



Europe: Italy

WHAT ARE SOME CHANGES YOU HAVE NOTICED IN YOUR CUSTOMERS THIS PAST YEAR? ARE YOU SEEING ANY NEW REQUESTS FROM CONSUMERS?

Professional customers are instinctively and constantly looking for new rituals and products. Indeed their real need is for business support and promotional activities which can help them be more profitable and attract and maintain a loyal customer base.

Consumers' requests are now focused on three major topics. The first is the search for natural, sustainable green formulas and for a transparent communication on active ingredients and on the commitment of the company to sustainable and ethical projects. The second and third are the search for visible rejuvenation and slimming treatments as well as the request of de-stressing pampering rituals. One comes from the desire to remain young and attractive, and is combined in some spas with small surgery or dermatological treatments. The other expresses the need to recover from frantic life rhythms, from everyday lack of time and care for oneself which is indeed what spa is really about.

There is also a growing request for affordable spa experiences. The Italian spa world initially attracted very affluent people. Now due to many new promotional activities, the spa temples are opening to a growing number of lower-budget customers. Discovering built in travel and vacation packages, special-price entries to wet locations, late opening hours for workaholics. Younger people and families, these are creative ways to attract and nourish confidence when entering places which sometimes do still intimidate and are perceived as unaffordable. Gift certificates as well as gift boxes and websites such Groupon are helping to diffuse the spa culture and services, favoring the communication of spas which very often do not have the funds and the capability to promote themselves.

WHAT SECTORS DO YOU SEE ATTRACTING THE MOST INVESTMENT CAPITAL THESE DAYS? WHAT ABOUT WHEN IT COMES TO THE SPA AND WELLNESS ARENA?

In all sectors in Italy, the recent economical crisis has caused a reduction in investments; in the wellness arena there is a very interesting dynamism. Many thermal centers are trying to modernize their facilities and increase their wellness and beauty offers. In tourist locations 3 to 5 star hotels are adding the spa component in order to be more competitive and also to de-seasonalize their offer. Last but not least many beauty centers are going through a process of renovation of their interior design and menu in order to enhance the quality of the customer's experience.

The region which has understood and transformed this potential into countless projects is Trentino Alto Adige. "Spa" means a wide range of possibilities different in size but similar in the mission of delivering well-being, from completely modernized public locations to luxury hotels which have added huge wet facilities with pools, water attractions and spa rooms as well as niche wellness centers with a sauna and a couple of rooms in smaller hotels to help guests enjoy their stay at best.

Important investments in design and architecture have been made to add value to the guest experience and to increase distinctiveness and competitiveness. Merano Thermal Baths, opened in 2005 and designed by Matteo Thun, is an exceptional example of how sustainability and modern design can combine to revive a tradition that dates back to the 19th century, and enhance the contact with nature as well as interaction with other people. This has changed the perception and the value of the spa world, which includes not only the pools, the spa and the medical center but also bistros and a park to favor socialization. A destination for aristocrats has so become an open and accessible location for families, couples and kids.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE LOOKING LIKE FOR SPA AND WELLNESS IN YOUR COUNTRY?

The spa market in Italy is a land of opportunities, with an impressive potential in terms of attractiveness and countless challenges to modernize and improve the quality of service, in order to be appealing and competitive towards demanding national and international customers. The ability to transform ancient traditions into a contemporary innovative profitable business model will determine the future of this segment.

Educational and marketing competences need to be fed with investments and passion, as well as an optimistic vision of the future, which the recent crisis has of course recently decreased. A wider offer which includes lifestyle and prevention consultation, cross marketing opportunities, “shop and spa” packages, the ability to do public relations and enhance the international visibility are key elements not only for destination spas but also for urban spas to attract Italians as well as international guests vital for their business.

Last but not least, among the many different strategies and creative business solutions, a “retail revolution” could definitely help spas to perform in sales, allowing for the raising of funds for education and modernization. Competing with luxury stores and perfumeries is not easy but a boutique, appealing approach can help urban and destination spas to maximize credibility in product recommendation, and to increase consumer satisfaction as well as improve the business success and profitability.

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