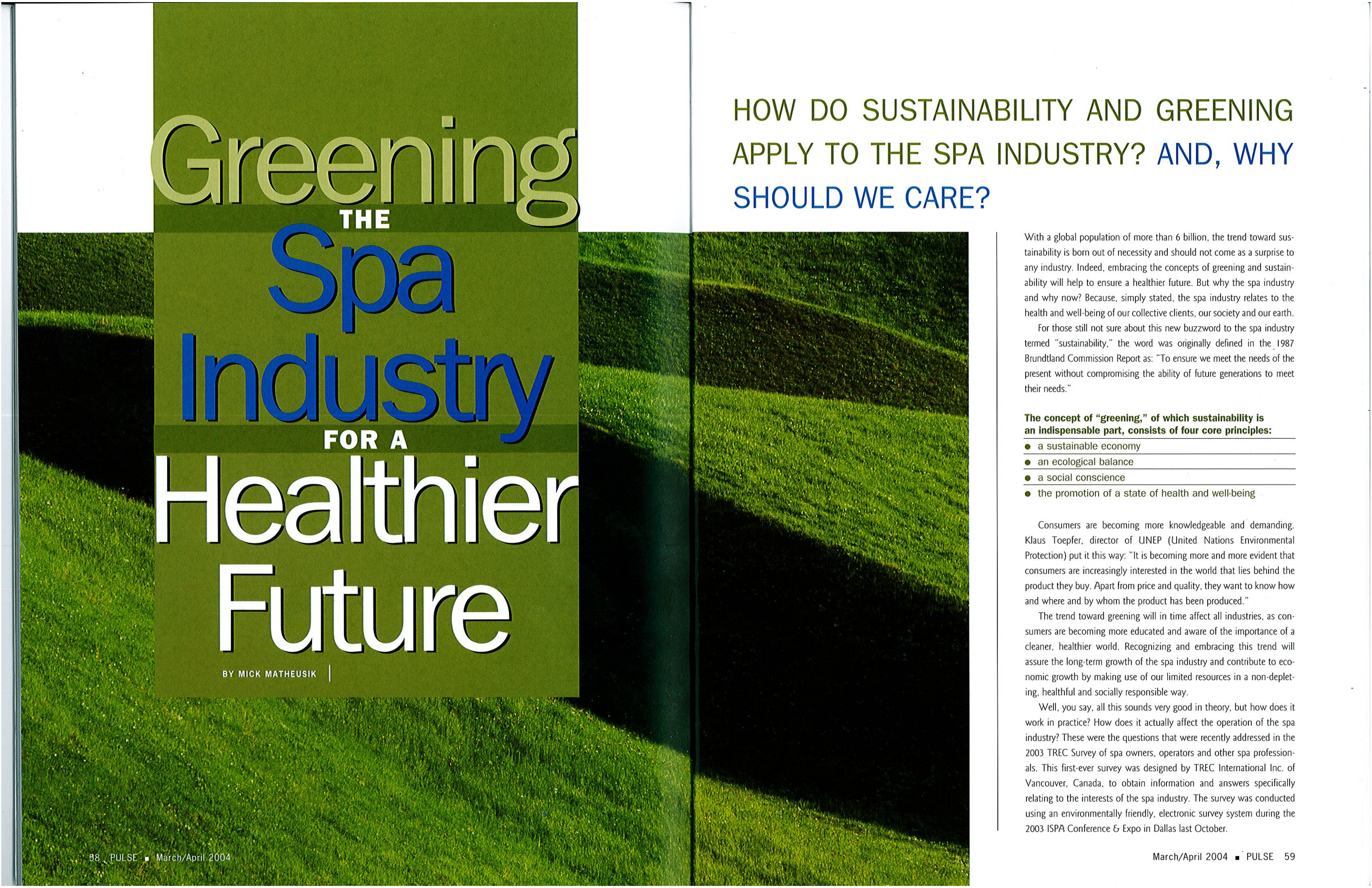


Greening
THE
Spa
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FOR A
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Future

BY MICK MATHEUSIK |



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HOW DO SUSTAINABILITY AND GREENING APPLY TO THE SPA INDUSTRY? AND, WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

With a global population of more than 6 billion, the trend toward sustainability is born out of necessity and should not come as a surprise to any industry. Indeed, embracing the concepts of greening and sustainability will help to ensure a healthier future. But why the spa industry and why now? Because, simply stated, the spa industry relates to the health and well-being of our collective clients, our society and our earth.

For those still not sure about this new buzzword to the spa industry termed "sustainability," the word was originally defined in the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report as: "To ensure we meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."

The concept of "greening," of which sustainability is an indispensable part, consists of four core principles:

- a sustainable economy
- an ecological balance
- a social conscience
- the promotion of a state of health and well-being

Consumers are becoming more knowledgeable and demanding. Klaus Toepfer, director of UNEP (United Nations Environmental Protection) put it this way: "It is becoming more and more evident that consumers are increasingly interested in the world that lies behind the product they buy. Apart from price and quality, they want to know how and where and by whom the product has been produced."

