

A good time for a makeover

Mon, 05/19/2008 - 13:38 — colinlim



Singaporeans want to look good, and they don't mind paying top dollar to feel good either. More training will be needed to match the growing sophistication of the beauty and wellness industry.

By Letchimi Palanisamy

While beauty salons present an array of services that can transform one's image from top-to-toe, the beauty and wellness industry has been undergoing a makeover of its own towards the development of a professionalised and specialised industry.

With more women entering the workforce and enjoying a higher disposable income, the presence of hundreds of beauty and wellness salons is a testimony of women taking an interest in self-grooming and self-indulgence.

Estimated to be worth at least \$200 million, the beauty and wellness industry in Singapore is home to leading names from Expressions to neighbourhood outlets and home based businesses.

Like any product or service, identifying the target audience, positioning the boutique's services, and offering holistic treatments pegged to a reasonable price performed by experienced staff are crucial to a salon's establishment. Equally important, is the location of the outlet, ambience, customer service, publicity and word of mouth recommendations that helps sustain its presence of the boutique in the long-run.

To stay ahead, one of the competitive advantages in a boutique's success in remaining exclusive, lies in offering face, body, nail and foot care treatments entailing exotic concoctions such as caviar known to stimulate regeneration of cells to chocolate scrubs for detoxification and wine themed spas for skin nourishment and rejuvenation.

In addition to commercial operators, home based businesses have been sprouting in the homes of homemakers in the heartlands. Having worked in salons, these ladies choose to run their own business as it gives them the flexibility of minding their children and contributing to the family income. Running an outfit presents its own challenges, as they have to be well disciplined and motivated to keep abreast of the latest trends. Depending highly on referrals, savings from renting a shop to labour costs are passed down to budget conscious customers.

Spa culture

Riding on the wave for demands for holistic spa treatments from both the locals and foreign tourists, the spa industry has evolved with support from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and leading spa operators. To help establish Singapore as a hub for the spa industry, the establishment of The Spa Association, Spa Academy, Asia Spa Institute, ASI and other establishments demonstrates the city's commitment in developing and professionalising the industry.

Citing statistics from a report by Intelligent Spa, Dr Theresa Chew, CEO and Company spokesperson of Expressions International, says, "About 2.2 million people in Singapore are listed as 'active spa-goers'. This number is expected to rise as the population increases, and the number of visitors is expected to spike once the Integrated Resorts are completed."

So what are some of the challenges posed by an escalating demand for spa services? "There is a lack of spa management education in Asia. While many spa operators are satisfying customer needs with the latest treatments available, they are still operating without properly setting the minimum treatment standards, let alone receive any training in this field," explains Dr Chew.

She adds, "We must first correct the mindset that the spa and wellness business is a 'blue-collar' job with poor career prospects. For example, ASI organises seminars and conferences to educate industry players as well as the public on rising global trends, a breakdown of the industry's performance, and what new skills and talents are needed.

"At Expressions, we encourage interested students to intern with us as we believe that it is the experience of learning on the job that counts. We adopt a coaching and mentoring programme to help new members of the team assimilate into the company."

Customer satisfaction

Having completed her National ITE Certificate (NITEC) course in Beauty Therapy with the ITE this year, 20-year-old Loh Chun May, undertook her first internship with Expressions.

"I interned as a Customer Service administrator/therapist. I answered customer enquiries, checked product stocks, filed memos and made appointments for customers. I also performed simple facial treatments after receiving in-house training at Expressions," she says.

Now promoted to the position of Customer Service Officer/Trainee Consultant, Chun May provides consultation services and performs sales. "There's nothing like a happy customer who thanks us for the service they receive. Other memorable experiences include walk-in customers who only came for a trial session and were so satisfied with our services that they became regular customers," says Chun May who plans to acquire more skills and continue her studies in the industry.

Staying Relevant

When ITE first launched its NITEC in Beauty Therapy in 2006, little did they know that their course would attract more than 320 applications for the 40 training places they had. Since then, despite having increased the number of training places, the course remains a crowd puller.

Judith Chng, Lecturer in Beauty Therapy, not only traded her therapist work to teach in ITE but also undertook additional responsibilities of developing the course notes and training facilities, when she joined the school in 2005.

Having attained her Cidesco diploma, the most prestigious qualification in the field of aesthetics and beauty therapy in one of Britain's prestigious beauty schools, Champney's College, Judith has witnessed the industry flourish as Singaporeans take an interest in their well-being.

Occupying a 7,200 square feet, the Beauty Therapy Training Centre is divided into the Nail and Make up Studio, Facial & Body Therapy Studio and Beauty & Wellness Spa. Collectively, these studios house 21 manicure and pedicure stations, 21 facial, body treatment rooms, and three treatment rooms. To ensure that students experience the setting of a commercial spa, the Centre has been carefully designed to simulate a real spa. Apart from managing and running the Centre, the students also attend to walk-in customers.

"To stay relevant to industry's needs, our course modules have been carefully designed to accommodate feedback from our consultation with industry experts and operators. The 15-month module along with our well equipped facility and accompanied with a three-month industry attachment facilitated by the Institute, presents an ideal learning environment for individuals who are interested in this industry," she says.

Having catered to 120 students since its inception last year, Judith reveals that she receives interests from leading spa operators and beauty salons offering positions such as cosmetic consultants, spa therapists, manicurists and beauticians, prior to their course completion. So, the prospects for students certainly look good, even before they have graduated.