the marketing game:

learn how to successfully market yourself and your business

BY JENN SOMMERMANN, LCMT
THE NO. 1 COMPLAINT OF EMPLOYERS AND MASSAGE THERAPISTS WHO OWN THEIR OWN PRACTICES IS THEIR INABILITY TO MARKET THEMSELVES AND THE CUMULATIVE BENEFITS OF MASSAGE. Employers, more than ever, are looking for employees who are comfortable bringing in clients and up-selling to the existing ones. Most therapists and business owners want more clients, but are baffled by how to get them.

There is also evidence to support the fact that many massage therapists are leaving the industry within three to five years, citing not being successful enough as one of the reasons. This is astounding to me, considering that it takes a fair amount of effort, time and money to become a massage therapist in the first place.

Now, success is different things to different people. For the sake of argument, let’s assume I am talking about success in terms of being able to pay your bills and have some money left over for savings. In my opinion, lack of success is a result of not following what I call the “One-Third Rule.” This rule defines the three components for true success in our profession.

Success in the massage industry is one-third hands-on skills, one-third business skills and one-third marketing techniques, all in equal proportions. However, most therapists put all their emphasis in hands-on training, thinking it is the way to boost business. It may add to the technique toolbox, but it doesn’t make you more successful.

I believe that the lack of emphasis on business skills and marketing techniques is why so many practitioners fail in business. If equal time was given to all three components, every practitioner would be wildly successful.

Yes, marketing is hard, but aren’t the best rewards from the things you had to work hard for?

This course offers insight into how to overcome the myriad obstacles that can inhibit your ability to market yourself and the benefits of massage. General marketing tips, as well as specific techniques to fit a variety of budgets, will be covered.

CONTACT HOURS: 2.0
WHAT DOES SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU?

One part of developing marketing efforts that are going to work for you is understanding what success means to you. Remember, you can answer this question any way that you like. Take a minute now and think about the question. When you are finished, list the top 10 things that mean success to you. This exercise will help you better define where you want to go and how you might be able to get there, as well as give you a way to measure your progress. If you don’t have a benchmark, how will you know you are successful?

It is important to have this list in your mind’s eye, especially in a world that always strives for bigger and better.

If you need some additional help thinking of how to benchmark your success, consider what Terri Lonier, author of *Smart Strategies for Growing Your Business*, calls the five Fs:

- **Fame** is not about your name in lights. Rather, fame is considered to be a love of self or making a mark on the world. So many massage therapists go into the field to help others, and that is how fame relates.

- **Fortune** is about paying the bills and having some left over. It’s that simple. It isn’t a dollar amount, as everyone’s needs are different. Only you can say how much would mean success.

- **Family** is to be in charge for the hour you spend with your clients. Incorporating a sense of self is just plain fun. Many massage therapists are drawn to this industry because of the self-expression and creative side.

- **Freedom and Autonomy** are not only more important than money in massage work. You are in charge for the hour you spend with your clients.

Not surprisingly, more important than money is freedom and autonomy. Even if you are not self-employed, there is an element of freedom in massage work. You are in charge for the hour you spend with your clients.

As you continue to think about your own lists in light of the five Fs, I’d like to add one more. Some of you feel successful when you have the flexibility to do whatever else in your life makes you happy. For one of my staff, success meant being able to meet her kids getting off the school bus each day. Another staff member considered success being able to work with different target markets in three different settings.

I came to massage therapy from a 9-to-5 career, where there wasn’t much flexibility in my life, and have come to love the flexibility that it provides me. My personal benchmarks are shoes, dog and theatre.

Think about your massage therapy career and then list the top 10 things that would signify success to you. This exercise will better help you define where you want to go and how you might get there. If you don’t have a benchmark, how will you know you are successful?
Those three things tell me when I am realizing the success I desire.

**FINDING THE RIGHT TECHNIQUE**

When you have a sound idea of how you define success, you need to start developing a marketing plan that can help you achieve your goals. As you begin to market yourself and your practice, keep in mind you might consciously or unconsciously create obstacles for yourself. Here are some common excuses I hear in my consulting practice:

- “I’m not good at it” is the excuse used most frequently. What that means to me is that you have not found the specific type of marketing that suits your personality, budget and interest. Successful marketing is about finding the right technique, for the right customer, matching your personality and budget.

