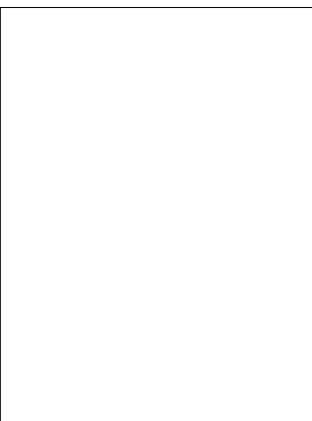


Trend Spotting

FOLLOW THE TRENDS, NOT THE FADS, TO KEEP YOUR SPA BRAND FRESH.

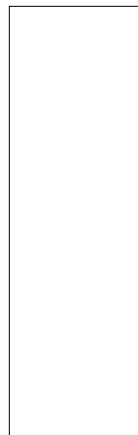
By Nancy Trent



BIG CORPORATIONS HAVE BIG MARKETING budgets, and innovative startup companies often have newness on their side in the battle for consumers' hearts and minds. The importance of staying current can't be overstated. While having a brand and remaining consistent with it is of paramount importance for a spa, it's also important to either start the trends or capitalize on them. But how can you find the latest spa trends that will bring you profits rather than bleed your coffers dry? How do you find the best direction for your business, when there are so many new directions in which to go?

The spa industry often leads the way when it comes to trends in health and beauty. Some examples of this in treatment, procedure and product customs include:

- Exotic, cultural spa experiences, accompanied by medical procedures, both of which reflect increased globalization and tourism overseas.
- New scientific discoveries that have allowed spas to introduce more results-oriented procedures and products.

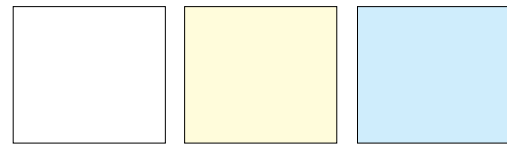


- The baby boomers' war on aging, which has created a demand for consistent, alternative wellness treatments.

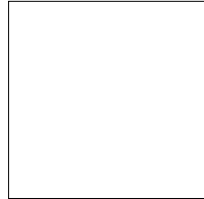
There's no question of the popularity of the spa culture. It's so widespread that "spa" has become an "it" word, used as a way to describe nonspa items to increase their perceived value. Yes, the spa industry is a cultural leader, and the choices for new therapies, products and procedures have never been greater. So the question for you is, are you setting trends or simply following fads?



Hula Hoops...disco...low-rise jeans...reality TV...pedal pushers...Aqua Net...



Slin... afro...karaoke...tie dye...3D movies...Slinky...beehiv



Trendsetters see where things are headed and get there first.

Trend or Fad?

While spas are still a relatively hot concept, to remain on top of the business world you need to reinvent your spa once in a while. Like Madonna, spas must stay fresh to capture consumer attention. They also need to put a high value on branding—a compelling image that gathers followers the same way fashion items, food or new electronics do. A good example of this is the recent effort by many spas to franchise their own spa brand and concept.

Trendsetters see where things are headed and get there first. They appear at various stages of the making of a trend. A trendsetter can be:

- The one analyzing the marketplace to identify upcoming consumer needs.
- The “reformer” trying to create and/or package an innovative product to meet the needs of consumers based on the current direction of the market.
- The early adopter of new ideas, making the case studies that others turn to before they leap.
- The one spreading the word about the most recently identified trends and inspiring others to follow.

Before you invest in a trendy treatment or product line, you must determine its staying power. The industry is flooded with business failures whose only crime was being too far ahead of the times. But how can you tell what’s going to last?

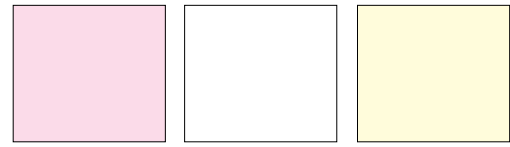
This acronym can help you determine if you’re investing in a trend rather than a fad:

- T**IME: Trends develop over a period of time.
 - R**OOTS: Trends have depth and staying power.
 - E**VERYWHERE: Trends slowly sprout up in different places.
 - N**ONSTOP GROWTH: Trends reinvent themselves.
 - D**URABILITY: Trends have a strong staying power in culture.
- A fad, on the other hand, has these characteristics:
- F**AST: Fads are easy to adopt and spread quickly.
 - A**LL OVER: Fads quickly take on a mainstream appeal.
 - D**ISAPPEARING: Fads can fade as quickly as they start.

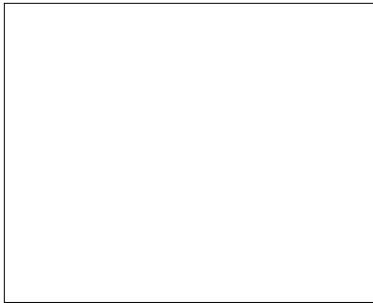
When it comes to fads, think of the flotation tank. Many spas bought them, but how many spas are offering this treatment today?

