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Spa Sustainability Strategies for the Environment, The Guests & Your Business

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Going green is not a trend . . . it has a life of its own that continues to grow and gain momentum. This phenomenon is becoming so prevalent that people are moving away from the term "green" and have embraced the larger concept of "sustainability" because it better describes the long-term and on-going evolution and revolution of personal, cultural, economic, environmental and global well-being. As more and more individuals and corporations are engaging in the sustainability culture, it is important to see how well-aligned this is with the spa revolution of the past 10 – 15 years. Spas went from being trendy to being on-trend; from being a luxury to a necessity; from elite to main street; from loss-leaders to profit-makers. Substitute the word "sustainability" for "spa" and you will see the similarities and synergies.



Dr. Judy Singer

Many spas have assumed more responsibility for providing a "soft" but conscientious, results-oriented and educational experience that is integrated into and balanced with the corner stone of the spa experience which is rest and relaxation. A spa experience typically helps people focus on "personal sustainability" in terms of taking responsibility for one's health and well-being; instilling a sense of balance and control; and learning and practicing new skills for personal and professional growth, happiness, fulfillment and purpose. From a business perspective, the sustainability movement has an emotional connection as well as an economic impact, e.g., it is just as much about how a business stays alive and thrives as it is about people and the environment. If the spa is not profitable, the business is not sustainable.

Spas have an opportunity, and many people say a responsibility, to effectively and seamlessly address both personal and global sustainability . . . it's all about lifestyle choices that lead to results that positively impact people and the planet. Eco-efforts are not about sacrificing or "doing without" (not about dieting or deprivation) but rather making healthy choices that enhance the overall well-being of people and places.

When people are at a spa doing things that are good for themselves, there is a dichotomy if they are not also being responsible consumers. Spas have found that awareness leads to action, e.g., when people are educated about simple, inexpensive, effective and results-oriented things they can do on their own and at home, many of them will take small steps but this can have a great impact.

There are many organizations that are focusing their attention on the spa industry from everything from the hardware (construction) to the software (products) to the infrastructure (policies, procedures, processes) and their effect on the spa's profits:

• **The Green Spa Network** (GSN:greenspanetwork.org) was formed 6 years ago to help spas incorporate a greater sense of eco-consciousness from an operational, educational, environmental and global perspective. To paraphrase Michael Strusser, a founding member of GSN, "green spas harmonize the rhythms of nature and the body so that people feel healthier and stronger." GSN has created an on-line toolkit of ideas to help spas launch their sustainability program.

• **EC3 Global** is an environmental advisory group that feels the "spa sector can be the market leader" in terms of driving change. EC3 is launching the first green benchmarking and certification system for international awareness for the spa industry based, in part, on their 12 core benchmarking indicators for spas.

These are just two of many organizations that are focused on helping spas be more sustainable. There are new resources evolving on a regular basis as well as lots of individuals who have practical words of wisdom.

PRACTICAL AND PROVEN "WORDS OF WISDOM"

I have invited two industry experts who are immersed in and committed to spa sustainability to share a few helpful strategies.



