



The Americas: United States

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

Consumers are getting more savvy on massage and seem to be more educated on what they want regarding types of massage and bodywork. Whether through the media, friends or therapists, they are learning about various modalities and starting to understand basic concepts of things like reflexology or Thai massage. We have also seen an increase in longer session times. We have a good percentage of our members upgrading to 1.5-hour or even 2-hour massages.

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

I know of two massage franchise companies that have been acquired by investment companies—Massage Envy and Elements Therapeutic Massage and another that has new investors Hand & Stone.

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

It's interesting to assess the growth of the spa and wellness industries and to note what led this growth. In the U.S. over the past two decades, spa and wellness growth was a grassroots movement. It was started by individuals looking outside of the accepted norm and saying that way of thinking medically doesn't work for them. It was led by the first pioneers in spa and wellness that existed in small pockets all over the country. It came from everyday folks that received their first spa service and kept returning because of the positive results they experienced, and then, from those people telling family and friends.

This grassroots movement has now created more consumers for spa and wellness services than ever before. An average U.S. spa consumer has more knowledge about benefits and more awareness about being proactive in maintaining their own health. Research is starting to shine a light on various spa services, particularly massage therapy. More hospitals have added or considered adding adjunct complementary services. The future for spa and wellness services looks bright regarding consumer demand, if the services are affordable.

The future for staffing spa locations is not so bright. If consumer demand continues to grow, spa businesses will experience a lack of educated professionals to meet that demand. For the past 6 years, enrollment/graduation numbers from massage therapy schools has continued to decline. Schools are closing and the annual numbers of graduates shrink. Qualified spa managers and directors are difficult to find at this point as well.



It would seem to me that we need a national campaign that outreaches to potential future students (and crosses diversity lines) educating about the validity and potential of various spa careers. The reality is that even high school career counselors don't know enough about spa careers to be able to share with their students. There is potential, we just need to tap into it.

I will highlight an example for you. Two years ago, I attended the American Cosmetology Schools Conference. I was looking at recruiting materials from Great Clips and Supercuts and on one piece it said that "40,000 open cosmetology positions went unfilled last year." This particular piece was addressed to potential students.

Spas could be in this same position in the next few years if united focus isn't given on developing educational outreach strategies that highlight those spa careers that are the heart of most spa businesses.

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