



# THE AMERICAS: UNITED STATES

## **What are the most significant global issues facing us today?**

We have a worldwide recession, waning supplies of oil and energy resources, pollution, global warming, wars, and unstable situations in countries like Iran, Syria and North Korea. So what does this have to do with the spa industry? Stress, in the forms of uncertainty, information overload, and lack of restful sleep, is in abundant supply and the calm and clarity that a spa environment can bring becomes more important than ever to a world spinning out of balance. To the extent that it is possible to create and market the antidote for stress and solutions for wellness within an environment that allows for calm, creative and clear thinking, spas can play a much bigger role in infusing hopelessness and hurt with hope and help and healing.

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

A tech boom in apps and app functions, social media and the internet; all of these are spurring innovation and development. While entire publishing and information industries have been brought to their knees, an entire generation of participants has been brought to the table to freely write, receive and exchange content, whether written, filmed or recorded, with whole populations of strangers connected online simply by their interests.

The spa industry benefits greatly by this new flow model. One of the primary means of spa marketing - one-to-one or word-of-mouth - has been reinvigorated via blogging and social marketing. This means of spa promotion is completely unprecedented. "Spa" is a topic that needs to be explained, experience by experience, and to the right audience of people looking for the solutions that a spa can offer. As blogging, social media, YouTube and other forms of internet interaction continue to develop and expand they have become the perfect distribution platforms for those spa businesses that know how to employ them.

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

The primary innovations in the spa and wellness industry have come from the medical tourism side. With the advent of medical tourism as a legitimate industry, spas all over the world have been able to add programs that fuse beauty and relaxation with true medical benefits. Consider teeth whitening, Botox®, cryotherapies and even Juvaderm. These are treatments that even a few years ago were considered too controversial, too complicated or too risky to be placed on a spa menu. Now they may be common and expected. In some of our spas, guests are given a choice of trying minimally invasive alternatives or an ultrasound method for body sculpting and managing cellulite. At other spas, guests may come in search of massages and facials but find the menu leading to smoking cessation programs, pain management therapies and lifestyle changes. Such treatments were less prevalent even five years ago.

Another element of innovative change in the spa industry has been the development of spa and rejuvenation as a global enterprise, and infusing such spa amenities as salt rooms, jade rooms, tea baths, camphor wraps, even sweat lodges into common spa environments where one might not expect to encounter such options. It is getting as easy to get "threading" treatments in Los Angeles as it is in Istanbul or Bangkok, or as common to find acupuncture therapies on the page at any US Spa as it is at Spa Village Pangkor Laut in Malaysia. The globalization of spa and wellness therapies has helped the industry greatly by delivering new reasons for people to go, new discoveries and beauty options for people to try, and new buzz to set the industry in motion.

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

In a word: money. While the world's potential spa-goers may be more stressed than ever, much of that stress arises from the devaluation of their assets, and the disappearing security of their jobs, their skills and their ability to carve out a profitable life in the current state of our world. Spa treatments are neither food nor shelter and may be among the first items removed from a to-do list.

Even so, opportunities are popping up as fast as Facebook pages and Groupon alerts. Urban centers now see \$40/hr massages, \$15/hr reflexology treatments and \$10 shoulder rubs advertised on storefronts - a concept that may provide opportunity to therapists who simply want to hang a shingle and get to work. We are witnessing the emergence a new market, perhaps on a lower rung of the economic ladder, but a new market nonetheless. This may not be the same market that orders room service at a 5-star resort but it still opens up new markets. Similarly, in spa's newfound mainstream growth, all hotels, from Hiltons to Garden Inns, are now expected to have a spa - especially in resort or vacation destinations. That means, again, more exposure for formerly unexposed populations, and wider acceptance of spa treatments as a necessary part of daily life, rather than a gift reserved for special occasions. It also provides more opportunities for therapists to ply their skills and learn new tricks of their trade.

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

Three influences seems to be key in determining the strength of a spa business: Location; Treatments (Prices and Range of Selection); Outreach.

Regarding location: spas can team up with an enterprise, be it a hotel/resort, a salon, a mall or simply a well-trafficked and captured traffic location, such as an airport or a Saturday farmers' market.

High treatment prices often mean empty treatment rooms so spas can offer a range of treatments that also may offer attractive pricing to those customers who might not want to spend \$3 a minute on a full body massage but might be happy with a \$1.25 a minute, 15-minute foot rub. Drawing customers in is half the challenge, followed up by treatment up-selling and customer retention. Off-peak times in resorts offer opportunities to create spa special pricing and added value for longer treatment periods formerly not booked.

In treatment, spas should consider offering at least one or two high-end exotic treatments, especially if they mix in a "sense of place," such as a scent that is local or a potent anti-oxidant herb found in that area. A treatment can be as much of a souvenir of a place or time as a painting or souvenir purchased during a trip.

#### SUBMITTED BY

JoAnn Kurtz-Ahlers  
President  
Kurtz-Ahlers & Associates, LLC.  
United States  
E: [j.kurtz@cox.net](mailto:j.kurtz@cox.net)  
W: [www.kurtzahlers.com](http://www.kurtzahlers.com)

