

Healthy glow for tanning salon chain after record results

Ambitious expansion plan allows Indigo Sun to shine during post-pandemic boom

Tanning salon chain Indigo Sun has reported its best ever results, recording a turnover of more than £26 million and almost £5.6 million profit in its latest financial year.

Both turnover and profits of the family-owned Scottish business have doubled on the previous financial period, when performance was hampered by months of Covid lockdowns.

However, owners of the firm, headquartered in Stirling, say the impressive figures far outstrip performance even in pre-Covid years, giving the business a platform for an ambitious period of expansion.

Frank Taylor, 72, the founder and CEO of Indigo Sun, said: "In 2022 we saw full freedom from Covid closures. As the economy reopened, our customers were determined to get back to normal and to go on holiday with great enthusiasm.

"That was a clear signal for our customers to return to our salons. They did so in such numbers that during peak periods in 2022 we were serving 140,000 people a week.

"While those lockdown months were extremely tough, we used that time to look ahead. We set out plans to expand by 10 salons a year once business resumed."

As well as opening new salons, the group has also embarked on a refitting and refurbishment programme, bring a new and upmarket beach club aesthetic to its salons, which has proved a major hit with customers.

Between February 2020 and September 2022, Indigo Sun opened 14 new salons and refurbished another 10, with each refit costing an average £350,000. Of those 24 salons 15 are in England and nine in Scotland.

It means the firm now operates almost 100 tanning venues across the UK, employing 817 people. Most of the venues are 1000-2000 sq ft and on average offer 12 tanning booths. Frank, who runs the business with wife Sadie and their son Ewan, says a critical element of the ongoing success is the ability to identify the best locations.

Now established as the biggest tanning chain the UK, Indigo Sun has also positioned itself as a sought-after tenant for commercial landlords and property managers operating retail outlets on major arterial routes inside towns and cities.

Typically, those are anchored by smaller supermarkets operated by the likes of Aldi, Tesco, Asda or M&S, with other outlets on the site including popular coffee shops such as Costa, pharmacies like Boots and popular fast-food outlets, such as KFC or Greggs.

With its younger customer base and large footfall – Indigo Sun customers spend an average of £500 on tanning per year – the chain is now a prime target for such developments, which are within town or city limits, but sit outside of traditional town centres.

He added: “We have found the perfect niche for our salons. These locations are very much about convenience. Customers drive in and can see the full retail offering in front of them, be it a supermarket, a coffee shop or a pharmacy.

“They may spend as little as 30 minutes in these retail centres – including a sunbed session – and then head on their way. That is perfect for what they need and want.”

Currently stretching from Inverness to London, the group’s continued expansion will see it focus on towns or population centres with around 100,000 people. In bigger cities, it will look to create clusters of salons, for more streamlined management.

Serial entrepreneur Frank set up the business after running a successful chain of video rental stores. Early on he spotted the threat posed by DVDs and online streaming, so exited the business and transformed his shops into tanning salons instead. The first was launched in Stirling in 1993.

He is a passionate advocate of safe tanning and supporter of industry organisation The Sunbed Association, which seeks to battle misinformation about tanning salons and indoor tanning equipment.

He also highlights the health-giving properties of safe tanning, particularly with regard to vitamin D.

