



After running her own salon, Claire Hibbert has launched a tool to help other businesses benefit

CLAIRE HIBBERT SAYS QUALIFICATIONS ARE NO LONGER ENOUGH TO MAKE A GOOD THERAPIST. THEY ALSO NEED EXCELLENT NETWORKING SKILLS AND BUSINESS ACUMEN

# MORE THAN EDUCATION

Claire Hibbert originally worked in the recruitment and computer games industries before illness forced her to make a career change. Hibbert took the plunge and fulfilled life-long ambitions of caring for people and running her own business by training in beauty therapy and setting up The Body Clinic in Swindon. She is also co-founder and director of *icomplete*, an integrated business management solution that is specifically designed for those running small salons.

## What made you train in beauty therapy?

I came to the industry relatively late at the age of 30. I've always worked in people-related industries, though. While I was working in computer games, I contracted an eye infection and had to give up my job. I wanted to do something nurturing, which helped people feel a sense of calm and relaxation.

## What sort of training did you do?

I trained at Swindon College of Beauty Therapy and also took an Itec course in massage aromatherapy

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and an IHT (International Institute for Holistic Therapies & Vibrational Healing) qualification in reflexology and Indian head massage. But prior to that I did an A-Level in business studies.

## Did this help you when you set up your salon?

Yes. Lots of therapists aren't business savvy and I wanted to be as prepared as possible. It's crucial to know how to balance the books and to have some experience in sales and marketing too.

## What was the hardest part of setting it up?

Finding the right team fit. Therapists also need good teamworking skills. Salon owners can encourage this by organising regular in-house training and role plays. This way therapists can share information, it gets them involved and it makes them feel like they are making a valuable contribution.

## How did you maintain high standards?

Before I set up the salon I did extensive market research and studied the best salons in the area so I could duplicate and enhance what they were

## icomplete helps owners to know and grow their salon

What has the response been so far in the beauty industry?

Following the news of the launch in the *Professional Beauty* e-newsletter in April [sign up by emailing [professionalbeauty@emap.com](mailto:professionalbeauty@emap.com)] we've had an excellent response and we're working with a number of beauty salons who are keen to have it.

## What is your advice to someone wanting to open up their own salon?

The key is education and building up business skills. Start by taking courses with local colleges or with Business Link. Enquire at the local Chamber of Commerce for networking and relationship-building events. Encouraging and establishing partnerships with businesses with a similar purpose to yours is essential. For example, I targeted hair salons and bridal shops where there is a need for beauty services. Through this you can also share advertising and help one another grow.

## Will you go back to beauty therapy work in the future?

I miss the caring aspect, but I think that I've taken my career to the next level now. The next stage would be to possibly go into lecturing so that I could use my experience to help others and pass on the knowledge that I've accumulated. **FB**

Interview: Sophia Cottier

doing. After opening the salon, I sent my therapists to mystery shop the competition. The therapists could then pick up ideas on how to improve any weak areas and could identify what worked and what didn't. They didn't always have treatments; visiting the reception area was also valuable.

## How did you create the idea of icomplete?

While I was running The Body Clinic I identified some of the problems that small salons faced, such as a lack of reception support, the inefficient updating of and poor access to client records and a high volume of client no-shows. Most salon owners tend to invest heavily in the therapists but neglect the administrative side and reception area.

## How does the package work?

*icomplete* is an integrated business management solution that uses PA services, telecoms and applications. I wanted to create something that actually helps small salon owners to grow their businesses, save them money and upgrade the image of the business professionally.