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## Five Tips for Better Spa Management

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**Maximizing profits while keeping clients and employees happy can be a challenge. Here's how your spa can operate more smoothly.**

Spas may offer members and guests an oasis of serenity and calm—but operationally, running a spa can be anything but relaxing.

Like many client service-based businesses, spas can easily find themselves struggling, in both their busiest and slowest times, to coordinate appointment scheduling, staffing and other administrative tasks. And spas, perhaps more than any other club department, are especially susceptible to the ins and outs of fads and trends.

Without diligent attention to continually evaluating their appeal and value to clients, the “hot” treatments, products and practices of today can quickly throw nothing but cold water on tomorrow's bottom line.

How can your spa exfoliate away ineffective practices and continually rejuvenate its revenue streams? Here are some proven tips and practices that can help smooth out the rough patches often associated with spa management:

### 1. Know Your Audience—And How To Reach Them

Spas located inside private clubs where clients must either be a member or the guest of a member to book an appointment, such as the Spa and Salon at Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, Calif., have the built-in advantage of a dedicated client base to actively use the facility and its services. At the same time, this can also make it harder to attract new clients during slower periods.

#### SUMMING IT UP

- Staff effectively. Train employees thoroughly before they start. Extra incentives like product sale commissions can help retain staff.
- Maximize profit with better booking. Make sure you have staff members available during special promotion periods and your busiest time of day.
- Offer practical packages. Create spa specials that stress value, and encourage your employees to promote them.

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“The challenges are a little different to get people into the spa,” says Becky Cota, Spa Supervisor at Mission Hills CC. “We have to be a little more creative with our marketing efforts and specials.”

It’s not always about getting a bargain, though. When marketing spa services, it’s important to make the right pitch to the right people, by knowing what motivates them.

“Our morning appointments are our busiest part of the day,” reports Cota. “We make sure that we’re well-staffed during this period, so our members have lots of options.”

Equally important is knowing what—or who—your audience wants, what problems they want to solve, and how you can be a part of their solution.

Once members become regular spa-goers, Mission Hills seeks to make using the spa easier by taking member preferences into account when creating weekly or monthly staff schedules.

“Because we’re a country club, a lot of therapists have specific repeat clientele,” Cota says. “It’s important that these staff members are available for our members, so we schedule them accordingly.”

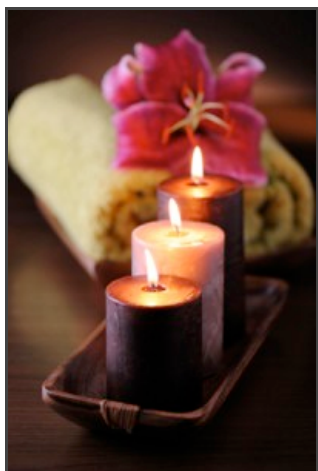
## 2. Enable And Encourage Employees

Training is an essential part of ensuring that your spa employs staff members who will connect with customers and offer the best possible experience—and improve the chances of creating repeat customers—each and every time.

“Too often, management rushes to get people to work without proper training,” says Veronica DeMarti, Wellness Manager at Three Springs Spa at Barton Creek Resort in Austin, Texas, which offers uncommon body and skin therapies, expert fitness instruction, guided stretching, meditation and fresh spa cuisine to its guests. “Training and clear communication are keys to successful performance, productivity and consistency.”

Therapists, in particular, should be trained to use the spa’s preferred method of draping, performing wraps, and other types of services.

“If it’s a particular service, like a Swedish massage, the staff members should incorporate their own techniques, but the overall process should be standardized so the spa can recreate a similar experience each and every time,” says DeMarti.



Once you’ve got a solid, well-trained staff in place, adding extra enticements can help motivate and retain employees.

In addition to job benefits such as medical coverage for full-time employees and a 401(k) plan option, Barton Creek (where a 2010 renovation added a pre-service relaxation area) offers incentives for selling spa products. Employees also get discounts on hotel stays within the parent company’s (KSL Resorts) family of properties.

Some extras don’t have to cost the spa a cent—but can pay big dividends in employee satisfaction. Barton Creek, for example, has opted not to include a set gratuity in its treatment prices, to enhance employees’ opportunity to earn more for exceptional service. “We’ve found that not including a set gratuity benefits the staff more,” DeMarti says.

## 3. Create Specials That Offer Value

When the economy struggles, attracting clients for luxury services can be a challenge.

“Everybody right now is looking for the best value,” says Jennie Comer, Assistant Spa Director at Golden Door Spa at The Boulders resort in Carefree, Ariz.

Golden Door emphasizes creating spa packages that offer more bang for your relaxation buck,

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such as its “Beat the Heat” and “Beat the Chill” seasonal specials, which include three 50-minute treatments and lunch for \$350.

Specials that involve other parts of the property require strong communication. Each morning, the Golden Door staff tells the café that is managed by the resort’s culinary department how many packages it has sold for the day, so the café can prep accordingly.

Golden Door spa guests are asked to choose their lunch menu when they first arrive. “Then, when they come to the café, the food is ready and they don’t have to feel rushed to try to figure out what to order,” Comer says.

Barton Creek offers a \$99 day package, featuring an all-day pool pass, designed to attract locals. According to Kelly Clarke, Director of Marketing Communications, the package was created to help distinguish Barton Creek’s offerings from other area spas.

“With our child-care facility, Hill Country surroundings and culinary capabilities, there is more for the local day spa guest than just a massage or a facial,” Clarke says.

To develop spa specials and packages, first determine what vision or concept you want to portray, and to whom.

“Specials can be determined by many things: holidays; wellness programs; or even promoting other parts of the property,” says Barton Creek’s DeMarti.

#### 4. Encourage Staff To Spread The Word

Having an almost exclusive, member-based clientele can also help a spa effectively target its marketing efforts. At Mission Hills CC, upcoming promotions and new services are advertised through member e-mail blasts, signs posted in public areas of the club, and flyers given out at the front desk.



If the spa is open to the public, a property’s marketing department can handle traditional marketing efforts such as promotional e-mails, print mailings and other forms of advertising. But everyone on the spa staff can also help to spread the word about new services, packages and promotions—particularly if they have genuine enthusiasm about offering them.

Currently, Comer and her staff are excitedly touting the premiere of a new aromatherapy line in November at Golden Door, which offers a nature-themed spa experience that includes a Japanese bath and desert views.

“Make sure the product lines you use for facials and body treatments are ones the staff is happy to work with,” she advises. “Research the different products out there. Make sure yours are unique and that they really represent your spa and your vision. Then get the staff excited about these products, and encourage them to help with your marketing efforts.”

#### 5. Outsourcing Spa Management

If a club or resort’s spa staff is small—or if the spa is looking to revamp its business to increase profitability—hiring a spa management company or consultant may help to improve operations.

Companies that specialize in spa management can provide resources and support that include:

- **Updated technology.** Some spas may use outdated booking systems and could benefit from IT assistance that can help them purchase and maintain new systems, as well as train staff, at a significant savings, while also enhancing technological benefits.
- **Business boost.** An outside consultant can objectively help a spa analyze and manage its expenses, to produce a more favorable bottom line.
- **A more effective business plan.** Consultants shouldn’t demand that you make every suggested change. According to the president of a Maryland-based spa management company, a strong consultant will listen to a spa’s reasons for wanting to hold on to certain clients or services, and incorporate valid concerns into future plans.

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