



GREEN Business

Heeding the Call of Mother Nature

BY MAE
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JOHNSON

On April 22, the world celebrates Earth Day. The annual event helps to raise environmental awareness and mobilize means to encourage the protection of Mother Nature. Such celebration couldn't be any more but timely as the world faces the most daunting threat of climate change.

In fact, a report by Pew Research Center states that a global median of 54 percent of respondents surveyed in 40 countries around the world are "very concerned" about climate change (read more about this study in *Pulse Points*, page 14).

Environmental awareness and protection resonate deep within the spa industry. “Isn’t it ultimately the objective of every business to provide a product or service that improves the well-being of their customer in some form? If we provide that well-being, how can we ignore the impact the delivery of that product or service has on the environment? Without a planet that is well, *we* cannot be truly well,” says Szilvia Hickman, senior vice president of Szep Elet, exclusive distributor of ilike organic skin care.

The Indiana-based company takes this mission to heart. “We are developing businesses that create products that help people reduce their impact on the environment while at the same time improving their own personal well-being,” she says.

Blake and Carmen Gendebien, founders of A Wholesome Glow located in Canton, New York, share similar views. “We believe a healthy lifestyle means more than a few moments per day of environmental awareness. As farmers and spa owners, we have a responsibility to be advocates for wellness, which means healthy people and a healthy planet. All businesses play an important role in educating others of how they can optimize

their own mindfulness to be stewards of sustainability in their own communities. This inspires people to take important action and leads to better choices and a better world for future generations,” says Carmen Gendebien.

Good Business Sense

For many businesses, protecting the environment is not only a moral responsibility, but also makes good business sense. “For us, caring for our planet and its inhabitants is a defining cornerstone of our company. How ironic would it be that a company relying so heavily on the goodness of Mother Nature would conduct its affairs in a manner that are detrimental to our source of raw material? One could argue that our desire to protect the environment is for self-serving reasons, as without the bountiful of natural ingredients, we wouldn’t have the raw material to make our products,” says Blue Beautifly CEO Vida Karamooz.

Shelley Lotz, author of *Green Spas and Salons: How to Make Your Business Truly Sustainable* and founder of Vios Spa Group, states that promoting green initiatives is a necessity in today’s market, primarily because consumers demand it. “From using organic products with sustainable packaging to assessing

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SZILVIA HICKMAN

Senior Vice President ■ Szep Elet, exclusive distributor of ilike organic skin care ■ Indianapolis, Indiana





CARMEN GENDEBIEN
Co-Founder ■ A Wholesome
Glow ■ Canton, New York

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indoor air quality, spa wellness extends to everyday business choices. Choosing responsible vendors who have natural and organic products and supplies is an easy way to green up a spa,” she says.

She warns, however, on the dangers of greenwashing, a common marketing practice employed by some businesses to deceive consumers on environmental claims. “Of course, being sustainable addresses more than just products. Avoid the greenwashing bandwagon by being transparent and educated about your business choices. Are you really green or just starting on the path? Be prepared to answer questions from clients on your green measures,” she says.

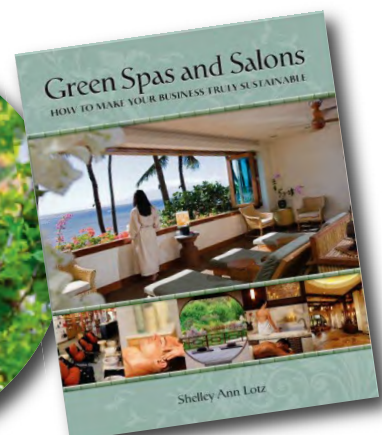
Gendebien, on her part, says their green efforts have helped to enhance the quality of their businesses. “On the farm, our sustainable efforts help us conserve and protect our soil structure and reduce soil erosion. We are also able to reduce fertilizer costs and save significantly on our water usage. At the spa, these benefits are evidenced in our treatments, materials, utility expenses and the quality of the services we provide,” she says.

Eco-Friendly Initiatives

A Wholesome Glow is well aware of consumers’ growing demand for sustainable practices and clean products, which is why it operates its farm with philosophical,

ecological and environmental consciousness. “All of the milk produced on our farm, is cooled with naturally cold water on its way to the tank. This is also the water supply for over 400 of our dairy cows. Nothing leaves our farm except our milk and A Wholesome Glow products. All water, animal food and wastes are reused and recycled back into the farm. Our animals are a part of a healthy ecology and we must provide them with a healthy environment to thrive in, every day,” Gendebien says.

