

SALON DIFFERENTIATION: ARE YOU STRUTTING YOUR STUFF?

By Jay Chapman

What sets your salon apart from any other salon in your street, suburb or city? As a salon coach, I visit many salons in my travels and get to meet a bunch of business people. I always ask salon-owners: What is your point of difference? If I asked you that question, right now, how would you respond?

If you're thinking I'm asking about a full-on salon concept, like an express blow-dry bar, you'd be on the wrong track. What I'm looking for is a point of difference in what you do every day in your salon.

As hair professionals, we often focus on the "fluff" – piles of trendy magazines, state-of-the-art coffee machines, sleek and shiny waiting areas. While I agree that those things are important, I want you to consider this: What is your point of difference for your service delivery? Do you even have one or is it the same as the next salon and the next?

I recently asked a client: What is the difference between your global colours compared to other salons? She was stuck; she wasn't quite sure.

When we dug a little deeper she identified that her team always use the correct colour in the correct place, only applying permanent colour where it's truly needed and using demis and semis to refresh and look after the condition of the hair.

She went on to explain that, with some clients, her team use three separate mixes to achieve the desired global colour. To prevent staining, they always apply protective oil to the hairline with any colour deeper than a level 6.

Wow! The clients must be impressed with that attention to detail, right? Well, they probably would be ... except they are never told.

And there's the obstacle I often find standing between salon-owners and actual differentiation – a reluctance to strut their stuff.

Our clients want three main things from us: great customer service, a great experience and a knowledgeable expert.

Generally, we achieve the first two quite well. But all too often, I see that we drop the ball on the third – being an expert in our industry. Even though this is the critical differentiator, the thing that can set you apart from competitors and prove your value over inexperienced or lazy operators.

So, how do you demonstrate your expertise? You need to share your secrets! By that, I mean tell your clients about the things you do to care for their hair during every salon visit.

It's NOT secret hairdresser business!

Tell them why you choose one colour type over another. How you decide what style best suits their face shape. Explain the techniques and professional tools you use to blow-wave and style. Show them what they can do at home between visits to care for and style their locks.

What you're telling or showing your clients might seem like Hairdressing 101 to you. To them it's a specialty, a skill they don't have or understand. In reality, it's the exact prowess and know-how your clients pay you for. It's doing your job.

As an industry, we seem to take our own expertise for granted. We undervalue it and we forget to share it.

I'm not asking you to reinvent the wheel and develop a completely different concept to take the hairdressing world by storm. Start simple, start where you are with what you're already doing.

Brainstorm with your team to identify exactly what it is that you do differently. Here are some ideas to start with, some things you might do as a matter of routine, but not share with your clients:

- weaving around the hairline with foiling so you get a soft result when the hair is tied back
- using texture in layering so you don't get any lines or have that "just cut" look
- over directing when styling to create shape and volume
- why, how or where you place any product used on the client's hair

Maybe staying up-to-date with new hairdressing trends and products is your thing? No client wants to think their hair is being cared for the same way it was five, ten or even twenty years ago. But when was the last time you showed a client how engaged



and connected you are with happenings in hairdressing?

Get to it: talk about that recent training night you attended or impress them with what you know about an amazing product just hitting the overseas market. It could be as simple as creating a buzz around a hair magazine spread of the latest style images.

Hairdressers are famous for small talk; the chit-chat that's a positive part of the salon experience for many clients. Why not use a portion of that conversation time to remind your clients why you do what you do and why you're worth the investment they make in your salon. You'll be educating your clients, creating a loyal relationship and doing your bit to change perceptions about our industry.

Own it. Be bold, be professional and strut your stuff for all to see.

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