

Baby Boomers Turn 60!

The Perfect Storm

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The spa industry is sitting in the vortex of a perfect storm....

The **first front** in this storm system is an aging population who have the desire and means (and as they retire, the time) to do what it takes to “stay forever young”, as evidenced by the fact that of that 60 *is* the new 40...

The **second front** of the system is that many are defining youth with matrices that only *start* with external looks and extend well into more complex issues of quality of life, disease prevention and psychological well-being. This expansion of awareness directly expands opportunities for spa services.

The **third front** of the perfect storm is related to the American medical system. Our health care system is stretched to its limits and in some cases failing; in response to the medical system’s short comings (and their own aging bodies) many individuals are investigating alternative self care options. To that end, spa regimes, meditation, nutritional supplements, and lifestyle classes are some of the ways that consumers are supplanting their allopathic care.

The **last component** to complete the storm is the fact that boomers are savvy, result-driven consumers who collect experiences the way their parents collected possessions. They are not constrained by the pack-mentality of previous generations and are willing to try new and adventurous things....especially in the name of vanity, health and wellness.

Issues germane to the health, well being and vanity of an older population have saturated our media, and it is reasonable that spa treatments, services and even the facility configurations continue to address and acknowledge these trends. This is not to advocate that all spas be configured to reflect an amenity at an assisted living facility, but rather it is important to point out that if the front end of the boomers are 60 the tail-end of the boomers are 42. This means that there is an 18 year window of opportunity related to this middle aged (and beyond) demographic. When the youngest boomers are approaching their 60th birthdays the front end of the demographic will be just shy of 80! This kind of trend provides the ability to address immediate as well as long-term solutions. **This article is designed to identify the dynamic dance of demographic trends and spa related opportunities.** Some of these issues may require significant capital, while others may be addressed with a bit of sensitivity and creativity.

Trends

It is clear as we age that the “follies of our youth” becomes cumulative and dire. Mitigating the damage caused by too much sun, tobacco alcohol, and too little sleep, exercise, and nutrition are areas where the spa industry can continue to collaborate with

various medical modalities to create enterprises that support our aging population. It is reasonable to expect that we will see **increases in the number and type of “medical” spas**, especially as the concept of medicine is expanded by both scientific and technological advancements as well as by modalities that the market embraces.

The **presentation of the spa environment** may also undergo some changes, such as spa menus with larger font, or better contrast and light levels that are slightly higher to address weakening eyesight. Locker rooms may have additional private changing areas to accommodate a greater percentage of the population who may be self-conscious due to physical anomalies caused by scars, surgeries and general aging. Further, HVAC systems may require a higher top end, to ensure client comfort. Required safety railings in all showers may make it easier to address the needs of a market who may not be so sure on their feet. As well, spa corridors and doors will become wider to accommodate those who may need mobility assistance. Fortunately, sound insulation may become less critical for some.

There is great potential to **expand hydrotherapy treatments**. In addition to addressing the current needs of hydrotherapy, it is reasonable that there will be facilities specializing in hydrotherapy treatments targeted towards mobility and arthritis issues. More medically-based body wraps and soaking treatments will provide relief from stiff joints, stiff muscles and poor circulation. It is also reasonable to assume that deep soaking tubs and walk-in tubs may become more popular as the market requires these accommodations.

The spa industry has already started to become more socially oriented. The **socializing trend should increase**, as the population ages and community connections replace those found in the nuclear family. Initially this may be a function of empty nesters, while later the spa community may provide fertile socializing opportunities for widows and widowers. Closely related to this trend is the need to address **memory and mental alertness**. Absent degenerative diseases, lack of socializing and mental stimulation can cause mental atrophy. It is widely believed and generally accepted that the mind is like a muscle and the more it is used, the stronger and more flexible it remains. It is logical if spas are all about feeling good and creating an elevated quality of life then, mental stimulation may become a part of the spa menu. Puzzles, bridge tournaments, mental exercises and free-form socialization are all ways to enhance mental acumen.

Massage treatments and reflexology may become more important and regularly scheduled, especially as the population ages. Scientific studies conclusively support the benefits of therapeutic touch both physically and mentally. Seniors singles, especially those who have no relatives in their immediate vicinity, have a dearth of physical contact, except in clinical circumstances. Massage and reflexology is a safe and codified way to provide opportunities for therapeutic touch.

Skin care lines and skin care treatment will be modified to address thinner membranes, age spots, and less elasticity. Treatments and reagents that work well for healthy 40-year-old skin may overpower more elderly skin. Treatment therapies and

product types are expected to evolve to address the needs of an aging market. A prescribed series of treatments and specific skin care regimes will be further tailored to address the needs of those who desire personalized treatments.

Nutraceuticals, or the way food will affect one's performance, mood and general health will most likely become more important with an aging population. This trend aligns itself with the increase in the marriage between the medical and spa industries. Using food as a means to enhance the quality of one's life has unlimited possibilities and may show up in spas either in spa cuisine or in classes and seminars which instruct the participants on how to use food to enhance their longevity and their quality of life.

Sleep, or inability to sleep is a problem that becomes more and more common as we age. Spas that involve themselves in sleep hygiene, sleep programs, relaxation, meditation and other means to achieve and maintain a relaxed state will have great market acceptance. We believe that this trend may stem some of the pharmaceutical-based sleep "cures".

The boomers are iconoclastic. They have broken rules, shifted paradigms and created conventions to address their personal needs. Given this it is reasonable that they will continue to do this to the end of their lives. For this reason **hospice spas** will come into vogue. Resembling destination resorts, where all one's desires can be met, it is not only reasonable but logical that one would select this environment over a sterile and uninviting hospital room. The hospice spa will need to have a health care infrastructure as part of the back of the house, but its attractiveness is that to the consumer it will look, feel, and operate as a 5-star resort.

Some of the above trends are already coming to fruition as evidenced by residential communities incorporating spa and wellness centers as the keystone of their development. They combine issues of socialization, wellness, medicine and community. Clearly, these trends will evolve gradually and will have numerous iterations and permutations in their development. However, if resorts and hotels are incorporating residential amenities into their infrastructure to make the lodging product more inviting, can the time be far off when wellness centers (with amenities and facilities noted above) eclipse traditional destination spas and become the must-have item for all destination resorts?