

## **WHAT DOES A SPA CONSULTANT DO, AND WHY HIRE ONE?**

In the past decade, the spa market has grown exponentially due to burgeoning consumer demand, and concurrently the spa guest experience and business model has become highly sophisticated. Highly-qualified, professional spa consultants—such as the IMC (Institute of Management Consultants) Spa Chapter members accessed through this website—provide expert guidance and advice on successfully managing spa operations, maximizing profits, and planning new spa development.

Some spa consultants may have general knowledge across a variety of disciplines, while others specialize in a specific programmatic area (e.g. menu design and authentic spa therapies; spa equipment; spa employee culture; spa retailing, financial management; staff training and development, operational efficiency, and new spa development). Often a spa consultant concentrates their practice on a specific industry market segment such as day or club spas, hotel and resort spas, or medical spas.

The expense of engaging the services of a spa consultant can be justified many times over by the superior nature of the results obtained and costly mistakes that are avoided. Spa consultants often deliver bottom line value that is ten-fold its cost.

### **HOW DO I KNOW IF I NEED A CONSULTANT?**

Each company and/or project has its own set of needs, challenges, goals and available resources. Common situations which warrant hiring a spa consultant include:

- The company lacks the specific knowledge and skills to make informed decisions and solve problems
- Current and previous efforts have not produced the desired results
- The company continues to deal with the same set of issues/problems
- The company client lacks the time or staff resources to dedicate to the project
- An independent opinion is needed to either confirm a decision or to provide alternatives

### **Some of the common pitfalls spa owners and developers fall into include:**

- Assuming that the architect or designer are fully capable and qualified to develop an operationally workable and market-appropriate spa design and business model
- Not performing adequate research and market feasibility to guide the development process and the financial commitment
- Perceiving familiarity with a handful of spa facilities or concepts as a sufficient base of knowledge from which to develop a spa on their own, without actual operational or development experience
- Ill-conceived and unrealistic expense and revenue projections
- Hiring a spa consultant *after* initial plans have been developed & submitted to planning authorities
- Hiring a spa consultant that does not disclose kickbacks from recommended equipment or products
- Allowing a Spa Director to develop the spa who lacks the appropriate experience and skill set

When a company decides to build a new spa, or to renovate or optimize operations in an existing one, it is important to utilize expert development resources to ensure the best result. It's far easier and ultimately faster to engage a spa consultant with the necessary experience, tools, and ability than to

follow a shoestring approach which ultimately may jeopardize the success of the entire project through serious errors made in critical planning areas.

### **COMMON SPA CONSULTING SCOPES OF WORK**

- Market Analysis, Site Analysis & Financial Feasibility
- Concept Development & Facility Programming in conjunction with the design team
- Architecture & Interior Design Review; Value Engineering
- Equipment and Supplies Specification
- Vendor Recommendations, Selection, Negotiations
- Spa Menu of Services & Programming
- Business Operations Planning & Development
- Retail Product Development & Merchandising
- Financial Forecasts & Analysis
- Staff Development & Training
- Compensation Strategies & Policies
- Strategic Marketing and Branding Programs
- Management & Staff Recruitment, Interviews, Selection
- Management & Staff Training
- Formulation and monitoring of a Pre-opening Critical Path
- Pre-opening Onsite Assistance
- Post-opening Audits of Management/Staff, Customer Service, Facility, and Financial Performance

### **THE ADVANTAGES OF HIRING AN IMC SPA CHAPTER CONSULTANT**

The Institute of Management Consultants International Spa Chapter was formed to set new standards in spa consulting and to foster collaboration among the industry's premier consultants. Chapter members are committed to promoting excellence and ethics in management consulting through pursuing CMC® certification (Certified Management Consultant). Just this past year, IMC USA earned ISO/IEC 17024 accreditation for its certification process from the prestigious International Organization for Standardization (ISO), making it only the third institute worldwide to gain ISO recognition for its high professional standards and ethics.

As independent professionals, they are bound to the IMC Code of Ethics that details a standard of conduct that raises the bar for the spa consulting practice:

- Professional standards of conduct and competence
- Impartiality
- Confidentiality
- No conflicts of interest
- Integrity
- Agreements in writing and clear communication
- Client satisfaction

IMC members are accepted into the Spa Chapter only if they meet the minimum experiential and academic requirements necessary to pursue a CMC® distinction—a minimum of three years full-time management consulting experience in the spa industry and a Bachelor's degree.

To earn the CMC® mark involves a rigorous written and oral examination process, and is awarded to a select few consultants who have achieved a level of performance that includes professional standards in technical competency and ethics; global standards in consulting competencies; professional

behavior; client and project management; and personal conduct. Members are expected to achieve this status within 1 year of being accepted as a Spa Chapter Member.

## **THE CONSULTANT SELECTION PROCESS**

The key to success is finding the right match for you and your project: selecting a consultant who meets the criteria of your project's needs, can fulfill deliverables according to your timeline, has impeccable client references, and the "right fit" or chemistry with key management or stakeholders.

- ✓ Be prepared to do your research to find a consultant that has relevant knowledge and experience required for the specific needs of your project
- ✓ Have a list of pertinent, standardized interview questions to ask in your interviews with consultants
- ✓ Be able to clearly explain your business vision, needs, and goals to the prospective consultant
- ✓ Be aware that spa consultants have varying levels of experience, including some who have "hung out a shingle" without any experience in developing, operating or managing a spa
- ✓ Be aware that spa consultants may specialize and excel in different aspects of the development, operations or management process (Finance; Design & Planning; Operations Development; Customer Service; Menu Development; Training; etc.)
- ✓ Determine if you need a consultant who has general knowledge and expertise in a range of disciplines or one who has a specific, in-depth focus
- ✓ Request a list of client references and perform the necessary due diligence

Many professional spa consultants price their services on a "project basis" based on a detailed scope of work with clearly defined deliverables, rather than charging by the hour. Some consultants are also available by the hour for smaller or more specific engagements. The scope of work is often broken out into phases in the case of longer, more involved engagements. An advance retainer is typically required for the consultant to commence work, and payment becomes due for each phase as the work is completed. You should receive a written proposal or agreement detailing scope of work tasks and associated work deliverables for each phase. Travel, accommodations, and miscellaneous expenses such as copying, binding, and phone calls are the main reimbursable expenses which are not typically included in consulting fees.

As with many consumer goods and services, the highest price doesn't always ensure the best quality, nor does a low price necessarily indicate inferior capabilities. It is never wise to make a choice based upon price alone. When comparing consultant's proposals, do make sure that you are comparing "apples to apples" in terms of knowledge, expertise and scope of work. There is no set format for proposals and consultants may offer a range of services with varying amounts of detail included in the work.

The IMC Spa Chapter website is designed so you can "cut to the chase" and easily research the capabilities, knowledge, and client lists of our member consultants, knowing that membership in the IMC Spa Chapter has already narrowed your search to the spa industry's finest.