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KNEADFUL THINGS:

Putting the Rest in Stressed

Fraser Clarke
President & CEO



Written by Allison Dempsey

Whether used for injury rehabilitation, sports therapy, relaxation or mental health support, an effective massage performed by a reliable professional remains an overwhelmingly popular choice of treatment for many. Finding the quality — and consistency — in treatment can be challenging, but Massage Addict Inc., Canada's first and largest membership-based massage therapy provider with more than 100 locations across Canada, addresses and skillfully handles these issues. Massage Addict's proven business concept serves a gap in the market by providing affordable therapeutic massage without sacrificing quality or service.

The company opened its first clinic in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in July 2008, and in August 2014, the founder sold Massage Addict to Fraser Clarke, an experienced leader with a history of growing membership-based health and wellness companies. At the time of sale, Massage Addict had 28 locations open with massage being the only therapeutic treatment service offered — at a discounted price — but with Clarke came a new management team and a path and vision for substantial growth.

After significant market research and numerous client, therapist and franchise partner surveys and in-person focus groups, the new management team launched a three-pronged growth strategy that included national expansion — opening clinics in key strategic markets from coast to coast; a premier provider model — migrating from a discounted pricing model while still providing an extremely attractive value proposition to members and new clients; and an approach focused on holistic wellness.

"This meant authentically evolving from a single service to offering multiple therapeutic services and related products to help Canadians resolve their symptoms and conditions, namely pain management, stress, anxiety and injury recovery," explains President Caroline Kolompar.

That strategy proved an impressive success. Today, Massage Addict boasts more than 100 clinics located across the country, and is proud to offer four therapeutic services for clients to choose from: massage therapy, reflexology (added in 2018), acupuncture (added in 2019), and chiropractic care (added in 2020). In addition to those therapeutic services, Massage Addict also now fits custom orthotics (as of 2021) and offers topical pain management products.

"Our complement of services was carefully selected to support the needs of the Massage Addict client," says Kolompar. "Unlike

a spa, Massage Addict clients visit primarily for pain management, stress, anxiety and injury recovery."

The company's vision statement — to be the premier provider of therapeutic treatments in Canada and beyond — continues to guide its growth, a goal that's unquestionably being realized as Massage Addict continues to expand its therapeutic wellness services: its 100th clinic opened in 2020, and there are more upcoming in 2022.

That milestone 100th clinic — which opened its doors in October 2020 — is fittingly located in St. John's, Newfoundland, birthplace and home location of the company's current Chief Executive Officer and Owner, Fraser Clarke.

"Our expansion plans include opening more clinics in order to help more Canadians," adds Kolompar. "We will have 123 by the end of 2022, with further growth in 2023 and beyond until the company covers all viable markets in Canada — approximately 200 clinics."

"The new management team launched a three-pronged growth strategy..."

Therapists practicing at Massage Addict currently help 75,000 Canadians per month. As the company continues to grow, and the therapeutic services offered continue to increase as a preferred choice amongst Canadians for their health and wellness routine, Massage Addict expects to see more than 150,000 clients per month.

"As our clinic count grows, we will continue to focus on our four therapeutic services: massage, acupuncture, reflexology and chiropractic care," says Kolompar. "With that said, we continue to study the market and survey clients, therapists and franchise partners to identify additional therapeutic services that all stakeholders would like to be available at Massage Addict."

As the company also considers new potential treatment options, it will remain committed to ensuring all products or services are within the scope of helping Canadians with pain management, stress, anxiety or injury recovery.

As massage migrates from its previous misperception of simple relaxation practice to one with proven and worthy health benefits, it's worth noting how that change ties in with the ►



► notion of self-care in general: looking after your overall well-being, both mental and physical, is essential, and massage plays an important role.

"I think the biggest change over the years with regards to self-care is that what was previously known as 'complementary therapies' are now fundamental to Canadians' preventative and acute care," says Kolompar of services such as massage, acupuncture and chiropractic care. She adds there are many reasons for how and why the notion of self-care has changed over the years.

"Over time Canadians have developed a greater awareness and understanding of the long-term health and wellness benefits of paramedical services versus just thinking about them as a special occasion 'pampering' experience," she says.

