

American SALON

BEAUTY

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RETAIL THERAPY RECESSION-PROOF RETAIL

Christie & Co. Salon Spa in Bayside, NY, positions itself as a retail business that just happens to do service, too.

It has been said that when one door closes, another one opens. Lois Christie, founder and owner of Christie & Co. Salon Spa in Bayside, NY, found that statement to be especially true when she decided to temporarily close one of the two doors to her salon, making customers enter through the retail area. Before she knew it, retail sales increased by 13 percent.

Christie, who is the president of Intercoiffure America/Canada and a longtime member of the National Cosmetology Association, has spent the past year researching ways to improve her retail strategy. "Given the economic downturn, we wondered if our revenue took a dip in the service department, how could we fill that gap?" Christie says.

She enlisted the help of her staff and retail experts and took inspiration from department store design to devise a plan. Her efforts appear to be working. Christie & Co. is currently experiencing the highest retail sales in its 38-year history; sales make up about 26 percent of the salon's total revenue.



Christie & Co.'s retail display was expertly designed to create a buying environment.

It was the design of department stores, where customers must walk through cosmetics before getting to most other departments, that inspired Christie to change the way clients enter her salon. Christie hired a retail expert to help with everything from strategically placing products to choosing the wall color. "It's important to create a buying environment," she says. "It's a science on its own." For instance, she says she placed her products under shelf headings according to hair texture rather than brand or product type because it helps make the buying process more individualized.

She also uses the "gift with purchase" offer commonly found at department stores at her salon, along with other discounts. One promotion, for example, gives customers who spend \$150 or more on products a complimentary blow-out with a newer stylist. It not only encourages clients to buy more, but also helps build new talent, Christie says.

Christie stresses the importance of developing a relationship with the brands she sells. For example, when Kérastase, the salon's best-selling brand, recently sent out an e-mail promotion for a free blow-out, Christie & Co. received 43 new customers that day. Central to Christie's philosophy is the idea that retail sales should not be viewed as an additional source of revenue, but as an essential part of the salon business. Says Christie, "Our new mantra is, 'We are a retail business that does great hair.'" —A.F.

The National Cosmetology Association (NCA) has launched an aggressive campaign to help salons increase retail sales by \$50 per day. That's a \$600 million infusion of cash into salons in 2009 if just 25 percent of the 50,000 salons in the United States participate. Visit nca cares.org for more information.



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