ACROSS THE TABLE

BUSINESS CONSULTING

INDUSTRY STACK 16 · SALON / SPA

The Salon and Spa Stack

Seven systems for a business where the whole economy is whether they rebook before they leave.

Knowledge Article I16

AI Stack Series · acrossthetable.biz

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WHO THIS IS FOR

You run a salon, spa, barbershop, nail studio or wellness practice. You sell time in a chair or a room, your capacity is fixed, and an empty slot is revenue that cannot be recovered.

This guide is for the owner who is busy some weeks and quiet others and wants the schedule to be fuller more predictably.

It applies whether your stylists are employed or renting chairs; the rebooking maths is the same either way.

START WITH THE WORK, NOT WITH THE APPS

These are not twenty lists of AI apps. Each stack starts with the jobs a particular business performs, then matches AI and conventional software to those jobs. Treat it as a menu to evaluate, not a shopping list.

For this kind of business the work runs in one line, start to finish:

> **THE PATH THE WORK TAKES**
> Discovery → Appointment → Service → Rebooking → Loyalty

Broken into the steps a customer actually moves through:

- Discovery
- Appointment
- Service
- Payment
- Rebook
- Review
- Loyalty

Read that line left to right. Somebody finds you, books, is served, pays, and the whole business depends on what happens in the ninety seconds after that.

Here is the economics in one sentence: an empty chair hour is gone forever, and the cheapest way to fill next month is to book this client before they walk out the door. Rebooking rate is the single most important number in this industry, and most salons do not measure it.

THE STACK, PIECE BY PIECE

Every tool below is matched to one of those steps. You do not need all of them, and you should not buy all of them at once. Read the “What it is” column first and find the step where your business is losing the most time or money.

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Tool	The step it covers	What it is	Price
Vagaro	Appointments and operations	Booking, payments, marketing and staff management for salons and spas.	Per employee/month.
Mindbody	Alternative booking platform	Booking and business management for wellness and fitness businesses.	Per month by plan.
Square	Payments	Card payments, POS hardware and simple business tools.	Percentage per transaction.
Canva	Marketing	Design everything else — decks, social posts, flyers, simple video — with AI help built in.	Free tier; Pro per user/month.
Mailchimp / Klaviyo	Retention	Email campaigns, automations and audiences.	Free tier; per month by contacts. / Per month by contacts.
ChatGPT	Campaign ideas and content	OpenAI's general assistant — writing, analysis, research and, with Agent mode, multi-step work.	Free tier; paid plans per user/month.
QuickBooks	Accounting	The small-business accounting standard — books, invoicing, reporting.	Per month by plan.

Where two names share a row with a slash between them, they do the same job and you pick one, not both. The description shows the first of the two.

You need one booking platform, not two — the first two rows are alternatives to each other. Pick the one that fits your service mix and staff model.

What to watch out for in each one

None of these are reasons not to buy. They are the things owners tell us they wish they had known first.

- Vagaro — Add-ons per feature.
- Mindbody — Priced above what a small studio expects.
- Square — Per-transaction fees. Watch chargebacks.

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- Canva — Easy to drift off-brand. Lock a brand kit.
- Mailchimp — Costs climb with list size.
- Klaviyo — Priced by profile count.
- ChatGPT — It sounds confident when it’s wrong. Check anything that touches money, law or a customer.
- QuickBooks — Only as clean as your categorization habits.

WHERE AI ACTUALLY FITS IN THIS BUSINESS

Appointment reminders, rebooking campaigns, personalized marketing, review responses, service education.

In plain terms, that means:

- Writing the reminder and confirmation messages that cut no-shows, in a tone that sounds like your salon.
- Building the rebooking campaign for clients who are overdue based on their own service interval.
- Drafting replies to reviews, including the difficult ones, without sounding defensive.
- Writing the service descriptions and aftercare notes that clients actually keep.
- Grouping clients by what they book so promotions reach people who want that service.

What AI cannot do in this business is the part clients pay for — the hands, the eye and the conversation. Use it on the admin so your team spends more time on the chair and less on the phone.

WHAT TO SET UP FIRST

Do these in order. Finish one before you start the next. Most owners who try to do all of it in one month end up using none of it.

