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Chapter

Technology for Spas, Salons, and Wellness Centers

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SUMMARY

Spas, salons and wellness centers have been slow to embrace new technologies, but guest expectations of personalization, access to information, and ease of transactions have recently spurred the creation and adoption of many technology tools within this specialized field. This chapter explores technology commonly used in this segment for managing operations, marketing, enhancing the guest experience and evaluating performance. The chapter begins with an introduction to the nature of spa, salon and wellness center operations and explains how technology is used, in general, to facilitate this high-touch arena of hospitality. Additional topics include technology for managing operations such as point-of-sale and booking software, marketing tools, technology used for enhancing the guest experience and customer relationship management, and the use of technology for evaluating performance. The chapter ends with a look into the future with insights from leaders in this segment about how they believe technology might facilitate the evolving needs of the spa, salon and wellness center industries in the next decade and beyond.

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, the student will be able to:

- Outline the guest journey in a spa, salon and wellness center
- Identify technology tools that assist operations, marketing, human resources, the guest experience and performance analysis
- Consider the role technology should play in a high-touch service environment
- Describe components and functions included in spa software systems
- Explain the importance of maintaining correct information in spa software and other systems
- Provide examples of technology tools in use
Introduction

Despite ancient roots dating to the pre-Roman empire, spas, salons and wellness centers have historically been slow to embrace new technologies. However, guest expectations of personalization, access to information, and ease of transactions have recently spurred the creation and adoption of technology tools within this specialized field. This chapter will explore technologies used in this segment for managing operations, marketing, enhancing the guest experience and evaluating performance. It will begin with an introduction to the nature of spa, salon and wellness center operations and explain how technology is used, in general, to facilitate this high-touch segment of hospitality.

Spas, Salons and Wellness Centers

Spas, salons and wellness centers offer some of the hospitality industry’s most labor-intensive and personalized service products. Typically, there is a one-to-one, or even greater, ratio of staff members to guests in these environments. A guest journey in a luxury spa, for example, includes a warm greeting and check in at the reception desk, perhaps with a welcome ritual of some kind; a guided escort to the locker room and thermal facilities; an orientation to the amenities with instructions on how to enjoy various relaxation areas such as a steam room, sauna, whirlpools and experience showers; a thorough consultation with a spa therapist; and a massage, facial, body scrub, pedicure or other treatment. After the spa treatment, the guest is escorted back to a relaxation lounge, offered a beverage and wished well before

Digital Detox

Woven deeply into the debate about technology and the guest experience is the idea that devices and being “plugged in” is detrimental to human health and wellbeing. There is evidence to support the premise that the impacts of common technologies, especially those related to the ubiquitous use of smartphones, is linked to increased levels of stress and its myriad effects along with less connection to nature and loved ones. Nature-Deficit Disorder, a term coined by author Richard Louv, seeks to organize this concept, as well as the various reasons why younger generations are typically less exposed to nature (Louv, 2011). Many spas embrace this philosophy and make efforts to bring natural elements inside as well as offer treatments outside. They encourage guests to turn off their devices and focus on the natural environment and the healing spaces of the spa. For example, Jeremy McCarthy, Group Director for Spa and Wellness for the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group said, in an online interview in late 2020 that helping guests and even staff members manage their relationships with technology has been increasingly important, and that the group tries to make their spas a place where people can go to take a break from technology (McCarthy, 2020). Some spas even offer interactions with nature as a treatment itself, such as forest bathing, also known as “shinrin-yoku,” sessions which include guided hikes, outdoor meditation, nature walks, outside massage, and mindful yoga (DiNardo, 2016).
departing. When the guest has finished enjoying the spa facilities, they return to the reception area, where a staff member assists them in choosing retail products to purchase for use at home, processes payment, makes any follow-up appointments for more services that the guest might like and offers a gracious departing remark. So, how does technology fit within such a personalized and interactive service package?

There is debate within the spa industry about what role technology should play in the spa experience. Spas, salons and wellness centers have been resistant to adopt technologies that other areas of the hospitality industry quickly embraced. They lagged behind in their adoption of social media, apps and online booking through websites. Some still require that guests shut off their devices to create a technology-free zone during their visit, so as to avoid disturbing other guests, enhance the relaxing benefits of their treatments and enjoy a “digital detox” (see box in the previous page). However, most spas, despite their philosophy on technology’s place in the guest journey, use tech tools to improve business functions whether these tools are seen by guests or not.

