

# LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD MEN

Every guy entertains the notion of being a man of mystery and international intrigue. And the fact of the matter is, he really can be—at least in terms of approaching him effectively for skin care services. Stereotypes both new and old can get in the way when targeting a male clientele, and professionals need to sweep away these misconceptions in order to reach the huge potential of the male market.

## THE MYTH OF SUPERMAN

Men like to feel manly, and for decades now they have spurned skin care services because they've heard their skin is tougher than female skin. And they're mostly right, but this toughness only goes so far.

It's true the dominance of testosterone in the male metabolism stimulates collagen production while estrogen decreases collagen synthesis. A man's skin is on average 25% thicker and more resilient than that of a woman his age. This contributes to the long-held cultural stereotype that men age more gracefully than women, even though the wrinkles men eventually get will tend to be deeper and more severe than a woman's lighter damage.

But anyone who has sat through an episode of Gene Simmons' A&E television show *Family Jewels* will agree: Testosterone has its ugly side. The presence of male androgens can cause the sebaceous glands to enlarge, making pores more visible and often contributing to acne.

Male clients need to be reminded that they are not superhuman and neglect will indeed damage their skin. Sunscreen is not just for girly men—in the United States, for instance, men take a significant lead over women in skin cancer diagnoses and in the diagnosis of deadly melanomas according to the American Cancer Society. Clearly, this is an instance where winning is not always a good thing.

On a subtler scale, improper cleansing can aggravate the male tendency toward acne. Shaving with alkaline products causes inflammation that may result in painful, unsightly bumps and persistent, or even permanent, hyperpigmentation in the shave zone. In fact, a daily shave with aggravating products can essentially offset the collagen advantage male skin genetically possesses, contributing to redness, roughness, sagging and wrinkling.

But how do you use this knowledge to get male clients into your spa? Knowing the facts behind the skin will definitely help. Give him his space, and let him come to you. Most men are really little boys at heart, and love to explore and play as long as there is no pressure.



**BY TROY FAIRCHILD**

For the female client with a man in her life, prepare a collection of trial-sizes such as shave products and sunscreen for her to bring to him along with a certificate for him that entitles the bearer to a free skin analysis.

## THE MYTH OF THE METROSEXUAL

Breakthrough cultural experiences, beginning with the landmark Bravo television series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* several years ago, proved sometimes even a manly man just wants to feel attractive. However, it's a mistake to conclude all men are seeking to glorify their inner diva and secretly yearn for a thong-snapping, "boy-zilian" wax while listening to Broadway showtunes. There are the fearlessly fierce among us who do lose beauty sleep over whether or not we're exfoliating properly or if our new Malibu Ken-blond highlights are just a bit much, but most men entering the skin care environment don't want to feel quite that fabulous.

Creating a comfortably gender-neutral experience is the most prudent course in attracting and maintaining relationships with male clients. Of course, your décor should be neutralized of any overwhelmingly feminine components: pink walls, velvet-flocked wallpaper, gold-leafed statues of Venus, twinkling chandeliers and fluffy silk flower arrangements.

But don't err to the other extreme, either. Not all men love sports. Blaring coverage of the game from a flat screen TV or a heaping stack of hot rod magazines in the waiting room may not be his thing. Ditto for the financial and business magazines—if they are of interest, he probably reads these at the office. Car and sports metaphors do click for lots of guys, but use these references carefully based on what you know specifically about your potential male client; he may see himself as more of a sleek, polished gentleman than a cowboy.

Armed with this knowledge, know that a simple, direct approach works best. Spell it out for him. He's no dummy, but men are truly baffled by the expectation that they are mind-readers. This is why many men express genuine surprise when their Valentine's Day gift of a kitchen appliance receives a chilly reception.

Rather than trying to create an experience for the guy, talk with him about results—how to get them and how to maintain them. Refer to the services as grooming and detailing—nothing fussy. Focus on no more than three specific benefits, otherwise his eyes will glaze over, and appeal to his practical side by discussing the benefits of using products in tandem.

Tell him what's in the products you're going to use, and how and why they work. Tell him what to expect, and give him the opening to rebook, but don't push. One

stereotype that does bear some truth is that most men are commitment-phobic when entering a new situation. They want to feel in control, and resist the hard sell. If the skin therapist has tuned into the client's needs, though, no pushing will be needed.

