



ALIGNING THE WORLD? *expanding our boundaries*

RAPID GLOBALIZATION, THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION and the largest economic collapse in a generation have served as a wake-up call for the spa industry to redefine itself and become more relevant to what people are seeking from spa services.

Easy to use digital publishing tools and social networking have enabled the spa industry to reach a global audience across a number of platforms. This storm of technology has turned the spa industry upside down, laying a fertile ground of fascinating new topics to explore. We have been given a unique opportunity to share ideas and experiences in how we are living and perceiving our world. This opportunity

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comes with a huge responsibility to communicate information that is globally useful and beneficial.

The economic downturn hit many spas hard, with overall revenues falling 20 percent. Despite this setback, consumer interest in spas continues, and not just with the affluent baby boomers (those born between 1946-64), who fueled the industry's initial success and remain committed spa-goers. The industry also now has a following among the younger generation, for whom spas, fitness and well-being are integral parts of their busy lifestyles.

Surveys show that 81 percent of consumers have a strong interest in improving their personal wellness, rather than luxury services that provide pampering experiences. In addition, the spa industry needs to take consumer demand for wellness products and services very seriously. With the shortcomings in the global healthcare system, a shift toward wellness and prevention will accelerate—and it must.

There is a rise in sustainable treatments that provide rejuvenation, rest and relaxation. The participation of the preventive/anti-aging industry is also having a decidedly prominent impact on the wellness industry. As the world becomes more globalized, there is an enormous need to educate people about the universe we live in, and how we can thrive with health and longevity. The sharing of knowledge with people around the world is very significant, since this is how we expand boundaries and unite to improve the quality of life for all.

Wellness and spa awakening

Wellness is a vast industry—and very real, with an extraordinary ancient and modern history on a global level. Little research has been done on this two-trillion dollar market, and there is no consensus on key definitions and benchmarks.

Therefore, building a bridge to wellness begins with providing answers and new ways to address questions surrounding an astonishing decrease in health and well-being. A good starting point is to simply acknowledge that most individuals are focused on productivity, and are pushing themselves to physical and mental exhaustion in order to achieve. Establishing a sound platform for how we should begin to redefine products and protocols should be based on the fact that spa-goers are depleted emotionally and physically. As I have traveled all over the world during the past 12 years teaching and learning, I find that most people are looking for a few simple acts of healing that can soften and transform the stress of everyday life into feelings of comfort and hope. Providing a spa experience that allows the consumer to leave feeling restored is paramount.

Translate wellness to the spa

Media technology has connected us to the vastness of the world. We can be plugged in 24/7, which leaves very little time to connect with ourselves. But media experiences impact our well-being beyond personal connection. Advancements

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in medical technology have provided a greater understanding of the human body and how it functions when exposed to media technology. The findings indicate that media stimuli engage the autonomic nervous system, triggering the release of endogenous chemicals such as hormones and neurotransmitters (e.g., dopamine, adrenaline) into the bloodstream. The impact to human physiology leaves the body fatigued, and its systems lacking regulation.

Exploring services and products that can reduce stimulation to the autonomic nervous system should be at the forefront. Changing the duration of the treatment, reducing exposure to equipment and utilizing products and manipulations that deactivate overstimulated systems is a good start.

Most spa services are scheduled for one hour. It is generally impossible to achieve everything dictated by the standard spa protocol during this duration of time without rushing through the treatment in order to get ready for the next client. This approach focuses on productivity, but does not provide wellness for the client or for the service provider! Greater success can be achieved when you offer a variety of select services that are targeted at restoring the body, and provide these services during a shorter amount of time. The goal of a treatment should not be to apply a certain number of products or accomplishing something in particular, but rather to affect the body so that the individual has the experience of feeling well.

The other phase of transforming your spa to wellness is to reduce the effects of non-ionizing radiation by reducing the use of equipment. Research is showing that the effects of ionizing radiation (such as far-ultraviolet, X-rays and gamma rays) and nonionizing radiation (including visible light, microwave and radio) may be undesirable because they can cause DNA damage and mutations—thus we should all limit our exposure to its sources. Extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields (EMF) surround home and spa appliances. Evidence of health effects from EMF, including their influence on the brain, could pose genuine health hazards. Exposure to high levels of nonionizing energy, such as radio wave frequencies, can damage the structure and function of the nervous system. Creating protocols that are more hands on and utilizing products that energize the skin/body is far more effective at supporting the health of the body.

Reducing exposure to harmful ingredients is key. Skin care product formulations are currently under revision due to their long-term affects. Omitting ingredients like parabens, propylene glycol, acrylamide, sodium laureth sulfate, poly-sorbates, etc., all of which have been determined to cause

high health risk, would be a proper move as we strive for wellness. There are over 500 ingredients that are currently used in the U.S. that are banned in Asia and European countries. Adopting the same standard as our global community in banning these ingredients would certainly align our worlds in an effort to be well.

As a final point, changing manipulation techniques so they too are focused on reducing stimulation is essential. Each technique of skin manipulation addresses various systems in the body. The standard effleurage “activates” the circulatory system and “stimulates” the nervous system. In some conditions this technique may be necessary; for instance skin that is pallid due to lack of oxygen, detoxification and slack muscle tone. However, if we were to consider that most individuals’ systems are already overstimulated, incorporating techniques that deactivate would be more wellness oriented. An example of one such technique would be pressure point, which deactivates the nervous system, allows the body to go into rest mode and therefore repair. Pressure point is highly effective for reducing inflammation, regulating lymph movement, and reducing facial tension. The sedative effects of pressure point allow clients to journey to a place of inner quiet and awaken restored and renewed.

Transforming an industry to be relevant takes time and education. Many spas are becoming a canvas, which allows the consumers to experience an inner retreat where they reconnect with what the body needs. Services and products should be the inkwells that transform consumers into the best versions of themselves.

My own life experiences and learning continues to translate into a healing benefit to others. It is my fervent wish to make these offerings available to all who need them through education. The spirit of my work ensures that we align the world by exchanging ideas, debating and strategizing for the good of our industry, the consumers we serve and the planet we share. The possibilities are endless. By expanding the boundaries of our consciousness, we can all be healthier, and live more productive lives. ■



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