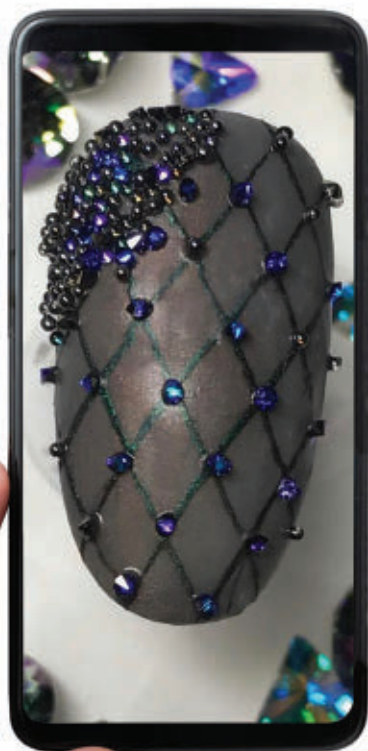




MANAGING CLIENT EXPECTATIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Do not be intimidated by clients requesting celebrity- or Instagram-inspired nail art—simply snag these expert techniques for nailing the proper preparation, communication and follow-through. // *By Tracy Morin*



You have probably been there: A client pops in toting an image of drool-worthy nail art—but there is no way you can complete such a set within your given time frame or skill set. Or they would cost a small fortune to properly pull off, leaving the client mortified by the final bill.

In today's trend-a-minute world, mismatched expectations can easily lead to uncomfortable situations, making advanced planning super important. "While these digital times bring artistic challenges never before seen—I actually had a client bring me nail art inspo in the form of a 3D-printed (as in, using a printer) nail—it has also never been easier to manage those expectations," notes Hillary Fry, nail artist and educator at Hillary Fry Nails in Brookfield, Wisconsin. "Take advantage of everything that is digital to understand client goals *before* they get to the salon."

3D nails by Hillary Fry, nail artist and educator at Hillary Fry Nails.

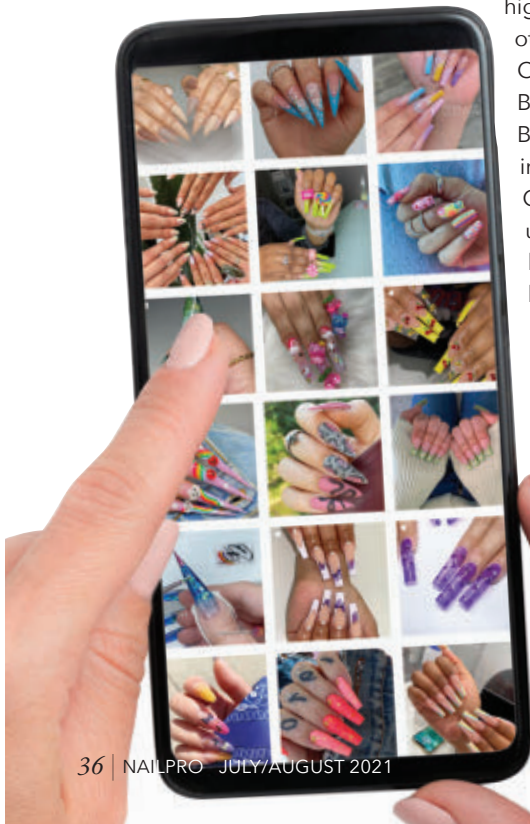


PREAPPOINTMENT POINTERS

Techs should clearly communicate service pricing and capabilities before clients even begin to book an appointment. “Use your online presence (website and social media) to publicize your services—with photos, service names, descriptions, the time required and price,” recommends Jaime Schrabec, Ph.D., licensed manicurist and owner of Precision Nails in Carmel, California. “Potential clients should understand what is possible and what is not. The more information you publicize, the less time you will waste negotiating to secure a new client.”

