

STYLE

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Beyond Polish [Selling Boutique Items Successfully]

Intellectually we know that selling retail can increase our bottom line, but for so many of us, selling retail — particularly non-nail items — is a foreboding hurdle. The question to ask is not should I sell retail, but how do I sell retail.

By Michelle Pratt



When we find a cute bag, new jewelry, or a colorful summer hat and buy it on impulse, we walk away delighted and excited over our fun, new purchase. Further, we are aware that there is a whole world of buyers out there searching for a place to spend money. But despite knowing this, many techs and salon owners still have a hard time generating revenue from a boutique section in their salon. Why is that? What barriers prevent salon owners from taking a piece of the impulse-buying pie?

"Many techs have the perception that when they are selling they sound like a used-car salesman," says Laura Bronner, general manager at Nail Bar and Trim, both located in Chicago. Bronner says when she encounters this attitude she asks techs to think about the last thing they bought. She'll ask how they felt when they bought it. Did they feel cheated? Of course not! They felt great. They loved it. They were glad to own what they bought. "I tell them that's how clients feel when they make a purchase in the salon," says Bronner. She says the key to talking about retail items without it sounding forced is for techs to talk about things they genuinely like.

The Nail Bar in Chicago sells handbags, jewelry, T-shirts, and other boutique items. Bronner says she asks the techs to find three items they like and talk about one or all of these items to every client. "Everyone won't buy, but if you don't suggest it, they won't buy it," says Bronner. In other words, you can't just put up a cute display and wonder why the product doesn't

move. Retail doesn't sell because it has a passive presence in the salon. It sells when techs are excited about the merchandise and are willing to share their excitement with clients.

The number-one factor in successful retail sales is the attitude and excitement clients sense from the person selling it to them. However, there are secondary factors that increase sales. One is the location and appearance of the retail boutique section. "We put a mannequin at the front door of the store, and change its outfit every week," says Tasha Scaglione, spa director at Spa Jardin in Tampa, Fla. Scaglione says placement and frequent change are very important to retail sales. "Every Sunday we move items around," she says. She uses half-body mannequins to display items, and she moves the mannequins to different spots in the spa. This creates the feeling that there is always something new somewhere in the salon.

Bronner agrees. "You want new products, and eye-catching ways to display them," she says. "Don't put too many products in a space where it will be cluttered." Bronner says her salon displays the receptionist's favorite three items on the front desk so they are right in front of the customer. When clients ask about the items, the receptionist can have a natural, honest conversation about how much she loves them.

The third tip for selling retail is to find items that are unique. Clients will feel cheated if you repackage cheap merchandise and sell it at a higher cost. Instead, offer items that clients can't get. "We sell items made locally," says Ally Conley, owner of Mani Pedi Cutie in Hermosa Beach, Calif. Her spa sells unique diaper bags, hats, jewelry, purses, and magic wands for little girls, all made from local artists. T-shirts are also a big seller. "We have tees that say South Babe and Beach Bump. They are so cute, and clients just love them."

Conley knows that no matter how unique her items or eye-catching her displays, she needs her techs to make retail move. To encourage techs to talk up the retail products, she asks them to wear a few of their favorite things when they work and then gives them 5% of the income from sales they generate. When clients see boutique items on their technicians, they naturally comment or ask questions — even if it's just a compliment. This helps techs talk easily about the items they like, often without initiating the conversation.

A final tip on how to sell retail successfully is to be bold. Invest in products that you like and launch it well, suggests Bronner. Don't be half-hearted and fearful. Find things that you personally love so you'll be able to talk about why you like them. And don't be scared to spend money to bring in expensive merchandise. Clients are people with disposable income. Create a niche market for unique, high-end products that they can't find when they walk into Wal-Mart. "We sell candles that cost \$65," says Scaglione. "Everything is high-end, one-of-a-kind, and fabulous." She says each product has a story, and clients come in looking for what's new.

Ultimately, success in the retail world comes when techs have a shift in their thinking. It's easy to picture ourselves as nail techs charging a fee for a spa service, but sometimes it's hard to view ourselves as business owners who offer both products and services. Once we make that shift in our thinking, we can be every bit as excited about our unique boutique items as we are about the unique signature we place on our nail services.

For some reason, we're comfortable making a profit on our labor, but not on retail items. However, a small shift in thinking here will also benefit us. Instead of creating a retail space because the business gurus tell you it's a smart business move, begin to look at retail as a secondary way to express your creative side. Find boutique items that you would want to own yourself, and then bring them into your salon as a way to serve your clients. Think of it as exceptional customer service. Clients don't have access to tradeshow and wholesale vendors the way you do as a salon owner. You are their door to the latest and greatest items on the market. When you offer retail items that delight your clients, they walk away thinking you care about your business — and about them. That creates a two-way relationship, when you're talking to them about salon services — or talking to them about salon merchandise.

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