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Useful Tips for Greening Your Spa

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The terms "green" and "organic" are ubiquitous—here's how to apply them to your business.

TOP SUSTAINABILITY PURCHASING DRIVERS

Global Respondents vs. Those Willing to Pay More*



Nielsen 2015 Survey on Millennial Purchasing Habits

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When marketing a business or consumer product line these days, the terms "green" and "organic" are prevalent, and their popularity continues to grow. Consumers are increasingly interested in embracing "green" businesses, but what exactly that means varies wildly. Some businesses use or retail products that are considered green in one way or another, but that may be the extent of their green business practices. Others may have an eco-conscious operation, but those efforts may all be behind the scenes, and not readily apparent to clients.

Either way, embracing green products and business practices continues to be important, especially in the spa and wellness industry silo. This makes perfect sense given that clients interested in health and well-being are probably also oriented to green business practices, more than might be expected by clients of restaurants or professional services firms. Guests come to the spa to advance their personal wellness, and a green environment is, for many, an important component of that.

There are a variety of ways in which you can embrace this green movement, from creating a facility with LEED certification, to embracing green business practices, to providing eco-friendly products for consumers. In view of this wide spectrum, it can be difficult to know where to begin. For a broad overview of green business practices, the Federal Trade Commission offers the [FTC Green Guides](#). First published in 1992 and subsequently updated, the guides serve to advise marketers on how to make environmental claims that won't mislead consumers. The [Seven Sins of Greenwashing](#), a website published by Underwriters Laboratories, also gives guidelines for marketers, but both of these are more geared to what *not* to do or say. When it comes to taking action to improve the green practices of your spa or wellness business, the [Green Spa Network](#) offers some wonderful resources, and membership is free. [Starter Tips](#) and [Green Spa Toolkit](#), both found on the GSN's website, provide helpful tips on where to start your green efforts. Reviewing these materials will allow you to map out a plan and prioritize your efforts. Industry supplier Universal Companies also is very active in green initiatives, and offers [sustainability and social responsibility](#) advice on its website.

Large Scale Change

The acclaimed [Miraval Life in Balance Spa](#), designed by [Clodagh Design](#), uses a natural design aesthetic in keeping with the resort's desert surroundings, and many of its lodging facilities are built to the Silver LEED standard. Dalice Shepard, marketing coordinator, shares that the most impactful action has been the installation of a state-of-the-art water reclamation facility, which allows for 99% of the treated 50,000 gallons of waste water per day to become available for reuse, a practice that has drastically reduced water usage at the resort. The [Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite](#), host of last year's [Green Spa Congress](#), also installed a water reclamation system. Tenaya uses six wells—the property's only source of water—and by recycling the laundry water in the new unit, staff were able to save three million gallons of water; the equipment, which was supposed to pay for itself in three years, recovered its cost of investment in just eight months. Even better, the water is returned to the Tenaya system at 83 degrees, and doesn't need to be heated.

These are wonderful results, but represent the kind of capital expense that isn't possible for many spas. Cici Coffee, founder of the 12-unit [Natural Body Spa and Shops](#) in the Southeast U.S., is a green pioneer and a founding seed spa of the GSN, and has put numerous green initiatives in place at Natural Body locations. They've been recycling since the day the first location opened in 1989, repurpose materials where possible, and use recycled shipping materials and peanuts. Coffee began asking her spa business vendors to improve their packaging and resources, even reaching out to some larger manufacturers to encourage them to evolve their business practices.

Coffee suggests that spas perform a waste audit, and involve all of the staff, which helps them to see how impactful recommended changes can be. Lightbulbs are always a great starting point. "In our newest location, most of the interior hallway lights that stay on all the time run on 3 watts, rather than 45. Multiply that by 30 units and the energy savings really add up," says Coffee. Lighting renovation plans can have a payback of two years or less, and you can even receive energy credits now for swapping out an old system. Daniella Russo Dimitrova, founder of [Think Beyond Plastic](#), gave an impassioned presentation at last year's Green Spa Congress, sharing that the ubiquitous Keurig-type plastic cups found in practically every commercial establishment are currently a massive source of pollution—even switching back to old-fashioned coffee and tea preparation can be impactful.

Gauging Impact

But how do all these green efforts affect our end user, the consumer? How many clients choose a spa based on its green practices? A 2014 Nielsen survey showed that 55% percent of global online consumers across 60 countries were willing to pay more for products and services provided by companies committed to positive social and environmental impact. In 2015, the rise in the percentage of respondents aged 15-20, also known as Generation Z, who are willing to pay more for products and services that come from companies committed to positive social and environmental impact was very strong, up from 55% in 2014 to 72% in 2015. But so-called "millennials" are the standard-bearers in environmental engagement: according to a National Marketing Institute study of consumers in nine countries, millennial respondents in favor of sustainability actions are on average three times more agreeable to paying extra for sustainability actions than Generation X (35-49) respondents and 12 times more agreeable, on average, than Baby Boomer (50-64) respondents. So, especially if these groups are among your target clients, green practices can reap real rewards.

At Miraval, Shepard says: "During their stay, many guests have become inspired by our programming and techniques, making them curious about how they can bring our eco-friendly practices into their own lives." Coffee shares that "Part of being LEED certified is educating others; we don't want to make people feel guilty, but we *do* want to teach them in subtle ways to notice green-oriented activities." At Natural Body locations, beautiful placards made from reclaimed wood that highlight Natural Body green initiatives and make suggestions for what consumers can do at home are hung around the spa. Coffee feels that, from the amount of consumer feedback she's received, each visitor to the spa who is green-aware represents many others, whether friends or business associates, which helps expand the reach of these initiatives beyond her spas' walls. Natural Body has even hosted a group of architecture and design students, who wanted to see what had been done in a commercial environment.

According to Carolyn Parrs, principal at green marketer [Mind Over Markets](#), and previous Green Spa Congress presenter, consumers fall into three camps; "Deep Green" consumers are willing to pay a premium for green products, "Medium Green" consumers are practical, and interested in the concept of green provided that the products make sense and can provide results. Only "Light Green" consumers are uninterested in environmental issues. It's likely that most spas will have a mixture of these client types, and clients in search of authenticity will certainly take your business practices into account when making choices about where to spend their hard-earned dollars. —*Lisa Starr*

Feeling Green

Interested in greening your spa but concerned that such an undertaking might be too taxing? Fear not: there are a myriad of small, easy changes you can make to ensure that your business slowly but surely becomes more environmentally friendly. With the help of Paul Schmidt, executive director of the Green Spa Network, we came up with the following list of tackle-able tasks.

- Send your guests away from the treatment room with the clean, nearly dry towel that covered them during their service—they can re-use it when they shower or visit the Jacuzzi.
- Install low-flow water filters and dual flush toilets.
- Go paperless by having clients fill out intake forms on tablets and uploading them online. Or, print spa brochures and business cards on plantable paper.
- Replace single-use plastic or paper cups with reusable drinking cups, and consider installing a small dishwasher.
- Switch out your incandescent light bulbs for energy-efficient bulbs, such as halogen incandescents, compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) and light-emitting diodes (LEDs).
- Provide a branded robe and sandals as gifts to regular or member guests. Distinguish them from your standard offerings so that they become conversation-starters.
- Adjust treatment protocols to reduce the quantity of fresh linens used in each service. Simple changes, like using the floor mat that was stepped on once by your guest to initially wipe product from the tub or shower, can make a big difference.
- Plant potted lavender, jasmine, rosemary or aloe vera around your spa. These varieties generate and improve oxygen quality, and can be used to infuse body treatments.

—*Rachel Kossman*



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