



Best Practices Marketing Your Spa – Does Your Spa Make Cents, Scents & Sense?

By Judith L. Singer, Ed.D., ISHC
President & Co-Owner Health Fitness
Dynamics, Inc. (HFD)

Spa . . . a magical marketing word and "tool" that has permeated the lifestyle industry. We are surrounded by "spa things." With such a pervasive use of the word "spa," we are not sure if we are diluting or strengthening, hurting or helping the "real spa" which for the purpose of this article is the multi-million dollar facility attached to a hotel or resort. The word spa is:

A powerful adjective that adds emotional, prestige and pricing value that takes a common product and elevates it to new level, e.g.,

- car spa vs. car wash
- pet spa vs. pet grooming
- spa tea vs. herbal tea
- spa warm-up suit vs. sweat suit
- spa bed vs. any pillow top bed
- spa candles vs. fragranced candles
- spa manicures vs. manicures

- A descriptive noun that connotes everything from pampering to relaxation, fitness to wellness, whirlpools/hot tubs to bathtubs, etc.

- An active and passive verb that describes involvement in spa-related activities, e.g., people go spa-ing to sit in the steam room, take a fitness class, meditate in the relaxation lounge, etc.

- A lifestyle concept that people strive to experience whether it be during an hour spa treatment or living in a residential spa community.

The lodging industry has experienced an explosion of spa development especially in the last 5 years. Hotels as well as resorts have seen the need for and value of adding a spa in order to sell rooms and real estate. Spas have become the new Starbucks...there's a day spa on every corner and a lodging spa in every hotel/resort. No one has done research on the saturation level or impact analysis, but development continues to occur at a fast pace. HFD believes that there is more of a supply than there is a demand as evidenced by research we have done which shows what we consider to be an "under-whelming" average of about 35% utilization of treatment rooms. If hotels/resorts were at 35% occupancy, they would be out of business.

In order for spas to be profitable business ventures in and of themselves, they need to be properly planned and staffed, but of equal importance is the need for an exceptionally strong, creative, on-trend and well-executed marketing plan. Consumers need to know why they should go to your spa, e.g., why is your spa different from and better than the one down the street. In our 25 years as spa advisors, we have constantly emphasized the need to have a solid pre-opening and operational marketing budget and plan that will allow you to bring in people who want to spend time and money in treatments and retail.

Since marketing is critical to revenue-maximization, I thought it would be beneficial to hear from people who are integrally involved in creating and implementing marketing strategies and plans. Therefore, I invited 3 of HFD's well-respected clients to share some of their experience, insights and strategies.

Michele Wilken, Spa Director & Sonia Djahanshahi, Spa Sales Manager, Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL:



Dr. Judy Singer

Events:

1) Charitable Events – This is a great way to raise money for the community and get press on your event:

- Make sure you research the organization you partner with so the event is beneficial for you both. You need them to give you a great turnout.
- Ways to raise money for the charity include creating a silent auction with product baskets donated by vendors or donating a portion of sales back to the organization
- Be sure to have a raffle with a ballot to capture all of the guests names

2) Shopping Events – These are key events to have around the Holidays, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, etc.:

- Make sure you beef up your merchandise ... stock for the event so you have lots of options for guests to buy
- Merchandise your products on an extra table to give the event a trade show feel
- E-mail blasts are a great way to invite guests ... send them several reminders prior to the event coming up with a themed PWP (purchase with purchase) like an add-on "Holiday spa tote" with any gift card purchase is a great way to generate additional revenue.

3) Advertising / Direct Mail / E-Mail Blasts – Whichever method you decide to use for promotions be sure to have a specific "Call to Action" so you can accurately track the success of your efforts, e.g.;

- Present this card to receive a special gift with your purchase.
- Bring this card and receive 10% off your massage Monday - Friday only, etc.

4) Resort Marketing

- You have to have a presence in your resort especially if your spa is located outside the resort, e.g., if the spa is not attached to the resort.
- Our biggest form of marketing is an in-room newsletter – it's placed in room daily and highlights service specials, offers for specific groups, announces fitness classes, etc. There are two editions one is Monday – Thursday and the second is Friday – Sunday, so we plan the specials accordingly.
- To give a taste of our spa experience, we leave our signature lotion in a nice presentation at the resort front desk for all guests checking in to smell the spa scent.

5) Spa Wish List:

We created "*My Spa Wish List*" for guests who just came out of an amazing spa experience and want another. We offer them the opportunity to fill it out a "gift certificate" that we send to their friends and family so they know what the recipient would like. It's almost like a "spa registry."

6) Spa Boutique:

A great avenue to generate revenue for the spa is through retail sales. We are beyond the years of just selling products for at home care, now guests can pick out their favorite yoga wear, fragrance and great gifts in spa boutiques.

- The 2 keys to success are to carry exclusive lines that no one in the surrounding area has and think like your customer. You have to merchandise the area well and up-date it week.
- Appoint a front desk staff member as a retail specialist to spearhead the sales and communicate product knowledge to the rest of the spa.

