attribute the start of my own consulting company to a

relationship I had with the vice president of architecture and design for a major hotel brand."

The Early Years

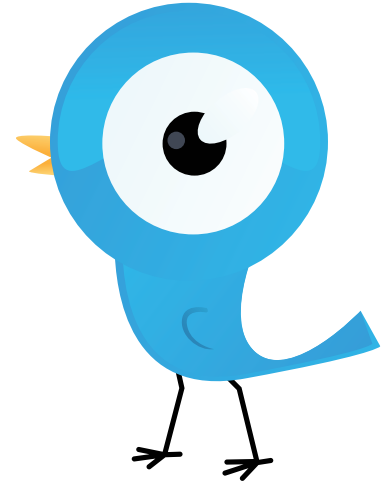
Terry was fortunate to understand the power of relationships and connections from the beginning, but this was not always the case for most estheticians a few decades ago. If you rewind to the 1980s, it was a very different environment.

"When I started in the spa industry in 1980, the word *networking* was not even on our horizon," says Janet McCormick, a licensed esthetician, nail technician, book author, CIDESCO* diplomate, consultant, and spa educator. "First of all, at the time, the 1980s was an era when professionals were very egocentric—it was the 'me' decade. There was a huge amount of competition and, therefore, disorganization within the industry. The competition was so fierce that even in the same salon, pros would overtly battle over clients, skills, and knowledge. This lack of synergy and cross-promotion created a very disconnected environment for us to work in, which was not geared toward networking."

McCormick says national and regional conferences helped unite the industry. Professionals could talk to each other and exchange education, ideas, and resources. Soon after, organizations and associations formed, further developing the industry's networking avenues. But the real networking push came in the 1990s, when antiaging therapies required advanced knowledge and skills.

10 Ways to Start Networking

1. Commit to at least one in-person event each month.
2. Consider getting involved with a charity event.
3. Create Twitter and Facebook accounts and tell clients.
4. Create or refine your website and add an educational blog.
5. Go through your business cards and reconnect.
6. Join industry associations that are in line with your goals.
7. Join LinkedIn and search for links to people you already know.
8. Keep a list of trusted sources you can refer others to if the need comes up.
9. Research trade shows and start budgeting to attend one every year.
10. Send thank-you notes to all of your clients and those you meet.



“Early on, networking was used to satisfy the need for more instruction on clinical skin therapies, including superficial exfoliation,” McCormick says. “With the explosion of therapeutic antiaging products, networking became more valuable.” She helped fill the education gap by writing articles for industry magazines.

“I connected the editors to educators and sources—helping each other is the networking style I enjoy,” McCormick says. “I was able to gain the trust of publications, which, when they started expanding their trade shows, invited me to be a speaker. I’m a firm believer that if you pay it forward, it will eventually come back to you.”

Education and Business Cards

Networking has certainly evolved over the years, but it’s no accident the most successful professionals in the industry are skilled networkers who have the gift of gab and do the hard work. They stick to the basics like using business cards and having mentors. Judith Culp, also

a CIDESCO diplomate who started her esthetics career in 1980, has worn many hats over the decades. These include spa employee, employer, independent contractor, manufacturer’s representative, and educator—all of this before she opened her school (the Northwest Institute of Esthetics) in 2003. A mentor who unknowingly inspired her was Robert Diemer. “Diemer is a CIDESCO diplomate and educator, and somewhat of a legend in the esthetics industry,” she says. “I said something to one of his staff members about how someday I wanted to work with him and they said I had to get my skills and knowledge up before that ever happened,” says Culp, who was spurred on by this statement to work even harder. Several years later, through networking, she landed a dream job as a representative and educator for the firm Diemer formerly owned.

In addition to having a mentor and doing the hard work, a well-designed business card is essential. Also, if the card refers to a website, the website should be functioning and reflect the right image.

“Everything you put out there related to your business sends a message,” Terry says. “Make sure it’s the right message.”