Ms. Kit Cassingham

KIT CASSINGHAM, ISHC

Sage Blossom Consulting, "*Sustainable Hospitality Is Our Business*",
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- **AIR QUALITY:** The first impact a spa has on its guests is its air quality. If you expect to improve people's health through treatments they get at your spa, you must start with clean, fresh air. Most of us don't think about our air quality unless we are outside and see the air. But indoor air quality is often more toxic than outdoor air quality. To improve your spa's air quality, consider:
 1. Room finishes and upholstery (think off-gassing; use low VOC paints and finishes and non-petroleum-based fabrics and cushions, and formaldehyde-free materials
 2. Don't use scented "air fresheners" or cleaning supplies
 3. Allow for plenty of fresh air
 4. Consider the use of air filters to get rid of allergens and pollutants.
- **NATURAL AND ORGANIC** is another environmental step a spa can take. Starting with the sheets, towels, and robes, and ending with the foods and treatment products, makes an environmental difference to the people and the earth. Exposure to chemicals is impacting the health and well-being of people around the globe. Choosing chemical-free items will not only benefit your guests and employees, but also the planet.
 1. Using cotton, or better yet other organic, natural fibers like silk, modal (birch bark fiber), soy, bamboo, and hemp helps reduce the exposure of toxic chemicals to your guests.
 2. Buying organic food from local farmers and vendors lightens your footprint on the planet.
 3. Reducing the use of chemicals improves not only people's health but also air quality, and it decreases our reliance on oil.
- **FILTERED WATER** is often an overlooked ingredient in a healthy spa. So many chemicals are used in sanitizing and cleaning water that it's not as healthy to drink as filtered water. Do you filter water in your spa – for consumption and treatments? But bottled water isn't much of an answer: bottled water has been shown time and again to be tap water. So not only are you providing clean water to drink and cook with by using bottled water, but you are also contributing to our reliance on oil for the production and transportation of those water bottles, and adding to landfills,
 1. Using filtered water for the water people soak and steam in, or their spa treatments are made with, provides a chemical-free treatment for a truly healthy spa experience.
 2. Installing a filter on the incoming water line will remove the bulk of the chemicals that have been put into the water to purify it – chlorine and ammonia being two primary chemicals.

- **WATER CONSERVATION** is an important environmental step. Though the planet is covered in water, less than one-hundredth of a percent of it is potable.
 1. Use low flow toilets, sinks and showers to reduce your consumption.
 2. For those spas with outdoor landscaping, a fantastic way to conserve water is to have a low-water, or xeric, landscape. If possible, use your gray water to flush toilets and water the outdoor garden to further save that precious resource.
 3. Restaurant using ice machines need to make sure they aren't dumping water down the drain; there are newer models that are more water conserving.
 4. Water efficient appliances in the food area will also help you save water and money.
 5. Train staff to not run water unnecessarily, especially if you don't have a gray-water system. You might as well flush money down the drain if you are careless with your water consumption

- **MY FINAL POINT** on ways a spa can be environmentally friendly is through energy conservation.
 1. Switch incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs). Even the old fluorescent tubes aren't as energy-conserving as CFLs so evaluate their replacement too. When LED bulbs are less expensive they'll be an even better option than CFLs.
 2. Turn lights out in rooms that aren't being used.
 3. Manage room temperatures more closely too. When feasible, turn the heat down or the air conditioning up.
 4. Replace old HVAC equipment with energy efficient E-Star appliances and maintain them for more efficient operations.

ALEEZA MOORE

Independent Consultant with 10 years of spa and hospitality experience
Fuquay Varina, NC



Ms. Aleeza Moore

Each individual's health is dependant upon the health of our earth . . . As we are in the business of promoting and enhancing personal health, aren't we in a perfect position to address the sustainability of our industry?

- **USE LOCAL**
 1. Wherever possible use local vendors, merchants, producers, labor and other resources. When your spa makes use of local resources, you are ensuring that fewer chemicals are pumped into the environment because you minimize the fuel, packaging and transit costs associated with flying, shipping, hauling or driving things in for delivery.
 2. What's more, you gain the added PR component of supporting local industry.

- **RE-USE AND RECYCLE**
 1. We all know to recycle paper, plastic bottles, aluminum cans, newspapers and the like.
 2. We can also recycle water (many spas have a grey-water system – some even incorporate rain water), building materials (have a local artisan use broken old tiles in a mural or mosaic in your spa), plastic and glass product containers, cardboard boxes, and so much more.
 3. On top of recycling, it is of the utmost importance to perpetuate this cycle by using recycled materials. Does your spa use unbleached, 100% recycled paper? What about product packaging – is it minimal, reusable, recycled or recyclable? What about building materials – do you have recycled carpets or other flooring? We can make great strides by re-using what we have as well. Cabinets, countertops, desks and other items can be re-purposed, given the right approach.
 4. Do everything in your power to reinforce the cycle of recycling and reusing recycled materials to minimize our industry's waste and environmental footprints.