Kimberly Love, Spa Sales Manager, The Umstead Hotel and Spa, Cary, NC:

- Be an active part in new hire training with spa reception and hotel front office. They are the first contact and need to know how to answer questions confidently and knowledgeably.
- Market your spa as an incentive destination for corporate awards programs as a team- building project or to recognize individual achievements .
- Introduce "impulse" buys by suggestive, up-selling. During a pedicure, the service provider should suggest purchase choices of multi-use slippers or moisture socks to keep the feet warm after the pedicure.
- Promote a service of the month as a feature story in your newsletter and as a special offer during mid-week. Include interesting, educational information including the benefits of that particular service. Provide rewards for repeat visits.
- Offer booking flexibility for groups by adjusting spa services around their meeting schedules.

Advertise Special Features:

- Arrange transportation for *Girls Evening Out* and include a champagne toast upon arrival.
- *Remember Romance* . . . capitalize and market co-ed lounges and co-ed treatments.

Tina Crawford, Spa Director, Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island, Amelia Island, FL:

- Develop *Signature Services* that truly capture the culture as well as embrace the natural beauty and surroundings of the resort.
- “*Heaven in a Hammock*” is a top-selling signature service developed and created by The Ritz-Carlton Spa Staff to symbolize carefree, coastal relaxation
- The “*Surrender*” services are designed to be simple and effective treatments that are customized and results-oriented. Our guests simply give us the amount of time that they can spend then our highly skilled therapist tailor/customize treatments based on their specific needs.
- A full-time *Spa Sales Manager* focuses exclusively on bringing Group/Incentive Business to the Spa.
- Strong emphasis placed on Media Relations and placements in Trade, Travel and Lifestyle publications has resulted in significant local, regional and national coverage which has generated measurable demand
- Develop Seasonal/Holiday promotions and specialty treatments using appropriate ingredients.
Provide “preferred pricing” for local residents to encourage day business, particularly during “need” periods.
- Develop relationships with the local community by partnering with local businesses as well as non-profit organizations

Other Thoughts from HFD –

HFD has created a collection of thousands of marketing ideas that we categorize by market segment. We know there are strategies that will emotionally connect with each specialized market segment in terms of experience, time, money, benefits, features, etc. We give these to our clients when we help to create their pre-opening and operating marketing plans.

Here are some ideas to think about if you want market-driven revenue-generators:

- Identify marketing strategies in your resort that can be tweaked or piggy-backed for the spa, e.g. use yield management pricing based on prime-time/non-prime time services, popularity of the services, value-added services, etc.
- Create a “*SpaBucks*” program, e.g., when guests check into the resort, give them spa dollars that they can use in the spa for treatments and/or retail during the first 24 hours of their stay. This is an incentive to get them into the spa early and hope that they will make time to use the spa one or more times during their conference or leisure stay.
- Have your spa amenity line be your in-room amenity line and provide a spa music CD for your entertainment system. Merchandise these in your mini-bar or offer an incentive for guests to stop in the spa to make their purchase.
- Make sure your web-site includes an on-line booking option so guests can make appointments on a pre-arrival basis. Also have sections on special packages, spa wellness tips, etc.
- Hotel keys can be printed with your spa name, hours of operation, spa logo, picture of the spa, opening date and/or anything that will pique the interest of the hotel guest.
- Create a “spa ambassadors” club with local merchants and offer them incentives to promote your spa as part of their gift baskets, wedding celebrations, etc.
- Put a digital photo frame at the hotel front desk and spa front desk to show the spa facilities and treatments as a visual enticement.
- Create a spa turn-down amenity, e.g., a spa “proverb,” a “worry” or “happy” stone, vitamins, spa chocolate, apple, etc.

Since the spa is an integral part of your hotel/resort, create cross-marketing strategies that enhance the overall spa and/or lodging experience. Challenge the staff to think of ways to increase traffic flow into the spa, up-sell and link-sell treatments and products, increase retention, reward loyalty, create referrals, celebrate special occasions, be the place for professional networking (especially with all the people who home-office), etc. In order for a spa to be profitable, you need to drive the top line which means you need to make sure your audience knows how and why you can meet their needs, interests and budget and how their investment dollars and time will be beneficial and valuable.

Every spa should focus first on how to generate revenues then they can look at how to control expenses so that the spa is profitable. Without a strong top-line, there is not much to manage on your bottom line. In our experience, the spas that do well are those who are focused on driving the top line through internal and external marketing.

Judith L. Singer, Ed.D., ISHC, is the President & Co-Owner of Pompano Beach, Florida-based Health Fitness Dynamics, Inc. (HFD) (www.hfdspa.com) an internationally recognized spa consulting company that specializes in the planning, marketing and management support services of spas for fine hotels and resorts, day spas and mixed-use developments. HFD is also actively involved in conducting economic and consumer spa research. Since its inception in 1983, HFD has been the consulting firm to over \$650 million of completed spa projects. A partial list of clients includes: The Umstead, Rosewood Mayakoba, Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires, Little Dix Bay, Four Seasons Hulalai, Miraval, Malliouhana, Cranwell, Pinehurst, The Homestead, The Greenbrier, Bacara, Silverado and the Delano. Dr. Singer is also the past chairperson of The International Society of Hospitality Consultants (www.ISHC.com) and was on the ISPA Committee for the inaugural edition of the Uniform System of Financial Reporting for Spas. As we go into our 25th year as spa consultants, HFD will be focusing more of its experience and expertise on helping existing spas to be more profitable via management advisory services. Dr. Singer can be contacted at 954-942-0049 or judysinger@hfdspa.com