



Bruce Schoenberg

EDITORS' NOTE Bruce Schoenberg has held his post since 1998. He is a graduate of Stony Brook University.

COMPANY BRIEF Named "Best of New York" and "Best of Westchester," Oasis Day Spa (oasisdayspanyc.com) invites guests to step away from their busy lives to enjoy peace, serenity, and relaxation. Their goal is to provide visitors with affordable luxury in a beautiful, tranquil environment, and help them to develop a healthy lifestyle.

Would you talk about your vision for what would differentiate Oasis and what you saw in the market that made you feel this concept would work?

I never do anything on the fly. I come out of the trade show industry where everything is measured in metrics; they don't take guesses.

Before I decided this was an industry I wanted to get into, I brought together potential customers in a focus group. I advertised and worked with friends to find people who were spa-goers and found more than 35 potential spa-goers to get their feedback on what they liked and didn't like about the industry.

I also ran focus groups for people that worked in the industry to find out what it is that made them want to work at a spa.

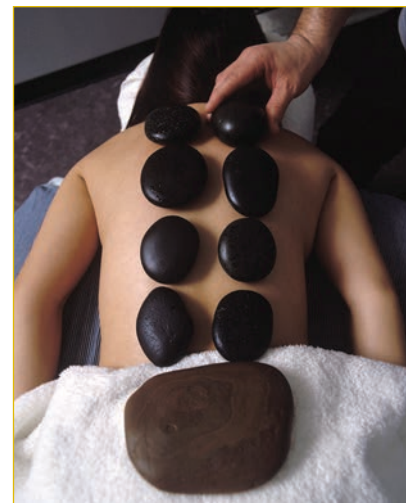
I always had a knack for marketing and selling, but when you're taking a leap of faith and opening your own business, the financial reward has to be worth the investment. It was not an easy decision – I had to weigh the risks and potential ROI to see if it made sense to switch professions and still be able to provide for my family. My business professors taught us that the risk reward of owning a business required a far greater return on ownership over leaving a salaried position.

After this process, I visited many different spas. At that time, in 1996, the spa industry was not what it is now, so I was able to get a really good feel for the industry. I also went to a couple of industry trade shows.

The most important issue to the consumer is customer service – it's about how important we make people feel. A massage is not just a

A Lifestyle Experience

An Interview with
Bruce Schoenberg, Owner, Oasis Day Spa



An Oasis Day Spa
lava rock treatment

massage because it is different for every person. We had to understand what the consumer was thinking. We talked to the focus groups about everything from the colors in the spa to the size of the rooms.

I determined that the market to go after was the working professional.

Is Oasis a spa or a wellness center? How do you define it?

The wellness aspect of the industry is an evolution. The word "spa" has a meaning, which is "water." So when we opened up the original location, we made sure water was a part of our services. In the original location, we also had a flotation tank, the concept of which is to give a feeling of weightlessness.

When we originally brought these spa services in, we realized the mind/body connection. This provided a natural transition into incorporating wellness. We didn't want to just have an impact by giving a customer a massage or helping clear up their skin – we wanted them to be able to come in and have a lifestyle experience.

One of the first questions we ask clients when they come in is what they're trying to achieve that day. We want to make sure our guests are not just coming in to feel good and relax, but that they think about us when they're having any sort of physical or wellness issue. Our acupuncturist, for instance, is well-known for helping women who are having fertility issues.

We will look at anything that is lifestyle and wellness-oriented and evaluate whether it can fit into the framework of our mission.

How important is it to build a team and retain your talent?

This industry is famous for having people who move from spa to spa. Massage therapists who get licensed in New York State can work anywhere in New York.

What's more interesting is how often staff leave here because they are getting \$1 an hour more elsewhere but then they come back. We truly have a family environment.

For every five people who apply for a job here, we only hire two. I'm not just looking for staff that are skilled – they need to have heart, and an ability to connect with our clients and make them feel special, as well as a passion for this industry and a love for healing people.

Everybody in our management has come up through the ranks so they really understand

the business. I get far too much credit and blame for anything that happens here, but I'm also the decider. When I have a disgruntled client, I call that person myself.

Are you interested in expanding to new locations?

Everything depends upon where I am in my life. To run this business right, it requires a lot of time and attention. I have things I'm working on right now so it comes down to the opportunity. If it will be a positive expansion for Oasis Day Spa and my bottom line, I'm interested.

Did you know early on this idea would work?

There is a risk in everything. I know my brand is highly respected, and not just in New York City. I opened in Westchester County because in my database, I found that 44,000 people who had visited my Manhattan locations were from Westchester, so I already had brand recognition. I also had the ability to go to Westchester and be respected because I had proven I knew how to run a business. Everyone wants to partner with someone they can make money with.

I signed the lease in Westchester on April Fool's Day 2008, just as we started to see sales drop off in New York as a result of the recession.

I then did all I could to lower overhead. Because of the stock I had built up with my core and those who worked for me, I held a meeting and told them I had to reduce all salaries by 10 percent and that I was reducing mine by 50 percent.

I opened the Westchester location and knew we had to survive, and that came from everything I learned from growing up in a family business to getting a great education to taking additional business classes. I knew that a lot of my competition would not make it through, and I felt it was hopefully short-term pain for long-term gain.

Looking at the landscape, there are not many day spas that are outside of a hotel so I'm glad we pushed through.

Will your company be sold at some point?

Whoever may look to acquire us will do so because we're successful. When they ask me why I'm successful, I say that it is because I have the undying loyalty of my staff, and that's what makes Oasis what it is. ●