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## **Dermatologist Starts from Scratch to Build Four-Clinic Practice**

Dr. Anais Badia started her dermatology practice with an answering machine and a Yellow Pages ad. Now she's zeroing in on \$6 million in annual sales.

Top 500, No. 432

A freshly minted dermatology resident in 2000, Dr. Anais Badia quickly realized she wanted to run her own practice. She also knew

once she completed her residency in Albany, N.Y., she wanted to return to her native South Florida.

"I interviewed with a lot of practices, but I didn't find what I wanted in terms of the total package," she says.

So she decided to create her own.

At a glance:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>% Growth</b>
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2015	\$4.22M	
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2016	\$4.79M	13.5%
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2017	\$5.9M	23.2%
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After settling on the Fort Myers area, the Miami native began researching, mostly by telephone, learning the wait to see a dermatologist here was measured in months – in some cases longer than a year. And that was if the clinics were accepting new patients at all.

Finding the market promising, Badia found space to rent across the street from her first and primary location off Metro Parkway, near Lee Memorial Hospital. She then spent \$800 on a Yellow Pages ad, eight months in advance and from 1,400 miles away, began taking reservations for appointments by answering machine for July 2001.

The plan worked. Says Badia: "I saw 13 patients the first day."

Such was the modest beginning of Florida Skin Center, now with locations in Fort Myers, Cape Coral, Lehigh Acres and Punta Gorda. It has a database of more than 78,000 patients.

### **Focus on service**

Armed with no formal business education, the founder and president of the dermatology practice has relied on instincts and

her own market research to form expansion strategies. With a full-time staff of 40, she has steadily grown Florida Skin Center into a \$5.9 million business in 2017, up nearly 40% in revenues from \$4.22 million in 2016.

"Our big focus is customer service," Badia says. "That is how we've been able to grow. Our focus is on the patients and making sure they receive high-quality care in a comfortable environment. I go to a lot of doctors, and they are great doctors, but the customer service side doesn't seem to be as important as we make it here."

On a daily basis, the original Florida Skin Center office, 13691 Metropolis Ave., Fort Myers, is a beehive of activity with patients of all ages. Badia, in addition to treating adults, is one of the few pediatric dermatology specialists in the region. On the second floor is an in-house lab and surgery suite for Mohs, a microscopic surgery for some kinds of skin cancer.

It's a far cry from her first day in 2001, when Badia was a one-woman shop.

"I was doing everything at first, answering the phone, checking patients in and checking them out," says Badia. "It grew very quickly, so I began looking into having my own building. I knew that the hospital here was going to be expanding, so I thought this was a great area. I found this property, and four years after I opened in 2001, I built this building."

Construction and expansion of Florida Skin Center is a family affair. Badia's mother is an engineer, architect and building contractor, and her father is an engineer. Together, they have identified, designed and built or renovated all four offices. She incorporated a separate entity, which owns all four buildings.

Badia determined the viability of the locations, she says, mostly by listening to her patients, and through some "secret shopper" sleuthing.

"Many of our patients were asking if we could come to Cape Coral, so that was the next natural step," says Badia. "I started calling around to see what the wait times were and what services were offered."

Badia purchased, renovated and opened the Cape Coral office in 2012, and soon set her sights on Lehigh Acres, again based on customer requests.

"Lehigh is very underserved medically," says Badia. "A lot of other physicians discouraged me from going there because they didn't think it was that big of a need, but we found it to be great. They really need bi-lingual physicians in that area, so we helped fill that need."

The Lehigh Acres office opened in 2016 and the fourth in Punta Gorda in June, after more secret shopping.

"I knew that was a great opportunity because it is still sort of an undiscovered area," says Badia. "I called dermatologists there to see about making appointments and they told me they could not see me for a year-and-a-half or they weren't taking new patients."

## **'Additional treatments'**

Practicing medicine and growing a business require divergent skill sets, not to mention considerable time commitments. For some 15 years, after seeing patients during the day and running operations, Badia spent nights and weekends focusing on business plans and growth strategies.

Finally relenting to her own limitations, she hired George Gulisano as CEO 18 months ago.

"He is an accountant by trade," Badia says of Gulisano. "Prior to that there was a lot of guesswork on where we should focus, and I think that has been a big change. I had to figure out if we can we afford to make a change and how long before we can move to the next project. I love practicing dermatology, but I also love the business side. I love building new ideas and adding different revenue sources for the practice."

Gulisano's presence doesn't mean Badia is removing herself from developing growth strategies. Quite the opposite. "The beautiful thing about having more administrative people who can take that time from me is I now have more time to think of new ideas and what we can do to better serve our patients," she says.

Florida Skin Center's growth hasn't always come easily. Badia says the Lehigh Acres opening was delayed because she didn't have enough available staff to run the office. "I think we met a little bit of a ceiling there, but we were able to hire some people like George who can help us better strategize, and that has helped us in our recent growth," Badia says.

The growth of the business and its commitment to community service – free skin checks are one example – has not gone unnoticed. In April, Badia received the Florida Southern Regions, U.S. Small Business Administration National Small Business Person of the Year award. Last year, she was named the 2017 Distinguished Entrepreneur of Southwest Florida by the Florida Small Business Development Center at Florida Gulf Coast University. In 2016 she received the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Achievement award.

Florida Skin Center remains in growth mode, but Badia says expansion, at least for now, does not include additional brick and mortar. Instead, she is developing plans to expand the practice within the walls it already has.

"Maybe expanded hours, adding Saturday hours, bringing in more specialists like a leg vein doctor or a plastic surgery," she says of the possibilities. "What additional treatments can we offer to patients within the confines we have?"

The answers to those questions may lie with a few more secret phone calls.

**(<https://www.businessobserverfl.com/article/dermatologist-starts-from-scratch-to-build-four-clinic-practice>)**