



ASIA: RUSSIA

What are the most significant global issues facing us today?

The most significant issues facing us today have to do with three forms of interactions we experience in our daily life: those with the environment; with people around us; and with the material world.

The first issue stems from the global trend of consumerism – our obsession with buying and consuming goods, even when doing so does not bring any real value to our lives. Globalization, recent developments in technology and the current economic order have greatly expanded the supply and variety of goods available to the average human. Without even noticing it ourselves, we have become addicted to buying, which gives an incentive for companies to produce more and more. Some people criticize this trend; others defend it as being an inherent implication of human nature. Regardless of the general opinion, it is certain that consumerism has been detrimental to one part of our world: the environment. Unfortunately, sooner or later we are going to have to put aside our lavish habits and come up with sound solutions to this very serious problem.

The second issue has to do with the cross-cultural barriers that exist in our world. Multiculturalism, the global economy, new communication technologies and ease of travel have brought all cultures, nationalities and religions incredibly close to another in the past several decades. This phenomenon has had many positive effects, as we have come to respect one another regardless of our race, nationality or religion. Yet it has also produced certain tensions. The language barriers and cultural differences existing in some parts of the world (i.e. Russia, Ukraine or Kazakhstan) are real obstacles to development of some fields, such as spa and wellness.

Finally, the third issue has been a hot topic for quite some time now: the instability of the current economic order and the possibility of another global crisis.

What do you see as the main innovations happening around the world, those which are game changing and/or disruptive?

The main innovations that have been most influential to our lives have been in the fields of technology and science. It is hard to imagine that less than a decade ago we did not know of such things as Facebook, Twitter, BBM or the iPad. We are now more connected with each other than ever before, which makes our lives a lot easier but also poses a threat to live communication. In the scientific realm, there have been discoveries and experiments (e.g., stem cell research) that completely undermine the common perception of human longevity and aging. There has also been a shift in the understanding of what is important - better living rather than looking younger is gradually becoming the focus. Further breakthroughs in genetics are likely to influence not only conventional medicine, but our lifestyle as well. Maintaining a diet according to one's genetic passport might be a common thing soon!

What do you see as the main innovations in the spa /wellness industry (existing and future)?

I have noticed three main innovations taking place in the Russian spa and wellness industry. There has been an increased interest in the concept of “Intelligent Spa” – the notion that spa treatments need to take into consideration the customer's health and aim at improving his or her overall well-being. Since most spa therapists in Russia are required to have basic medical education, Russian spas set a great example of the evidence-based approach.

Secondly, the need for relaxation that most spas have held at the core of their programs is being substituted by demand for energizing treatments that could combat conditions such as emotional burnout, seasonal emotional disorders etc.

Finally, there have been innovations in technology, such as the trend for “flotariums” (flotation tanks equipped with perfect purification systems) and “cryo-saunas.”

What do you see as the greatest opportunities/challenges for the global spa and wellness industry?

We are faced with a constantly growing demand for a better living; customers not only want to relax and pamper themselves but also to be healthier and lead a better lifestyle. Due to this demand, spas are beginning to accept the “evidence-based” model that comprises all components of a healthy lifestyle: perfectly balanced nutrition, individually planned exercise, professionally organized leisure and personal growth. One area that could still be developed to complete this approach is that of practical psychology. Spa business is the one that constantly appeals to emotions. Therefore, spas can and should introduce treatments and programs aimed at developing their clients’ EQ.

One serious challenge that the industry has to address is that of merging eco-credibility, perfect service and style. Our clients often perceive luxury and sustainability as opposite notions, which is not actually the case. We need to learn how to maintain the same level of service and at the same time show our customers that we are socially and environmentally conscious.

What are some practical ways for businesses to create a climate for creativity and innovation?

The interdisciplinary approach, which allows professionals to realize their potential fully, and cross-cultural management. Another way to encourage creativity is through education and training programs. In Russia, for instance, we have recently launched a one-day training program called “Developing Creativity” that is run by professional psychologists working in the spa industry. Lastly, it is crucial to consider the atmosphere at work. Employers and managers should aim to create an environment in which every employee can be a decision-maker, thus motivating the staff to introduce and generate innovations.

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