



Salon & Spa Buyers Guide

Our expert's answer some of your most asked questions...

Question 1

I've heard there is a difference in UK and overseas manufacturing that impacts on fire regulations. Can you explain this?

Our Experts Answer...

It is alarming that currently it is not compulsory for therapy couches, massage tables and treatment chairs sold in the UK to meet any safety standard. Responsible manufacturers voluntarily produce couches and therapy equipment to a minimum criterion.

Your client's safety is of the utmost importance; in the compensation culture we live in today it is prudent for professionals to ensure that their equipment is safe and it is advisable and sensible to ensure that the furniture and equipment you purchase meets British Safety Standards (e.g. BS3379) and the upholstery and foam padding meets UK Fire Regulations (e.g. Furniture & Furnishings Fire Safety Regulations S11324).

Ethical Manufacturers adopt the UK regulations laid down for soft furnishings in order to meet stringent testing for Flame Retardancy and they use foam and upholstery which has been rigorously tested by an independent body for flammability, longevity and quality. It is estimated that 75% of foreign imported foam and upholstery will not meet BS3379/BS5852 regulations, and European safety criteria is generally lower than those set in the UK. It is advisable to establish where in the world your equipment is manufactured.

Question 2

Are there any laws or regulations that I have to comply with? Our Experts Answer...

Our Experts Answer...

Every business or service provider needs to be aware of the legal changes which came into force in October 2004, to ensure that they not only meet their legal duties to ensure that disabled people can use their services and facilities but also don't ignore all those disabled people who are potential customers.

According to the Act reasonable adjustments to physical features does not only include steps, stairways, entrances, washrooms etc but it is important to realise features that also need consideration include, for example seating. For the therapy treatment room this has implications for any equipment a client reclines or sits on. Any UK business providing a service to the public, such as a therapy treatment room or salon, needs to ensure they can treat disabled customers and make every service they offer available and accessible to disabled customers. As a salon manager, the first step is to ask yourself 'can disabled people use my services without inconvenience, discomfort or loss of dignity?'. You may need to ensure that at least one couch is 'disabled friendly' to accommodate wheelchair clients and will descend low enough to allow easy and safe transfer from wheelchair to couch, we would suggest a lowest setting of 19" will allow you easy wheelchair transfer. Staff may need to be trained to treat clients with different types of disabilities. If you are positive and helpful in your approach and provide a service that is accessible to all, you will attract more potential clients. This will include not just the disabled client but maybe the friends or family accompanying them/ their carer as well as elderly clients who may not be disabled but will appreciate easier access.

Question 3

I'm just setting up my first salon. What are the key items I should look to purchase?

Our Experts Answer...

In planning your first salon you should budget for the best quality equipment you can possibly afford and that major equipment items offer enough flexibility to encompass the full range of therapies and treatments that you envisage offering, both initially and as your business develops.

The design of your key equipment, a treatment couch or chair should provide for client comfort and an effective treatment; it should also afford a safe and comfortable working environment for the therapist. The working height of a couch is most important, and couches may need to be at varying heights to suit your staff. A flexible alternative is the hydraulic or electric couch - these can be quickly and easily adapted to suit individual treatments. Correct posture for a seated therapist is vital and ergonomic seating contributes to the welfare of the practitioner.

Most heavy-duty static couches are multi-functional and will be suited to a variety of treatments. If you are diversifying over a number of therapies, you should know that beauty equipment offering the comfort of thick padding may not be so well suited to massage or manipulative work which requires the firm support of higher density foam.

If space is at a premium a single major piece of equipment can be adapted to many disciplines. A top specification electric couch will be strong enough for heavy massage and sufficiently flexible to convert to a chair for foot and beauty work.

Further versatility for manipulation treatment may be offered where the design of the couch or table provides a lifting leg or knee elevation or sectioned to provide both a positive and negative tilt facility offering a wide variety of treatment positions for massage therapy, medical application and also useful in leg waxing and foot treatments. Where you are buying from the manufacturer you may be able to specify the dimensions of your major equipment item so that it is customised to your needs. Buying the least expensive couch may be a false economy. Such items become shabby quite quickly and will not be sufficiently robust to withstand the demands of a busy salon. If your budget is tight then my advice is to buy quality items that are relevant to your initial needs and as your business prospers, you can gradually enhance your facilities. You are offering a professional service and the investment in equipment should reflect this fact; a quality image will result in customer and employee satisfaction which will give you the return on investment.