"There's a sweeping change in the attitude toward actively managing your mental and physical wellness."

That awareness and understanding is coupled with increased access to high-quality, convenient and appropriately priced paramedical services — Massage Addict alone treats 75,000 Canadians per month, a triumphant display of access that was significantly more difficult and inconsistent just 10 years ago.

"There's a sweeping change in the attitude toward actively managing your mental and physical wellness — something that was discussed continuously through the pandemic," Kolompar says. "As Canadians, we're lucky to have paramedical services funded by employment benefits."

That fundamental shift in thinking is seen every day in Massage Addict clinics across the country, she adds.

"According to our internal surveys, 83 percent of Massage Addict clients visit for pain management or relief from stress or anxiety or injury recovery, and more than 80 percent of our client base is repeat clients." Pretty impressive stats, and ones that speak to not only the popularity of massage, but its actual need as treatment for a variety of both physical and mental issues.

But along with the successes have come the challenges, and the ongoing pandemic plays a significant role.

"COVID and all subsequent variants has been a challenge for us, as it has for almost every business," Kolompar says. "With that said, being part of the regulated healthcare industry ensured that we were allowed to stay open, other than a three-month period starting in March 2020."

When COVID first hit in early 2020, the Massage Addict team immediately took a step back and asked themselves a very simple question: How do we help all our stakeholders through this pandemic? This included clients, franchise partners, therapists and, of course, the head office team, says Kolompar.

"For each of these stakeholders we developed communication plans that included weekly updates and programs specific to their concerns or programs that could help during lock-down," she shares.

As an example, clients were sent guides on stretching, how to stay pain-free while working in the kitchen — not always an ergonomically friendly space — and how to lower stress levels. For therapists who consistently communicate how important continuing education is, Massage Addict partnered with the Dexterity Online Learning program to provide free online continuing education courses for a variety of different treatment techniques. The company also provided step-by-step how-to guides and links to all the government programs available for contract workers.



"Most importantly, once reopened, we ensured that all stakeholders knew and understood that safety and sanitation was the primary concern," says Kolompar. "Our development of sanitation and social distancing protocols, the contracting of a third party 'deep clean' of all clinics, and the use of PPE for clients and therapists ensured that clients knew we were a safe place to receive much needed treatments, and therapists knew they were in a safe place to treat."

Massage Addict's commitment to sanitation and safety was uncompromising, she adds, and since reopening the company has seen a "flight to quality" by both clients and practitioners.

But those aren't the company's only impressive accomplishments: Massage Addict has achieved numerous major milestones in the last five years.

"I think the most important is that as a company we provided support and guidance to all our stakeholders during the last two years, which have been difficult for everyone," Kolompar says. "The result is that we emerged an even stronger brand with a stronger sense of community."

That stronger brand will lead directly to approximately 200 clinics nestled in communities throughout Canada, all with the same consistent, quality client experience, one of the many attributes that continues to place Massage Addict ahead of the competition.

"There's a lot that sets us apart from similar companies, but fundamentally one of our core differences is that we listen to all stakeholders when developing new initiatives for the brand," says Kolompar.

New developments begin with a full spectrum of research for market, client, therapist and franchise partners that helps define how the initiative either offers more choice to existing clients and/or will help more Canadians through authentic business model evolution, such as when the company added additional therapeutic services beyond just massage. In fact, Kolompar believes the company can only be successful long-term when all stakeholder needs are understood and respected through each and every step of evolution, and to date, this philosophy has been the cornerstone of the success of the Massage Addict brand.

"Massage Addict is a professional and safe clinic for several disciplines of practitioners to practice and opportunities for franchise partners to have successful, long-term, locally owned small business, which are the heartbeat of communities across Canada," she says.

In the coming years, Massage Addict looks to continue its growth and success, while helping clients achieve their desired goals.

"It's extremely important for us to stay true to our strategic vision and follow that specific path to continued growth," Kolompar says. "If I had a looking glass into the future I would say that Massage Addict will continue to be Canadian's largest provider of multiple therapeutic services and related products, all through one membership and thereby offering choice, quality and convenience to help Canadians manage their pain, stress, anxiety and more." ■