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December 21, 2004 10 min. Reading opinions of entrepreneurs-contributors are their own. With all the attention these days focused on holistic remedies, organic products and botanical beauty products, it is no surprise that interest in spa treatments is on the rise. Everyone from hated executives to football moms and baby boomers in particular is eager to try out anything that makes them look younger and feel better. This makes this the perfect time to take the plunge into one of the hottest personal service companies: the Day Spa. Day spas offer the same beauty and wellness services as pricier destination spas and resorts, but do not require the same time commitment. According to the INTERNATIONAL SPA Association's 2002 Spa Industry Study (ISPA), there were nearly 156 million spa visits in the United States in 2001, 68 percent of which were in daily cures. Sales in the U.S. spa industry in 2001 were nearly 11 billion U.S. dollars, compared to 5 billion U.S. dollars two years earlier. Still, these expenses have taken place at fewer than 10,000 spas nationwide - 75 percent of which are day baths, meaning the market is open to new spa owners. Spa BasicsThere are two types of day baths. The standard day spas offer body treatments and lifestyle services. Medical spas offer traditional spa services as well as services that must be provided by a licensed doctor, such as acupuncture or microdermabrasion. Although the conventional wisdom is that real day baths must offer hydrotherapies such as Scottish hose treatments or underwater massages, many day spas do well with dry services alone. Not all customers feel comfortable with water therapy, says Hannelore R. Leavy, founder and ceo of the Day Spa Association in Union City, New Jersey. Americans are reluctant to take off their clothes and stand naked in front of a stranger who will perform unusual therapies on them. It is better to open your spa without water therapy, especially if your money is limited. But you can add it to your business plan so you're ready to expand when and if your customers are willing to do so. Dennis Gullo, 47, used a simple formula to determine what services are on offer at his spa. I started with [well-known] services like massages, he says. I didn't want to spend energy selling services that no one has heard of. The formula worked: The spa section of Gullo's Moments Salon & Day Spa in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, generated 44 percent of the company's total revenue of 1.8 million U.S. dollars in 2003. Example: The ISPA-Day Spa Usage Survey 2001 shows that two of the top five reasons why people don't have a Day Spa that they think spas are too expensive and they believe they are not the spa type. So examine the demographics of your target market to see if, for example, the residents of an agricultural community in the heart of Nebraska are the type. Are you interested in pedicures. The fact is that you're more likely to attract customers when the market area is populated with employees under the age of 45 who have a college degree, the survey found. You also need to educate people about their services so they don't see them as a luxury, Gullo says. People feel guilty about pampering themselves, so instead we position ourselves as a provider of healthy life benefits. Equipped with demographic analysis, you can write your business plan. This plan serves as a roadmap for presenting your course and as an invaluable tool to show a banker how savvy you are about the realities of running a business. Your plan should include a description of your business and the services you offer; market strategies (developed with the demographic information you have collected); an analysis of your competition; an operational and management plan; financial information, including assets and capital requirements for startups; an income/expenditure plan and a repayment plan; and a human resources management plan. Services & Equipment Even early in the planning process, you have to decide exactly which services are offered. The treatments typically offered in day spas include massages; Facials and make-up application; Electrolysis; Spa manicure and pedicure; Body treatments such as peeling, wraps and packs; Aromatherapy; and hair services such as cutting, styling and colouring. Hydrotherapies include hydromassage, mineral and seaweed baths, dry and humid warmth and a shower massage. Many spas also offer healing therapies such as Reiki (a form of energy healing) and acupressure, which must be performed by a licensed practitioner, depending on your condition. The services are usually combined in complementary spa packages that guests enjoy for four to eight hours, but also services and prices should be available, both for customers who want to mix and customize their treatments and for customers who want to try something new. The offer you want to offer will have a big impact on the type of investment you choose. Since the wellness equipment (such as massage tables) is usually large, you need enough space to spread out and create a relaxed atmosphere. Your best options are a detached building, a shop window or a strip mall store. Mall locations are usually not optimal as people go to shopping malls to shop, not to enjoy a salt glow treatment, and the rent is often very high. To attract an Oberend clientele, you need a well-equipped facility in a good neighborhood. It should be close to other retail companies to have a good view and there must be enough parking spaces. Don't underestimate the importance of parking. Spa services are not necessary, not even for baby boomers who want to maintain their youth. So if it's difficult to visit your spa for any reason, they won't come - or they'll go somewhere else. Day spas require a lot of equipment to emulate the level of service in resort spas. These Spending will quickly drive up your starting costs, so you'll probably need financial support to get the show on the road. If you find that your big plans outperform what the bank will offer you and what your