

# Marketing Your Massage Business



by Laura Lander, LMT



*Marketing Your Massage Business is a manual of very practical ideas for building business and increasing clientele. Written by a successful massage therapist for other dedicated massage therapists who seek success in the profession, this work is a distillation of years of experience with the marketing aspects of developing and sustaining a successful independent massage practice.*

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Revised e-edition January 2014

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## Chapter 5: Setting Your Prices

One very important decision you face when you are starting up a new massage practice is at what amount to set your prices. And the most common mistake I see new therapists make is to set their prices *too low*. It seems to me that, for whatever reason, *women* especially typically undervalue the worth of their services.

You do not have to build your practice by giving it away for free. Giving away freebies attracts people who are out to get something for nothing. You want to attract clients who value your service and are willing to pay for it.

It is a fact that low pricing is not an effective marketing tool for small businesses. You have to be big, like Wal-Mart or Massage Envy to be able to undersell the competition and still make a worthwhile profit. Furthermore, if you set your prices at less than the going rate, you are advertising that you don't believe your own services are up to standard.

The minimum price that you even consider should be able to provide you with *at least* what you would make if you worked elsewhere for someone else instead of for yourself, plus your overhead expenses factored into that. Otherwise, why not skip the hassle of running your own business and just go work for someone else?

My main consideration in setting my prices is *what the current market value is for massage in my locale*. And in one marketing seminar I attended it was brought to my attention that I should also add in to the going rate the value of gratuity which is expected in the commercial salons, especially since I do not expect tips and I make that known to my clients.

In other words, if I call around to the major spas and salons who offer massage as a part of their services, and find out that a one-hour massage in the Northern Kentucky area generally costs between \$75 and \$85 dollars, I also need to consider that a 15% - 20% tip is the norm for those places, bringing the actual cost to the customer up to between \$86 and \$102. So in reality, a fee of \$75 per one-hour massage is actually *quite a bit below* the current market value scale.

I also want to evaluate my own services in comparison to those at the major spas, and *articulate to my clients and prospective clients* the differences and advantages that I offer. These might be more personal service, more time spent with the client, a full 60 minute massage as opposed to a "business hour" of 50 minutes, a private setting, no tipping expected, a cozier environment, more years of experience, etc.

Differentiate your service, know the value of it yourself, articulate that value, educate potential clients, and price accordingly. Set your fees, keep to them, and re-evaluate annually. Do not be hesitant or apologetic in giving yourself a raise each year or every other, or whatever keeps your prices abreast with the *current market value*.

If you value the service you offer and realize the value of being in exchange with your clients, you will attract clients who value that as well.

If you have received further education in specialized modalities, it is not unrealistic to charge more for those types of sessions. If the going rate for a general Swedish massage from any therapist just out of massage school is \$75, then how much more value should be assigned to receiving bodywork that is more specialized, from a more experienced therapist, who invested more time and money in training for that modality?

I have a printed *Menu of Massage Services* that I give to my first-time clients which articulates the various modalities of massage that I offer, the benefits of each, lengths of sessions, and their respective fees. This is marketing as well as client education. People like to see what is available; they may want to try out different modalities; they like to be given options.

They may read something on the menu about a particular benefit that would apply to someone they know. This may generate a referral. They can see clearly, at a glance, the value I place on what I have to offer them. No apologies, no deals. *Remember Chapter 1 on "marketing vs. selling": it is up to you to offer something that meets an individual's needs. It is up to them to decide if they want to pursue it or not.*

Examples of menus I have used are available in the online materials. See the last page of this e-book for details on how to access the bonus materials.

There may be certain individuals that you wish to give a discount to for one reason or another: real financial need coupled with specific health issues that could be greatly alleviated with massage, etc. If you want to practice the Good Samaritan ethic as a part of your massage business, do so *consciously*. Decide on the number of clients that you will offer a discounted rate at any given time. Keep careful track of this. It is easy to follow your heart in giving away hours of your work, and consequently burn yourself out physically or emotionally. In the end you will be of less service to less people, and you may not even be able to support yourself.

Always remember that even though caring therapists may feel the impulse to give away massage to people who are suffering or in need, it sets up an unhealthy and imbalanced paradigm. Think how uncomfortable *you* would feel being continually on the receiving end of a one-way gift. It is better for individuals to be empowered by being *in exchange* rather than just receiving something for nothing.

Discounted fees may however be used as an effective marketing tool to encourage repeat sessions or to educate clients on the benefits of consistent massage over sporadic appointments. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

In setting your prices, keep in mind that the universe is clearly abundant. There is no limitation except for that which we create for ourselves.

## Chapter 7: External Marketing

External marketing is all of those efforts you put toward getting new clients of the type that you want.

Remember that it is important that you define your ideal client; this makes it more likely for you to recognize one who crosses your path. It also gives you direction as to where to go to address potential clients.

The Homework Exercise #1 that lists all the people you know (in Chapter 1) is a starting point. These are groups of people who already have some connection with you personally. Think of appropriate ways in which to invite them to experience your services. Giving a presentation? Mailing an introductory/informational hand-out? Hosting an Open House with gift certificates as door prizes?

It may be as simple as talking to individuals within those groups about what you do, handing them a card, and letting them know that if they would be interested in your services, *or know of anyone else who might benefit*, you are available.

Review the names on that list: Is there a teacher? Consider asking them to deliver your information to the PTA of their school about your availability for on-site chair massage during teacher appreciation week. Is there someone who is into sports? Introduce that person to the benefits of pre- and post- event massage, and let them tell their teammates.