**Managing Operations**

The most common tool used to facilitate operations is a spa software program installed on the spa office, reception and reservation computers. Similar to a hotel’s property management system, spa software programs act as the main hub for scheduling staff and appointments, tracking sales, managing inventory, acting as a point-of-sale system at the reception desk and boutique, maintaining client files and information, running revenue and productivity reports and more. Some of the most commonly used spa systems include SpaSoft by Spring-Miller Systems, book4time spa software, Mindbody, Meevo 2 by Millennium Systems International and Resort Suite.

These systems typically include multiple hardware units placed at the spa reception desk for making appointments and collecting payments. There are also integrated hardware items like barcode scanners for retail product sales, credit card processing units and membership key fob readers. Many of these systems are now cloud-based, which allows them to be accessed from spa offices, related departments and even mobile devices remotely through the Internet. There is also usually software access to the system from desktop computers and mobile devices so that it’s connected to spa offices and related departments. Many of these systems are now cloud-based, which allows them to be accessed remotely through the internet. This is important for spas that are within a large organization that have a separate reservations office or that have multiple locations operating under the same umbrella. This way, communication is easily and immediately shared between business units and offices.

Caelynn Christoff, Front Desk Manager of Elements Massage Studios based in Colorado, cautions that it is important to consider cost and availability of technical support when choosing a spa software system. The software her spas use has 24-hour access to technical support, which she depends on regularly to call upon after spa operating hours with requests for assistance or to ask questions (Christoff, 2020).
Guest Management

Linked to improvements for reception staff and increased efficiency for many management tasks, a robust spa software system is a must for most spas, salons and wellness centers. There are different philosophies on what’s most important in a spa system. Many of these philosophies depend on the kind of business model that is in question. For example, integration with a full property management suite of programs is important for hotel and resort spas. In this situation, staff members at the spa desk must be able to post charges to a guest folio at a minimum. Ideally, a detailed guest profile, including all resort reservations, preferences, food allergies, and communications with staff from all resort departments could be stored and accessible by spa staff to provide a more seamless and personalized experience. A membership-based spa, however, may focus more on membership management and frequent communications between the spa and its members. A medical day spa might want robust inventory management to facilitate strong retail product sales.

Most spa software programs will offer functions for a diverse range of tasks, but one size does not fit all. The Ocean Tides Spa at the Omni Resort on Hilton Head Island, SC, for example, does not use the online appointment booking features in their spa software by SpaSoft despite recent popularity of online booking within the spa industry. Paige Cope, Spa Director, explains that because many of her staff members are designated as on-call spa therapists, it is difficult to program availability of appointments on any given day to facilitate online bookings. She and her reception staff prefer to work with guests one-on-one to book appointments and call in spa therapists as needed (Cope, 2020). Caelynn Christoff of Elements Massage Studios, on the other hand, espouses the benefits of allowing guests to request appointments using the Mindbody app through their mobile devices. She explains that many guests enjoy the flexibility of making appointments on their own, especially younger or more experienced spa-goers. (Christoff, 2020).

Inventory Management

Spas, salons and wellness centers use many physical products and supplies in their operations. These include disposable supplies like cotton rounds, toe separators, treatment product portion containers, hand towels and rubber gloves. Most spa or salon services also include the application of a treatment product such as marine mud, seaweed gel, massage cream, aromatherapy oil, face cleanser, hair dye and nail polish. In a busy spa or salon, inventory management can be difficult, and for any operation, it is critical. In many instances, there simply is no appropriate substitute.
when it’s discovered that an essential treatment supply is out of stock. If the estheticians run out of the right hair removal wax on a busy Saturday, for example, chaos will ensue.

It is important, therefore, to take advantage of the supply inventory management capabilities that most spa software programs have. Many managers avoid putting in the necessary time while setting up the system to program in the supply usage for each service. It can be time consuming and tedious. However, if done correctly, these systems will calculate how much product is being used in operations on a continuous basis using the treatment bookings as a guide. It will then alert the salon manager or inventory manager to any supplies that are running low and even prompt with a purchase order if set to do so. Physical inventory checks must still be done in to check for discrepancies. However, the running tallies in the system should closely match what’s in the supply closet most of the time. If it does not, there may be a programming error in terms of what supplies or how much of each supply is being used in each type of service, there may be treatments being performed that are not in the system, staff may be overusing or underusing product, or there may be shrinkage issues. It is very difficult to pinpoint these problems if the spa software inventory management is not in place and being properly used.

