

Trend TRACKER

BY ECHO SURINA

For years, consumers have been finding ways to bring the spa experience home, from meditation gardens in the backyard to massage recliners in the living room. A market saturated with high-quality products and a waning economy make it more important now than ever for spas to savvy up and give consumers good reason to seek professional services. Progressive spas survive and thrive by learning and adapting to evolving consumer needs, and by including four main ingredients for success, says Mindy Terry, president of a spa consulting firm called Creative Spa Concepts. As a consultant with locations in Atlanta and Las Vegas, she often works on projects that won't come to fruition for another three to five years. "Trends are basically new or old ideas that ignite and catch on at the right time," Terry said. "Here's your potential formula: A good idea plus an infectious person that can communicate the idea and get others on board, plus the media to help spread awareness. This formula does not always equal a trend. The final factor is the timing right now – does the mainstream consumer embrace the idea? If so, you've got yourself a trend."

Check out these five hot trends according to ISPA's 2008 Spa Industry Study Trend Watch. Check out these five hot industry trends carving out promising niche markets (according to ISPA's 2008 Spa Industry Study Trend Watch), along with leading advice on when to hop on a bandwagon or start one of your own.

1 Pre- and Post-natal Treatment

Pregnancy is in like a hot runway fashion, and Hollywood's A-list celebrities tout it not only with what they're wearing, but what they're doing for themselves as well as the little one on the way. The baby business is booming for spas, according to Real Hamilton-Romeo, senior account director at Pierce Mattie Public Relations, which represents Basq, a skin care line for pregnant women and new moms.

In fact, maternity-specific spas are opening all over the country, and approximately 60 percent of U.S. spas offer preg-

nancy massages according to the ISPA 2007 Spa Industry Study. Like many niche markets, growth is driven by consumers' disposable income and age – the latter of which has progressively increased in mothers. Between 1990 and 2006, the birthrate for women age 40 to 44 increased 65 percent and doubled for women 45 to 49. Women want the full experience of pregnancy, Hamilton-Romeo said, and now the nine-month journey is just as much about the mother as it is about the baby.

Because spa treatments offer such physical benefits as lessening stress, improving mood and tempering body changes (say goodbye to facial breakouts, bloating and fatigue), there is potent sell-

ing potential to expectant mothers. Hamilton-Romeo recommends capitalizing on mothers' primary concerns: stretch marks, body aches, swelling, fatigue, muscle strain, unbalanced facial skin, puffy eyes and trouble sleeping or relaxing.

2 Delicious Variety

When it comes to food and drink, "More of a variety seems to be the norm nowadays instead of just having smoothies and teas labeled as spa refreshments," said Kelly Salatino, spa manager at Eaglewood Resort and Spa in Itasca, Ill., where whole fruits, chocolates and dried fruits are offered in relaxation rooms along with more traditional beverages. Terry agrees that "food and beverage elements are



becoming more significant,” and noted that expanding a food program or creating alternatives to happy hour can ignite business during off-peak times of the week. Many resort and residential spas are profiting from demonstration kitchens, which provide an opportunity for lifestyle cooking classes and support for catering after-hours events.

A Blessed Union: The Spa-Fitness Program

Traditionally, spa and fitness have been packaged as two separate entities, but people who simultaneously engage in both often see faster, more effective results. Equinox Fitness Club + Spa in Los Angeles and New York and soon-to-open The CortRight Concept Wellness Center in Lima, Peru, among other industry leaders, are working to bridge the disconnect with a new trend in fully integrated spa and fitness programming. Often lasting anywhere from six to 12 weeks, these programs may include personal training sessions, group classes, spa treatments based on individual goals and nutrition counseling complete with a customized diet. The message to the consumer: Fitness without spa services is an incomplete program.



Eco-friendly Alternatives

Natural products including green and sustainable labels are in high demand and are here to stay, said Salatino. Whether companies and customers are sincerely earth-conscious or simply eager to capitalize on the positive exposure environmental practices bring is irrelevant. Sustainability is good for the industry, environment and consumers' health, said Terry, as it manifests in spas' interior design, architecture and products – from green finishes and soft goods to geo-thermal heating and energy-efficient electrical systems. Vendors use recycled materials in packaging and textile products now more than ever, and many spas, such as The Spa at Amelia Island Plantation and The Cliff House Resort & Spa, are receiving awards for their environmental efforts.

Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is up-and-coming. These resorts team with doctors to offer medi-spa and traditional medical services in an anonymous, away-from-home setting. SunRaven in Bedford, N.Y., among others, offers limited and full-range traditional spa services (facials, massage, body treatments); traditional medi-spa services (laser, Botox, Restylane, permanent makeup); and medical/wellness proce-

dures (PET scans, radiology, blood analysis, cardiology, acupuncture, chiropractic services, homeopathy, liposuction and more). Even though such services may not be covered by insurance companies, facilities under development are racing to meet this trend, such as Vdara – CityCenter in Las Vegas and Hotel Saba in Rosemary Beach, Fla.

Some spa professionals may consider medical spa services such as laser facials, Botox and liposuction the antithesis of wellness, but keep in mind that many consumers find that these procedures improve their well-being, confidence and self-image, which for some can be life changing. The Gateway Medical Spa in Salt Lake City offers image-focused services like this that are only expected to increase in popularity, Terry said.

A plethora of exciting, new spa services are on the cusp of innovative solutions, but how do you know when it's time to follow a trend? Industry leaders including Salatino and Hamilton-Romeo encourage spa owners to look for authentic, long-term benefits for the consumer while staying focused on quality: If you can't do it well, don't do it at all. "I often find companies that try to be all things to all people – this can not only be very

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costly but can send mixed messages to your customers,” Terry said. Successful spas’ products, programs and services communicate a particular philosophy or message. “The best way to determine if a trend is right for your spa is to identify whether or not the trend aligns with your company’s values.”

Some spas might find that the pregnancy niche fits well, as pre-natal customers have the potential to become long-term, post-natal customers. Hamilton-Romeo recommends “layering in” new services and products; this way, a trend doesn’t have to mean a complete overhaul of your business model. As always, cross-marketing like retail and gifting can significantly enhance the bottom line.

It’s one thing to risk embracing a new trend, but it’s even more daring to start one of your own. If you’re more inclined to lead than follow, trust your gut and make informed, calculated decisions, Terry said. “My observation has been this: The people and companies who have been most successful in establishing trends are those who are passionate about and believe in what they are doing.” If the motivations behind the idea include money, publicity or logic, steer clear, she said. Look instead for ideas that spark your passion. “If you truly believe what you are doing is going to make a difference in the quality of someone’s life...go for it.” If you’d promote it for free or still believe after everyone’s told you you’re crazy, then “you are a future pioneer just waiting to happen.”

With a finger on the pulse of the industry’s future, Terry anticipates a wave of spa experiences that are increasingly difficult to categorize in addition to programs that address our emotional need to socialize – places to interact with others such as steam, arctic and inhalation rooms; and

private or coed relaxation lounges. Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Ariz., for example, offers many communal areas on property where guests can organically interact along a maze of outdoor pathways lined with desert plants, at its labyrinth or in fitness classes, among others.

Experts look into the industry’s proverbial crystal ball and see relaxation and stress-control products, support for fertility treatment and a more full-service wellness approach to pregnancy. This could include creative baby shower ideas like a day at the spa for expecting moms and friends, said Hamilton-Romeo.

Underway but not yet launched are fully integrated Western hospitals and five-star hotels, an experience that will include organic restaurant, retail, spa and fitness components. Terry said these high-tech locations will offer spa programs developed specifically for people with cancer, special

cardiac needs, diabetes and pre-/post-natal care. “The goal here is to provide insured patients with personalized health care and look to various ‘profit centers’ throughout the hospital to subsidize costs,” Terry said.

Whether or not you incorporate a trend, start one, or simply enhance the services you’re already offering, remember: There isn’t necessarily a right answer. So find your niche and don’t be afraid to stand out. The 20th century fashion pioneer Coco Chanel was many things, including a successful, memorable maverick. Her passionate maxim resonates across industries, inspiring us even today: In order to be irreplaceable, one must always be different. ■

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Pros and Cons of Incorporating a Trend

INCENTIVES

- Keep business fresh and relevant.
- Attract new market segments by expanding your appeal.
- Prompt public relations and media coverage.
- Attract talented staff members who want an innovative work environment.
- Increase profit potential. Some services, such as pregnancy spa treatments, can be added to the menu at a premium price.
- Establish your business as “cutting-edge” or a leader in your marketplace.

RISKS

- Deconstruct the elements that made your spa successful by steering too far from your brand.
- Alienate current customers by capturing a new market segment. For example, if the majority of your customers are female baby boomers, they probably won’t continue to patronize a spa that caters to kids.
- Take more of your time, which is often necessary to execute trends effectively.
- Deplete your finances, as re-printing marketing and sales collateral, for example, is costly.
- Worsen your business’s image if it appears to try to be all things to all people – a generalist rather than a specialist.