Question 4

At what point should salon owners start thinking about the furniture which is going into a new salon?

Our Experts Answer...

Make sure you plan to purchase your equipment well enough in advance, one of the most common statements made to our sales consultants is 'I'm opening in 2 weeks time and I am looking for a complete salon suite'!

Groundwork can be carried out well in advance, as long as you have your treatment plans in place you can begin your search for the right equipment to encompass the treatments your salon will be offering, even before you have your premises. Also consider your longer term business plan and choose equipment that will grow with your business and be able to adapt to perhaps more treatments being introduced as you progress.

Your colour scheme can also be planned well in advance so when you are ordering your equipment you know what finish /colours will match your overall design. e.g. wooden natural theme, clinical colours, or corporate colours., etc

For your main equipment, such as electronic couches /tables/plinths, treatments chairs you must allow at least 4-6 weeks for its manufacture. If you having bespoke furniture made to your special dimensions, then 6 weeks is the absolute minimum you should allow for your equipment to be made. Also if you are ordering from a company who offers a personal installation service with their delivery you need to notify them well in advance of your opening date to ensure that a delivery date is booked for you. A common error is that more money is spent on the aesthetics of the salon and the furniture takes 'back stage'. Designers and architects are not necessarily the best authority to give you advice on therapy equipment. They know about the things they are qualified to do and that's design and plan buildings, staircases, flooring, doors and perhaps can advise on plumbing and electrics etc. In our experience they do not have working knowledge of therapists and remember the business you are in is very, very specialist. If you can be lucky enough to have the chance to talk to an actual equipment manufacturer about your equipment needs, they have the business knowledge combined with an in depth-product knowledge to best advise and give guidance. They will be well experienced in dealing with salons and spas on a daily basis and will know what will best works in your salon environment and, more importantly, what doesn't work. They may highlight certain issues that you may not have even considered and would certainly not be considered by an architect.

Question 5

Can you suggest some common oversights when planning new treatment rooms?

Our Experts Answer...

a) The most common omission (*and electricians don't always think of this*) is plug sockets. If you are using electronic couches, consider your electrical wiring and have under floor sockets fitted so that leads are kept at floor level. Also consider where your wall plugs are fitted for the best access for magnification lamps etc.,

b) Check the equipment you are buying complies to fire regulations required by your indemnity insurance. Remember they are no requisite regulations governing equipment sold in the UK but there will be regulations you may need to meet for your premises. Also ensure that your equipment enables you to meet the Disability Laws.

c) Ensure there is enough room for a treatment couch to be accessed both sides. If your therapist is having to constantly reach over this will cause common posture problems such as bad backs and possibly time off work.

d) Make sure you consult the therapists who are going to be using the equipment. A big mistake many make is that the person responsible to make the buying decision is not necessarily the practicing therapist, or on many occasions has any knowledge of therapy at all. What may appear value for money to the man with the purse strings may not actually be a viable purchase when its in situ if it doesn't stand up to the rigors of continuous use, meet all your various treatment needs/ disciplines and may not be easy for the therapist to use and assist their treatments. Remember don't be led by your accountant... what's good value for him may be in the long term false economy.

Your salon equipment and furnishing make a statement about your business and rate highly in the overall impression a customer goes away with. Remember that the ambience creates a good feel factor and impression but the comfort of the treatment is paramount, e.g. you can have a lovely vase in the corner of room but if the couch your client is lying on for an hour is uncomfortable or unstable they won't come back for another treatment !

Question 6

Glossy brochures and websites look great but how can I compare the technical information between products and brands?

Our Experts Answer...

Technical information about products varies greatly. Manufacturers (especially from the UK) should give precise and detailed descriptions, specifications and illustrations. Companies websites that may be more informative and up-to-date than a printed brochure.

Before you start it is a good idea to list your requirements. Your priorities can then be compared with appropriate models in each brochure and you can shortlist those that best suit your needs. The final decision is an important one and should not be taken lightly.

The most reputable suppliers will give you further technical information and provide advice on the applications of their equipment and the suitability of different models to your therapy discipline (s). Look for companies who employ qualified therapists in their Customer Service function.