A percentage of spa and salon revenues are sourced from retail sales. This percentage can vary depending on the type, management and philosophy of the spa or salon. A medical spa, for example, may earn a quarter or more of their revenues from sales of retail products for home use, such as anti-aging face creams and healing ointments, whereas a wellness center may have a much smaller percentage. In any case, careful inventory management of retail products can ensure that popular items don’t go out of stock and help managers identify less popular items for possible clearance or promotion.

A spa system will track sales patterns for each item and categories of products along with reports on what’s selling, when it’s selling and other helpful information. At any given time, a manager can use the system to produce an immediate inventory count based on sales and even create automatic purchase orders if wanted. Again, the accuracy of this will depend on staff carefully counting any incoming inventory deliveries and inputting those counts into the system, as well as removing any damaged and discarded items from the system, those that have perished or those that are removed from the shelf for use in the treatment rooms.

**Human Resources**

Staff training, scheduling, payroll and performance reviews will usually use a form of technology. Some spa managers and human resources managers still use simple Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to keep track of important data. Mastery of spreadsheet programs like Excel is very helpful for any hospitality management task. However, there are other tools that may provide the same or better functionality for each of these tasks.
For example, most spa software programs will assist with staff scheduling. Using the program for staff scheduling offers automatic updates to the appointment book for treatment scheduling with spa therapists. It also allows managers to run performance reports related to productivity, such as revenue earned per hour scheduled, treatments performed per shift, etc. Capabilities for customizing each staff member’s profile within the system, including break preferences, types of treatments offered, pay rates, training completed, percentage of repeat clients, customer satisfaction rates, upselling and retailing performance, miscellaneous notes and seniority within the company are very useful when managing operations and preparing staff performance reviews.

The use of an accounting software system, like Intuit Quickbooks, for payroll and expense tracking is common. Spa software programs should have export capability to facilitate this for payroll purposes. Again, staff profiles within these systems will allow the manager to program one or several pay structures in for each staff member. This is important in a spa environment, since staff sometimes have dual roles. A nail technician may also work some hours at the front desk as a receptionist. Spa therapists may be paid a combination of hourly pay and commission on services performed. A spa reservationist may also earn commission if they assist guests with retail sales, etc. All of this should be tracked through the spa system in order to compensate staff fairly per the company pay structure in place.

Finally, staff training may come in many forms. Job shadowing and hands-on training workshops have long been the most common forms of training in a spa environment. Recently, however, there has been a surge of online and computerized training for all positions. Basic training for reservationists on how to use the spa software, service scenario training for receptionists, retail knowledge training for boutique staff and even treatment training for spa therapists may all be done online, either on a computer with pre-recorded videos or live streaming. Staff can easily be assessed for competency in the newly learned materials with electronic quizzes and tests. These assessments can even be customized for each organization, with new receptionists, for example, choosing from the names of actual stylists in their salon based on mock appointment booking scenarios. Many companies have adopted this technology because of its ease of use, time savings, improvements in training standardization and relatively low-cost. It also has the advantage of being available off-site, removed from operations. When training staff members on the job, the risk of errors or the training otherwise impeding the delivery of excellent service is high. Customers usually do not want to feel that they are in the midst of a training session when they are at the spa for a relaxing experience.

**Cleaning and Disinfecting**

It has always been important for spas, salons and wellness centers to carefully clean and disinfect all operational spaces, tools, implements and equipment regularly to reduce the risk of disease being transmitted during visits. The risk of transmission is not just between staff members and guests, but from staff member to staff member and guest to guest. The Covid-19 pandemic created
additional challenges with its highly contagious nature and inconsistent information from governing bodies about how it could be spread.

Common cleaning and disinfecting technologies already in place before the pandemic included Barbicide soaking jars, UV sterilizers and autoclaves, which use high pressure steam to clean small facial implements, hairstyling tools and nail implements. Many operations also already included no-touch soap and sanitizer dispensers for both staff and guests. The use of air purifiers, added ventilation and air filtration, plexiglass shields and personal protective equipment (PPE) increased in all hospitality spaces with the additional risks associated with Covid-19, including in spas, salons and wellness centers. Extensive online and computerized training was also used prepare staff members for new policies and procedures related to cleaning and disinfecting.

Finally, many spas, salons and wellness centers took a second look at their guest journey and made changes to reduce the risk of possible Covid-19 infection by using touchless technologies for check-in procedures, payment collection and check-out processes during the 2020 pandemic. For example, Elements Massage Studios’ receptionists completed the check-in process in the parking lot with iPads linked to spa software so that guests could remain in their vehicles until it was time for their appointments. They also used touchless thermometers to check guests’ temperatures before treatments (Christoff, 2020).