Laura Merzetti, owner and nail artist at Scratch My Back Nail Studio in Ajax, Ontario, Canada, uses her online booking portal to communicate with clients, offering a nail service labeled “Pinterest- or Instagram-inspired nails,” which has a

higher price point than other services. And Chris Davis, owner of Buff Salon and Buff Beauty Academy in Charlotte, North Carolina, also uses her online booking service to lay out the many possible options for nail art clients, from “Full Set



The Art of Adjustments

What if you find yourself facing a client expectation gone awry? Techs share their strategies to avoid awkwardness:

“If your new client turns up with a Pinterest- or Instagram-inspired picture of nails and your heart sinks, do not despair! First, do an assessment of the service. If her nails are too short, I say, ‘We can incorporate this particular art detail into your set today or the same colors.’ I try to always bring something from the photo into the service so she is not disappointed. It is important that the client understands why she cannot have that design today but that she may be able to in the future!”

—Laura Merzetti, owner/nail artist, *Scratch My Back Nail Studio, Ajax, Ontario, Canada*

“We just modify and simplify. We say, ‘Let’s do this really cool art on your two ring fingers,’ and the rest of the set can be simpler, which saves time. Also, give the client options. Say, ‘We can modify/simplify today to get them done, or we can reschedule for a future double-time appointment.’”

—Traci Dungan, owner, *ProFiles, Cape Coral, Florida*

“If a client does manage to slip in an unrealistic request (due to time, money or skill), you do not need to lose the sale. Offer alternate styles the client can leave with that day that mimic the look, as a ‘street trial.’ Also, always keep a couple of designs in your back pocket that are easier to apply to almost everyone and that can bring satisfaction to a client who wants nail art in a pinch. Or you can offer press-ons as a less stressful alternative.”

—Hillary Fry, nail artist and educator, *Hillary Fry Nails, Brookfield, Wisconsin*

Swarovski Bling Nails—Medium to Long” to “Encapsulated Full Set (Glitter, Mylar, Shards).”

“Things are spelled out to give every possible situation, with detailed info,” Davis explains. “It may seem wordy, but that gives me the ability to set expectations and give them what they want.” Alternatively, Fry notes that an online scheduling service can include an unpriced option for nail art, with a small description stating, “Extended time and pricing to be determined after consultation,” which tells the client this is not a typical in-and-out appointment.

Finally, Willem Avé, general manager of San Francisco-based Square Appointments, notes that nail art is more in demand than ever—Square saw a 461% increase from April 2020 to April 2021—so it is worth updating your website and booking pages with appointment timing and service prices. Then you can send customized appointment reminders conveying important details about the service, including a preview of any day-of add-on costs that clients may incur so there are no surprises.

CONSULTATION CHOICES

Fry advises completing a thorough consultation to answer key questions: What type of art does the client want, and what supplies will you need to complete it? Do you have the skill set for this request? If not, will you be up to the challenge by appointment time? Is the client's foundation—her nail plates—suitable for this look? Ask that she sends you a photo of the inspiration or similar looks, as well as one of her own hands and nails, and ask if she has had any problems with nail services in the past.

"All of this should happen well before appointment time and can be done via email, text or even by Zoom or FaceTime," Fry says. If a receptionist handles appointments, always follow up personally to confirm the information and inform the client of any other technicalities—i.e., if this look will require e-filing for removal.

Also, keep in mind that photo inspiration can have various interpretations. When Merzetti receives an image of the nails the client would like, she will ask herself: Can I do this design? If so, how much extra time will it take, and how much extra will it cost?

"Sometimes, I can do part of the design, but not all of it—or maybe I cannot do any of it—because I do not have the right products or skill," Merzetti explains. "If not, I ask the client, 'What about this style do you really like? Do you like the colors, the design on the ring finger, this type of glitter, that fade?' Perhaps they simply like the way the nails are shaped or the colors used."

