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Written by,
Mindy Terry, President
and Founder, Creative
Spa Concepts
www.creativespacon-
cepts.com

The Spa Menu: Do's, Don'ts and Tricks of the Trade



Just as a restaurant menu gives the initial impressions of a dining experience, the spa menu serves as an introduction to relaxation. Though, your menu causing guests more stress than relief? What does the spa-goer expect, want and need from a menu of services?

Through more than 14 years of creating treatments and developing menus for dozens of the world's leading spas, I have created a slew of menus. In fact, creating menus is one of my favorite parts of being a spa consultant.

Creating an effective spa menu is a balancing act. To give a very specific formula is difficult as there are many nuances to consider such as the type of spa, location, clientele, etc. In this article, I am giving you general rules of thumb and a sample outline. Though, keep in mind to not get too caught up in the logistics that your intuition is blocked. If you do the proper homework, you can trust your instincts.

Three Steps to Success - The Feast

So, how do you get started? The three steps to success...

1. Do your homework
2. Know your guest
3. Develop a concept-driven menu

Due diligence includes conducting market research to determine local demographics, area competition/comparable businesses and pricing, as well as your guest profile. Doing your homework helps you know your guest. Before working on your menus, it's important to pinpoint your guests' basic statistics (male/female, education, family status, earnings, etc.), local culture and personal priorities (relaxation, stress relief, get work done, etc.)

With the knowledge of your market research and a clear understanding of your spa's vision, values and philosophies, you are ready to develop your spa concept. Your concept will help to guide you in the right direction towards selecting the appropriate products and services for your menu. In creating that concept, be sure that it will resonate with your guests. For example, is your spa Asian influenced, focused on alternative therapies or based around seawater? Are your clients in a lavish resort on vacation or do you operate a day spa that caters to locals who need to get work done? You need to know these answers before you put pen to paper in creating your menu.



Pick Your Side Items...

Next you pick your products. Product lines are critical. I truly believe the most important part of the spa experience is the treatment. If a guest has an amazing treatment experience, they will forgive almost everything else. To determine the best products for your spa, analyze:

Will this product appeal to our guests and is it priced correctly?

Does this product reflect our concept?

Is this product line broad enough to support the range

of services we offer and the type of experience we are trying to create?

What small niche lines might we need to supplement with in order to meet the needs of our guests?

How much sales, marketing and training support will this product vendor provide to my business?

Now you can put together a skeleton menu and decide the treatment categories (nails, hair, face, body, men, pre- and post-natal, etc.) you want to offer. Then pick the appropriate types of treatments (detox, anti-aging, cleansing, hydrating/skin repair, etc.). For help, the Get Spa Smart section of www.creativespaconcepts.com offers a list that is free of charge.

Look at time durations. You'll want a mix of 25-, 50-, 80- and 100/120-minute treatments. Make sure your menu has an appropriate selection of different treatments at varying durations that appeal to consumers in your market. For example, if your spa is located in a busy urban area, you'll want a nice selection of 25-minute treatments that can be done on a lunch break.

Next, begin creating treatment protocols. A mix of 75/80% vendor protocols and 20/25% signature protocols is a good rule of thumb. And, consider all senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, touch – when creating treatments.

Finally, pricing. Market research helps determine appropriate pricing. Conduct a survey to determine the low- and high-end price points in your market. Also, consider the cost of goods per treatment. Averages to follow include 1% for massages, 8-12% for facials and 6-10% for body treatments. You may also want to look at pricing services for time vs. pricing per treatment. Not only does this process offer more flexibility for the guest in packaging, it helps to even out bookings and also allows the opportunity to exceed the cost of goods on key treatments areas.

How long should all of this take? Ideally, you should start developing your menu six months out. At a minimum, 90 days out. Involve staff in the process – if the staff dislikes a line or a treatment - it won't stick around long.

The Icing on the Cake

You've done your homework, you know your guest and you have a concept-based menu. Congratulations! Though, don't let things go stale. If your clientele is transient, such as at a resort, the need to reinvent the menu is not as significant. With day spas, you should

update more often, such as every six months. At the least, review your menu annually and always keep your core/most popular treatments.

Consider some packages. Packages simplify the selection process for guests and are ideal for special occasions such as bridal parties and girlfriend getaways. On an operations side, packages increase use of less popular treatments and allow better distribution of bookings.

People always want to know what's trendy. In menus, as well as throughout the entire spa industry, wellness is huge. We are working at crazier paces than ever before and with technology, we are never turned "off". Help your guests ease out of the work world by thinking of ways you can prepare their minds before their treatment begins (iPods with guided meditation, water circuits, etc.). The treatment should begin as soon as a guest walks into the facility though music, lighting, ambiance, aroma, etc. ■



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