

Making the most of the forthcoming festive season: fourteen top tips

For the majority of aesthetic nurses, November and December are often the busiest months in the calendar year. However, with planning and preparation, staff can make time for seasonal celebrations alongside their long days in the clinic, says business development director Gilly Dickons. Based on her experience of handling client calls, she offers valuable advice on task management in the lead up to Christmas

As you make your way into the busy pre-Christmas run, I would like to share some useful tips with you that may help you to manage your client's expectations, as well as your valuable time and customer service challenges. As the UK's only dedicated aesthetic enquiry management and call handling service, Aesthetic Response handles thousands of calls across a range of practices, from small remote independent practitioners to large well-established clinics. With our support, clients maximise on the opportunities that are presented at this time of the year, while also maintaining the work-life balance they need to achieve.

While November and most of December are normally busy, it is often not the volume of clients that causes aesthetic nurses the most stress, but the nature of the demands of the season. Many find themselves juggling the demands of this busy period with a very hectic family time, comprising Christmas shopping, parties, school performances, preparation for Christmas day, and getting ready for visitors. The list appears, and often feels, endless. How can you treat your clients effectively while managing everyone else's expectations? This article discusses a few steps you could take to make the most of the coming weeks.

Diary dates

Set some time aside to plan your diary availability up until 24 December. The

pressures in December come from the fact that you need to manage 4 weeks of treatments in 3 weeks. Ensure that you have your diary carefully planned for the next 7 weeks. The first couple of weeks in December are always the busiest time.

Contingency diary time

When you plan out your clinic hours, it may be of benefit to consider the provision of a contingency for those valued clients who have forgotten to book until the last minute—don't be caught out when they call. If you set this time aside, you won't feel as pressured if they contact you and you

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will be able to keep control of your diary—it can be so hard to say no to loyal clients. We repeatedly see our clients have this struggle, however small or large their practice is; the ones who plan ahead manage this the most effectively. Consider adding in an extra evening during the week or having a Saturday morning clinic.

Manage your incoming calls

If you are a practitioner handling your own calls, this means both call and treatment volumes are running at peak levels. Based

on experience over the last three Christmas seasons, practitioners should be prepared for a call volume increase of 20–35% during the first 2 weeks of December in comparison to October and November calls. You need to be prepared—make time to respond to your callers and messages, or consider bringing in some temporary help.

Newsletter, email or text campaign

Send out a mailshot, newsletter or automated text message for festive seasons bookings this week. Remind your clients that they need to book now for their Christmas treatments and ask them to plan ahead around any events that they have coming up in order to avoid disappointment. Gently remind them that leaving their treatment until a day or two before a Christmas party is never advisable.

Christmas gifts

Use the same newsletter or email to gently remind your clients that they can come to you for some of their Christmas shopping. Have they thought about skincare products for gifts? Tell them to let you know who they need a gift for and that you will help them to make the right selection. Talk to them about what you can offer.

Social media campaign

Keep posting updates on your social media sites to remind clients that they need to book their appointment. You could also use Twitter and Facebook to make Christmas gift suggestions on a daily basis.

Gift vouchers

Husbands and partners often call for gift vouchers, even on Christmas Eve! Have them available for collection or to email at



short notice. You can set up a template to email the client and tell them to print the voucher themselves. Payment for this can be taken over the phone using an affordable and readily available system, such as Sage Pay or Worldpay.

Late bookings

Have a strategy in place for those clients who want to come in for a treatment a day or two before their high-profile event. Are you happy to treat them? Decide now what your policy will be as it is hard to stick to boundaries when someone is pushing you, especially if are answering your own calls. If you have staff on reception, let them know in advance how you would like them to handle these enquiries and train them in providing the correct response. It is possible to hold your ground and let a valued client know why you are not happy to treat them without losing their future business.

Pushy clients

Try not to let the demands of clients encroach on time you have set aside to manage your family commitments. This can overstretch you, making you tired and resentful. There will always be someone who will tell you that they cannot make the appointment that you have available; however, you will be amazed how flexible a client can be if they realise that you genuinely have no other option available.

Treatment times

Don't compromise on your normal treatment times unless you are confident that this won't impact on your customer service or treatment outcomes. It is tempting to squash clients into tighter treatment spaces to accommodate them, but don't let seasonal pressures compromise your practice standards and values, as this has the potential to impact on your business well into the new year. Think of other ways to help to take off some pressure; for example, if you work on your own, do you have a friend/relative who could help out for a few busy days in the clinic?

Temporary help

Do you know a friend or family member who could help you out for a few of your busy clinic days? Could they provide coffees, book follow-up appointments and take



Remind your clients that they need to book an appointment now for Christmas treatments

payments? Think outside the box—your babysitter may make a great temporary assistant. If possible, free up your valuable time to treat clients as your business is best served by you doing what only you can do. See what you can ask someone else to support you with to free up your valuable time. It will be worth it.

New clients

At this time of the year, it is possible to see new clients who have booked a treatment as a one-off for the party season. Of course, you work hard all year to secure valuable new clients in the hope that they will become long-term clients, so think about what you can do to encourage them to come back for further treatments. Make sure that you book a follow-up appointment with them or review their treatment plan there and then, and talk to them about the longer term benefits of regular treatments. You could also offer them a voucher to go towards their next treatment to encourage them to come back to you.

Knowledge is power

If you have been working on developing your practice this year, our extensive experience with handling calls shows us that you can realistically expect at least a 20% increase on last year's (2014) business. What does this mean for your time management? Look back at last year's diary, as well as your call levels, and work out now where the extra 20% of

the time needed is going to come from. What are the implications of a 20% uplift in terms of both calls and treatments? This is the information that can assist you in your preparation and forward planning.

Post-treatment concerns

There may be clients who are worried about a treatment outcome over the Christmas break. What support can you put in place for them? Once you have treated a client, there needs to be a way for them to get hold of you in the event of an emergency. While most queries will wait for a couple of days, there may be a situation that requires a more urgent response. If you are intending to leave an out of office message on your answer machine, you need to ensure that clients have a way contacting you in an emergency. You could also offer an email address to use in an emergency, making it clear that you will be checking your emails and will respond in a genuine emergency.

Conclusion

It is my hope that there may be one or two of these suggestions that you can add to the plans you have already put in place to manage the weeks ahead. I would like to think that you will be able to sit down at some point on Christmas Eve and reflect on how well you have managed to juggle this exceptionally busy period, and look forward to enjoying some well-earned time off with your family and friends.