With a better idea of what really caught the client's eye, you may be able to create an awesome alternative. "I find that most people are not 100% set on the actual design—if they trust you, they will be happy with what you create if you take

the time to really work with them," Merzetti says. "Sometimes, as nail techs, we are so overwhelmed with giving the client exactly what she asks for that we overlook the fact that we can make them just as happy with something less complicated! Flexibility is key." Finally, Fry advises, after the consultation, always verbally repeat and email details of the requested services, including agreed-upon pricing and estimated appointment time.

ADVANCED ART

If you are offering elaborate looks, you may have special considerations to keep in mind. At ProFiles, a 30-tech salon in Cape Coral, Florida, most clients bring pictures, but owner Traci Dungan doubles as receptionist, so she thoroughly questions new clients. "I know when they are asking for a full set to give them a little longer, especially a new client," she says. "We also have a service on our menu called 'Couture Nails'—basically, a double time slot for something more detailed. Most existing clients know to book that if they want something really crazy, like a lot of hand painting."

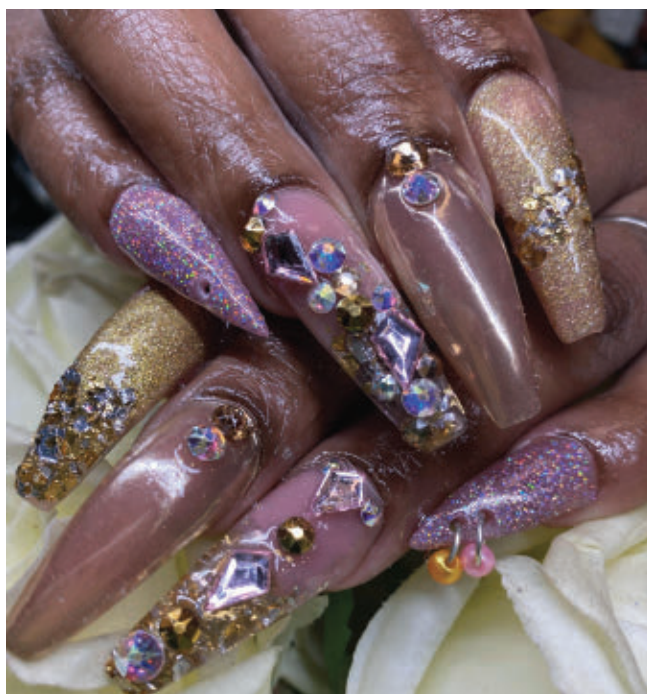
Similarly, Celine Cumming, a traveling freelance nail artist based in the greater Philadelphia area, specializes in detailed nail art, so she maintains a very specific strategy to deal with client expectations and timing. For both brand-new and return clients, she completes a consultation over text, Instagram direct message or email, asking the client what design idea she has in mind and encouraging her to send screenshots of inspiration pictures or pictures of the pattern or clothing items she wants her nails to match.

"When necessary, I brainstorm with them to finalize the idea, and I even sometimes hand-sketch designs with paper and pencil," Cumming says. "I like to be totally sure that the client and I are on the same page about the design before they arrive at their appointment." Once the design is finalized, Cumming provides a price quote and a time estimate for the appointment, and then she schedules it.

Davis also requests design pictures because she may need to source the appropriate products. For example, as a Swarovski educator, she explains to clients that there are various pricing levels for rhinestones, from affordable options to high-end. When she needs to purchase new rhinestone colors or sizes, she requires a 50% deposit and communicates that they are being purchased especially for that client.

However, if you are still a nail art newbie, sometimes it is all about reworking that elaborate look according to your own skill set—and the result may be something that clients can more reasonably wear in everyday life. "Create your own inspirations!" Fry recommends. "Sometimes an extravagant look can be entirely wearable, so it is worth plotting out the time for a rainmaker design. Plus, you can always find clients who want to be testers for new designs on social media. Having those testers will help you unleash more creativity and help you better understand your timing and costs." **NP**

Tracy Morin is a freelance writer and editor based in Oxford, Mississippi.



COURTESY OF CHRIS DAVIS

Buff Salon owner Chris Davis creates a set with Swarovski crystals.