



New *tricks*

Utopia Beauty has undergone more than just a design makeover. **Suzanne Braithwaite** finds out how staying committed to staff and clients are the secrets to success

It's a brave move to take over a tired-looking salon when it's fallen victim to constant discounting and offers, but this is exactly what Stefania Rossi did back in January 2014 when she became director of Utopia Beauty & Advanced Skincare in Hornchurch, Essex.

Rossi gave the much-loved high street salon a new lease of life, restoring it to a high-end beauty retreat that focuses on quality treatments and introducing its clients to new results-driven brands.

The salon relaunched in October 2014, following an ongoing refurbishment programme. Rossi and her staff made sure that the essence of the old salon, which had been part of the fabric of the high street for

over a decade, was retained by gaining feedback from its loyal customers and working in partnership with other local businesses.

Payback

Staying loyal to the community has paid off, with Utopia gaining 1,137 new clients since January 2014 and Rossi reports that they are on target to increase annual turnover by 50% on 2013. The business also recorded 80% retention of both new and old clients from January to October 2014, which she expects to increase over the coming months.

She says, "I have worked hard to gain a true focus on who our ideal client is and their needs. Our business ethos focuses on keeping those clients loyal, and acting on their continuous feedback to increase appeal to new and existing clients within our target market."

The success of the business has been a group effort, with Rossi attributing much of it to the dedication of her staff. "It has given me the biggest satisfaction seeing how my staff have reacted. The existing team fully believed in the success of the salon and helped with the transformation," she says.

When she took over the business, the team had been on zero-hour contracts, and Rossi worked with employment lawyer and PB columnist David Wright to overhaul that, putting everyone on a full-time, permanent contract to give them more security. She also invested more in training in 2014, and took on a junior therapist who is currently completing her NVQ Level 3. "I'm really





focused on supporting my team and I'm a firm believer in giving opportunities, so will to look to take on apprentices next year," she adds.

Clear idea

The salon's new design adopts a classic and elegant appearance, with mulberry as the signature colour that is carried through the logo, treatment rooms, and brochure.

Rossi had a clear vision of how she wanted the salon to look and feel, and worked with consultant Susan Routledge to help put her ideas in to practice.

"Our focus has been on the cosmetic work and the practicality of the salon layout," explains Rossi.

The 2,205sq ft salon now has two extra treatment rooms, after the lie-down sunbed was removed to make way for a spray tanning room downstairs and an additional room upstairs was freed up where the previous spray tan room had been. The reception area was also redesigned to create a large, open-plan relaxation area with comfortable chairs and new retail displays, as well as adding in a nail bar.

Results driven

Rossi also gave the treatment menu a revamp, investing in new salon machinery and product houses to offer clients a



comprehensive range of treatments. Last year saw her take on a Caci Ultimate machine, plus Environ facials, Lash Perfect and Lycon Precision Waxing. She has also opened accounts with CND, OPI and Alessandro, working closely with each brand to make sure the salon benefits from the various training and marketing opportunities.

Rossi says that 2014 was all about getting the systems and operations at Utopia streamlined, with a view to opening a second salon by the end of this year. "I have more plans for 2016, to grow the Utopia brand further," she adds. But for the immediate future, her focus will be on training her staff up, and investing in their progression through the business and their development as therapists. **PB**



SALON STATS

Budget: £10,000

Size: 2,205sq ft

Relaunched: October 2014

Staff: eight, including a front of house manager, two senior therapists, four beauty therapists and one receptionist

Treatment rooms: nine across three floors

Other facilities: spray tan room, nail bar and relaxation area

Brands: Environ, Dermalogica, Caci, Crystal Clear, Lycon, Lash Perfect, OPI, Gelish, CND Shellac, Alessandro International, Sienna X