

Global Spa Summit JOINING TOGETHER. SHAPING THE FUTURE.

General Session
Monday, May 19th, 2008
9:30am - 10:15am
Empire Room

Next Generation Technology Meets the Spa and Wellness Industry

Panel Leader:

Philip Wolf, CEO, PhoCus Wright, Inc., Connecticut

Panelists:

Dr. Marc Cohen, Professor of Complementary Medicine, RMIT University and President, Australian Integrative Medicine Association, Australia

Doug Chambers, Principal, Blu Spas Inc., California

Larry Donahue, COO and Corporate Counsel, SpaBoom, New Mexico

Paul Lehr, President, Pritikin Longevity Center and Spa, Florida

Scribes:

Vanessa Stoessel (EHL) and Kristin Rainey (Cornell)

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

All types of new and emerging technologies are helping to shape, grow and transform the spa industry. Emerging technology is strategic, not tactical, in growing this industry. Technology can be defined as advances in equipment and innovations in design, online technologies, planning and architecture.

Meet the Panel

Doug Chambers:

Our company is a full-service consultant firm, which works with clients starting with Pre-opening issues to post-opening operational issues. I deal with feasibility and business development.

Marc Cohen:

I'm a full-time academic researching wellness. I've just created a new Master's in Wellness at RMIT University in Australia.



Larry Donahue:

SpaBoom provides internet functionality for gift certificates. We have 2500 spas using our services.

Paul Lehr:

I carry on my father's work to teach diet, exercise, and lifestyle worldwide, through the Florida residential center, books and food products associated with the Pritikin name. Our focus has mainly been in the U.S.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

What should the U.S. do to create a culture that embraces technology? How do you make sure that culture sticks?

Larry Donahue:

There's a lemming effect. Everyone looks at their peers but every business is different. You should hire an expert to help you incorporate technology into your business. You shouldn't need to use paper at all. Training in technology is important and needs to be ongoing.

Marc Cohen:

Technology needs to be the servant, not the master. It's important to have the mind-set that technology helps you and it's easy to use.

Doug Chambers:

There's an assumption that technology makes the environment sterile and creates a barrier between the spa and the guest. It will actually improve operational efficiencies.

Paul Lehr:

The message of diet, lifestyles and exercise was very new in the 1970's. Sometimes it's older employees who are more into using new technology. Not all technology is good. Get everyone excited about the mission.

Comment from the Audience: Frank Pitsikalis (Resort Suite):

How can we make software more accessible? Like Google? We could set up yield management, let it go on auto-pilot and allow the employees to focus on the guests.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

Cite a specific case where an emerging technology has been implemented and is starting to show impact.

Marc Cohen:

The re-circulating shower in Australia. You can use 10 minutes of water over a 3 hour period. This technology is used at facilities and at home. Water is such an issue there.

Larry Donahue:

Facebook and other social networking sites show the need and desire to share info. Data is greater than info which is greater than knowledge which is greater than wisdom. Computers help us tap into our peers. CitySearch offers feedback on spas. Last year, most of our audience had not heard of Facebook. Now nearly everyone has.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

The wisdom of the crowds is a new concept which is different from asking your neighbor. Are there specific networking groups devoted to wellness?



Larry Donahue:

Not at the Facebook level. SpaFinder channels millions of dollars into the spa industry.

Doug Chambers:

There are different ways of filling in off hours. For example, text messaging clients to alert them of openings at a certain time. This is real time communication.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

The best way to solve the labor shortage is to ensure that excess capacity is filled. Some people in this audience use technology to help with yield management.

Paul Lehr:

We have done sleep studies. Pete and Susie have predicted this will be in demand this year. Intimal media thickness (IMT) is a highly advanced carotenoid ultrasound which measures the thickness of artery walls. This is a method of early detection for plaque and allows people to make lifestyle changes.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

What is a wellness assessment technology?

Marc Cohen:

It measures your well-being and places you on a spectrum to help improve your health and wellbeing; for example, body composition measurements (body fat and lean mass composition). Other high tech new issues include DNA risk assessment (this is what you're predisposed to), fitness assessment, and bio-metric tools you can wear.

Paul Lehr:

In past, people would go to spas for sleep studies. Now they're becoming more common.



Marc Cohen:

In Australia, the government covers sleep studies and the information is transferred through internet.

Paul Lehr:

Sleep studies at Pritikin are done on site.

Marc Cohen:

The digital microscope with an attached USB cable is another example of wellness technology. Anyone can be trained to use it. Same with LED lights. You can take image of a skin lesion and send it over internet to get a dermatologist's opinion. You get high-level medical expertise at the spa and access to a worldwide network of dermatologists. Tele-medicine will merge with the spa world.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

We have attorneys on stage. When technology becomes more mainstream and the price goes down, you can use the product in more places? Are there any threats from a privacy point of view? Or having people use the equipment?

Doug Chambers:

Some companies would be worried about liability.

Marc Cohen:

Australians lead the world in tele-medicine, largely due to the population patterns of Australia. You have to travel thousands of miles to get services. Robust privacy measures are key.

Larry Donahue:

The U.S. is a very litigious society. Strict standards are key, as is a consumer's privacy.

Question from the Audience: Philippe Hennessy (Pevonia):

Why, Marc, do you have such a small a number of dermatologists?

Marc Cohen:

We only have 20 million people. There are restrictions on becoming a dermatologist.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

What next generation technologies do you see coming?

Larry Donahue:

Software is a large piece which puts technology into a small component. The more effort put into the front end part, the better the long term investment will be and lower the cost. Ideally, we should have one set of data.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

What are the silos?

Larry Donahue:

Financial info, facilities and operations, products and services.

Philip Wolf (Panel Leader):

Sometimes reservation systems are separate from the systems that customers use on site. These silos need to talk to each other, which will make a better customer experience. What's something you've put into your facility that is high-tech?

Paul Lehr:

Consumers expect answers. It is important to use these tools, but be discriminating about what you do. Some will give false sense of security or unnecessary worry.

Larry Donahue:

SpaBoom offers gift certificates on the web. It's a no brainer. A website becomes a profit center. Many tools now are insertable into your site, allowing for a richer experience on the internet and greater revenues.

Marc Cohen

Internet technologies are more engaging. Online education is becoming more accessible.

Doug Chambers

Radio-frequency identification technology (RFID) has broad implications. Energy savings, payroll issues, Customer relationship management (CRM) issues, inventory control.

Comment from the Audience: Andrew Gibson (Mandarin Oriental):

I'm interested in sound technology to help to increase circulation, help sleep, increase relaxation. It's brand new.

Paul Lehr

Harmonic resonance is becoming more popular.

Marc Cohen

So are Bio-feedback technologies.

Comment from the Audience: Anna Bjurstam (Raison d'Etre)

The issue is how reliable is this technology? Is this technology valid?

Larry Donahue

The clients have the same questions. They're also trying to figure it out.

Doug Chambers

We need more hard data rather than anecdotal.

Marc Cohen

We do trials. You can search world's research online.

Paul Lehr

You need to dig deeper.



The Global Spa Summit is an international organization that brings together leaders and visionaries to positively impact and shape the future of the global spa and wellness industry.