Marketing is not a “one-size-fits-all” concept. What has worked for me might not work for you and vice versa. You need a variety of techniques in your toolkit. If one strategy is not working, toss it out and use another. Or, perhaps save it for another time and another audience. What works in one venue may not work in another. For example, providing sports massage demonstrations wouldn’t work in a senior center, but would be great at the weekend road race.

- “I don’t like marketing” is another excuse I hear. Again, you have not found the right type of marketing. When you find the magic combination, your marketing efforts will work and when they do, I guarantee you will enjoy marketing more.

According to Todd Brown (www.getmassageclients.com), “we tend to repeat things that bring us success and satisfaction.” If you find marketing techniques that work and bring more clients to you, you will want to use them more. It is a wonderful cycle that can be repeated and celebrated with great success.

- “It’s too hard.” Many people feel this way about marketing, but I need to be blunt when dealing with this excuse: If marketing was easy, everyone would be successful.

- “It takes too long” is another excuse. On average, you should expect to spend two years building a self-supporting, full-time practice. That was true 16 years ago when I started my first practice, and was still true four years ago when I started my second practice in a new state. It takes time, patience and effort.

Often I see therapists quit because they didn’t know it would take so long, even though most massage schools specifically address this fact. I am amazed when my former students tell me they didn’t expect a full-time practice to take two years to grow. They thought the statistics didn’t apply to them because they knew so many people or had so many friends tell them they were eager for them to graduate.

**PLAN FOR SUCCESS**

The successful therapist is one who understands massage marketing and
Marketing is not a “one-size-fits-all” concept. You need a variety of techniques in your toolkit. If one strategy isn’t working, let it go and use another.
The trick is to get outside the box. Realize that you are not limited by your body but by your mind. Assume you will never be successful and you never will. You must challenge yourself to think bigger.

is willing to put in the time and effort and apply it to their business. These are the action steps necessary to achieve the dream, accomplish the goals and obtain the success that you desire. Without this effort and action plan, there is no success.

A wise person once said: “A goal without a plan is just a wish.” Having a clear-cut plan of the amount of time and effort you will spend is necessary to see results. Time and effort seem like vague terms, so let me elaborate with examples. When I say time, I mean at least 20 percent of your anticipated or projected client hours. If you want to see 20 clients per week, then at least four hours per week should be spent on marketing efforts. Likewise, if you want to see 10 clients per week, then at least two hours should be spent on marketing.

Let’s be clear what is meant by effort, however. When I say effort, I mean doing something that may be outside your current comfort zone. Think for a minute what your mind tells you about what you do for a living. Most of you can only imagine things that fall within the limitations you put on your minds. This isn’t a judgment. It’s just human nature. All most of us can imagine is what we already know. Look around and you will realize that you live in a box—a reality box. In this box, there are limitations, boundaries and categories. For the most part, your imagination is limited by the boundaries of your personal reality box.

The trick is to get outside the box, or what some of you think of as your comfort zone. Realize that you are not limited by your body but by your mind. Assume you will never be successful and you never will. Assume you cannot market effectively and you never will.

In a way, we are like goldfish that expand to the size of their bowl. I want you to dream a bigger goldfish bowl. Dreaming is the first step, but you must also continue to challenge yourself and keep thinking bigger and bigger so your goldfish bowl can continue to expand. Abundance only comes into a void. You must open your mind in order for the universe to fill it with the success that you desire.

REDEFINING SALES
I believe marketing is sharing information and helping people make decisions. Have you ever noticed how hard it is for people to make decisions? Why not make it easier for them? Offer them a solution. If you’re only trying to book appointments to fill your calendar and make money, you’re selling. If you’re offering the solution of massage therapy to someone’s headache, shoulder pain or stress, you are providing information and helping someone make a decision.
You aren’t alone if you have trouble talking to people. There are many shy people in the world. The problem for those of you who would like to increase your business, however, is that talking to people is essential to your success. I have a technique that can help even the shyest person have an easier time talking to potential clients. I call it the red star technique, and I’ve seen it work wonders.

Since massage therapists are kinesthetic by nature and eye contact is often hard, try taking a business card and a red pen when you introduce yourself to someone. Shake hands firmly and start your introduction: “Hi, my name is Jenn Sommernam. I just opened a new business at 180 Main Street and I would like you to have this special card worth 20 extra minutes on your first massage. I know you’re busy, and I won’t take up any more of your time. But use this card or pass it on to a friend and have a great day.”