### Marketing

Spas, salons and wellness centers all need to create awareness with potential customers, promote their products and services, strengthen relationships with regular guests and maintain their reputation. These activities are increasingly being done online. Long gone are the days when a spa could operate based on word-of-mouth advertising and an ad in the Yellow Pages. Customers now expect to be able to find a lot of information online before visiting a spa for the first time, and it is critical that the online presence is being carefully managed and utilized.

![Figure 2. ResortSuite Screenshots. Source: Used with permission, Frank Pitsikalis, ResortSuite.](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/m3publishing/vol17/iss9781732127593/9)
In addition to a creating beautiful and informative website, establishing and maintaining a social media presence is key to interacting with the online communities that include current and target customers. Tools for online communications and management include social media dashboard programs which integrate brand messaging across social media platforms and offer scheduling options to decrease the workload associated with maintaining an active presence in many online communities. There are also services, such as Hootsuite and Sprout Social, which will aggregate customer reviews from multiple review sites so that they aren’t missed by management (Marvin & Sevilla, 2019).

Some organizations even create their own apps to interact with customers. Common utilities include chatting with a spa receptionist, scheduling or changing an appointment, paying for a service, ordering retail products and checking event schedules such as for fitness classes and wellness workshops. Destination spas and wellness clinics also have developed features which allow previous guests to maintain communication and continue virtual sessions with counselors and wellness coaches that they may have met on site during their visit.

Marketing communications can be sent via email, text and app, in addition to traditional print advertising and direct mail. E-communications can be automated while giving the impression of being highly customized for each guest. It is important for tailoring marketing messages to gather detailed sales data through the spa software program to pinpoint customer groups, track

Resort Suite

With a family who owned a year-round ski and golf resort, Frank Pitsikalis grew up within the world of hospitality. However, Mr. Pitsikalis’ interests drew him to computers and technology, and he established himself as an efficiency and technology consultant for large companies in the beginning of his career. When his family came to him one day asking for advice on what technologies to adopt in their new spa, Mr. Pitsikalis realized there was a need in the market for a guest-centered property management system. He founded ResortSuite in 2000 with a collection of highly integrated modules to allow hotels and resorts with many different departments to manage their operations and communicate high quality information about their guests property-wide. From food preferences and allergies to on-property itinerary and purchases, the ResortSuite system was made to take a holistic view of each guest in order to allow the property using it to provide intensely customized experiences. Mr. Pitsikalis has worked extensively with the spa industry and currently serves as the ISPA Foundation chairman. He is passionate about helping spas, salons and wellness centers achieve success and streamline their operations using programming designed to analyze information that is specific to the business. For example, many spas and salons use the yield management capabilities built into the ResortSuite system which track trends of demand for the organization and manipulate availability for treatment booking in order to maximize revenues and profitability.
buying habits and identify trends in product and treatment sales. For example, guests who frequent the fitness studio should be included in updates on new fitness instructors and classes. Whereas, a spa member who comes regularly for facials would want to know about upcoming promotions on skin care products and cosmetic treatments. Messages can be targeted to reach the types of current, past and potential customers that are most likely to respond with sales tracking and customer segmentation.

Pricing is a key part of any marketing strategy, and spas, with the help of sophisticated software programs, are beginning to embrace the concept of revenue management. Revenue management, also known as yield management, has been commonly used in other areas of hospitality, such as the hotel, resort, cruise and airline industries. The basic premise is to match pricing to customer’s willingness to pay, especially in situations where there is limited capacity. For example, if there is more demand for massage treatments on the weekend than during the week, the treatments should be more expensive on the weekends. This adjustment could take many forms, including actual price differences, such as discounts during the week or premium pricing during peak times. The Spa at Omni’s Grove Park Inn in Asheville, NC uses this tactic along with giving preference to on-site guests when booking services before opening up availability for walk-in and day guests. They separate the menu pricing into less expensive “inaugural days” which are Monday through Thursday and “pinnacle days,” which are Friday through Sunday (Omni, 2020). Other revenue management strategies used in spas include limiting options for appointments during peak times to more expensive or more profitable services. For example, may spas using this technique will only offer full-hour signature services with profitable add-ons like aromatherapy and hot stones during busy days, whereas they will open the menu to less expensive express services and no-frills treatments during off-peak days and times. This encourages price-conscious guests to choose spots that might not otherwise have been booked, like the early morning on a weekday, and allows the spa to earn a premium from guests who are willing to pay more for a signature service on a Saturday afternoon, for example (Pitsikalis, 2020).

