

Salons and Spas Go Digital Amid Coronavirus Closures

Practices are turning to virtual consultations and telemedicine, simultaneously bolstering online sales.

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[Salons](#) and spas are turning to digital in response to the government's mandate to close personal-care businesses due to the [coronavirus](#).

Hair-care brand Bleach London, which has temporarily closed its three London [salons](#) due to COVID-19, will soon host a virtual "hair party" series. The digital party will guide customers on how to dye their hair at home — "self-dye-solation," to use the brand's term — featuring appearances from clients such as Georgia May Jagger and Pixie Geldof. Users are granted access to the series after purchasing products on Bleach London's web site.

Aestheticians and dermatologists are pivoting to Instagram and virtual consultations, though each has a different philosophy and approach.

Revenue from digital consultations doesn't offset the cost of staying in business, but it does help, said Joanna Vargas, celebrity facialist and founder of Joanna Vargas Salons and her eponymous skin-care line.

"It's helpful, but there's no way it could make up for being open," said Vargas of virtual consultations. "The salons really need to be open. I have a 15,000 square-foot salon in the middle of Manhattan that's closed. I have 70 people working for me that aren't working, except for a couple of people."

Vargas is offering virtual consultations for \$70, gifting each client \$100 in credit for future treatments, purchases or gifts. She has also opened a text line for clients seeking skin advice.

So far, her digital efforts are paying off. Joanna Vargas Skin Care sales increased by 251 percent between March 14 and March 20, said Vargas.

Dermatologists' offices haven't been required to close — dermatology qualifies as an essential business — but some are choosing to practice via **telemedicine**.

"I use it for clients abroad," said Dr. David Colbert, board-certified dermatologist and founder of New York Dermatology Group, of the virtual practice. "We've always had **telemedicine**. Now it's in the spotlight."

Discussion of elective procedures like CoolSculpting and Botox haven't slowed despite clients' confinement to their homes.

"Just because they're elective [procedures] doesn't mean we can't talk about it," said Dr. Colbert. "I have clients going onto my web site and purchasing packages for when this crazy thing is over."

He estimated sales of his skin-care line, Colbert MD, had increased roughly 25 percent since COVID-19 began.

Facialist Joanna Czech has also started offering virtual consultations for \$300 for 30 minutes. She has had to lower her team members' salaries in order to retain all of her employees.

"People say your client is the most important person, but if your employee is not happy, then there will never be a happy client," said Czech.

For larger practices, digital consultations translate to a temporary bump in revenue to put toward larger looming costs, such as rent. Smaller practices, though, are finding that virtual initiatives could make or break whether they will eventually reopen.

"It's going to be tough on a lot of businesses," said Pekar, who is currently looking to expand her product offerings. "Some of us will make it, some of us won't." Pekar is also hosting complimentary digital consultations in the interim, while also making herself available for regular clients to reach out with specific questions or inquiries.

Pekar has also been posting at-home, naturopathic tips to her Instagram feed. Instagram seems to be the tool providers are employing the most, if only to invest in long-term client relationships. Joanna Vargas has also been working on masterclass videos with her team of estheticians (recently, she taught the art of the facial massage on an Instagram Live). Joanna Czech and Aida Bicaaj are posting tutorials and answering treatment-related questions. Dr. David Colbert will be joining their ranks soon, too.

"Every few days, I'm going to try to come up with something creative to give people content," said Dr. Colbert. "Just to help people fight off their demons, and to make them feel better."