

# THE NAIL EXTENSION

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## Rebuilding Your Schedule for the New Year

*by Jaime Schrabeck*

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No matter how busy and successful you were a year ago, none of us can afford to be passive about the future. While we don't know what the next few months or next year will bring, beauty pros should not expect clients to readily return to their pre-pandemic routines. In years past, the holidays may have brought new clients and more frequent salon visits but that will not happen this year. Income generated from a weak holiday season will not compensate for prolonged closures, reduced capacity, less demand and the post-holiday slump. At a time of such uncertainty, we need more than ever to take control and rebuild our salon schedules.

Under these unusual circumstances, those of us who routinely schedule clients with standing appointments have a distinct advantage. We know our clients well and mutually benefit from having dependable, enduring relationships. Moreover, we avoid the time it takes to negotiate individual appointment times and the anxiety associated with either having too few clients on our schedules, or too many that we cannot find time for our best clients when they want appointments. In my salon, our "preferred" clients can always choose to cancel or reschedule according to our policies, but for the most part, they would rarely do so when they've committed to a convenient time.

Challenged by the pandemic, even the most loyal clients might adjust their choice and frequency of services and, sadly, some clients might not return at all. Regardless, we still have

a foundation upon which to rebuild. To reinforce that foundation, we must prioritize the health and safety of our clients, continuously earning their trust and business. We should also review service pricing and timing, scheduling policies and availability to make the appropriate adjustments before planning too far ahead. The more consistent we can be, the better.

Despite technological capability, we don't use online booking; instead, we maintain control of every minute of available salon time. Given this power, we only offer the option of standing appointments to the most reliable clients. There's no monetary incentive involved; the incentive for the client should be securing the most convenient time on a consistent basis. We want clients who can easily afford to have their nails done at our prices, not those who need special pricing to justify the experience.

Inviting a client can be as easy as saying: "I really enjoy doing your nails, but as my clientele grows, appointments will be harder to schedule. I'd like to reserve a specific day and time just for you. What days and times work best?" Not all existing clients will be able to commit as their personal and professional schedules may vary too much, and that's understandable. Nonetheless, we value "regular" clients because they fill our schedule.

For many years, my staff and I would start reserving appointments for the following calendar year (January-December) in June. This

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hasn't happened yet because until recently, we questioned whether it's worth the effort, especially if we could be forced to abruptly close again. Based on two reopenings since March, one in late June and another in early October, we find most clients want to keep their previous schedule as much as possible. That California guidelines prohibit manicurists from providing simultaneous services remains the biggest obstacle to resuming our pre-pandemic routine; we don't anticipate being able to do so in the near future.

To focus on our compliance with state and local guidelines, we require clients read our new salon procedures and submit a waiver before we make their first reservation after reopening. Now that we've normalized these procedures and clients have responded positively, we'll move ahead with a goal of reserving 50-75% of our 2021 schedule with standing appointments. If clients already have standing appointments, there's not as much scheduling work to be done except for holidays or other conflicts that prompt a change. When infrequent or potential clients contact the salon to request an appointment, we can offer whatever times remain. New clients must prepay the entire cost of the service being reserved.

If you've relied primarily on walk-ins, there's more work to do initially. At a minimum, you should record the full name, email address and contact number for every client. (Ideally, you would capture that information for every person who contacts your business, whether they receive services or not.) Salon management software simplifies this process, but even without technology, you should list your clients in order of priority (frequency, dollars spent, seniority, etc.) with their preferred services, days and times. Starting with your most important

client, work down your list by offering and confirming reservations in your 2021 schedule. Once completed, you can determine your capacity to proactively engage both infrequent and new clients.

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