A robust spa software program can not only automatically adjust availability of treatments and pricing per the spa manager’s stipulations, it can also help that manager identify peak times based on sales history and recommend revenue strategies based on the unique patterns of that particular spa. It takes some of the guesswork out of what has been, traditionally, a nuanced and difficult practice that only experienced, knowledgeable professionals could successfully master.

Finally, collecting market research and customer satisfaction information is key to understanding the needs and preferences of guests. There are many different technology tools to aid in these activities, including satisfaction surveys that can be automatically deployed via email along with a purchase receipt when a guest checks out after a visit. Apps can also be programmed to include an easy way for customers to provide feedback on the spot or directly after their service, which is especially helpful for service recovery when the guest is dissatisfied. As with all technology tools, the most important part of these systems is how staff and managers use them. Satisfaction reports
that go unread and customer feedback that is left without a response is damaging. The quickest way for a dissatisfied customer to become even more dissatisfied is if they provide their feedback and then receive either no response or a poor response from management. So, it’s important to have follow-up plans in place when utilizing these tools.

**Enhancing the Guest Experience**

The service provided in spas and wellness centers is considered by many to be the model for the ultimate in guest care and luxury, and for good reason. The ratio of staff member to guest is typically greater than 1:1, meaning, for every guest in a spa, there is usually more than one staff member serving them or offering support for the service providers. With this, comes an enhanced attention to every detail and an experience that is highly focused on catering to each individual guest’s needs.

Technology is increasingly used to assist in the customization and elevation of the guest experience in spas. The tactics are many. For example, spa software programs allow for detailed profiles of each spa guest and member so that their sales history, preferences and additional information can be easily and quickly communicated to all staff members who have interaction with them during their visit.

Ironically, although guests are usually visiting a spa, salon or wellness center for a high-touch service, guests are increasingly using and showing preferences for “touchless technology” during the non-treatment phases of their visits. In fact, most complaints received from guests are because of perceived failures in the processes that are peripheral to

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**Providing a Sensory Experience**

The sensory environment can also be customized for each guest by using technology.

- **Touch**: Some treatment tables are equipped with warming features for guests who like a warmer temperature
- **Hearing**: In-room sound systems can play music or ambient sounds per guests’ choices or sometimes even connect to the guests’ mobile devices so they can hear their own playlists
- **Sight**: Lighting can be dimmed or brightened for the guest in the treatment room. Colored lighting may also be used for therapeutic effects
- **Smell**: Many times, guests are provided aromatherapy scent options which are then pumped into the room using electronic diffusers
the spa service, such as appointment bookings, checking in and checking out, rather than a problem with the spa treatment itself (Christoff, 2020). Offering convenient online appointment booking, electronic consultation forms to fill in at home before arrival, guest itinerary via app and contactless payments after the service increases the ease with which the guest is able to complete these elements using their own devices, and therefore allows them to better enjoy the treatments and other interactions with staff that much more (Pitsikalis, 2020).

Either the spa system or another communication software system may be used to maintain a connection with guests after a service to follow up on any lifestyle advice or other items discussed between spa staff and the guest. Some spas and wellness centers offer virtual wellness coaching, subscription-based memberships and virtual sessions with their specialists via app or videoconferencing software. The destination wellness spa, Hilton Head Health, for example, launched a subscription-based membership to its past guests in early 2020 called Hilton Head Health OnDemand which offered online fitness videos, nutrition workshops, healthy recipe videos and counseling videos along with a guided weight loss program. They also used their Facebook page extensively during the pandemic-related shutdowns that same spring and summer to extend their outreach to non-subscribers and potential guests with free versions of their original content (Boyd, 2020).

**Treatment Technology**

**Hydrotherapy and Large Equipment**

The roots of “spa” stem from healing with water. Natural and hot springs have been used for centuries to treat everything from psoriasis to rheumatism. Many spas offer hydrotherapy, which simply means that water is the primary element of the treatment. Equipment needed for hydrotherapy can be as simple as a bathtub and as complex as an experience shower with programs for the temperature, strength and flow patterns of the water, colored lighting, music and aromatherapy.

