



Carving Out a Niche

An elegant concept and hands-on approach shape Hand & Stone franchisee Tanya Christie's success

By Kym Wolfe

Tanya Christie is a bit of an original. As a franchisee, her first year was unique in that she was Canada's very first Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa franchisee.

Hand & Stone provides affordably priced, high quality massage and facial services, performed by Registered Massage Therapists and licensed estheticians. Christie was drawn to the franchise after experiencing

an amazingly relaxing massage in the franchisor's flagship spa in Thornhill, Ontario. "I liked the atmosphere and the ambience. To be able to provide a professional and affordable massage in a really warm and inviting atmosphere, it's a unique niche in the market. No one else is offering what we do in the elegant way we do it."

Christie liked it so much, she ended up purchasing the Thornhill location. She took

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– Tanya Christie, Hand & Stone Franchisee

over the spa in March 2010 after taking extensive training in day-to-day operations of running the spa: the specialized computer programs, reporting requirements, marketing campaigns, and more. Another big attraction to Hand & Stone was not having to go through “the arduous, time consuming and expensive exercise of carefully selecting everything from concept, logo and colours to equipment and computer systems” that an independent businessperson would face. Instead, she started with a proven model and track record, plus training and support. “I was able to hit the ground running and grow my business from day one.”

Her top priorities were to immerse herself in the Hand & Spa system, and to learn every position so that she could manage staff with a hands-on understanding of the work they were doing.

“For the first six months I worked seven days a week, doing all the jobs from front desk to laundry. I wanted to

understand every aspect of the spa,” Christie recalls. “Then I’d go home and run reports so I could really understand the data and could look at ways to run things more efficiently and effectively.”

She also used this time to figure out what she really enjoyed and did well, and what tasks she would have staff look after. “As important as knowing your strengths is to acknowledge weaknesses,” she says. “You cannot do everything well; learn to delegate. Focus on what you do well and give responsibility and accountability for the rest to your staff.” So after the first six months, Christie turned her focus to the areas that she wanted to excel in.

Christie discovered a love for marketing and promotion, something she had not done previously. For 25 years she had worked for a major Canadian bank in a variety of positions, from foreign exchange to being the director of an anti-money laundering department. While she thinks that coming into a

franchise with a background in the industry would probably have led to a faster learning curve, she says she’s proof that “even without it people can be successful. A good franchisor like Hand & Stone will give you the basics to understand your business and beyond that it’s up to you. It’s amazing how many people have readily transferable skills that are highly applicable to completely different careers and don’t even recognize it. What you really need is passion and commitment.”

She also enjoys interacting with clients and potential clients, and looking at new ways to be of value to them. She says the best part of owning the spa is that her services really make a difference to people. She even introduced a new service in response to a client need she had identified.

“I wanted to pioneer the half-hour Express appointment for clients who wanted to get back to their desk on time,” she explains, and she feels fortunate to be with a franchisor that is supportive of franchisees’ taking initiative. “I presented the idea, name, and pricing to my franchisor. Within 72 hours we had the codes and pricing in the system, and my franchisor designed a window poster that was in place before the week ended. The Express is now expanding franchise-wide.”

Looking back to her first year, Christie says the biggest challenges were



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THE FIRST YEAR



Christie's advice for new franchisees is to find the right staff. "Be firm with your probation period and provide consistent, constructive feedback so people know what to adjust."

hiring the right staff, and learning to let go so that she was not dealing with details that her staff could take care of. When hiring initially, she says, "It's hard to wait for just the right person when you need staff now. In the end, it's a balancing act between getting enough staff to make sure the business runs, but still ensuring you don't hire too precipitously only to regret it later. Our policy now: hire slowly to know who you are getting, fire fast if it's not the right choice. Be firm with your probation period and provide consistent, constructive feedback so people know what to adjust."

She can now reap the benefits of having an effective staff team in place. "I can work remotely from home to do reports and payroll, and can plan my commute to miss the rush hours. Most importantly I can take time for family. I had the freedom to restructure my working hours to take care of my mother last year when she was dying."

Christie has other advice for franchisees who are in their start up year: "Watch the pennies – spending a few dollars here and there doesn't seem to be a big deal, but multiply it by each purchase over a year and you'll be amazed at the

total. Learn to be gracious with clients but not let them take advantage of you, and never let anyone bully your staff. If I were to do it again, I would be more selective in my advertising and give away fewer freebies. Know your area – this is the source of your income and the target of your advertising and promotion. Drive every neighbourhood, talk to everybody, get out and have a bite in local restaurants, go to the local community centres and check out the programs, find out what sports are avidly played or followed. Where are the schools, libraries, churches, synagogues, mosques? How many seniors, young families, professionals?" An added bonus of conducting this market research, she adds, is that "You may well find your staff in these adventures, since it's smart to hire people who speak the language, literally or culturally, of your clientele."

Christie finds it helpful that the franchisor arranges meetings with other Hand & Stone Spa owners several times each year. "We meet as a group to learn from each

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Christie (pictured left) says one of the highlights of spa ownership is interacting with clients and finding new ways to be of value to them.

When Christie opened her spa, Hand & Stone was an emerging brand in Canada; now there are nine locations. She's hopeful that other Canadian franchisees have benefited from the groundwork that she laid. "We want each location to be strong and successful for the benefit of all. Every new Hand & Stone gives us more credibility, visibility and legitimacy as a force in the market. The key is simple: people like what we do and we do it well." 🍀

other – what worked, what challenges we faced, our different approaches, successful as well as dud campaigns and strategies. We have a broad range of skills we readily share. I had never used Facebook, and another franchisee came to my spa, sat me down and walked me through it. Once a year we attend a conference with all the North American locations and there is so much to learn and share, both in the organized seminars and in the informal time spent talking to other owners."

HAND & STONE STATS

Franchise Units Canada: 9 **USA:** 100
In Business Since: 2008
Franchising Since: 2008
Franchise Fee: \$39K
Investment Required: \$359K-\$483K
Available Territories: All of Canada
Training: Three weeks
CFA Member Since: 2008
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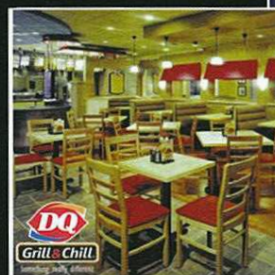
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