Is there someone who works for a large company? Ask that person to give your information to the Director of Human Resources, volunteering to give massage at their next health fair. At the health fair, be sure to introduce yourself to the other health professionals volunteering there. You may find a significant source of referrals.

Analyze that list and be creative in finding avenues to get the word out through those people who already know you. Their referral is worth more than sending information to someone who has no idea who you are. Work those avenues. Sow those seeds.

Don't be shy!! Remember, you are offering something that is of great value to their health. It is up to them to decide whether or not they will pursue it. If your heart is in the right place, you are seeking to make a contribution to the lives of others.

Remember, the more people to whom you make your services known, the more who will decide to say yes. In educating potential clients about the benefits of massage and what you have to offer them, you are sowing seeds. Some may yield no clients. Some may yield one-time or occasional clients. And some may yield clients who end up coming to you for massage on a regular basis for years. You don't know which kind of seed you are sowing at the time you sow it...so sow seeds everywhere.

*Everywhere you go, everyone you meet* may be an opportunity to connect with a potential client. Keep your business cards with you at all times. Don't hesitate to hand them out. You are sowing seeds.

*Get the word out there.* In our culture it is possible to be relatively isolated from neighbors and co-workers. We can choose to live hidden in our cave, or we can choose to be out there. Being in your cave-home, getting in your cave-car, going to your cave-office, and waiting for the phone to ring is not effective. And yet I have seen beginning therapists who do just that. They find a place to set up office, and then they wait for people to magically appear. It does not happen that way. You need to be *out there*. Do not limit yourself by your own comfort level. Remember, it is not about you, it is about them.

Here is an important fact to keep in mind: it generally takes *at least* three to four years to build up a full-time clientele. This is three to four years of working to build that clientele, not just waiting for it to come to you. Do not get discouraged. Work steadily and patiently.

Remember your self-care. Remember to schedule regular and sufficient time for working *on* your business in addition to *in* your business. Spending hours per week in this way may not pay now, but it will definitely pay later. Remember that in the beginning, you can expect to put more time into the marketing end of your massage business than in doing actual massage, and that this will change proportionately as your business grows.

### *Health Fairs, Support Groups*

Volunteering at health fairs, school and church functions, etc. is one way to spread the word about your business. Giving an educational talk about massage at a local library or other organization is also a good way to let people meet you and hear about the benefits of massage. Uncomfortable speaking in front of a group? (Join the club! Not many people are 100% comfortable with public speaking, so this is not really a good excuse not to do this.) Face your fears, stretch your comfort level, get over it, and get out there! The more often you speak about the benefits of massage in front of small groups, the more comfortable you will be with it.

Other groups to contact for speaking engagements are support groups of all kinds: fibromyalgia support groups, cancer support groups, lymphedema support groups, the Arthritis Foundation. How about groups that are prone to repetitive use syndromes: quilter's groups, gardening clubs, writer's groups... You could show them some effective stretches to counteract the stress their favorite activity puts on specific body parts, talk about the benefits of massage, and offer a door prize of a massage tool, or a gift certificate for a chair massage, half-hour massage, or one-hour massage.



## *Press Releases*

Press Releases are another excellent way to make your name and your business known. Most local newspapers are looking for material to publish. If writing is one of the things you wrote on your list of "Things That I Am Good At" in Chapter 4, consider submitting timely articles about massage to a local newspaper. Press releases should contain in their heading "Press Release", the date, contact name, title, phone number, and "for immediate release."

If paper newspapers are too passé, consider submitting articles to online newsletters and participating in pertinent online discussion group conversations.

## *Other Businesses*

Look for people who are already doing business with the kind of people you want to do business with. (I am not referring to other massage therapists. I am not recommending that you try to woo away clients from other therapists!) Refer to your description of your ideal client in Chapter 4. Where do you find those kinds of people? Who already does business with them? (Chiropractors, yoga teachers, fitness centers, Pilates classes, café's, health food stores, churches?)

Establish connections with those places or people to open up avenues for new clients to find you. Introduce yourself to them and then make follow-up contacts. Seeing your face over and over and hearing from you repeatedly fosters a growing impression of familiarity and trust. (It is said that people need to hear something five times before they know that they've heard it!)

## *Promotions*

Offering time-sensitive promotions in any of the above areas or groups is a way to give interested people the idea that they need to act now, and not put it off indefinitely. Along with your educational information give out flyers advertising an introductory special, valid through a certain date.

There are pros and cons to giving discounts to your work, but it *is* an effective marketing device to invite people to experience your services. When you are starting up your business, you usually have plenty of extra time. It might be more profitable to fill some of those empty slots with brand new select clients who are paying a discounted rate for a first-time massage with you. If they continue to return for repeat sessions, the \$10 or \$20 first-time discount will have been more than worth it.

In spreading the word about your business, always be gracious. Listen to what the person you are speaking with has to say. Answer questions with honesty. If you don't know the answer, say you'll find out and get a contact number so you can report back. Never be pushy. Do not come across as asking

the customer to do you a favor by coming to you for massage. You are offering them something that is of great value to their life and their health.

After explaining what you do, let them know that you appreciate their listening, and ask them to share the information with anyone they know who might benefit from your services.

Remember that it takes much more effort to attract a *new* client than it does a *repeat* client. While you are putting plenty of energy into the above strategies, be sure that you are not just filling a bucket with a hole in it. Once you get those new clients on your table, put energy into getting them to return. This is *internal marketing*, the subject of the next chapter.



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