1. **Put booking online and keep one calendar** Online booking fills slots at hours you are not answering the phone, and one calendar prevents the double-book that costs you a client.
2. **Turn on reminders** Automated confirmations and reminders are the highest-return single setting in this industry. No-shows fall immediately.
3. **Measure rebooking rate** Your software can tell you what share of clients leave with their next appointment booked. Know that number, then work on it.
4. **Build the overdue campaign** Clients who have not been in for longer than their usual interval are the easiest revenue available. A message at the right moment brings a meaningful share of them back.

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5. **Then add retail and loyalty** Product sales and loyalty programs raise the value of a visit once the visits are reliable.

WHAT IT COSTS TO START

Booking platforms are priced per month, often by how many staff or service providers you have. Some take a cut of bookings made through their own marketplace — understand that before you rely on their discovery, because it is a different cost shape from a monthly fee.

Payments are a percentage of each transaction. On smaller average tickets that percentage matters more than it does for a trade business, so compare it properly.

The thing worth spending on is not features; it is the reminder system and the rebooking reporting. Those pay for the whole stack.

The price column in the table above tells you how each one charges — per user, per location, per contact, or a percentage of every sale — not what you will pay. That is deliberate. The charging model is what decides whether a tool stays affordable as you grow, and it is the part that does not change every quarter. Get the current dollar figure from the vendor's own pricing page before you budget.

THE RULES UNDERNEATH ALL OF IT

Legal · Privacy · Data protection · Security · Compliance · Records · Audit · Risk · Human oversight — underneath every one of the twenty stacks, not an afterthought.

Client records may include skin conditions, allergies and treatment notes. That is sensitive personal information and belongs in your booking system, not in a notebook or a group chat.

If your services are licensed — cosmetology, massage, aesthetics — your board's record-keeping rules apply, including consent forms for certain treatments.

Text message marketing requires consent and an opt-out. Reminders about an appointment the client booked are different from promotions; know which you are sending.

If stylists rent chairs, be clear about who owns the client record. Write it into the agreement before it becomes a dispute.

MISTAKES THAT COST THE MOST

- Taking bookings by phone and direct message only, and losing the people who would have booked at ten at night.
- Not measuring rebooking rate, which means not managing the number that matters most.
- Letting clients leave without their next appointment because nobody asks.
- Running the same promotion to everyone instead of to the people who book that service.
- Leaving client treatment notes somewhere that is not a secured system.

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THE CEO DECISION

- What is your rebooking rate? If you cannot answer, start there.
- What is your no-show rate, and are reminders turned on?
- How many clients are overdue right now against their own usual interval?
- What share of bookings come in outside business hours?
- If a stylist left, who keeps the client relationship, and what does the agreement say?

YOUR QUICK REVIEW

- ☐ Clients can book online, any hour.
- ☐ Automated reminders are on for every appointment.
- ☐ I know my rebooking rate and watch it monthly.
- ☐ Overdue clients get a message at the right interval.
- ☐ Client treatment notes live in a secured system.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tool	Where to find it	What it is for
Vagaro	www.vagaro.com	Owner-operated shops with a handful of chairs.
Mindbody	www.mindbodyonline.com	Studios with classes, memberships and packages.
Square	squareup.com	Selling in person without a merchant-account project.
Canva	www.canva.com	Small teams with no designer who still need consistent-looking work.
Mailchimp / Klaviyo	mailchimp.com / www.klaviyo.com	General small-business email marketing.
ChatGPT	chatgpt.com	Your default thinking partner when you want one tool that does most jobs well.
QuickBooks	quickbooks.intuit.com	Clean books your accountant already knows how to read.
Across the Table AI Assessment	acrossthetable.biz/#assessment	Fifteen minutes. Tells you which job to start with before you buy

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Tool	Where to find it	What it is for
		anything.
The Scaling Edge	acrossthetablebiz.substack.com	Weekly newsletter for owners without a business background.

Go deeper on the pieces

Each of these is a full guide comparing the three tools that do that job:

- Market by email — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/market-by-email/ (covers Mailchimp, Klaviyo)
- Ask and reason — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/ask-and-reason/ (covers ChatGPT)
- Make the deck — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/make-the-deck/ (covers Canva)
- Manage the money — acrossthetable.biz/knowledge-articles/manage-the-money/ (covers QuickBooks)

CONTINUE LEARNING

The Across the Table AI Assessment takes fifteen minutes and starts from the work the business performs.

The guides above compare the tools for each job.

READ AND CONNECT WITH ACROSS THE TABLE

Across the Table website: https://acrossthetable.biz

The Scaling Edge newsletter: https://acrossthetablebiz.substack.com

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@AcrossTheTableConnie

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