Each type of treatment requires different equipment and technology. Massage tables are used for most spa services, and again, these range from the simplest padded wooden table through to electric tables with heat settings and hydraulic lift options. In fact, some of the premium models of massage tables available on the market include upgrades like built-in warmers, towel cabbies, extra storage, side armrests and adjustable breast comfort options (Oakworks Spa, 2020).
Additional equipment is needed for specialty treatments, like hot stone heaters for hot stone massage. Body treatments, which include services such as full-body scrubs and wraps typically include the use of a hot towel cabbie for heating moist towels and treatment products. The Ocean Tides Spa at the Omni Resort on Hilton Head Island, SC, for example, uses special warming bowls to heat Himalayan salt rocks used in their Tide Salt Stone Massage, an alternative to the traditional hot stone massage that is offered in many resort spas. Paige Cope, Spa Director, said she chose the salt stone sets not only for their therapeutic effects, but also because the salt stones are easier for the spa therapists to handle and clean. They are also a beautiful addition to the treatment room, since the soft glow of the warmer and pink hue of the salt stones adds to the ambiance and guest experience (Cope, 2020).

Salons also have large pieces of equipment that is needed for services, such as sterilizing equipment for implements used in nail treatments, shampoo bowls with adjustable seats, and pedicure thrones which many times include programmable massage chairs and bubbling foot spas. Hot towel cabbies are also sometimes equipped with UV sterilizers, offering extra protection from contamination (Cope, 2020).

A walk around the floor of any spa or salon convention can dazzle attendees with the plethora of tools and technology available for treatments, whether traditional or innovative. Important to remember when purchasing large equipment for a spa, salon or wellness center is to understand the maintenance requirements of the item and to compare warranties, repair options and maintenance contracts between vendors. They can vary greatly, so the least expensive choice for purchasing the equipment on Day 1 may not be the best choice in the long term.

**Esthetics and Cosmetics**

![Figure 5. Cosmetic Equipment. Source: Gustavo Fring, Pexels #3985356.](image)

Trends in esthetics and cosmetic treatments tend to be driven by innovations in equipment and technology. For example, oxygen facials which advertise glowing, fresh, rejuvenated skin with the use of machines that puff oxygen-rich air onto the face during treatments were popular in medical spas and luxury resort spas in the early 2000’s and have remained a staple on many treatment menus. However, microdermabrasion machines, which blast tiny crystals onto the skin and then sweep them away in order to exfoliate and remove dead skin cells have declined in popularity within the same timeframe (Christoff, 2020). Guests seeking cosmetic services often follow beauty trends and will choose which spa or salon to visit based on whether they offer the latest in anti-aging, skin care, weight loss and longevity.

Some of the more sophisticated cosmetic procedures, such as laser hair removal, permanent makeup and laser-based treatments not only require large investment in tech-driven equipment,
but also specialized training and, in most cases, specially licensed medical professionals to operate the machines. In the US, the licensed massage therapists, estheticians and cosmetologists that typically make up spa, salon and wellness center staff do not usually have the necessary education and certifications to perform such services. It is therefore important to check local licensing requirements for any new additions to the treatment menu before investing in equipment and technology.

Unfortunately, the cosmetic-based area of the industry is particularly vulnerable to pseudo-science and false claims. Beware items that promise too-good-to-be-true benefits. The spas and wellness centers that advertise treatment effects based on these promises can be held liable when guests don’t see the desired results after their visits. This is especially prevalent in weight-loss and body-shaping programming. Be sure to research large investments thoroughly, including seeking reviews sourced from outside the vendor or manufacturer to check the results and efficacy of using the equipment.

**Fitness and Exercise Performance Metrics**

Wellness centers and spas with a fitness component are responding to strong trends in personal fitness, including technologies that track individual performance and health. Many guests, especially those in spa and wellness centers’ target groups, are investing in gadgets such as smartwatches and heart rate monitors to measure their wellness in various ways. Gone are the days when simple pedometers were worn by only the healthiest of health nuts wanting to “count their steps.” As these technologies become more sophisticated and pervasive, spas are upgrading their own in-house equipment to provide even more information and feedback to their guests.

During the pandemic lockdowns of 2020, in-home smart fitness equipment, such as Peloton stationary bikes and the Mirror smart fitness mirror, were quickly adopted by affluent gym-goers who were stuck at home (Michalska, 2020). An increase in live streamed and recorded boutique-style classes quickly followed.

Integrative technology is important for this demographic of guest, so that they are able to sign into their own exercise profiles and customize their workouts while on property, as well as import their metrics from their sessions back into their tracking programs.
Evaluating Performance

Spas, salons and wellness centers are businesses, and like any other type of business, the general manager must regularly track the performance of the business and its personnel. Even the few resort and hotel spas that are classified as “cost centers” or property amenities instead of revenue centers are still carefully evaluated to ensure they are fulfilling their roles within the organization. Spa software is the primary tool to do this, and most systems offer reporting capabilities that can facilitate the process.

