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Articles

How to Create Signature Spa Services

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A couple of designing women demonstrate how to create customized services that will make your spa a standout.

There is a science behind a customized spa service, and it's not just the chemistry that backs up the products. The service must appeal to a spa's target market, support the business's overall brand, and be profitable. Most importantly though, the signature service must contain some magnetic powers of attraction, because the rest of the menu's more standard services count on it to continually intrigue new and repeat customers and drive them into the spa. SALON TODAY invited two service scientists, Spa Consultants Mindy Terry of Creative Spa Concepts in Atlanta, Georgia, and Nancy Nemer of Red Cashew in Cardiff, California, to detail the process behind designing spectacular spa services:

ST: Why is it important for a spa to have services that are unique to their own business?

Nemer: A unique service gives a spa the opportunity to create a point of difference in a competitive market. Anytime you create a signature service, it's a reflection of



who you are and it should be executed at a level of excellence and authenticity. It's important to remember that these services may not be the most popular on your menu. I was just reading a survey from the Global Spa Summit, and 60 percent of spa goers purchase the 60-minute Swedish massage. But the signature service is the one that attracts attention to your business, offers a great opportunity for gift certificate purchases and separates you from the pack.

ST: What's the first step in creating a signature service?

Terry: Before you can really start developing your menu, you have to do some market research. Try to learn about your consumer—take a look at the demographics: What is the age range? Are they interested in image or relaxation? Are they concerned about aging? Are they one-time guests or clients who'll return again and again? Study the strengths and weaknesses of your competition. Emulate what they do well, and capitalize on their weaknesses.

Nemer: Also, if you haven't, sit down and determine what your culture is—who do you want to be? Brainstorm a concept that is relevant to your culture. Come up with a vocabulary of five words that are relevant to that concept. People have a tendency to deviate from the path when they are designing services—those five words will guide you and help you stay on track for your concept.

ST: Should all of a spa's services be signature services?

Terry: No. With the current economy, today's spa guests are looking for simpler, not overwhelming, menus. A general rule is to have one or two signature services in each service category (facial, nails, body, etc.) —with a few more in body treatments. About 75 percent of your services should be standard ones that follow your vendor protocols—about 25 percent should be customized.

Nemer: More doesn't always mean better. If the menu is too complicated, guests don't know what to get. If you carry a broader menu, consider having a spa concierge—someone who can spend time talking with clients about the treatments and helping them craft a good experience. Make sure the treatments you are designing are ones you can deliver. It's damaging to your business to have a guest ask for something off the menu and not be able to get it because the technician who performs it isn't available that day. Also, too big of a menu can be costly in back bar costs, especially if the majority of those services are only bringing in 2-3 percent of the business. I like an 80/20 ratio, with 20 percent of services being customized, and 80 percent being the more standard, vendor-driven services.

Nancy Nemer



Mindy Terry



To illustrate the importance of designing for an audience, Terry points to these pages from the menu for Vita, a spa located within the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan. These services were clearly created for a very definite audience—expectant and new moms.

ST: When you customize a signature service, where do you draw your influences?

Nemer: Look at how you can make it experiential. As corny as it may sound, try to hit all the senses. Offer guests a tea or some fruit, invite them to swing in a hammock, incorporate music that supports the concept, present some of the elements used in the service on a beautiful tray, spray guests with Evian. The more you do to heighten the five senses, the better you can invoke that sixth sense that says, “This is right.”

Terry: Everywhere—from your product line, your concept, your history, your region. For example, I worked with the Segó Lily Mind Body Spa in Salt Lake City, Utah, who drew upon their history—the first settlers in the area lived off the roots of segó lily flowers. So we took a look at Utah and what it had to offer. We developed services that incorporated mineral salts from the Great Salt Lake and honey from the region.

Currently, I'm working with Rosewood Hotels in Abu Dhabi, and it became important for us to understand the Middle Eastern culture and how to market to them. For example, they don't respond to stress, so while “stress relief” are strong buzz words in the United States, it doesn't mean anything there. One of the things I did was read *One Thousand and One Nights* (Arabian Nights)—it helped me understand the pride of the people and how it associates with their history and culture. Good menu development is about the time you put into it.

ST: How can a signature service help a spa communicate its brand?

Terry: If done correctly, spa services can communicate your business's health and wellness philosophies to your market. For example, consider a spa owner who cares about the environment and is concerned about chemicals used in spa and cosmetic products. She might consider designing services that require less water. Because body treatments can often use a lot of linen, she might think of ways to adapt the treatment so fewer towels and sheets are used. She might purchase a water filtration system to eliminate the post-treatment bottled water she gives her guests. Last, but not least, she may give a percentage of profits from specific signature treatments back to the community.

ST: We love examples. Can you share a service you think was targeted to its

audience and a description that clearly explained it?

Nemer: The Kabuki Spring Spa in San Francisco has a menu that fully concurs with their authentic concept. I really like that it is clearly defined in both service description and what to expect from this unique service. Here's their menu description: "In the great tradition of Japanese public baths, Kabuki's communal bath is designed to encourage harmony and relaxation. Facilities include a hot pool, cold plunge, dry sauna and steam room. Individual bathing areas include traditional Japanese-seated bathing areas and standing western-style showers. You are welcome to enjoy the complimentary bath products, sea salts, chilled cucumber face cloths and teas. The communal baths include a full time attendant."

ST: How should owners incorporate their staffers in service design?

Terry: Allowing them to be part of the process is a great way to both engage and reward them, and the services will be more successful when they all buy into the protocol they helped create. Pair staff members off in teams: with someone performing the services and the other as a guinea pig. Let everyone vote on their favorite treatments.

This process will tell you something important—how 'operationally easy' the services are to perform. Are the products sticky or tacky? Do the services use too many pantry items that will be difficult to store and access? Is it too challenging to clean up in between services?

ST: How do you price services?

Nemer: Any menu is a reflection of your revenue model. Your two biggest expenses will be labor and rent, which are somewhat dependant on your region, followed by your product cost. Then you have to factor in all the peripheral costs that go into the service, such as laundry, linens, water, etc. In the end, you're really doing well if you get about 20 percent. That's why it's so important to encourage retailing of your skin care products, because your profit margin is so much greater.

Terry: Again, go back to your market research. Gather up all the price lists in your area and organize them from the lowest to the highest. Make a mental note of each of the facilities and the amenities (locker rooms, steam rooms, sauna, fresh fruit and tea, robes and slippers) they offer. Where do your prices fall in that market?

On average, 40-45 percent of your price will be labor—salary and benefits. Any more than 45 percent, and you're not making money.

ST: What's important to remember while designing the actual physical menu?

Terry: The vernacular is very important. Single words can really resonate with guests, but make sure you don't overpromise and underdeliver. When it comes to design and layout, go back to your brand—you are really trying to own a piece of real estate in your consumer's mind. A specific image comes to mind. Think about your colors, your imagery, your photography, your typeface, your paper quality, your words. What do they say about you and your business? Is it accurate?

Nemer: It should be a physical representation of your brand. It should touch on the beginning of what they are going to experience. Make it something that can easily fit in a purse, so they take it, reread it and remember you.



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