Blue Beautifly categorizes its eco-friendly initiatives in three buckets: procurement, plant operations and post-consumer. In procurement, the company ensures that all ingredients are sourced from organic farms. “With an eco-friendly mindset, we are keenly concerned about the air and water pollution caused by chemical fertilizers and pesticides due to oversprays and run off. In addition, the dramatic decrease in bee population is largely attributed to conventional farming. Therefore, by purchasing USDA Certified Organic ingredients, we are certain that none of our products contribute to environmental degra-



SHELLEY LOTZ

Consultant and Author ■ *Green Spas and Salons: How to Make Your Business Truly Sustainable* ■ Ashland, Oregon

dation as a result of conventional farming,” Karamooz says.

In terms of operations, the company’s goal is to attain 100 percent renewable energy for its facility. To further minimize its carbon footprint, the company uses 100 percent post-consumer paper, printed with soy ink, and fully biodegradable ingredients. “Among the most harmful things to the environment is disposing complex compounds into the waste water that are hard to remove or take years, decades, or centuries to decompose. For example, many municipalities have begun to detect traces of prescription drugs in their water supplies recently. Another recent example is passage of the Microbead-Free Waters Act that is intended to eradicate the use of synthetic plastic microbeads in personal cleansing products by January 2018,” she says.

Hickman, on the other hand, says Szep Elet’s green initiative is evident in its products. In fact, ilike Organic Skin Care’s Carotene Essentials Moisturizer was recognized by the 7th Annual Beauty with a Conscience Awards for purity of its ingredients. “Besides implementing earth-friendly practices in our office and business practices, we continue to develop and

provide products that have a real impact on both personal and planetary well-being,” she says.

Strengthening Initiatives

Implementing environmental best practices require commitment and dedication, especially since challenges are bound to arise in the process. “To us, the biggest challenge is finding suppliers who adhere to our strict eco-friendly standards. Therefore, we spend significant time vetting our supplier’s credentials and certifications to ensure that their social and environmental standards have been validated by trusted third party entities,” Karamooz says.

Hickman, on the other hand, believes that in order to have a successful green initiative, one must focus on educating guests and staff members in order to help them change habits.

“People are creatures of habit—both in what they do and what they believe they know. Eco-focused initiatives, whether in the form of how we go about our daily lives or introducing products that challenge commonly held beliefs, requires that we first change our habits that are usually driven by short-term



VIDA KARAMOOZ, PH. D.
CEO ■ Blue Beautifly ■ Oakland, California

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rewards, question what we “know,” reeducate ourselves and spread the word to others through a new deeply held belief,” Hickman says, adding that it is a process that takes time, dedication and a focus on simplicity.

Gendebien, on her part, says the most challenging part usually takes place during the launch of new ideas or products in the market. “There is always a learning curve. Working together is the best way we have learned to understand these new concepts and communicate as a team to support new changes,” she says.

Teamwork is critical, so is customer support. “Ask your customers and your staff for eco-friendly ideas. They generally have the most innovative and practical ideas. By doing so, you will also enlist their support and active participation to ensure success of the initiative. Because no matter how good your idea may be, it won’t succeed without their enthusiastic support,” says Karamooz.

Apart from community support, Gendebien says it’s important to review utility costs, water usage and waste management. “By making upgrades to energy efficient equipment, lighting and water systems, you can reduce your

footprint as well as annual costs,” she says. “Plan ahead. Make small changes every year to keep increasing your sustainability. This will add value year over year to your bottom line and enhance your business, culture and personal satisfaction along the way.”

Lotz, a board member of the Green Spa Network, recommends taking measures like changing the treatment menu to reduce resource use, replacing bottled water with water stations and glasses and conducting an energy audit. “Start by assessing your current practices and then decide what your staff and your clients care about the most or what would make the most difference. What are you most passionate about? Focus on what energizes you and let that guide you on your path to creating positive changes for your company, clients, and the people you work with,” she says. ■



WANT TO read more tips on how to implement meaningful sustainability practices? Click here to read more insights by Lotz.

Marketing Your Sustainability Message

It’s often challenging to get the word out about your green practices to ensure that your staff and community associate your brand with your green mission. To help tell your sustainability story, Lotz recommends doing the following:

- Feature your sustainability on your website and on social media outlets. Change up the messages and be consistent with regular posts.
- Use collateral throughout the facility on your green initiatives. You can highlight different efforts throughout the seasons if you live in a place that enjoys the four seasons: For example, water in the summer; energy use during wintertime.
- Supporting eco-organizations through partnerships or donations makes clients and staff members feel good about your company’s efforts. Don’t underestimate team-building efforts and the connection between people working together on something they are passionate about.
- Sustainability campaigns add interest and excitement to business as usual and support staff engagement and public relations.