- **BE THE MOST ATTRACTIVE SPA**

1. Spa-goers know that the spa industry exists to promote health & wellness. Spa-goers also know that our world is changing and that everyone makes an impact on our environment and they make decisions based on many factors now, including a spa's "green" quotient.
2. Cultivate an eco-friendly culture of awareness among your staff and guests through low-impact collateral and the use of sustainable practices and materials – when spa-goers can see that their dollars are going toward a sustainable business which also provides services that help them feel good, they will feel a deeper sense of wellness and fulfillment – which is our ultimate goal.
3. Of course every spa wants to be the most popular but remember that if your spa is using sustainable practices and is "the" spa to go to, you are forcing competition to adopt sustainable practices too. If other spas want more business they will have to cater to the savvy spa-goer who is looking for services as well as a fulfilling experience... When you take dollars away from other spas, you affect change on an industry-wide level.

- **MAXIMIZE ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

1. You have trained staff to turn off lights when they are not using a prep room, linen closet or treatment room, but you know people forget, get rushed, or just don't bother. Install sensors! This can be done with lights as well as faucets. Once installed, sensors can easily cut electricity and water costs by ensuring that lights in unused areas are off and water is never left running.
2. This isn't the only way to be energy efficient though... What about tankless water heaters? Installing damper systems on air conditioning units that allow cold outside air to be pulled into the building when the air outside reaches a certain temperature?
3. Energy Star appliances? Using LED (Light-Emitting Diode) and CFL (Compact Fluorescent Lamp/Light Bulb) lights instead of incandescents? By their very nature incandescent light bulbs are inefficient: they work off the principle that the filament resists the flow of electrons, which heats it to a temperature where part of the radiation falls within our visible spectrum but the majority does not (it's infrared – which we cannot see), so not only can we not see most of the radiation they give off, they also create relatively large amounts of heat that require cooling

- **RELY ON RENEWABLE ENERGY**

1. Electricity and water are essential to the spa industry. If your spa is in the development phase, think about investing in wind or solar energy to subsidize the electricity use you know you will incur during operation. If your spa is already in operation, think about ways to use renewable energy.
2. Some properties are large enough that certain staff get around on golf carts, vans and the like. In areas where the climate will permit, why not invest in electric golf carts with rechargeable batteries or which are solar powered?
3. Think about using solar panels for heating and cooling pools and whirlpools or using solar panels or wind turbines for generating electricity. Not only are these sources renewable but using them in one way or another can seriously offset rising energy costs affecting every industry, not just spas.
4. The final reason to go with renewable energies? The federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 expanded the federal business energy tax credit for solar and geothermal energy property to include fuel cells and microturbines as well as hybrid solar lighting systems installed after January 1, 2006 – and that means tax credits for installing solar, geothermal, hybrid solar, fuel cell and microturbine equipment... all renewable energies with a little incentive from both federal and state government.

CONCLUSION

I trust there at least of few ideas presented above that you can use and implement right away. There are thousands of sustainability strategies that you may want to investigate and invest in, but if you have not done so, the one that can be done the quickest, cost the least and have the greatest positive impact is education and awareness since this will lead to ownership and self-responsibility. If we "teach" people (staff, guests, vendors, etc.) even the simplest things they can do to help themselves and their environment, they will be able to take small steps that will result in great strides. Feeling good about doing something positive is contagious. Spas are all about the "feel good experience" and assuming self-responsibility. Sustainability activities have a snowball effect. As more and more people do their small, but very important, part in this sustainability movement, it will have a life of its own while it contributes to the life of people and the planet. Not to be forgotten as a final message...economic sustainability is important to the health and well-being of your business. Every sustainability decision has a certain cost-value quotient that you need to consider in order to have a marketable and profitable spa with a social conscience.

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