The trend toward greening will in time affect all industries, as consumers are becoming more educated and aware of the importance of a cleaner, healthier world. Recognizing and embracing this trend will assure the long-term growth of the spa industry and contribute to economic growth by making use of our limited resources in a non-depleting, healthful and socially responsible way.

Well, you say, all this sounds very good in theory, but how does it work in practice? How does it actually affect the operation of the spa industry? These were the questions that were recently addressed in the 2003 TREC Survey of spa owners, operators and other spa professionals. This first-ever survey was designed by TREC International Inc. of Vancouver, Canada, to obtain information and answers specifically relating to the interests of the spa industry. The survey was conducted using an environmentally friendly, electronic survey system during the 2003 ISPA Conference & Expo in Dallas last October.

The survey was initially sparked by the challenge raised by Deborah Szekely (founder of Rancho La Puerto) at the 2002 ISPA Conference in Anaheim, Calif. Szekely delivered a fervent message, which was received by a standing ovation from Conference attendees. She convincingly made her point for the importance of greater awareness of these issues and why it is in the spa industry's own best interest to pursue the consumer-driven trend toward becoming more environmentally conscious. ISPA responded by offering several sessions covering this topic at the 2003 Conference.

The TREC survey (the source for all of the following statistics) consulted with several hundred ISPA Conference delegates and trade show participants, with more than 230 people completing the survey questionnaire. Interestingly enough, the survey found that 68 percent of respondents already incorporate some form of "green practices" into their spa environment and the products/services they offer, by:

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| ● Reducing the use of throwaway products | 50% |
| ● Reducing or eliminating the use of toxic products | 46% |
| ● Selecting green products and services | 44% |
| ● Using less or alternative packaging | 40% |
| ● Reducing water consumption | 34% |
| ● Providing environmental education | 31% |
| ● Processing and re-using wastewater | 23% |
| ● Building or landscape design | 21% |
| ● Other | 18% |

Yet, despite these most encouraging results, verbal feedback showed that the concept of "greening" is still relatively new to the spa industry. There remains considerable uncertainty and a desire to further explore ways as to how it can be more efficiently applied and incorporated into everyday spa business operations. Some underlying concerns were also identified, such as "The fear of killing the goose that lays the golden egg," or that greening might have an adverse or negative impact on the industry's profits.

When survey participants were asked if ISPA should become more involved in the educational process of how spas can actually benefit from "going green," 64.4 percent of respondents were in favor.

And concerning the question, "In what way(s) do you think ISPA should participate in the greening trend?", participants said:

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| ● Provide more educational material | 64% |
| ● Give the topic more media attention | 62% |
| ● Create a directory of green products | 54% |
| ● Create an educational Web site | 50% |
| ● Conduct seminars and roundtables | 49% |
| ● Form an Environmental Committee or Advisory Committee | 49% |
| ● Offer awards to successful operators | 47% |
| ● Work with other industry associations | 44% |
| ● Do nothing at all | 6% |

It is becoming more and more evident that consumers are increasingly interested in the world that lies behind the product they buy. Apart from price and quality, they want to know how and where and by whom the product has been produced.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as many as 68 percent of respondents indicated that they thought their customers feel positively about green products and procedures in spas. In relating this to their own business, they felt that greening could provide the following tangible benefits:

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| ● Reduce environmental impacts | 63% |
| ● Improve corporate image | 57% |
| ● Improve customer satisfaction | 48% |
| ● Create competitive edge | 40% |
| ● Encourage teamwork | 31% |
| ● Stay ahead of regulations | 30% |
| ● Increase profits | 27% |
| ● Reduce operating costs | 22% |
| ● Reduce capital costs | 16% |

The TREC survey results show that the spa industry generally is aware of the consumer-driven trend toward greening. Spa operators and other spa professionals may do well in adapting and moving with this trend to attain a competitive edge and remain successful in this business over the long run. When properly implemented, any initial costs will likely be more than offset by the resulting benefits and rewards.

Sustainability is about creating more economic and social value by providing technology, services, knowledge and experiences in a harmonized and balanced way. The greening of our industry is part of an already ongoing global transformation. It is not an end in itself as much as it is a journey in which all members of the spa industry need to show increased awareness and participation and play a proactive, conscientious and responsible role, no matter how big or small. By eliminating or minimizing, wherever possible, any negative impacts the spa industry may have on our health, well-being and our natural environment, we will be able to truly embrace and advance the balance of mind, body and spirit. ■

MICK MATHEUSIK, CMC, is a certified management & development consultant and ISPA member who specializes in spas, wellness centers, resorts and retail services. He is president of TREC International (www.trecinternational.com) and has worked in more than 10 different countries. Services range from developing concept/master plans through to implementation and incorporate ways to be environmentally sensitive while being customer and bottom-line responsive.



RESOURCE FINDER

For more detailed information on this topic, read the article "The Greening of the Spa Industry" in the August 2003 issue of *Pulse*. Also, To explore the topic of greening further, ISPA is creating a Greening Task Force and looking for ideas from you. For more information, contact ISPA headquarters by e-mailing ispa@ispastaff.com.