



ASIA: THAILAND

What are the most significant global issues facing us today?

The macroeconomic structure in the Western world will lead to a steady decrease in the middle class and an ever-expanding gap between the haves and the have-nots.

At present, the global economy depends very much on the growth engines of India and China as well as, albeit to a slightly lesser extent, the Middle East and a steadily growing and increasingly prosperous Africa.

An element more directly related to our industry is the fact that the Western world is combating a health crisis that will continue to grow. Due to large deficits in government budgets, the general public has realized that the responsibility to maintain one's own health falls on the individual who is required to make greater personal investments in terms of personal spending, and in the time to maintain and improve their own health. This presents an opportunity for those of us in the wellness industry to develop a new offering where wellness and integrated medicine are successfully combined with real estate.

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

A major game changer is the democratization process happening in the Arab world, the Arab Spring, as this changes the political and socioeconomic landscape while simultaneously establishing more democratic government models in the Middle East. This change will lead to increased investment opportunities and wider consumerism across the region, home to approximately 350 million people.

Another game changer is the extremely young populations in India, Indonesia, the Middle East, and Africa. This young population will force substantial changes in the economies and political systems within their own countries and throughout the entire world. These countries are in the process of creating bigger domestic economies, thus becoming less dependent on external forces. At the same time, their larger economies will attract more foreign investment. With greater domestic economies and consumerism, the middle class in these countries will gradually expand, leading to changes in the global economy already evident in the expansion of the G8 to the G20.

In the hospitality industry, we are seeing tremendous changes in China and India, where outbound travel is rapidly increasing due to their growing economies. These travelers will demand different services, standards, and even physical spaces, which will change the hospitality industry's design development, business structures, and service platforms. We can also expect to see growth in the number of innovative large-scale residential communities catering to particular lifestyle choices, whether they are created along the lines of preferred activities (wellness, golf, nature, etc.) or even according to ethnic or cultural nuances.

We have all seen how our lives have changed due to breakthroughs in technology in the past decade. Social media sites, tablets and smartphones, to name a few, have all had an impact on our lives. Technology will continue to evolve and have substantial impact on how we communicate, socially interact, build relationships, and conduct business.

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

The spa consumer has become more and more sophisticated and will continue to increase his or her spa knowledge, defining their preferences and needs. The educated wellness consumer will be demanding services that are directed at the ultimate result they want to achieve. The often unsupported claims by spa and product companies of the supposed results

their services and/or products will bring will be replaced by spa services or products which will have been developed from substantial academic and scientific research. The research will be drawn from ancient wellness traditions and new scientific discoveries.

Nations will put increased effort behind the creation of wellness communities where a wide span of wellness services, hospitality, and real estate combine and celebrate the cultural symbiosis of the country in question.

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

More and more people are questioning the validity of conventional Western medicine. Thus, the natural inclination for people to apply and utilize more traditional wellness modalities will further expand. This will lead to the development and growth of entire new product requirements, additional market niches will come up, and new supply chains will be established. In sum, this will open up a whole new growth segment for the industry.

A challenge the spa and wellness industry is currently facing is the fact that many of the supposed ‘professionals’ in the industry actually have very little knowledge about true wellness practices. As in any industry, professionals who do not practice what they preach will not create in-depth credibility, which could then lead to stunted growth in the industry. We would not go to a restaurant where the chef does not eat or know about his own food, why should spas be any different? If we were to take a look at the health, vitality, physical fitness, and nutrition habits of “leading” wellness experts, spa product company owners, spa associations, etc., we might be surprised at how many are overweight, have not seen a gym for a long time, or do not understand the basic principals of CAM nor are able to accurately explain the difference between TCM and Ayurveda and their historical roots.

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

First, encourage a company culture of open communication where team members of all levels are empowered to voice their opinions and exchange ideas, no matter how senior or junior their position. One of the things I enjoy most about my GOCO team is the number of times that our junior members come up with brilliant ideas that are fresh and innovative. These exchanges need not always be conducted in an office environment. Often, off-site gatherings prove more conducive to creativity.

Second, never focus on what you are already good at, but on what you can improve. Challenge existing processes and systems and define them further.

Third, get out of that box and into the wide, wide world. Look outside your social and cultural frames to discover unique ways of solving problems or gaining different viewpoints.

And lastly, dare to dream and pursue those dreams.

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