personal savings can float by controlling costs by buying high-quality used equipment or by reducing the number of services you offer. Facilities normally needed for a day spa include massage tables, manicure and pedicure stations, and sun loungers with sun loungers. Hydrotherapy equipment includes a Scottish hose, hydrotherapy tub, sauna, Swiss shower, Vichy shower, spa bath and steam cabinet. Be prepared for sticker shock: High-quality spa equipment can run from 4,000 to 25,000 US dollars per item or even higher. So be sure to buy wisely. It's easy to get caught up in equipping your spa with the best of everything - and never using it. We've spent 5,000 dollars on a pedicure bed that we use to make 8 dollars of eyebrow waxes, says Daryl Jenkins, 38. Think about how many services you have to provide to pay for the [item] before you buy it. His company, HairXtreme Salon and Spa in Chester, Virginia, projected sales of US 625,000 US dollars in 2004.B. Copier and office supplies, you have to buy: Basic Spa EquipmentStool for aestheticians: 125 \$Pedik Reception Desk stool: 150 \$Pedik to stool: 200 \$Magnifying Lamp: 300 \$Hot towel cabinet: 350 \$Pedik trolley with foot bath Massager: 350 \$Facial steamer: 400 Face vacuum/spraying machine: 400Manicure Table and light: 400 Room furniture: 400 USD per Rotary brush machine: 400 USD Retail product display unit/shelf: 600 . Massage table: 600Massage table: 600Massage table: 600Massage table: 600Massage Table: 600Massage Table: 800Reception Desk: 1,300 \$Gesichtsstuhl: 3,500\$Optional Equipment Steam cabinet: 2,000Vichy Shower: 3,500\$Scotch Hose: 3,800 \$Jacuzzi/Room Spa Bath: 4,000 \$Schweizer Shower: 7,000Hydrotherapy Tub: 15,000 \$Miscellaneous SuppliesManicure/Pedicure Supplies (Polished, Buffer and so on)Massage and Essential OilsMassage Creams and LotionTowels and Spa ClothesRetail Inventory (candles, oils, spa clothing) , Healing Stones and the like) Staffing and Advertising Your Salon Staff SavvyOnce you have all these cool things in place, you will need qualified people to use it properly. Cosmetology schools are the best places to find staff trained to handle the equipment and products in a day spa. Gullo has a foolproof method for dismantling the best and brightest: its employees Lessons at the local cosmetology school. So the young students know who we are and what we offer, he says. Many states require staffers (including spa owners themselves) to hold at least one cosmetology license; others require practitioners to provide a certain number of hours of specialised training and additional licences. Check with your state cosmetology board to find out more about the requirements. The staff you need are: aestheticians who do massages, facials, waxing and special services such as hydrotherapy; Massage therapists whose Stress relief and relaxation; Electrologists who remove excess body hair; manicure that offers manicure and pedicure services. Other professionals you need in your team include a makeup artist, a hairdresser and a spa manager, as well as reception staff. Debbie Elliott, 49, of Debbie Elliott Salon and Day Spa in Portland, Maine, suggests training staff to train more than one job and hiring unlicensed assistants to do tasks such as accompanying guests, changing treatment packs and mixing treatments. This saves licensed people the actual services, which improves our productivity and helps make the spa profitable, she says. It expects its spa to generate sales of USD 1.3 million in 2004. Elliott says personality is more important than skill because you can teach people what to do, but you can't give them a new personality. The dissemination of WordAdvertising is also crucial for a successful start-up. Since it is likely that some people in your market have never considered visiting a spa or are unfamiliar with the services you offer, it is up to you to tell them about the many benefits of the spa. In addition to a Yellow Page Line Ad, you may find a well-placed series of ads in the local newspaper or publication that targets upscale readers is an effective way to introduce the public to your services. Once you engage your customers, make sure you provide the best possible service. Word-of-mouth propaganda is crucial in this business and can mean the difference between many years of decent profits or disgraceful defeat. In the meantime, a clever way to cash in on good word-of-mouth propaganda is a referral program that rewards customers for transferring new customers. Every start-up should have a referral program, gullo says. It is a soft output that can lead to too much new business. Elliott swears by gift vouchers as a major source for new business customers, adding a total of USD 180,000 to their final result in 2002. Most of the time, she says, customers come to us first for a gift voucher. Curve LearningAs spa owners need to keep up with trends, both in the spa industry and in business in general. To stay up-to-date on what is new, you should join a professional association such as The Day Spa Association (201-865-2065) or the International SPA Association (888-651-4772). You'll also find a lot of information online that can help you make business better, faster and smarter. Gullo also recommends that general purchasing training be traditional college. Industry-specific education is valuable, but you also need to know solid business principles, he says. You need to understand what makes companies thrive. Learn more about your new business with these spa-related resources. AssociationsPublicationsSoftwareSpa EquipmentTrade ShowsAmerican Spa and Skin Care Congress, (800) (800) Spa Expo, (800) 427-2420, (218) 723-9130International Congress of Esthetics, (972) 226-2309International Esthetics, Cosmetics & Spa Conference, (800) 624-3248, (805) 995-2989International Salon & Spa Exposition, (800) 468-2274Medicalspa Conference & Expo, (877) ALL-SPASMedical Spa Expo & Conference, (888) 267-3793Eileen Figure Sandlin is an award-winning freelance writer and author who writes about business topics. Topics.

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