While you’re talking, draw a red star on the card. This does three things:

- It engages us kinesthetically, where we are in our comfort zone.
- It means you don’t have to look someone in the eye and can focus on the card. You can take as long as you need to draw that special star.
- Lastly, that card now has value—20 minutes of time. Someone is less inclined to throw it out if it is a valuable item. Even if they never redeem it, people will be reminded of you, your name and your business whenever they open their wallets.

This entire interaction should take about 10 seconds. Before anyone can reject you, it is over and you are moving on. It’s foolproof, and I’ve seen many shy students succeed with this simple technique.
Part of the skill of good sales is being able to ask questions and recognize the information someone needs. Ask the right questions, get answers and offer solutions accordingly. That’s effortless sales that won’t be noticed.

Part of the skill of good sales is being able to ask questions and recognize the information someone needs so that you can educate them and they can make the best decision for themselves. Ask the right questions, get answers and offer solutions accordingly. That’s effortless sales that won’t even be noticed.

There are many general tips for marketing that serve well, no matter what the specific technique. Many successful entrepreneurs across many types of businesses have adopted these tips. Let’s examine seven of my favorites and apply them to the massage profession.

Evaluate who you are and the image you want to create. This is particularly important because there is so much competition. Differentiating yourself is more important than ever as massage is becoming more mainstream. But in attempting to stand out, you must also be consistent. Is your image about health care or personal care? Are you relaxation-oriented or is your business more of a medical model? Neither is better than the other. You need to make these decisions based on personal preference. Know that whatever representation you choose, you will attract clients who resonate with you, your personality and the image you have created.

Consistency should also resonate throughout your marketing materials. I learned this the hard way. My first business card was blue, my brochure was orange and my stationery was green—and they all had different fonts. What was I thinking? It wasn’t until they were all side by side that I saw I did not have a consistent image. Be consistent with your materials and your image and it will say to your clients that your quality of care is consistent as well.

Know what you are offering and be able to describe it. You have five seconds to attract someone’s attention in a sales situation. You’ve already heard the saying about not getting a second chance to make a first impression. What you initially say and how you describe your services has to be concise and have the ability to grab someone’s interest.

Ideally, you should be able to answer the question “What do you do for a living?” with a reply that is clear and understandable, but also invites more dialogue. Replying “I’m a massage therapist” is good, but only answers who you are rather than what you do. Saying “I help people feel better through therapeutic muscular therapy” has more punch and speaks specifically to what you do.

Don’t expect marketing to be stress-
If you are ready to get started, AMTA has a variety of tools to help you kick your marketing campaign into high gear. Visit www.amtamassage.org today, where you can find business tips and information on advertising and public relations.
Marketing takes practice. Role play with friends, classmates or business associates. Go out and make mistakes and learn from them.

free. Although this course will help you, marketing is still going to be difficult. Even after years of practice, I am still challenged by marketing. Whether marketing my massage practice or promoting a continuing education class, I get stressed.

There is good stress and bad stress, and almost every situation involves some of both. The trick is to use the stress to your advantage by harnessing it for good. Remember, even famous film actors get nervous. It's what you do with these feelings that counts.

Set a timeframe and a budget for your marketing efforts and stick to it. This area is where I often see people fall short. I frequently hear someone brag that he or she was “under budget” for marketing. Now why would that be a good thing? When you set aside money for the purpose of growing your business, that is money well spent, and every dollar you allocate should be used. This is not the place to cut corners. Whatever your annual budget is for marketing, you should use at least 95 percent of it.

Similarly, if you have a budget for your time, stick to it. Treat that time as if it is a paying client. Nothing, short of an emergency, should interfere with the time you set aside for marketing. Of course, be smart about this budget, too. Don’t plan this time when you know you are busiest with clients. Choose a time that is typically slow so you can use your time wisely.

I can guarantee that this will challenge you. I know how hard it is when someone calls for an appointment when you had that time set aside to walk your block and meet some other business owners. The temptation will be to take the appointment and the money, thinking you can make up the marketing time another day. Trust me, few people do.

Marketing should always be a combination of things. No one effort will bring you total success. Reach out to your potential clients in a variety of ways. If one of the efforts has a downturn, your business won’t feel it too much. There are hundreds of ways to market yourself, and many experts have written books and have websites with suggestions. Maintain four to six ways you constantly use to reach your target audience.