Once you have business cards made, give them to the right people. Pay attention to nuances in conversation, McCormick says, because you shouldn’t hand out your business card to just anyone. Wait until you’ve talked with someone long enough that you have covered ground on something equally important to both of you. Culp says she always keeps her cards in the same place to avoid a scramble when asked for one. She also writes a couple of notes on the back of cards she receives to jog her memory about the networking possibility.

New Technology

Beyond business cards, perhaps the biggest game-changer in networking is the explosion of the new, high-tech tools. Industry pros must embrace the new technology, just to keep up.

“I learned that PDAs are useful so you can make appointments remotely if you have wireless on your phone or use

Outlook for your appointment book,” Culp says. “This way, you’re always ready to whip out your phone no matter where you are and whom you meet so you can make the appointment when prompted.”

Nina Curtis is an advocate of LinkedIn and Facebook, and says she’s using Twitter more and more. “From Facebook and LinkedIn, I have connected with other sub-communities and groups of interest,” says Curtis, a consultant and educator with more than 25 years of experience in the personal care industry as a spa owner. “This has opened up a whole new arena for networking.”

Make Time for Events

Curtis’ consulting and lecturing business comes from just word of mouth, she says, so she never misses an opportunity to network. “I attempt to physically network at least once a month and I like to mix it up with industry events, such as trade shows, entrepreneur events like breakfast meeting groups, and social cause events,” she says. Curtis notes a recent event she attended, “Hollywood Goes Green,” a fundraiser for the regrowth of Haiti.

Curtis says if you put yourself in the right environments, then business opportunities will always present themselves. But, you need to know what you want to achieve to determine where to spend your time networking.

“If I want to acquire more clients for my skin care business, I am going to spend my networking time at events and online in arenas that can offer me new business such as women’s groups, specific interest groups, and online with local communities interested in health and beauty,” she says. “I want to position myself as an expert in my field, but be seen as approachable, knowledgeable, and engaging.”

It’s Not About Me

“There are two types of networkers, those who are either all about themselves (and you’ll want to avoid them) or those who are all about others,” McCormick says. “I love to help people and this is how I’ve

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always networked. If you like helping others, then you are a good networker.”

For those who are shy, networking in person can be intimidating, but Terry says you just have to put that aside.

“Some tactics include just approaching a person and introducing myself,” Terry says. “Or I go looking for a friend who is speaking to someone I don’t know and join in the conversation, or I pay someone a sincere compliment about something I’ve noticed.”

Culp notes no matter where you are, you’ll meet people who may need your services, so you should “walk the walk, and talk the talk” and pay attention to appearances because you are an example of your work.

“Maybe this person is not a prime candidate for your spa, but don’t discount the networking possibilities,” Culp says. “He or she may know someone like a friend or family member who is a perfect candidate.”

At all costs, however, avoid using an overly rehearsed sales pitch. Experts agree that you should just be professional, be yourself, and ease into conversation.

Network with Clients

If you haven’t networked with a client, you may be missing business opportunities as the competition surely is already using

client referral programs and rewards, in addition to Internet social networking sites, blogs, eblasts, and charity events.

“I have networked with clients mainly for special causes, such as raising funds for their child’s school, donating to a silent auction event, and attending in support of the event,” Curtis says. “This has been very effective as it has given me a chance to meet people firsthand who might be interested in the service(s) I have donated.”

Culp says sending a thank-you card after a service visit is part of networking. She also feels rewards programs are about giving clients recognition. Curtis agrees and adds that thank-you notes are one of her most essential tools for networking.

To find hidden networking venues you need not look too hard. They are all around. Consider your interests and seek groups online. Think outside of the norm and consider giving lectures or donating services at places like churches, library seminars, local women’s interest groups, and the local chamber of commerce. McCormick has used all of these places and notes she even once did an educational seminar for a college sorority about skin care.

“I got the best clients from these venues,” she says. “The seminars ended up being very profitable, and the audience was already primed. Through education, I was able to gain their trust. The more activity you have, the more attention you’ll get. And if you can’t network during the day, use the Internet at home where you can log on at midnight and send an eblast. This is the next generation of how to do things,” she says. §



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*Comité International D’Esthétique et des Cosmétologie