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Forward-thinking retreat

Word of mouth, an attractive web presence and some good business advice have helped Antonia Burrell build on the initial success of her health and beauty salon Eden Retreat. Carinya Sharples reports

When Antonia Burrell was made redundant, after the skincare company she was working for went bankrupt, she decided to seize the opportunity to start her own business in the industry she loves. As a result, today Antonia runs Eden Retreat, a successful beauty, health and well-being salon based in Lewisham's Fitness First gym. With the support and marketing advice of Lewisham Business Advisory Service (BAS), business for Antonia promises only to get even healthier.

It is no wonder that visitors to Eden Retreat keep coming back since the range of treatments on offer is huge – including eight types of facial, massage, manicures, pedicures, permanent hair reduction, acne treatment, skin consultations, electrolysis, seaweed wraps, slimming treatments and even, by the end of the year, non-surgical face-lifting treatments.

"We have lots of regulars," says Antonia. "They come back every fortnight or once a month and because they are really happy with the service, they recommend family and friends to come too. We've really grown by word of mouth." Eden Retreat's specialised knowledge of treatments for black skin, a rare feature in most salons, has also proved especially popular with the black communities in the Lewisham and Catford area.

"Many people think black skin is quite robust but in fact it's sensitive. It scars easily; is thicker than white and so more oily, even though it can also be very dry," explains Antonia.

Antonia remembers the early days of the salon as "a one-man band – with me working from 10 in the morning, until 8 at night". As business blossomed, it became necessary to employ more people and now Eden Retreat consists of a team of experienced therapists working in the nestful treatment rooms. A fully qualified beauty therapist, assessor, teacher and internal verifier within the industry, Antonia has 14 years of experience. Yet the opportunity to improve her business even further was one she was keen to take advantage of.



IT'S MY BUSINESS

Offering free, confidential advice and support for both start-up and more established businesses, the BAS assisted Antonia to build on her success by providing advice on developing and promoting Eden Retreat. The support and suggestions she received from her Business Advisor Catriona Campbell, says Antonia, have helped immensely.

As well as assisting with marketing ideas for both internal and external promotion, Catriona was able to help Antonia to set up a website for Eden Retreat. "I went in and did a brief with the BAS to show what I was aiming for," says Antonia. "The content was already done so it was a matter of transferring information on to something that I wanted design-wise." Although it has only been up and running for two months, Antonia has already noticed the website having a positive impact. Very pleased with its sleek and professional style, Antonia says the website gives the salon something great to live up to.

Graham Hart, Business Services Manager at the BAS, which is a part Lewisham Council-funded initiative, summarises the kinds of help offered to those within the borough of Lewisham. "We offer training and support especially to businesses just starting up, as well as one-to-one advice to existing enterprises in the area. The marketing and business development we were able to offer Antonia is a good example of the sort of assistance we can provide to established businesses. There is no charge for the services and the time we can offer can vary from a one-hour individual session to help over a few days, depending on the needs of the business at that time." With many businesses approaching the Opening Doors Office in Lewisham town centre, the service will provide information advice and support to around 100 businesses this year.

For Antonia the future is bright and full of fresh ideas. She is determined to realise her long-standing dream of opening a beauty school and is also very keen to open an Eden Retreat day spa.

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