Keep the plan flexible and adjust accordingly. If something isn’t working or isn’t bringing you the results you want, stop doing it. Make sure you have a way to evaluate your efforts so you know if they are working or not. For example, fill in the blank: “I know my efforts will be successful..."
the value of a massage chair

HERE IS A QUICK IDEA THAT CAN BRING YOU GREAT RETURNS. The single best marketing investment I made was a massage chair. You may not even have to buy one. Often, schools will rent out chairs, or perhaps you know a colleague who would be willing to rent you his chair for a day.

Find the right venue for yourself. I like to offer chair massage at the local organic market one day a month. On the second Tuesday of each month, you can find me there between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. I offer complimentary five- to ten-minute massages to people who are at the market spending a lot of money to eat well and take care of themselves. These people are the perfect target market for my practice.

As a result, I’m now listed on this organic market’s website in the “Practitioners Corner.” This practice has been wildly successful for me. Find the right venue for yourself and “Give to Get.” Don’t go to a senior center and offer chair massage if you want your target market to be athletes. Conversely, don’t go to a 5k road race if you want your target market to be seniors. Pick your venue appropriately and put your efforts there.
When you speak to prospective clients, always talk benefits. People want to hear what’s in it for them. Talk in terms of what you can provide for your client and she will be more interested in what you have to say.

The answer may be to book one client or six, or to sell 10 gift certificates. The point is to know how to tell if your marketing efforts are worthwhile. Re-evaluate what you are doing and tweak your efforts where needed. Don’t be attached to a particular marketing strategy, even if it’s your favorite one, if it’s not bringing you business. Know that certain efforts are seasonal. Trying to attract skiers in the summer doesn’t make much sense, so table that activity until autumn.

Practice. Practice. Practice. It’s that simple. Role play with friends, classmates or business associates. Go out and make mistakes and learn from them. Test what you are going to say or how you are going to approach someone. Practice a handshake. Yes, really. That first physical impression is so important and is the window to our work. There is no cross-training for marketing, like there is no cross-training for massage. You just have to do it.

The Value of Word-of-Mouth Marketing
Word-of-mouth marketing is a great source of referrals, but it can rarely build a business by itself. It is best used for maintaining a thriving business. Word-of-mouth keeps the phone ringing but doesn’t get the phone ringing.

Consider for a minute, who makes word-of-mouth referrals? The answer, of course, is clients. Well, if you don’t really have many clients, then they alone can’t create a full practice for you. However, if you have a fairly steady stream of clients and are almost full time, word-of-mouth marketing can ramp that up and see you to a higher level of success. I have built several of my associate practices based on referrals from my existing clients, but I had to have those clients to start.

The Value of Networking
For those massage therapists looking to build their client list, a more successful marketing route is networking. Massage is essentially a hands and mouth game. You tell people what you do and then you show them with your hands. The more you can use both your mouth and hands for networking, the more productive your marketing efforts will be.

There is no doubt this profession is very visual. People are attracted to what they consider to be the picture of health. There is a perception that health is contagious and by standing near it, some of it may rub off. The same is true in choosing a massage therapist. People want to interact with a therapist before working with her, and they want to see that their therapist is the picture of the health they want to emulate.

Starting a new therapeutic relationship can be uncomfortable. Even long-time believers in the power of touch may be hesitant about starting with a new therapist. If you can begin a dialogue with your prospective clientele, talk to them and demonstrate your abilities, a connection begins. It’s from that connection that a long-lasting therapeutic relationship can be made.

The Mouth Game
Regardless of whether you are new to the massage therapy industry or a veteran, you should talk to ev-
new role for sales

Sales is caring enough about people to help them get what they need, instead of thinking only how they can help your bottom line. If you are focused only on booking massage appointments, you are selfish. When you really believe you have something that can help someone, you are focused on that person’s well-being. Take, for example, caring about a client’s rotator cuff injury and offering cross-fiber friction work. Everyone wins in this situation. Helping people feels good, and you won’t feel like you’re selling.

Sales is about customer service. You are serving your clients and potential clients when you talk to them about services that will improve their well-being. Can you imagine if doctors didn’t offer solutions because they were afraid their patients would think they were too pushy? Doctors serve their patients by making recommendations on diet, exercise, nutrition and medication. Even though these recommendations are beyond the scope of a massage therapist’s practice, we can still serve our clients by telling them about the benefits of massage. Share the information and your clients can decide what to do from there.

