



THE IMPACT OF ONLINE EDUCATION FOR AFRICA'S SPA AND WELLNESS INDUSTRY

By Angela Derks

In recent years, online learning, also referred to as virtual or e-learning, has been all the rage in western countries such as America, Great Britain, and Canada. It allows working professionals to earn degrees and new skills, study on their own schedule, and not have to commute to a far-flung campus for classes or advisory meetings. But now, utilising online education in Africa is becoming increasingly important. Here are some of the reasons online education is of major benefit to the spa and wellness industry of the continent.

The African spa and wellness industry has been rapidly growing and it has much to offer the Trillion dollar global wellness industry. It is integral that a high standard of education is initiated early in the growth phase and becomes the benchmark. A quality education framework is the key to optimising the continent's immense potential.

The development of best practice guidelines along with internationally recognised educational frameworks and benchmarks are essential, with the clear objective of empowering the future generations by harnessing the value that online education offers the spa and wellness industry of Africa.

The Education System

The first thing that might come to one's mind when talking about online education, is the education system. Most African countries are struggling in this area of their society, and it's here where online education can make the greatest positive impact.

Education is the key to empowerment and reducing poverty. The intention of online education is to provide equality by giving people the right to quality education at an affordable price and delivered via a method that makes it accessible to individuals that wish to develop their capability and skills as professionals within the African wellness industry.

Why Online Education?

One of the main reasons there are so many benefits in utilising online education for the spa and wellness industry in Africa is that it cuts down on much of the infrastructure costs that makes education of the industry-specific skills inaccessible for so many people.

For instance:

- The biggest difference that a learning program conducted via electronic media makes, is associated with the costs of the training to the worker and/or the business.
- Instead of a learner 'going to a class' the 'class comes to the learner', when and how it suits them.
- Much of the theory components of spa and wellness foundation skills can be taught via online delivery with practical aspects of treatments being taught as needed face to face. This is being done successfully in many other countries and can also be done in Africa.
- The use of Online Education also helps eliminate logistical issues, such as inadequate public transport or a lack of suitable roads entirely.
- Learners can fit in coursework and lectures around their own schedules and work hours, and therefore they are not wasting valuable time travelling to and from a campus or risking their personal safety and wellbeing, job and livelihood in order to attend classes to learn.

Africa's Economic Benefits

- Online education not only benefit learners, but a country's economy as a whole. Some of these benefits include:
- The flexibility of online education combined with its scalability means that more people have access to the information, irrelevant of their location and socioeconomic status. This is particularly important for the spa sector which tends to be female-dominated and where basic industry skills such as hygiene, health and safety have been proven highly effective through online delivery.
- As much of the workforce in the spa and wellness industry are women, it allows the opportunity to spend time with family for personal wellbeing whilst also enabling access to knowledge and skills for financial independence. This supports gender equality and the philosophy of Ubuntu (which translates as 'humanity towards others').
- Having a more educated workforce improves a nation's economy, and creates a competitive market for travel, tourism and foreign investment.



How The African Spa and Wellness Workforce Benefit

Many companies are gradually starting to use more and more tools in order to upgrade the skills of their workforce, to increase productivity and to deliver quality services and products. In order to attract business in today's global economy, both companies and countries must provide a very skilled workforce. The spa and wellness industry are no different from other industries in this regard.

Due to the high number of individuals with mobile phones on the continent, it is clear that Africa is perfectly positioned to take advantage of the benefits of online education. If you consider that this delivery method provides access to some of the best experts in the world about a certain topic, and access to knowledge that one cannot otherwise find easily, it is then easy to see why being able to access education online is both empowering and incredibly valuable.

At the Australasian Sustainable Wellness Academy (ASWA), for example, online education programs can be completed anywhere, at any time and at any pace – as long as the learner has access to an internet connection. One example is Diana, one of our Wellness Within Program participants. Diana is a spa therapist working on a remote island resort and wants to develop her wellness understanding and skills on her days off. In years gone by this would have cost Diana over US\$1,800 to access that information in an 8-week course delivered by industry experts, not to mention travel costs to attend the course. Diana now has access to the same industry experts from her remote island and without having to commute to the Academy, all at a substantially lower cost of US\$163.



The ASWA accredited Diploma of Wellness Spa Management is another example of how a therapist can boost their skills and career with less stress on their lives and their bank balance. What would have cost a therapist well over US\$20,000 to access high level information in a 12-month professional course delivered by experienced spa industry experts, can now be attained for only US\$6,000, and at times when it suits her life-work schedule. Working at their own pace, it allows aspiring managers to fully understand what is being covered by using their own real-life experience as a basis. The blended support approach includes regular face time with respected expert spa and wellness educators available fortnightly via whatsapp, zoom, skype, and other integrated platforms.

Not only does the aspiring spa manager have real access to quality accredited spa management information, but they are also directly connected with the industry experts themselves who can tap into their extensive professional networks to fast track the trajectory of the learner's career. This approach works particularly well for spa owners opening new spas and wanting to invest in the skills of their core team members prior to opening or during their growth strategy roll-out. And this is the approach that the continent's leading industry association, the Spa and Wellness Association of Africa (SWAA) wants to offer spa and wellness professionals in Africa who are looking to advance their careers and learn new skills.

Online Education also fills the gap where employees are unable to attend public courses and come from small companies, many of which make up the spa and wellness industry. This is where technology and video have become the strongest tools for enterprise learning and development in the spa and wellness industry in Africa. It's engaging, scalable, measurable, available anywhere any time, and increasingly, it's interactive – from podcasts by various professionals, group forums with peers, capturing of lectures, seminars and workshops on therapies, techniques and hints, to quality live broadcasts to audiences around the world. Online education provides greater equality for all to access quality education for greater employability.

There are many advantages to sign oneself or their team up for a quality online course. Because the cost is usually much lower than a face-to-face presented course, it provides the opportunity to gain more skills from completing more courses. You are also able to complete the courses at your own pace and in the comfort of your office or home.

For Africa's spa and wellness industry, online education represents the perfect opportunity to give everyone a chance to learn and to adapt.



Some Final Reflections

For centuries, Africans have used rituals and ceremonies aimed at honouring the body and mind and restoring the body's natural healing properties by using the elements of nature. By harnessing the capabilities of technology to honour Africa's culture and traditions SWAA's online education platform will provide a quality education framework and standards that support African countries and their local communities with employability skills and contribute to economic growth and development.

Not only will the online education platform benefit SWAA members, who will be able to learn important skills to boost their careers and business opportunities, both within the continent and abroad, but it will also help countries to save money, attract foreign investment, and sustain a healthy economy.

By Angela Derks, Wellness Pioneer, Founder CEO of the Australasian Sustainable Wellness Academy and Advisory Board Member for the Spa and Wellness Association of Africa.

**Education is the
most powerful
weapon you can
use to change
the world .**

- Nelson Mandela