Common key performance indicators (KPIs) used to evaluate performance of the business in this field include total revenues (sales) in each category, total visits, average check total per visit, number of treatments performed and profitability. Kimes and Singh made the case in their 2009 article that spas should include revenue per available treatment hour (RevPATH) as a performance indicator, similar to RevPAR used in hotels and RevPASH used in restaurants. This allows a higher degree of analysis and the potential for implementing successful revenue management strategies (Kimes & Singh, 2009). The software system can help make these calculations and also identify sales trends such as popular treatments and hot/cold product lists. This takes much of the guesswork out of what used to be standard practice among spa and salon managers. In the past, a spa director might flip through a paper appointment book and notice that there are more facials being booked this month compared to last month…or they may not. Now, managers have instant access to highly detailed analysis of all areas of their business. It is important to note that this is only true if the software and business processes have been set up to record all transactions, appointments and other operations properly. For instance, consider a salon manager who has just adopted a new line of shampoos and hair products for retail sale. Perhaps she has a busy week ahead and does not take the time to program the system to recognize the new SKUs or put the items into the system’s inventory. This means that until she does so, staff will have to manually put the sales in, use other product SKUs to record the sales or even perhaps not record the sales at all. This sort of situation can lead to a huge amount of confusion and strange data when the manager later tries to run sales reports and create purchase orders for more retail items. It is therefore exceptionally important that each change to operations is planned carefully and technology tools such as the spa software programs are set up to collect accurate information in order to produce useful reports.

Performance is not just analyzed for the business at large. KPIs are also used to evaluate individual staff members. Some of the KPIs commonly used for this purpose include revenue earned per hour, treatments completed per week, retail sales made, add-on treatment sales made, number of guests requesting the provider when booking and percentage of returning guests. Again, the software’s
booking and point-of-sale features will collect the data necessary to calculate these KPIs, which will help the supervisor evaluate each employee fairly and accurately.

**Looking to the Future**

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 accelerated many technology trends already in place, worldwide and across industries. The use of technology to facilitate communication, connection, work, wellness and health monitoring quickly skyrocketed and looks to be permanent. Cultural practices and consumer habits have shifted towards more online activity than ever before, and the spa, salon and wellness industries, although traditionally a high-touch arena, have nevertheless been affected. Many wellness centers now offer virtual consultations with their specialists and wellness counselors. Salons have online booking and payment options, and customers can order retail products from their spa’s online boutiques.

Frank Pitsikalis, founder and CEO of ResortSuite, thinks that telehealth services and using virtual connections with wellness specialists will be a long-term trend that will shape the spa and wellness industries. The guests’ social networks that are built while on their wellness retreats or while otherwise interacting through the spa, he believes, will also be driven more by technology and create lasting value for guests far after their visits. (Pitsikalis, 2020)

Caelynn Christoff, Front Desk Manager of Elements Massage Studios, is noticing a strong trend of guests expecting to be able to make appointments, communicate, see itineraries, check in and check out in a method of their choosing, such as via app or text message. She also believes in-room devices linked to spa software systems will become commonplace in the near future, with spa therapists using them to update guest profiles during and after treatments and check the health and preference notes of incoming guests (Christoff, 2020).

Certainly, in order for a spa, salon or wellness center to be successful and compete in the future, it will be important they offer the online communications and technology-related services that guests demand. On the other hand, groups like the Digital Wellness Collective are drawing awareness to the potentially detrimental effects of the imposition of technology in every aspect of daily life and building a “social movement for digital balance” (Digital Wellness Collective, 2020).

The spa and wellness industries are at the juxtaposition of the desire for increased convenience and personalization offered by technology and the need for tech-free time and space to recharge and relax. They may play an increasingly important educational role in providing guests the skills and knowledge to build healthy habits with regard to the use of technology just like they’ve
previously offered nutritional programming, stress management tools and skin care advice. More research is needed to explore the new preferences and needs of spa, salon and wellness center guests in a post-pandemic world, and the myriad ways in which technology tools may be used to address them.

