HOw’D THEY DO THAT?:

ISPA MEMBERS SHARE THEIR SECRETS OF SUCCESS

BY MARK CRAWFORD

IT CAN BE ELUSIVE. It almost always is a challenge. Achieving it can be the hardest thing in your life, yet also the most rewarding. It is success – creating a vision, pursuing it, and turning it into a prosperous venture. And the measurement of success is not just the numbers on a spreadsheet – it’s also the gratification of building something lasting and meaningful, the process of which leads you on a path of self-discovery.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The companies featured responded to our editorial query for this story. Want to be featured in Pulse? Look for future e-mails calling for editorial participation and respond to the ones you feel fit your business.
“For me, success is all about love and determination,” said Nancy Byrd Radding, who overcame weight issues and the lack of formal education to become the fitness director and intern coordinator for Oaks at Ojai in Ojai, California. “[Success is] loving something enough to pursue it, despite the obstacles, and being determined enough to make it work.”

Fayez Tamba, owner of Fayez Spa in London, Ontario, has seen his spa grow steadily in size over the years (now 8,500 square feet). “I value my clients as individuals, not as a faceless revenue stream,” he said. “Maintaining daily contact with clients builds rapport, and the result is huge in terms of repeat and referral bookings. If you don’t exceed client expectations, then you’re just another spa.”

“Well,” muses Crista Sellman-Jones, co-founder of Satin Serenity in Eagle, Idaho, which produces luxury linens and apparel, “if we thought success was defined by a large paycheck, we would be highly unsuccessful! Our success lies in the fact that we have fulfilled our dream. We have created, designed, and manufactured our entire product line ourselves, and kept all the manufacturing in the USA. The most important measure of success is our positive customer feedback, referrals and doubling our sales annually.”

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

Leslie Lyon, president of Spas2b Inc. in Waterloo, Ontario, realized she had a high-value product when her week-long spa management classroom courses kept selling out. “I was receiving constant international inquiries via e-mail, wondering when the courses would be offered in a distance learning format,” she said. Recognizing this unfulfilled niche, she conducted in-depth market research and hired a talented Webmaster to provide the international exposure she needed to promote the product. Today, Lyon provides spa management training around the world.

Self-preservation drove Sunny Griffin to create her highly successful Astara Skin Care company. “I had moved to Telluride, Colorado, and at age 55, had extremely dry skin,” she said. “The 9,000-foot altitude made my skin so dry I was unable to sleep through the night without getting up to put on more moisturizer, and I still woke up feeling as though my skin was going to crack.” When she discovered a woman who was developing skin care products made from raw botanicals that were effective at deeply hydrating her skin, she decided to bring the products to market.

A similar discovery motivated Mathilde Thomas to establish the Caudalie Vinotherapie Spa and Caudalie skin care line. “I met a genius, Dr. Joseph Vercauteren, from the University of Pharmacy of Bordeaux,” she said. “He told me how resveratrol, a molecule from grapevine stalks, was the most effective anti-aging ingredient because it produces sirtuins that increase the lifespan of skin cells.” That’s all she needed to hear. Since establishing her company she has been awarded patents for extracting and stabilizing three key molecules from the grapevine plant.

MAKING IT WORK

Turning dreams into reality takes an amazing amount of hard work and gritty determination. “I knew from my previous careers in the fashion and cosmetics industries that my company was going to have to have great PR to make it,” said
Griffin. “We had no money for advertising (she started the company by charging $137,000 on credit cards), so the only way to get into magazines was by convincing beauty editors that I had something special.” Griffin made frequent trips to New York City, crashing on friends’ couches and calling on spas, stores and editors. “This process took years and was very frustrating, but I did not quit,” Griffin said.

“Crista and I would brainstorm an idea, based partly on research and partly on gut feeling,” said Lisa Damron, Sellman-Jones’ Satin Serenity co-founder. “We quickly discovered that things don’t always work out the way they’re planned. We’ve definitely learned things the hard way at

TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN THE SPA WORLD

“Know the business and your market segment. Be obviously present at your business daily. Listen to your clientele and deliver the services and features they want.”
— Fayez Tamba

“Watch for holes in the industry – there are lots of them. When you spot one you can fill, focus on that niche opportunity and start building your offerings.”
— Leslie Lyon

“Choose your path carefully. Don’t let money be the only factor. Pursue with passion the person you are meant to be.”
— Nancy Byrd Radding

“Be aware that starting your own company will be the hardest thing you have ever done. It takes enormous energy and you have to be willing to give 110 percent all the time.”
— Sunny Griffin

“Jump in the water and then learn how to swim. Remember there is no success without an excellent product. There must be product truth.”
— Mathilde Thomas

“There are so many resources available to small businesses – use them sooner rather than later to start off on the right track.”
— Crista Sellman-Jones

“Start small and take little steps forward, making sure you accomplish your task at hand before moving on. In the beginning we tried to do too much.”
— Lisa Damron
times, which set us back, and we often wished we had more business experience. But we never stopped looking forward and building on those experiences."

Successful people know they can’t sit back and relax in the glow of their success. At Caudalie, Thomas invests 10 percent of sales into research. “There was a huge boost in sales with the anti-dark spot phenomenon when Viniferine was patented in 2005,” she said. The following year the company created the “Cosm-ethics Seal” and removed all parabens, sodium laureth sulfate, mineral oil, phthalates and colorings from the skin-care line. Lyon at Spas2b worked tirelessly to develop a comprehensive branding/marketing campaign and strong Internet presence. She joined associations and committees, gave talks, and took the time to develop strong business relationships. “I gave everything I had, with no holding back,” she said. “Now I know I can do anything and am already working on our next big project.”

A LEARNING PROCESS

“I’ve learned that nothing can compare to practical experience, a willingness to learn, and a passion for what you’re doing,” said Radding. “Without formal education or business experience it takes a little longer, but it’s worth it.”

Sellman-Jones agreed. “Our biggest challenge is that being small business owners, we have to wear so many different hats and it takes us twice as long as it should to do anything because we first have to teach ourselves how to do it,” she said.

She also cautions about burnout. “We were so determined to make our business work that we gave up almost everything to make it happen,” she recalled. “At times it felt like life was passing us by while we were working nonstop. Our New Year’s resolution this year is to create more balance in our lives, start enjoying outside activities again, and taking most weekends off. We have been fortunate enough to meet many wonderful people in the spa industry. When times are difficult, we try to remember where we came from and how great it is to have a dream that we were able to make a reality.”

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