## DODGING OBSTACLES

There are also a few key fears that are keeping men from booking appointments at the spa. By knowing what frightens them off and learning what to do about it, male clients will be that much easier to reel in.

First, one thing that scares off a great many men is not knowing what to expect. The gender of the therapist is always a concern to first-time male clients, as well as many female clients, so offer a choice when booking.

Another off-putting factor is men's fear of flashing. Excepting the random nudist or exhibitionist, many men are charmingly shy about not wanting to get naked with strangers. Discuss the degree of disrobing required before beginning the treatment. Provide plush, microfiber or cotton, full-length robes with ample crossover in front. Furnish towels and blankets sized to manly proportions. Short-sheeting the bed may have been part of his boyish high-jinks back at summer camp, but men like to feel covered when they're in a vulnerable position, such as sprawling out on a skin care treatment bed.

Men also have a distinct fear of looking goofy. There is no reason a male client can't wear swimming trunks instead of the traditional treatment gown during a skin care service. And ditto that idea in regard to pulling hair away from the face. Supply a simple, dark hand towel to protect his hair instead of the bonnet-and-headband combo.

Some men are also worried about screaming like a woman or laughing because it tickles during a service. Dentists often report nervous patients erupting into peals of wacky laughter, followed by gales of tears. Who knew that a simple procedure could become such a catharsis? With this in mind though, men who saw the waxing scene in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* will never be the same. They do fear the idea of pain. The fact is, men enjoy extractions because this part of the treatment yields highly visible results. If he gets the giggles in anticipation, offer him a glass of water until it passes.

Yet another factor in men's wariness of the spa is a fear of entanglement. Keep the transaction snappy and to the point. Microservices that address one issue only, such as treating a sudden blemish before a big meeting, can clearly send the message to a hesitant male client that professional skin care need not become a huge drain of energy, time and cash.

Finally, men may be worried they'll end up smelling like a girl once their treatment is concluded. As with floral

wallpaper and furnishings, keep sweet, flowery scents off the male treatment trolley. Clean, sharp essences of botanical essential oils such as citrus, lemongrass, clove, camphor and menthol will much better suit him.

## THE RIGHT PATH

Men find their way into the spa via numerous routes. Many are sent, like schoolboys to the principal's office, by the women in their lives, and this often is the gateway—they have now been given permission to explore skin care by powerful influencers in their lives.

Next comes a tentative phase similar to wading in the kiddie pool. The man will casually stop by the skin care center “to pick up something for a buddy of mine.” Yeah, sure. Your buddy who's really concerned about the milia he's developed around his hairline from not correctly removing his hair product. Or maybe he simply wants to brighten and refresh his eye orbit area, perhaps something with light-diffusing particles and a bit of tint?

Both of these introductory phases—the first visit and the subsequent testing phase—are critical to cementing the new relationship. At these key points, sampling is effective, but spare his more delicate feelings. Please don't give him a bunch of trial sizes in a ditzzy little shopping bag with a big purple butterfly on it. Remember, his self-image is fragile.

One way to reach him would be to use a contemporary, high-end grooming environment that draws in male clients with the pleasure and comfort of an old-school barbershop shave, often complete with a shoe shine, Rat Pack music on the sound system, and a boy's club highball as part of the service. This all makes sense, as shaving with conventional drugstore products can cause men a lot of grief, including the ubiquitous ingrown hairs and bits of toilet paper stuck to the morning's bleeding nicks.

However, neither an esthetic nor cosmetology license allows a skin care professional to shave a client; this ancient skill requires a separate license governed under barbering. If you are dedicated to developing a male clientele, you may wish to consider hiring someone with this specific license or work on obtaining a barbering license of your own.

One last thing: Don't be too gung-ho about offering men waxing services. Yes, sweater removal—otherwise know as waxing bushy back hair—and an eyebrow tidy-up may seem like second nature to you, but a moisturizing mani-pedi is much a safer menu addition early on.

The male client is out there, waiting to be tapped. Make him comfortable, and make him feel in charge. By doing this, you let your male client feel empowered to make intelligent decisions, and he will reward you with great loyalty.



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