**Conclusion**

Technology tools used in spas, salons and wellness centers are varied and should be carefully chosen to not only fit the organization’s operational needs, but also the needs of the guests it serves. Koh, You and Boger, when researching spa goers, found three distinct types of guests: escapists, neutralists and hedonists, each with their own characteristics, perception of service quality and preferences. For instance, they found that all types ranked relaxing as a top reason for a visit, but only the hedonist type prized social aspects of going to a spa (Koh et al., 210). Therefore, it may or may not be important for an organization to invest in technology that helps create a social network between guests and members, depending on the type of guests typically served.

There are other ways to segment guests in order to ensure technology tools are serving all major groups. For example, Caelynn Christoff, Front Desk Manager of Elements Massage Studios says that she’s noticed generational differences in the methods needed for guest communications. While a phone call and voicemail for appointment confirmations are typically preferred by more mature generations of guests frequenting her spas such as Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, younger generations prefer and respond more readily to confirmation by text message. In this, and all other aspects of the guest journey, it’s important to adopt and use technology that allows for versatility and customization. When mentioning the replacement of hand-written appointment cards with text messages and emails, she said, “There are so many things that, when I started in this industry, I thought you can’t replace that, and then it’s been replaced. So, it’s really important that people stay up-to-date on technology…even though it’s a hands-on business, it’s very important for our industry” (Christoff, 2020).

Paige Cope, Spa Director of Ocean Tides Spa at the Omni Resort on Hilton Head Island, says that she’s not sure what the future holds for spa technology, but that she’s looking forward to whatever comes. The technology used in spas has already changed spa landscapes within just the past decade, so she estimates that new and exciting technologies will alter spa operations even more in coming years (Cope, 2020).
Key Terms

**Digital detox** – a short break from technology, sometimes encouraged for guests by spas and wellness centers.

**Escapists** - one of the three spagoer segments found by Koh, et. al. This segment prefers to escape to a spa to relax by themselves, among other characteristics.

**Guest profile** – a digital file on an individual guest that includes important information such as contact information, sales history, preferences and health and safety notes.

**Hedonists** - one of the three spagoer segments found by Koh, et. al. This segment values social aspects of a spa experience had with friends and family, and ranks enjoyment of other characteristics of a spa experience higher than the other two segments.

**High-touch service** – a service package that includes the one-on-one attention of a service provider for an extended period of time, typically with actual physical touch involved as part of a treatment.

**Inventory management** – the careful recording of inventory inflows and outflows in order to make timely purchasing and promotional decisions regarding treatment supplies, retail products and other operational stock.

**Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** – numerical calculations that provide insight into business or staff performance over time.

**Nature-Deficit disorder** – a term based on the premise that current lifestyles minimize time spent in nature to the detriment of individuals’ and societies’ health and wellbeing.

**Neutralists** – one of the three spagoer segments found by Koh, et. al. This segment does not have strong preferences or perception of service quality.

**Revenue (Yield) management** – a collection of techniques that pair pricing and treatment offerings with customers’ willingness to pay in environments where capacity is limited in order to optimize revenues.

**RevPATH** – Revenue per Available Treatment Hour, a key performance indicator to be used in a spa, salon or wellness center as an alternative to RevPar, commonly used in hotels and resorts.

**Spa Software** – a software system that allows the collection, analysis and sharing of business information and offers functions for appointment bookings, staff scheduling, inventory management, payment collection, sales reports and more.
Virtual wellness coaching – the use of video, audio or text-based communications to provide coaching on general wellness and lifestyle changes over distance and time.

Discussion Questions

1. What role do you think technology (if any) should play in the guest experience in spas? Should it be different for guests in salons or wellness centers?
2. How might a spa, salon or wellness center combat “Nature Deficit Disorder” and enhance the guests’ relationship with nature through their environment, products and services?
3. What kinds of features might be most important in a spa software system for the typical hotel spa? Would this be different for a local salon or membership-based wellness center?
4. What kinds of issues might be avoided by careful inventory management using a robust spa software system?
5. Are there types of staff training in a spa, salon or wellness center that do not lend themselves to online learning? Why or why not? In what scenarios might online learning be an excellent solution?
6. How might the guest experience be affected due to the Covid-19 pandemic in a spa, salon or wellness center? How has technology assisted operations?
7. Why might spas, salons and wellness centers be reluctant to use revenue management techniques?
8. What recent tech-enabled additions to the spa experience have become a basic requirement for most spas, rather than a differentiator?
9. How might exercise performance technology be integrated into a spa or wellness center environment?
10. Why might a hotel or resort classify the onsite spa as a cost center rather than a revenue center?
References


Pitsikalis, Frank. (2020, August 17). Personal interview.


