

The Secrets to Successful Business Partnerships: Corporate Partners from Wall Street to the Spa

© 02/02/2017 10:12 pm ET

To understand how business partnerships work in the wellness and spa industry, I turned to Tom Elzner, Founder and CEO of SKIN SPA New York. Tom leads the largest East Coast provider of technologically advanced anti-aging treatments, laser hair removal and body sculpting treatments as well as innovative skincare and massage services in its 8 locations throughout New York and Boston. SKIN SPA has a range of premium combination treatments that are only available at its locations, and prides itself on being a one-stop shop for all things beauty at an affordable price.



Tom Elzner, Founder and CEO of SKIN SPA New York

What are the main factors in building great partnerships?

Simplicity, ease of communication and a win/win for all parties. I've found that great partnerships are ones that are easy to develop (not too intricate), easy to communicate (to all parties involved) and are beneficial for all parties involved.

How do you build a sense of community and trust with the consumers and businesses?

We've built SKIN SPA over the past 12 years, one customer at a time. They are our core constituency and we spend a lot of time communicating with them, both in-store and via email as well as the old fashioned way, through phone calls. We also have a rapid-response system for any customer inquiries or issues. This continuous communication and response system generates trust with our customers. Our community is built through our email marketing program as well through our social media outreach. We also take a similar approach with our business partners.

You offer local businesses partnerships that give their employees discounted services and rates to Skin Spa, and in return many businesses do the same for his/her staff. How did you get the idea for this, and what does it cover?

I started the company in 2005 after spending a decade as an investment banker on Wall Street. After 9/11, I decided to make a career change and do something that I was passionate about – skin care. So my first location was one room on the 12th floor of a nondescript Midtown office building. The day after our grand opening party I sat at the desk and waited for the phone to ring. It didn't. With my finance background, I had completely missed one of the most important parts of a business – marketing!

At that time, internet marketing was in its infancy and being in NYC, it was the best way to get our message out. I then started to think about other ways to bring customers in the door — other than standing on the street with a sign or handing out postcards. I wanted something more brand-enhancing. So There was a top-tier hair salon nearby and I approached them about a referral program between our two companies since we were both in the beauty industry and had customers who cared about their appearance and well-being. Once that became successful, I thought why not approach non-beauty businesses. Knowing that nurses have some of the toughest jobs in terms of being on their feet all day and taking care of others, I reached out to the HR department at a nearby hospital asking if they would like to join There was a nearby hospital and I knew that nurses have some of the toughest jobs out there in terms of being on their feet all day, taking care of other people. So I approached their HR department and asked if they would like to join our Corporate Partnership program. It was a natural fit - - we had a chance to take care of people who spend their days taking care of others. That hospital was our first Corporate Partner. Our partnership covers all of our services – individuals who work at our Corporate Partners get a set discount on services as an employee of our partners.

Could you explain how you built your partnerships?

At first, we looked for businesses close to our first location that had employees who would appreciate and benefit from our services. Slowly this evolved over time to customers inquiring about partnerships with their employers. We then set up a formal program that provided all of the information needed to set up the program and started reaching out to companies in industries that we thought would appreciate the program. One of the turning points was during one of our expansion periods. We opened a location in the Fashion District that was the floor below one of New York's top modeling agencies - Red Model Management. In our first month of operations, there was New York Fashion Week so all of their models were in the City and working non-stop. We approached the agency about the program and they immediately started sending in their models. So now our partnerships are with companies from a broad range of industries, from beauty and fitness to real estate, law, banking, hospitality and others.

What advice can you give to companies looking to build great partnerships?

Keep it simple and make sure everyone wins. You generally have about 30 seconds of someone's attention to communicate your story or program. In that short time you have to introduce the program, show that it's a win/win and also easy to implement.