

Quiet ACHIEVER

New Zealand's largest day spa chain, Formé Spa, has a consistent interior design style featuring white floating curtains and modern fittings across its nine locations.

Hady Wenham has taken New Zealand's Formé Spa from a single Auckland location to a chain of nine in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington in the same number of years. This success story unfolding in New Zealand is being driven by a strong grasp of target market and stunningly delivered brand concepts, as Nancy Lane reveals.



Hady Wenham, owner

In 2002, Hady Wenham left her advertising career to purchase Formé Beauty Therapy in Ponsonby, a suburb of Auckland. As a client of the spa, she loved the sense of calm and tranquillity, little knowing what went on behind the scenes to achieve it.

'There were many challenges in becoming a spa owner without a background in the industry,' says Hady. 'For example, with a manual system for appointments—book, pencil and rubber—it was difficult knowing how long treatments took, particularly multiple treatments. The team dynamics were also very different from a fast-paced and competitive advertising agency.'

Hady started by working on reception to learn the ropes before moving into an overall management role. Not being a beauty therapist enabled her to focus primarily on the business of growing the business.

Her initial approach was to transform the already successful business from beauty therapy and tanning into a day spa, incorporating a full renovation of the property followed by rebranding. At a practical level, this meant selling the sun beds even though they were generating steady income. Hady recognised the risk in turning away tanning clients but decided the service did not fit the tranquil environment she envisaged. The gamble paid off; clients appreciated these changes and the business experience a huge growth spurt.

Because Ponsonby was at near capacity, Hady chose her second location, Parnell, as another affluent inner city location. At the time, and still to a great extent, most of the New Zealand spa industry consisted of single-location owner operated businesses. Hady felt that there was opportunity to create

an up-market yet accessible day spa chain.

Since then, she has steadily grown the Formé Spa portfolio by acquiring existing beauty therapy businesses or starting new spas. 'Initially growth was fairly organic, based primarily on target locations,' says Hady. 'But we're now much more scientific in our location choice, using demographic overlays and market segmentation.'

'When we reached five spas, I saw the opportunity to be the largest player in the day spa market, and planned rapid expansion with four spas in 18 months. This has taken us to nine spas and over 50 treatment rooms—which was our goal based on the current market,' she says.

CREATING A BRAND

When an existing business was purchased, it underwent a full makeover to meet the

Formé brand standard. New spa fit-outs also followed the same format—from the design of the front desk and reception furniture, through to treatment room vanities, signature colours and finishing touches.

All the spas are located in villas or character buildings, and ‘warm chocolate’ interiors are complemented with white floating curtains and modern white fittings. Hady explains that clients are at home no matter which spa they visit due to the consistency in brand look and services. However, each spa does have additional service features like relaxation rooms or water modalities such as a couples’ claw-foot bath, Hydroco capsule, Geisha tub or large circular tub for two.



Hady’s background in advertising has come to the fore in building the Formé Spa brand. ‘In our industry, most salons and spas perceive advertising as an expensive luxury, and when they do advertise, it’s all about product or price without much focus on the experience,’ she says. In contrast, her significant investment in brand marketing, supported by tactical promotional advertising, has paid off with strong brand awareness, particularly at peak gift voucher buying times. Formé also shows appreciation for clients’ loyalty through a points-based reward system. ‘Branding is the tough stuff: the money is spent and the phone doesn’t ring, and many consultants in our

Formé Spas, all located in character buildings, provide a range of services that even incorporate injectables, IPL, Elos Skin Tightening, and Lumiere light therapy.



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industry will tell you it's a waste of time. But I believe you need to create desire through branding. Look at leading brands such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton: you don't see them advertising a handbag by saying it has three zips, a toggle catch and costs so many dollars. Instead, they create desire so that you desperately want to be associated with the brand, and price comes second. Of course, the experience then needs to measure up to the expectation.'

One of the factors contributing to the growth of Formé Spa is a lack of complacency. Hady says she is constantly on the lookout for new opportunities and ways to make improvements. She believes clients deserve to be surprised and delighted with both more and new ways to meet their needs.

A broad range of services has also enhanced Formé's reputation. In addition to facials with Bioelements and Environ, the spas offer high-tech options such as IPL photo rejuvenation, Elos Skin Tightening, Lumiere light therapy, peels and microdermabrasion. Hady explains that to fully round out their offerings she contracts with medical staff to provide injectables.

Recently, Spa Fresh Blends products were added to create a menu of spa rituals, which have also been well received by clients who appreciate the natural fragrances and textures that don't forsake luxury.

A PROMISING FUTURE

Beautiful spas and great products are only as good as the therapists delivering the spa experience according to Hady. 'We set high standards and coach teams to meet those standards. We provide continuous training in all aspects of the role, not just the hands-on therapy. Each staff member has a personal development plan, and we use both in-house and external trainers as part of our



Product lines Bioelements, Environ and Spa Fresh Blends are on the menu and in the boutique. BELOW: The ethereal promotional images of the Rose Bud Milk Bath and Mud Slide Body Wrap, two of Formé's new Heavenly Treatments.



everyday way of doing business.' Even in the small resource base of New Zealand, Hady says that they generally have strong response rates to recruitment advertising. 'Because of the strength of the Formé brand and its reputation in the marketplace, recruitment of therapists as well as spa managers has been easy. We have put in place a rigorous, multi-step interview process to ensure the fit is right both for the candidate and our company,' she says."

From this strong foundation, the inevitable question is 'What's next?'

'Nearly every week I get asked if I will consider franchising,' says Hady, 'but the model of all spas being company owned is working just fine. I also get asked whether we will be opening in Australia. It's flattering but a bit unrealistic, as there are already lots

of great spas there. While the thought of a global brand is certainly appealing, I think we'll leave that one on the drawing board for this week,' she says with a chuckle.

So does that mean Hady has further plans for expansion in New Zealand? 'Now that would be telling,' she laughs, 'but best said, we don't sit still!'

FORMÉ SPAS ARE LOCATED IN AUCKLAND (ALBANY, MT EDEN, PARNELL, PONSONBY, TAKAPUNA, REMUERA), WELLINGTON (CENTRAL, NGAIO) AND HAMILTON. FORMESPA.CO.NZ, +64 9 4899 769

Heavenly Creativity

This year, Formé launched a new treatment menu, which is accompanied by a striking brand campaign revolving around the concept of seven heavenly treatments. Three of these treatments use the newly added product offerings of Australian brand Spa Fresh Blends. The Rose Bud Milk Bath, Wild Lime & Coconut Sugar Scrub and Mud Slide Body Wrap are all represented as part of a beautifully photographed campaign. The concept evolved very quickly after a brainstorming session with an art director who specialised in women's brands. 'The campaign promotes the message that these treatments are special—not that they are on special!' Hady says pointedly.

Dr Nancy Lane has lived and worked in the United States, Australia and Asia. She has written and edited books and journals in a number of fields, including road safety, science communication and librarianship, as well as health and wellbeing. She has launched her own seaweed-based skincare line and written nailcare training manuals. Nancy is currently writing a book and developing a program designed to support people wanting to make positive, healthy changes to their lifestyle.