Sales is the opportunity to serve and support your clients. Whether you’re rescheduling appointments or sending a newsletter, you are supporting your clients’ needs. Contacting clients you have not seen in a while is also a wonderful way to be of service. I call this reactivation, and if you are genuine, you won’t feel like you’re selling. When the interaction is natural, sales will be effortless.
Sales is caring enough about people to help them get what they need, instead of thinking only about how they can help your bottom line. Helping people feels good, and you won’t feel like you’re selling.

everyone. I can appreciate how scary that is for some people, but if you plan what you are going to say, this activity will get easier. Think back to your first massage and try to remember how nervous you were. The same is true for planning a dialogue. Just as you had to learn a technique, practice it and then plan a routine, you need to do the same with an opening dialogue for introducing your services.

At this point in your massage career, you probably have some muscle memory built into your body, allowing you not to think about every move. Your massage work may seem effortless. A planned dialogue, often called a sound bite or elevator talk, does the same thing—incorporates muscle memory so speaking to someone new can be more effortless.

Ideally, a planned dialogue should answer the question, “What do you do for a living?” Remember you have five seconds to grab someone’s attention, so what you say first matters. I cannot tell you what to say, but I would suggest practicing this speech and adjusting it until it feels comfortable, genuine and attractive to prospective clients. Also, keep in mind that you are a massage therapist, but that is not what you do.

DESCRIBING BENEFITS
When you speak to prospective clients, always talk benefits. People want to hear what’s in it for them; specifically, how massage can help them feel better. Most of the time, massage therapists talk about services or products, not benefits. Take your cue from the automobile industry. When they sell air bags, what are they selling? The air bag is the service or product, and safety is the benefit.

How can you change your sound bite so that you’re selling a benefit? An hour’s massage is the service. Absence of pain or stress relief, for example, are the benefits. Talk in terms of what you can provide for your client and she will be more interested in what you have to say. You are more likely to make someone a client when you can tell her what she will gain from massage therapy.

THE HANDS GAME
The hands game is where many of

Increase your continuing education contact hours while expanding your skill set for your practice! To receive a certificate of completion for this course, visit www.amtaonlinetraining.org and follow the instructions to register and take the exam. AMTA members pay only $12 per contact hour; nonmembers pay $15.
you will shine. It is the heart, spirit and core of what you love to do. When considering the hands game, I want you to think sample. There is no doubt that people are more willing to invest money in something if they have sampled it beforehand. A consumer’s reluctance to try something new is often overcome when there is a complimentary sample.

The money a client spends on your services is an investment. If they can sample your hands and your services, they will feel more comfortable making the investment. This can be through chair massage or table massage, but the idea is to give samples of your services so that someone feels more comfortable making the investment. By giving away your services initially, you are establishing a relationship with prospects who will spend money in repeat sales. The profit will occur over the long-term relationship with the client.

CONCLUSION
You are all in the business of sales. Whether you work for someone else or have your own practice, you’re selling massage and its cumulative benefits. Overcoming your fear of marketing can be the beginning of a shift out of a comfort zone and into a huge move forward.

There are no good excuses for not being successful at marketing. Remember to find the right venue for yourself and those excuses won’t seem significant. Avoid taking rejections personally, as there is often no personal correlation when someone says he doesn’t want a massage. Try not to dwell on the failures. Instead, celebrate your successes.

---

1 Enroll in any of these Home Study CE programs...

- **CE Hours**
- **Tuition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Tuition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports Massage</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aromatherapy Essentials</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>$240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibromyalgia &amp; Massage</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexology</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>$205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Tissue Massage</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Massage Therapy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing Energy &amp; Touch</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>$260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lymphatic Drainage Massage</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Massage Collection</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>$495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Anatomy &amp; Pathology</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy Review for Professionals</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair Massage Fundamentals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>$205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiatsu Anma Therapy</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>$260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Massage For Professionals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>$185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myofascial Release</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuromuscular Therapy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Massage</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarity Therapy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prenatal Massage Fundamentals</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranial-Sacral Fundamentals</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacology for Massage</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>$190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nerve Mobilization</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>$240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

2 ... and complete the CE test ONLINE. You’ll save $30!

NEW online test-taking option is QUICK to access – and EASY to complete!

Enroll by October 29th, 2008, mention “MTJ08FA” and...

**IT’S EASY**

Enroll by October 29th, 2008, mention “MTJ08FA” and...

**SAVE $30!**

Plus: FREE Monthly e-newsletter helps you build your massage practice.

www.MassageUpdate.com Sign up today!