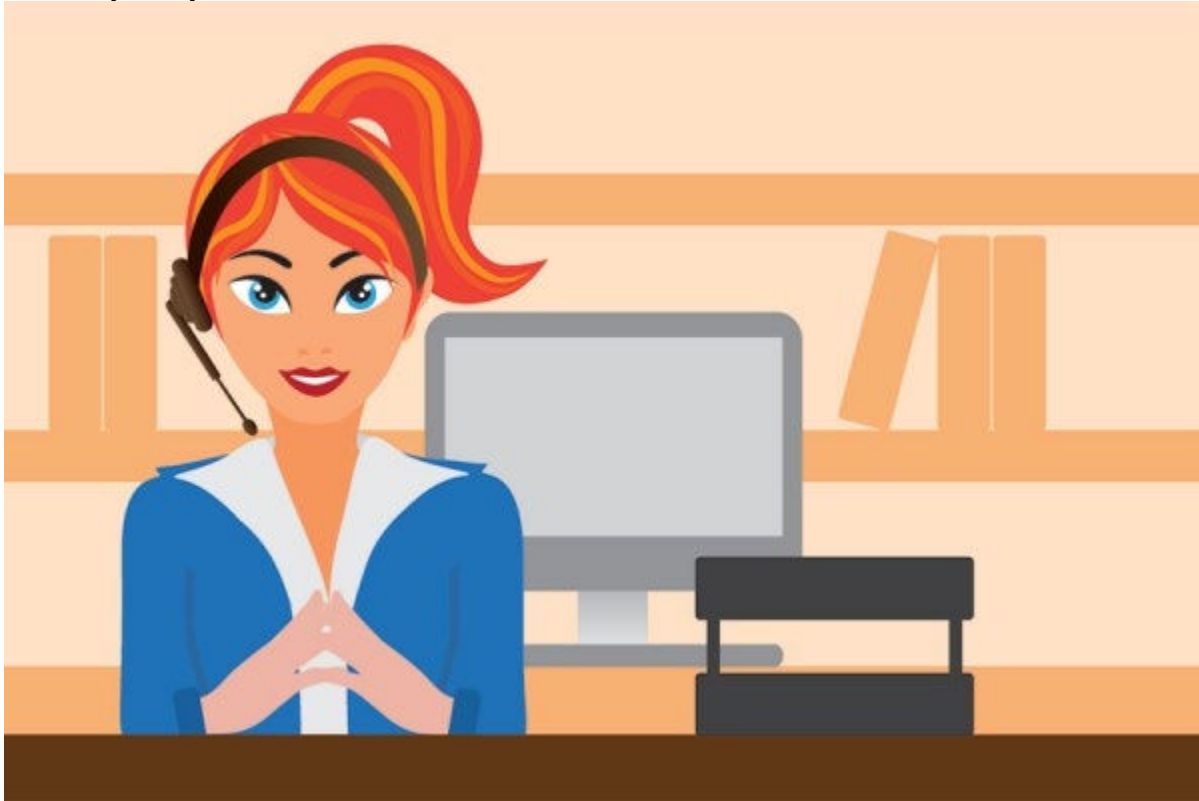


You Had Me at Hello: Spa Phone Etiquette

Written by Cheryl Whitman



The aesthetic industry is experiencing staggering growth year after year. This means more and more competition. Staying ahead of competitors with excellent customer service is a great start. The first person who represents the business must be a well-trained professional. Positive first impressions are critical. What does the client hear on the telephone when they call the spa?

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Consider how the spa measures up to the competitors in the area, both on the phone and in person. Send out a client survey to uncover details first hand. Research and compile a competitive analysis of the area. A competitive analysis is created by placing mystery shopping calls to competing practices, by researching competitors' websites, social media presence, service offerings, current specials, hours of operation, and pricing structures. It is crucial for professionals to identify these details in order to define their unique selling proposition and to determine how to position themselves as the go-to expert.

What are the reasons a prospective client would come to the spa over a competitor? A competitive analysis is a cost-effective way to determine how a spa is represented to the public. Another idea is to choose the top three competitors in the area and have an office staff member or other designated person visit the locations and compile details of their onsite visits. Book an appointment such as a miniature facial to experience how the practice operates. Rate each spa's knowledge, grammar, and professionalism.

PHONE PROTOCOLS

Establish best practice phone protocols for every staff member to follow. Consistency is key. This would include setting a standard greeting for each phone call. Emphasize the importance of establishing rapport within the first minute of a phone call. Encourage staff to speak their own names multiple times during a call (at the beginning, during, and at the end) and also to repeat the caller's name multiple times during the call to give a more personal touch. Always gather the caller's information and ask who referred them. Remember the goal of every call is to educate and build a bond.

The focus of a phone conversation should not be to sell services, but rather to educate the client and to provide solutions to their needs and desires. Any staff who answers the phone should be well-informed of all procedures and should be able to either recommend a customized solution or refer the call to a more qualified team member. Every client wants to feel special and to know their concerns are heard.