It’s important to remember that some fads may turn into trends over time and become classics. For example, yoga is a fad that became a trend, and has just become mainstream. Six hundred million dollars were spent on yoga in 2005, including yoga classes, outfits, bags, mats, tapes, DVDs and other accessories—and that figure is growing.

The main difference between a trend and fad is that a trend lasts longer, and there are many reasons for this. A trend makes long-term sense for a large number of people—it ties into and is consistent with their needs. A trend doesn’t happen right away, but a fad does.



roller skates...jacks...arcade games...tennis shoes...leg warmers



You must balance a trend's novelty with the time it will take to bring in profits for your spa.

If this sounds a little confusing, that's because it can be. Remember, some fads turn into trends over time. So how do you identify true trends?

Observation: Are there any shifts in the spa marketplace? Talk to fellow spa owners at trade shows and read articles in trade magazines—what direction does everyone seem to be taking? Are more of your clients requesting injectables, noninvasive procedures, lasers or pharmaceutical-grade skincare products? Your clients can help identify trends for you.

The rule of threes: Are you noticing any patterns? Typically, journalists require three examples of a service, product type or custom before reporting it as a trend. Are there three equipment companies offering a very similar product? This may indicate a trend, but it takes a talented trendspotter to spot them early and give them momentum and credibility.

Increased media coverage: Are the trade publications reporting on the same new treatment in the same month? Are you hearing clients and colleagues ask about a new treatment they saw in a magazine, newspaper or on TV? The media include some of the best trendspotters in the business, and watching them can give you clues on upcoming trends.

At What Cost?

While being on top of trends is important, before you adopt one you must be sure if it's consistent with your brand, and whether you can afford it—no trend is worth going broke over. Some trends may require too rich of an investment for your budget. However, with slight modifications they can work for your spa (much like choosing nonfat ice cream while on a diet). You must balance a trend's novelty with the time it will take to bring in profits for your spa. If you don't know whether it's consistent with your brand, either your brand statement isn't strong enough or you need more information about the trend.

The best way to determine if a trend will work at your spa is to develop a test program. A vendor can work with you to help minimize your risk. In some cases, vendors can create sampling or leasing arrangements that can help preserve your budget. Ask yourself these questions:

- Will vendors support your marketing efforts by giving you marketing dollars or support through their own advertising or public relations campaigns?
- Will vendors allow you to test the product or equipment before you agree to purchase it in full?
- Can you try the product or equipment at a trade show before you buy?
- Will vendors use your spa as a local showroom for other customers?



mp3 .shoulder pads...pet rocks...Hello Kit

Trend spotting boils down to remaining true to your brand and your clients.

Even if a vendor were to foot an entire trial, however, implementing something new in your spa will always be tricky thanks to other factors like location. For example, the hottest trend among spa-goers in Los Angeles may not appeal to New Yorkers, and what's trendy for teens doesn't always fly with women in their 30s or 50s. Also, you don't want to turn off any customers or dilute the spa brand you've worked so hard to build.

Getting the Word Out

Does a tree falling in the woods make a sound if no one is around to hear it? Adopting a trend won't bring in new customers unless you garner publicity for it. Public relations is critical to circulating your message to reach a large number of people through the media that are most read, watched and listened to by your target audience.

Publicity creates consumer demand, sells product, allows you to charge more for your products and services, and starts trends. Here are some key points for creating a PR campaign for a new trendy treatment:

Points of Difference: Know what sets you apart. What do your clients think of the new trend? What do you want to say about it? Do the media already know about it, or are you introducing it to them? These are all questions you must consider if you're going to get publicity.

News-making: Give the media news they can use. Are you the first to launch a treatment in your area? Does the treatment relate to a specific season, holiday or occasion such as summer bathing suit season or popular wedding months? Are there recent reports in the news that you can piggyback, such as advancements in the types of equipment you're offering? Do you have testimonials and before-and-after pictures of clients who received the treatment? (Important note: Don't forget

advertising rules—you must include the statement "Results may vary" with before-and-after images.) These are story ideas that journalists can use to fit your spa into a trend story.

Spokespersonship: Become a media darling. As you build relationships with the media, you'll learn what the editors need, how they need it and when they need it. A good spokesperson is available to editors to discuss trends, is knowledgeable about his or her industry and gives good sound bites and quotes.

Messaging: Have an agenda. Before speaking with a journalist, develop the points that are most important to you to get across in the interview. Always be prepared to cite compelling statistics, numbers, anecdotes or personal experience to be more quotable.

Media Contacts: Know who to call and what to say. Contact media in three categories: consumer (national and regional), trade and business. Be prepared with a press kit containing a news release, your biography, your company's background, and photos of your spa and the treatment. Ask to arrange an interview, a meeting or a demo, or invite journalists to an event at your spa.

Trend spotting all boils down to remaining true to your brand and knowing your clients. However, if you really think you've spotted a trend, don't bet the farm until you've thoroughly tested it. If it passes the test, being the first to introduce clients to a new concept can really set you apart, strengthen your spa brand and build your customer base. ●

Nancy Trent is the owner and founder of Trent & Company, a New York City-based public relations firm that specializes in publicity for the healthcare, fitness and spa industries. She can be reached at 212/966-0024 or at nancy@trentandcompany.com.