The brochure/website should give you standard dimensions although manufacturers may offer the option of customised sizes. But size is not the only criteria, what about quality, strength and durability? You do not need to know the 'ins and outs' of aluminium thickness, wood density, electric motor reliability etc, instead you can ask operational questions such as what is the maximum patient weight? How much weight will an electric couch lift? How stable is the item? What about durability? How quickly and easily can damage be repaired? What therapies do you recommend this equipment for? If a company cannot give you informed, considered and credible answers to your questions then go elsewhere.

Question 7

As people are getting heavier, how do I establish that the couch I buy will stand up to the rigours of everyday use and will hold my patients safely?

As a British manufacturer that regularly has experiences of 'picking up the pieces' of other brands of imported couches that have failed a salon or spa our advice would be to buy couches that clearly meet British Standards and be very careful not to be fooled by the aesthetics of a couch. Couches can be cheapened in many ways not apparent to the naked eye e.g. by thinning the under board and the aluminium box frame, by using cheaper upholstery, etc, and although they may appear similar to other models on the market their good value may be deceptive. They may not stand up to the rigors of day to day spa and salon work and you may find yourself re-purchasing equipment a lot sooner than you bargained for.

Ask pertinent operational questions such as what is the maximum patient weight? How much weight will an electric couch lift? How stable is the product? How durable is the couch? ...this will help you establish the quality of the couches' construction. In particular look for couches that are specifically manufactured to meet demanding applications. In addition think about after sales and how a break down may affect your business...if you choose a British made product from a reputable manufacturer, you can be confident in the quality of your product and have the technical support & backup on hand to provide specialist technical assistance during the life of your couch- look out for companies who offer maintenance and servicing and offer an engineer call out service that can be with you within 48hours, so that your business is not disrupted in the unlikely event of breakdown and parts for your couch are available here in the UK, not from abroad. [Full details of our safety standards >](#)

Question 8

What would you highlight as key points to remember when refurbishing? &... Whom/where is the best place to get advice on refurbishing/ a new fit?

Our Experts Answer...

Use the knowledge you have gained from customers comments and consult your staff before buying new equipment. Evaluate what equipment brings you in the most money and spend your budget accordingly. Work out what £ per square meter you earn from your different work areas. Versatile equipment that can be used regularly throughout the day pays for itself more quickly and can aid your growth. Time is money, for instance, utilize your equipment to save your staff time, e.g. well stocked trolleys dedicated to each room it will quicken the turnaround time for the next treatment as opposed to several therapists sharing a trolley and constantly having to take time between treatment to re-stock. Utilise every inch of your salon, clever use of partitions or screens can perhaps provide an extra work area thus giving you more income per sq. Metre.

Designers and architects are not necessarily the best authority to give you advice on therapy equipment. They know about the things they are qualified to do and that's design and plan buildings, staircases, flooring, doors and perhaps can advise on plumbing and electrics etc. They do not have working knowledge of therapists and remember the business you are in is very, very specialist. If you can be lucky enough to have the chance to talk to an actual equipment manufacturer about your equipment needs, they have the business knowledge combined with an in depth-product knowledge to best advise and give guidance. They will be well experienced in dealing with salons and spas on a daily basis and will know what will best works in your salon environment and, more importantly, what doesn't work. They can also help with sizes and colours and may highlight certain issues that you may not have even considered.

Question 9

More and more couches seem to be available in colours. Should I invest in a really funky shade of furniture or is this just a gimmick?

Our Experts Answer...

While your equipment needs to be functional the overall appearance should provide an appropriate ambiance and enhance your professional image. The therapy industry operates in a sophisticated and highly competitive market where customer expectations are high. Your business success will depend on your professional skills and on creating a clear identity, attracting and retaining a clientele. Your premises need to be inviting and welcoming generating a feeling of confidence and well-being in the client. The decor, equipment and furnishing of your salon make a statement about your business. Sensible equipment manufacturers do not introduce novelty on a whim; they monitor and reflect general trends in furnishing and decoration and identify the needs and demands of the therapy industry. Manufacturers respond to this demand with a choice of upholstery colours, chrome/silver framework and wooden finishes. Where the full range of equipment and accessories is available from a single supplier you may coordinate items in terms of material, colour and finish, giving an overall effect of harmony and uniformity. Major manufacturers should offer you an extensive range of choice. Complimentary and colour co-ordinated equipment will give your salon a professional image and will integrate with your colour scheme or salon theme. Corporate colours can endorse your brand or message. [See our vinyl colour palette >](#)

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Advice & Guidance

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