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Experience design and developing spa concepts

Experience creation

Successful spas focus on delivering quality, authentic, memorable experiences for their clients. An experience can be defined as something notable or important that happens to a client, something that has a beginning and an end. Creating amazing experiences for their guests should be a key aim for a spa manager.

It is necessary not only to take into consideration the actual experience but also how the experience fits into the entire spa journey as well. Each part of the journey should flow seamlessly, one into the other, whilst at the same time each part is distinctive.(Dewy, 1934).

Experience ‘value creation’ is about taking the spa experience onto the next level, not just making it memorable and satisfying but also profitable – “customer experience value creation is the performance of actions that increase the worth of goods, services or even a business” (Businessdictionary, 2019). ‘Increase’ here being the operative word!

Experiences in spas are driven by moments of engagement, or touchpoints, between people and brands, and the ideas, emotions, and memories that these moments create (Aarts and Marzano, 2003). When designing experiences in the spa environment, the following components should be considered:

- **Sensory** (how the experience affects the five senses).
- **Affective** (how the experience affects emotions and feelings).
- **Creative cognitive** (the thought processes of the client before, during and after the experience).
- **Physical behaviour and lifestyle** (of the clients having the experience).
- **Social group or cultural related influences** (and what impact they have on the client’s expectations).

Sensory

The best spa experiences are interactive, lifting the client's spirits by igniting their senses: touch, smells, sounds, tastes and visuals. The more activated the senses, the more memorable the experience will be and the greater potential for the client to seek to repeat the experience. In creating experiences, the spa manager should ask themselves the following questions:

- How can I make this experience **visually appealing**? What will the clients see as they move around the spa? How can the interior design, lighting and decoration contribute to the experience?
- What are the **sounds in each zone** of the spa? How can different types of sounds improve the mood of the spaces? Would music or noise effects be preferred? More importantly, where is it necessary just to have total silence?
- What about **smells and aromas** – good and bad? What does the client smell as they step in through the door? (That first smell makes an impressionable impact). How do the changing rooms smell? The pool areas? Are they damp and musty or fresh and clean smelling? What aromas could enhance the treatments and spa waiting areas?
- What will the guest **touch** during their visit (towels, robes, slippers)? More importantly how will the guest be touched by the therapists? Spas are tactile but they must also respect personal space. When and how is it appropriate and in what way to touch the guests?
- What **tastes** can be incorporated into the spa journey? Will there be fresh fruit at the reception, healthy nibbles and herbal teas in the relaxation areas? What will be the concept of the spa menu? How can the tastes be linked to the treatments in the spas or the local culture?
- What about the **sixth sense**, those intangible feelings that the guest picks up from the atmosphere and vibe of the spa? How do the staff contribute to the energy they create in the spa? How is the manager setting the example?

Affective

This refers to the arousal and activation emotions, their intensity and the impulse of the client to either move toward having an experience or away from it. Obviously in a spa the manager wants the guest to move toward experiences, so much so that they want to come back and repeat their visit again and again. Therefore, the spa manager needs to know the stimulus points in the spa journey, not just those that bring out positive emotions, but also those that hinder it as well.

Cognitive

Experiences are influenced by both the expectation prior to the experience as well as the event itself. Once the experience has happened it will remain in the client's memory forming a basis for new preferences and expectations (Larsen, 2007). Spa managers need to produce experiences that both live up to the guests' expectations and that lodge themselves positively in the client's memory, so much so that they will want to retain the experience and repeat it again and again.

Physical behaviours and lifestyle of the clients

These will have a direct impact on the experiences offered and the levels at which the clients will want to experience them. This is influenced by factors like health status (sedentary/active, fit/unfit, etc) and interests and hobbies.

Social group or culture

These will also affect their choices and preferences – class, level of education, age, nationality, culture, religion, sex, income level, sexual orientation, etc.

When creating an experience, all of these five components should be taken into consideration. In addition, there are also different stages of an experience. Aho (2001) lists seven:

- 1 **Orientation** (awakening interest in the clients).
- 2 **Attachment** (strengthening their interest).
- 3 **Visiting** (the actual experience).
- 4 **Evaluating** (when the client critically compares the experience with other experiences).
- 5 **Storing** (when the client stores the experience through photos, films, souvenirs or just memories).
- 6 **Reflection** (when the client remembers and reflects on the experience).
- 7 **Enrichment** (when the client cherishes the memories of the experience and plans to repeat it).

What is interesting to learn from this is that the spa experience begins before the actual visit and ends long after. Depending on the type of experience, it might or might not cover all the stages. The degree of intensity of each different stage will vary – the stronger the intensity level of each stage the more likely it is to carry on to the next one.

Experiences in spas do not just influence the guests or clients. they also affect areas of the business (Boswijk, Thijssen and Peelen, 2007: 145–146), for example:

- 1 Internal business perspective, core competences and technology.
- 2 The organisation's people and culture.
- 3 Innovation and creativity capacity.

(Zátori, 2013)

■ Types of experiences

Spa managers will normally be involved in creating three types of experiences:

- 1 **A micro experience:** "... is a **small, subtle, affordable** and **memorable** touch that resonates with customers for years. Not difficult to achieve, but challenging to design into the behaviour of a whole team or organisation. When it comes to these experiences, what we're most often talking about with micro experiences is those that are designed and executed at ground level" (Hill, 2017).