Make sure that team members understand and are able to communicate the key pointers and information for each service, product, and provider in the same way. Every spa must have a clearly established and easily communicated mission statement or elevator speech. The mission statement should be established by the owner. It is imperative that every employee speak the same language, give the same advice, and quote the same price. Empower employees to make decisions and offer discounts and complimentary add-on services to ensure every team member feels a sense of power in the outcome. Happy staff members result in happy clients. Clients may perceive being shuffled from department to department as evidence that the spa does not care for them or that the company is not interested in their needs.

Hold regular team meetings to discuss the objections staff may have received and role play possible responses. Educate employees on the best way to handle individual scenarios, such as fees or anxiety. Some of the biggest client objections may include the cost of a procedure, the possible down time, or the fear that the treatment may cause pain. How should the team respond? The answers should be easily spoken, positive, and honest.

The following are ideas for creating an exceptional experience for both current and prospective clients.

- Read clients' emotions
- Have a follow-up process in place
- Create cheat sheets on services, pricing, and products for each team member
- Remember that tone of voice is crucial to the success of the business
- Smile when speaking on the telephone – that smile is reflected in one's voice
- Create a protocol for who handles clinical questions – should these types of questions be referred to a patient coordinator, an aesthetician, or a nurse?
- Determine the client's preferred method of contact and use that information to send specials and offer incentives

Missed Calls: Return missed calls and messages within five minutes, when possible. Potential revenue is lost with each minute without a response. If office staff becomes too busy, staff members are at lunch, or the call comes in after hours, there should be a backup system in place.

Consider hiring a phone service to answer these calls so that the client's experience always exceeds expectations.

Transferring a Call: Explain why the call is being transferred. Ask the client if he or she minds being transferred. Make sure someone picks up a call before hanging up. Always explain the caller's situation and give their name to the person to whom they are transferred so the client does not have to repeat the information.

Taking a Message: Poorly taken messages produce uncertainty and worry for the client. They can also cause confusion for an employee returning a phone call. Instead, take detailed notes so the team member making the return call is able to speak intelligently. Explain the coworker's absence in a positive light, without revealing too much information. For example, "Cheryl is not available at the moment. May I help you or would you like me to ask Cheryl to call you back as soon as she is free?" Give an estimated time of the coworker's return. Offer to help the caller, take a message, or transfer the call to another qualified person.

Ending a Call: Restate the appointment day and time. Confirm the spa's address and any parking information. Remind the client to complete any paperwork that needs to be completed before the appointment. Be sure the staff member repeats their own name and ends the call on a positive note. Repeat any action steps the spa or the client will take. Ask the client whether you can do anything else for him or her. This allows for a final chance to tie up any loose ends. Thank the client for calling. If there is a problem, be sure to alert a manager to handle the caller immediately. Take detailed notes of the key information.

Putting a Client on Hold: If placing a client on hold, make sure to use the proper etiquette. Ask the client if they may be put on a brief hold. Explain why they are being put on hold. Thank the client for holding after returning to the line. Sometimes being placed on hold is an inconvenience for callers, so do not automatically assume that they will accept. If a client responds that they do not have time to hold, be sure to ask to take a message and have someone return the call.

TEAM BUILDING

Weekly or monthly staff meetings should be held to review what is working and what is not working. Depending on the size of the team, these meetings could be broken down by clinical and administrative staff to ensure communication between departments. Routinely bring the whole group together to promote team building. Also, meet individually with staff members for coaching and to discuss strengths and weaknesses. Set time aside for regularly scheduled team meetings so that the team is not coming together while in crisis mode but, instead, is proactively working toward the goal of growing the practice.

REMINDER AND FOLLOW-UP CALLS

Continuing in the efforts to provide superior customer service, make sure to confirm all client appointments. Reminder calls and text messages create a sense of urgency and allow staff the opportunity to offer special discounts or incentives.

Post appointment calls are vital to building a brand. The client should receive a follow-up call every time they have a consultation or receive a new service. These calls should be handled by the same person who did the consult or treatment. Small gestures will be well received by clients and will show that the spa cares.

Staff should also contact no shows and follow up with event attendees. Consider these groups to be warm leads who have expressed a direct interest in visiting the spa. Keep an internal spreadsheet which can be shared within the spa's CRM, Google Docs, or Dropbox, with notes to ensure everyone receives at least three contact attempts.

Each team member makes a direct impression on the people they meet, both during work hours and representing the business at outside events. Make smart, informed decisions on how the spa should be presented to the public. Remember, by raising standards of professional etiquette, the spa differentiates itself from competition. At the end of the day, the bottom line is what counts. Staff education should be ongoing, whether team members are new to the practice or have been there for years. Staying on top of the business and the industry itself will bring success now and in the future.



Internationally recognized aesthetic business development expert, Cheryl Whitman is founder and CEO of Beautiful Forever. She is a sought-after speaker and industry marketing specialist. With her seasoned team of professionals at Beautiful Forever, Whitman assists physicians and medical spas in creating new profit centers; developing profitable private label product lines; ghost writing articles and e-books; and identifying and executing new business strategies aimed at improving their bottom line. A celebrated author, Whitman's "Aesthetic Medical Success System," a turnkey educational system, has assisted clients in opening or jumpstarting their current businesses. Her second book, "Beautifully Profitable, Forever Profitable," provides solid, practical information on how to create, launch, and grow successful aesthetic medical practices and related businesses.