



Pose for Thought

Could a yoga offering at your spa boost profits and increase your clientele? *By Rachel Kossman*

Yoga is an ancient tradition, rooted in helping individuals cultivate endurance and balance on the inside through the development of physical strength. There's no doubt that concept goes hand-in-hand with a spa's objective of pampering clients' bodies to help relax their minds. There's also no doubt that yoga has slowly, but surely, become a nationwide trend—whether your spa is in a major city or a small town, this ancient form of exercise and spiritual well-being is practically unavoidable. And if your goal is to evolve into a wellness-focused spa business, you may be asking yourself, "Should I be adding yoga classes to my spa menu?" It's a complex question to tackle, but discerning the answer may be simpler than you imagine.

"Start with examining your brand," suggests Liz Galloway, founder of the media wellness consultancy group The Lotus Effects (thelotuseffects.com). Does yoga seem aligned with what your clientele is seeking? Ultimately, the decision to add yoga should spring from the desire to better serve your guests. If your spa takes a holistic approach to skin care or offers body

slimming or diet-focused services, incorporating a wellness offering like yoga could be a no-brainer.

Although it's important to remember that what draws clients to your spa is most likely your expertise in skin care—"A lot of day spas get themselves into trouble when they try to please everyone," Galloway cautions—there are instances where yoga has a place. "If you're confident there's a demand in your locale, yoga fits into your branding and there's no immediate competition in the surrounding area, I'd say go for it," encourages the consultant.

ENLIGHTEN YOURSELF

In contemplating whether a yoga component would be well received at Regeneration Salon & Spa in Columbia, Missouri, owner Marcie Olivas sent out a **simple survey** to clients. "We asked them what they would want and expect from yoga at our spa," explains Olivas. "We found two important things: they wanted private, individual or buddy sessions, and they wanted those sessions customized for their



needs. A year later, those are the two main foundations of our Regeneration Wellness program.”

Hosting yoga-focused events is another way to test your market for interest. “Yoga parties are so much fun to throw,” says Galloway, who suggests hiring a teacher to guide a beginners’ class, serving healthy snacks and partnering with a sponsor to hand out gift bags. If space is an issue, seize upon the summer weather and find a natural environment for potential yogis to gather. Offering free yoga by a river, at the beach or even a reserved park area is a cost-effective marketing tool, suggests Galloway. “I’ve had clients partner with their city to publicize their ‘free yoga night’ in the park. You can generate a lot of buzz by putting your spa name out there and hiring a teacher who’s well known in the community.”

Diane Ludwigsen, owner of Sacred Grounds Spa and Tree of Life Yoga Studio in Ephraim, Wisconsin, reminds other spa owners to start small.

“I opened my yoga space in June 2014 and we hit the ground running with all my wellness visions simultaneously: a daily meditation class, two specialized workshops, chakra balancing and meditative singing bowls. Sadly, nobody was interested,” recalls the owner. “I’ve come to realize that in this area in Wisconsin, we’re still educating people on the ben-

efits of yoga. Now we’re taking baby steps and offering all levels of classes so that people don’t feel intimidated.” Ludwigsen currently works with four teachers who offer five or six classes each month and she switches her schedule regularly based on client and instructor feedback.

EXERCISE YOUR PULL

One major way to draw new yoga-centric clientele to your spa is to **work with established instructors**. Though yoga is centered on individual experience, the meditative form of exercise is also about connection with a teacher, and that’s a concept Galloway encourages spas to capitalize on. “Enlisting a teacher who brings their existing clientele with them to your spa is an ideal scenario,” she notes, pointing out that even a small following represents potential regular clientele walking through your spa’s doors.

Developing a studio space can also serve as an opportunity to **partner with local businesses**. Danielle Cuccio, Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) and CEO of Cuccio Somatology (cucciosomatology.com), often seeks a yoga space for her private clients when in-home sessions aren’t ideal, and she has built relationships with local Los Angeles spas to hold private sessions at their facilities. Bonus: post-yoga, her clients frequently stay for a facial or enjoy the steam room. “This type of arrangement can truly be a win-win scenario that serves both proprietors,” Cuccio says.

The caveat of hiring outside instructors is the inevitable division of income. In 2010, Heidi Lamar, owner of Spa Lamar in Scottsdale, Arizona, unexpectedly became the owner of a 1,000-square-foot yoga studio when its owner, whose business was housed in Lamar’s building, could no longer afford the studio. Knowing that profits would be dismal if she split individual clients’ fees with an instructor, she struck up a deal to **pay teachers per class**, instead of per head. “That way I could slowly build the studio into something that had the potential for profit,” she explains.

While some owners, like Ludwigsen, do pay teachers per attendee, she admits that it’s harder to profit from this model. However, she has seen great success with the spa’s Yoga with Friends, in which individuals sign up in advance and bring in four to eight people for an hour-long, \$75 session that’s customized for the group’s fitness goals.

Olivas, who created a similar private session model at \$65 per hour, capitalizes further on the group offering. Last October, she sent two of her full-time staff to Los Angeles for a somatology workshop with Cuccio.



“Training Marcie’s staff in the benefits and fundamentals of yoga made complete sense to me,” says the yoga instructor. “A lot of times, my clients leave a private session and say, ‘That was as rejuvenating and therapeutic as a massage!’ Why not teach spa staff the same skills I employ?” Cuccio says. Now, Olivas charges \$35 per 30 minutes and \$65 per 60 minutes for private sessions, and her newly trained staff—estheticians and massage therapists—retain the same commission rate they make on other menu services.

Another advantage of the private yoga session is its compatibility with the objective of your spa. “If an individual wants to get a massage in a room of 20 people, they go and get a Thai massage, but if they want one-on-one time, they come to a day spa, for a special, elevated experience,” notes Cuccio. “That same concept can translate to yoga offerings.”

EXPAND YOUR REACH

Whether you plan to offer group classes, private sessions or a combination, engaging a new subset of clientele is the next challenge you’ll face. Building a steady new stream of interest while avoiding the temptation of monster discount deal sites is key, stresses Lamar. “Group deals inadvertently condition guests to think that our services are worth less than they actually are,” she says. “On the other hand, I’m a huge proponent of offering initial memberships for significant discounts to incentivize new clients.”

For your inaugural yoga event, **consider an exclusive invitation** that can be extended to current clients. “This type of special treatment and encour-

agement can be really positive,” says Olivas, who launched her yoga studio with a VIP event. “I built a list of my top clients who I believed would benefit most from yoga, and sent them personalized invitations,” she says. “That night, we laid out a brand-new membership plan and I was able to sign up nine customers!”

Premiere events can expose spa newbies to your business too. “One of the resorts I worked with offered local residents daily classes,” says Galloway. “It didn’t bring them much in the way of profits but it created loyalty and referrals. People were introduced to the spa and they came back later for treatments.”

Post-event, Lamar suggests **nurturing client crossover** by encouraging spa guests to check out yoga, and vice versa. “I’ve found that yoga is the ideal gateway drug,” laughs Lamar, who offers an unlimited monthly yoga pass for \$100, which awards yogis 20% off her spa’s treatments. Similarly, Ludwigsen offers a \$5 discount on any spa service preceding or following a yoga class. “Yoga clients can be a bit intimidated by the spa,” says Lamar, “but when they’re comfortable with me and my studio, they’ll try a treatment and realize what a safe, relaxing space we have, and how much our services complement their practice in the studio.” ■

Rachel Kossman is DAYSPA’s associate editor.

To get a rundown of tips for creating a yoga space, plus all the yoga tools you’ll need to fill it, visit dayspamagazine.com!