

Lights, Camera, Action!

How you can capitalize on live streaming to boost your business.



Just when day spa owners were finally embracing the idea of creating online videos for their businesses, along came internet marketers insisting that the hottest, most effective way to reach an audience is through *live* videos. Recent studies bear out the claim: According to a 2017 poll conducted by Livestream, 80 percent of American professionals prefer watching live videos to reading blogs, and 82 percent prefer live streams to social posts. Even more compelling? People are willing to watch live videos that are three times as long as pre-recorded ones.

Live streaming means showing a video to your social media followers in real time. Those followers can like or comment as you stream. It can be a lucrative marketing tool, and because it's still relatively new in the spa industry, a live video is virtually guaranteed to help you stand out from the competition. "It's a way for a spa to show prospective clients its personality, competency and unique point of difference," says Valerie Smith-Malin, founder of Innovative Marketing in Westport,

Connecticut. Live streaming also allows for overall increased visibility on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. "Businesses pay thousands of dollars to promote posts or ads, but live streams get priority exposure," says Nick Wolny, a fitness and yoga marketer based in Houston. "They help you cut the line for free."

Indeed, some spas that have taken the plunge report positive results. Susanne Allamong, owner of Velvet Skin Spa in Michigan City, Indiana, says that her live demonstration of a nanoneedling technique generated new likes, clients and interactive conversations with prospective customers. "The feedback was amazing," she enthuses. "I got a ton of requests for appointments." In fact, Allamong was so pleased with the results that she's planning a twice-monthly live series called "Skin-knowledgey," in which she'll discuss different skincare topics.

But there are a number of considerations to keep in mind if you want to maximize the results of a live video. Here, we've gathered some important tips to steer you down the right path.

plugged in

PICKING A PLATFORM



Here's a glimpse at the pros and cons of five popular sites.

Facebook: Easy to use with a built-in audience, but the platform's videos don't get picked up by search engines.

Instagram: Instastories go to the top of the feed, but disappear entirely after 24 hours.

YouTube: Great for SEO, but may require more effort to amass an audience.

Twitter: Streams can be easily retweeted (shared), but the platform works best for news stories rather than business ones.

Livestream: An "all-in-one" service for producing professional streams; the basic package costs about \$400 per year.



Showcase Your Brand

Although it seems like a fun, spur-of-the-moment thing to do, a live video should be as thoughtfully planned as any other serious marketing event. It's the perfect opportunity to spotlight your spa, so every detail should accurately reflect your brand.

Start with the big picture: Consider how live streaming fits within your broader marketing plan and goals. "What unique business niche does your spa fill? Who do you want to target, and how do your products and services solve their problems? The answers will enable you to choose content, as well as a delivery approach that will be the most beneficial to your spa," explains Smith-Malin. Next, focus on smaller but key details.



"Think about how you can communicate your brand through your choice of topic, shooting location, participants and even clothing," she recommends.

Be sure to highlight aspects of your spa that might not be immediately evident from your service offerings. Vance Soto, owner and president of Ole Henriksen Face/Body Spa in Los Angeles, achieved this during a 30-minute live stream discussion with dermatologist Sandra Lee, MD, about the practical treatment of acne and the condition's psychological challenges. "Guests with acne are often embarrassed about their appearance, and that takes a toll on their emotional well-being," explains Soto. By focusing on the psychological side effects of the condition, he was able to show how, in addition to helping clients achieve clear skin, the spa seeks to provide emotional support and ease mental stress.

Get Techy

Your live stream's lighting, video and sound quality must be top-notch or you can kiss your audience goodbye. "I've seen live videos where the camera is upside down or no one can hear anything because headphones are plugged into the mic," says Wolny. As well as failing to check audio and video quality beforehand, common rookie mistakes include streaming in a location with poor Wi-Fi bandwidth (which will cause your stream to continuously buffer) and failing to have a backup plan in case of technical difficulties.

Before going live, do a trial run—or several. "Test Facebook Live on your personal profile by switching the privacy of your status to 'Only Me,'" advises Wolny. Most streaming platforms offer ways to run a test or preview, so check to see what's available. As you review the test, be aware of potential problems like distracting ambient noise, unfavorable lighting or a sluggish upload speed.

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Rally a Crowd

Live streaming without amassing an audience first is like shouting into a hurricane. Whip up excitement for the upcoming video by promoting it regularly in email blasts and social media posts at least two to three weeks in advance, recommends Smith-Malin.

Wolny suggests choosing the platform where you have the biggest audience, and attaching a promotion to incentivize your followers to tune in. "You could offer a limited number of discounts on a service to people who show up for the stream," he says. "Think of it as a digital open house. The advantage is that you're attracting people who can't make it to the spa that day."

You can also reach a wider audience by teaming up with another appropriate brand. Soto and Dr. Lee partnered with a well-established beauty website to host their live stream, swelling their audiences substantially. To promote it, they made a short teaser video, which they posted on their respective social media channels. The stream garnered some 36,000 views.

Monitor the Stream

During your live video, audience members might leave questions or comments, or point out problems. Have a staff member follow the stream online and interact with viewers. "The ability to engage with your audience in live video builds trust faster than any other content form," says Wolny. "Other posts can be manipulated, but live video is uncensored—raw and real."

During the Ole Henriksen Spa live stream, Soto's publicist monitored comments as they came in. "Questions that were asked frequently were brought to the forefront and answered promptly," he says. If you don't have help during the stream, you can still respond to comments immediately after the broadcast.

Keep Promoting It

Once your live stream is over, it's possible to keep squeezing marketing potential from it. Most platforms allow you to save it as a regular, shareable video. "After I finish the stream, I immediately boost it on Facebook," says Allamong. She then shares the video in Facebook groups for local businesses, includes a link to the video in emails, and sends it to cross-promotion partners to share in their own marketing materials.

Bottom line: Share it anywhere that might increase your spa's exposure. "Live streams go in front of people who already follow you," notes Wolny. "Make sure you also get that content in front of those who don't." 📺



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