

Casting A Light On Profits



by Jenifer Hunt

The U.S. market for non-invasive cosmetic treatments has grown rapidly in recent years. These so-called "lunch-break" treatments are relatively gentle and can be performed in under an hour. These procedures are becoming popular alternatives to chemical- and surgery-oriented cosmetic treatments that are often more expensive with longer recovery times.

The popular Revlon ad campaign frontlined by spokes-model Melanie Griffith advised, "Don't Lie About Your Age; Defy It!" and recent statistics indicate that many Americans have taken up the challenge. The Consumer Perspective Survey, conducted in July 2006 by the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery (AACS), found nearly one in five individuals hope to someday undergo cosmetic surgery. The survey included 1,010 interviews and was representative of more than 1.4 million households including men and women, aged 18 to 65 years. Furthermore, a poll of 2,719 U.S. adults by Harris Interactive® (www.harrisinteractive.com) revealed 14 percent of American adults said they've already undergone some type of cosmetic treatment or surgery. While the popular appeal of cosmetic procedures is evident, still, more than half (54 percent) of respondents in the AACS sponsored survey said they were discouraged from seeking treatment due to financial costs, and nearly half (48 percent) cited the fear of appearing unnatural following recovery. More than a quarter (27 percent) feared that they would be unhappy with the outcome of their surgery.

A Bright Solution

Clearly, what many consumers want are appearance enhancing treatments that don't break the bank, are not aggressive, and are not associated with producing fake-looking results. Light therapy is such a solution. Light therapy exposes skin to certain wavelengths of light for a prescribed amount of time to treat specific health conditions. The deeper layers of skin are affected without harming the skin's surface, making it a true "lunch-break" procedure because it is fast and doesn't produce skin redness and inflammation. The patented Lumiere Light-Therapie™ device is one light therapy machine that has become popular with salon owners. It uses an array of carefully arranged LEDs to deliver pure, uniform, narrowband red light and works with Lumiere Topical Skincare to activate a series of responses in the skin that convert light energy into the cellular building blocks required by the body. The topical products also promote rejuvenation by nourishing the skin with vital precursors, stimulate production of collagen and elastin and promote DNA repair, cell regeneration and proliferation, the company says. Additionally, the regime strengthens vascular walls while oxygenating and detoxifying the skin. Light therapy procedures, such as Lumiere, do not cause down-time, discomfort or pain; therefore, the treatments do not require operator licensing or certification, and can be performed by salon employees. "Providing this service creates a positive image of salon owners as skincare professionals concerned with integrated approaches to skincare," Gina Davis, co-owner of the Huntington Beach, Calif.-based The Tanning Spa salons says. Salon

owners interested in offering light therapy services must demonstrate their interest in skincare by understanding the various light therapy skin regimes to better help customers achieve their desired results.

Targeting Skin Concerns

"Operating the Lumiere machine is simple because the same setting is used for each skin condition," says Farage Kharsa, CEO of the Encinitas, Calif.-based iTAN Solarium. "The topical products we apply to the skin prior to the light therapy determine the skin regime used." Major skin concerns are acne and the various signs of aging including fine lines and wrinkles, discoloration, sagging skin, etc. Fortunately, light therapy addresses all these concerns. "Lumiere handles overall skin clarity, fine lines and wrinkles, oversized pores, uneven skin pigmentation, and blemishes depending on which regime a guest chooses," Davis says. The light wavelengths used are anti-inflammatory, enhance circulation, target and destroy acne-causing bacteria. They also improve skin texture and lessen the visible signs of aging by increasing collagen production and healthy cell turnover.

Acne Treatment

"We have seen many skin conditions benefit from our light therapy services," says Scott Bushey, CEO and founder of the Albuquerque, N.M.-based Solarius Tanning Spa. "Those benefits include controlling and even eliminating acne." Acne is a common concern among adolescents and for many adults as well. This condition is an inflammatory disease of the skin primarily caused by changes in hair follicles and sebaceous glands. For most people, acne diminishes or decreases during a person's 20s. There is, however, no way to predict how long it will take for it to disappear entirely, and some individuals will continue to suffer for decades. Light therapy successfully has treated this condition using blue and red light wavelengths. Used twice weekly, blue light wavelengths have been shown to reduce the number of acne lesions by about 64 percent and are even more effective within daily treatment. Substances produced within acne-causing bacteria generate free radicals when irradiated by blue light and destroy the bacteria. Studies have shown red light wavelengths effective against acne as well, resulting in a 76 percent reduction of lesions after three months of daily treatment for 80 percent of patients, and overall clearance was similar or better than with benzoyl peroxide.

Anti-Aging Treatment

Americans are catching up with Europeans' acceptance of light therapy as a tool to combat the visible signs of aging. Benefits include increased skin firmness and hydration, improved tone and texture, reduced hyper-pigmentation, diminished fine lines and wrinkles, and reduced pore size. Understanding the structure and function of the skin can help salon owners educate customers on the benefits of light therapy as an anti-aging treatment. As skin ages, collagen and elastin breaks down and gravity begins to take its toll. The result? Fine lines, wrinkles, discoloration and loss of firmness. Additionally,

skin can be damaged by pollution, harsh soaps and chemicals, cigarette smoke and poor diet. Science has harnessed specific light wavelengths to help restore skin's beauty and rejuvenate its overall appearance. Anti-aging light therapy can increase collagen production and trigger skin's repair mechanisms. Light therapy is considered effective and convenient, is FDA approved, and often is used in conjunction with topical skincare products to enhance effectiveness. Topical skincare products specially designed to be used in conjunction with the therapy provide skin the nutrients it needs to maximize the effects of the light-generated energy, and may provide salons an additional lucrative revenue stream.

A New Customers, Credibility

"Offering light therapy has major benefits," Davis says. "It allows us to provide salon services to a much wider demographic than tanning customers alone, thereby helping us take advantage of the profit potential associated with facial rejuvenation services." According to Kharsa, offering Lumiere has helped his salon increase its per-client average expenditure and helps balance revenue throughout the year. "Growing the business horizontally, not just vertically, gives a business more legs to stand on, which helps stabilize revenue during the slow season," he says. "For example, if you sell tanning services and lotions, you're growing your business vertically because it's building on one kind of business. If you lose tanners you also lose lotion sales. However, if you grow horizontally by offering multiple services, you can increase revenue apart from that generated by tanning." Bushey found the skincare service has given his business a heightened level of credibility in the minds of other skincare professionals. This means he has been able to form relationships with professionals from sectors that are associated with advising people against using salon services. "Offering light therapy has made us more credible with other skincare professionals, which has resulted in referrals from plastic surgeons and dermatologists," he says. "They were surprised by the sophistication with which we position our service, as well as the depth of knowledge we have about the technology we use."