



# Expanding Your Practice into a Day Spa

BY STEVE CAPELLINI

**Y**ou've thought about it. You've seen other therapists take the plunge. Perhaps you've read about the ones who have become successful, opening up spa operations in cities across the country, starting up multiple-practitioner operations at airports, or winning the spa concession at resorts and boutique hotels. So, if you have thought about it, and you have seen the fruits of these other therapists' labors, what's holding you back? What's stopping you from following this particular dream?

Among the most commonly cited roadblocks to following this dream: lack of funds, business knowledge, nerve, experience, support, and encouragement. This list of lacks is long, but notice that among them you do not find a lack of passion. Many therapists have translated their innate love of what they do into viable businesses in spite of obstacles and shortcomings. Could you be next?

Opening a new spa business and hiring others to work alongside you is not an easy proposition. It will take all of your willpower, resources, and resolve to turn the dream into reality. But it can be done. Many others have gone before you, and there is a road map that you can follow. At the Day Spa Expo held this past February in Las Vegas, a team of map makers, who have helped hundreds of massage therapists, estheticians, and entrepreneurs create functioning spa businesses, was assembled. These experts can help you, too; the following pages are filled with their tips and advice.

For many therapists, the most intimidating aspect of expanding a practice is the prospect of needing to work with so many new people. In order to open or expand a business, you will need the help of professionals like architects, spa consultants and designers, and (gasp!) employees. That is correct; in order to fulfill your dream, you need to involve other people and to forge relationships with them, relationships that can sometimes get complicated. Wouldn't it be easier to just accept the status quo? Compared to work as an independent therapist, everything in a spa gets multiplied: multiple rooms, types of equipment, linens, products, services offered, and, of course, people.

The end result is never quite what you had envisioned during the early stages of your spa project, but sometimes a messy reality can be better than a pristine dream. Let's see if you're cut out for it ...

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT

Many therapists have a general idea of the type of spa or wellness center they would like to open, but few therapists have done much self-assessment regarding their readiness to own and operate such a facility. Often, their plans remain vague, and that vagueness is part of the problem that keeps them from reaching their goals. In order to open a spa, your plans must become concrete, and a good way to make them so is to take a close look at your preparedness in a number of relevant categories. With this end in mind, fill out the Spa Ownership Self-Assessment on page 43. This will help you determine how serious you are about getting started with your project.

If you score low on the self-assessment, put some effort into filling the gaps in your preparedness. If you have the energy and enthusiasm to eventually bring your score up to the mid to high 20s, that shows you are determined and serious enough to start on your project. These are nuts and bolts tasks and goals; they are not glamorous. Finding investors, getting trained in payroll accounting, visiting your local zoning office, and coming up with a new theme or logo may be a little tedious, but they are vital first steps in the alchemical process of turning thoughts into reality.

Without an underlying purpose and vision that defines your project, you will flail around in an attempt to either copy other successful spa businesses or to cobble together a mishmash of concepts into something new, but too undefined to gain traction

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with customers. That is not the way to create a thriving business. Successful spas are successful from conception onward, which requires you to be the lead visionary from the very beginning. Define what kind of spa will it be: a day spa, destination spa, medical spa, salon spa, Asian-themed spa? How will the spa reflect your own personal purpose? Will it be run according to certain principles and passions in your life, such as acupuncture, color therapy, natural wellness, the outdoors, vegetarianism? What is the historical purpose? How does the spa fit into its environment? How will it connect to your community? Once you know the proposed spa's purpose link it to your vision of how it should look. With

that in mind, you can ask yourself, “What kind of treatment rooms do we need? How many guests will we have per day? How big should the retail space be? Do we need a wet room? What will my expected income be?”

One final word of caution: take a close look at your motivations and ask yourself whether or not making a lot of money is one of your goals. Regardless of how opulent certain spas may appear, they are not, in general, sources of great profit for their owners. Operating profit margins of 5 to 10 percent are considered good; anything higher than that is extremely good. If your goal is to get rich quickly, you are probably better off going into investment banking or some other potentially more lucrative pursuit. But if the strength of your passion for the spa industry propels you forward regardless of this fact, then you are probably ready to step toward creating your business.

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