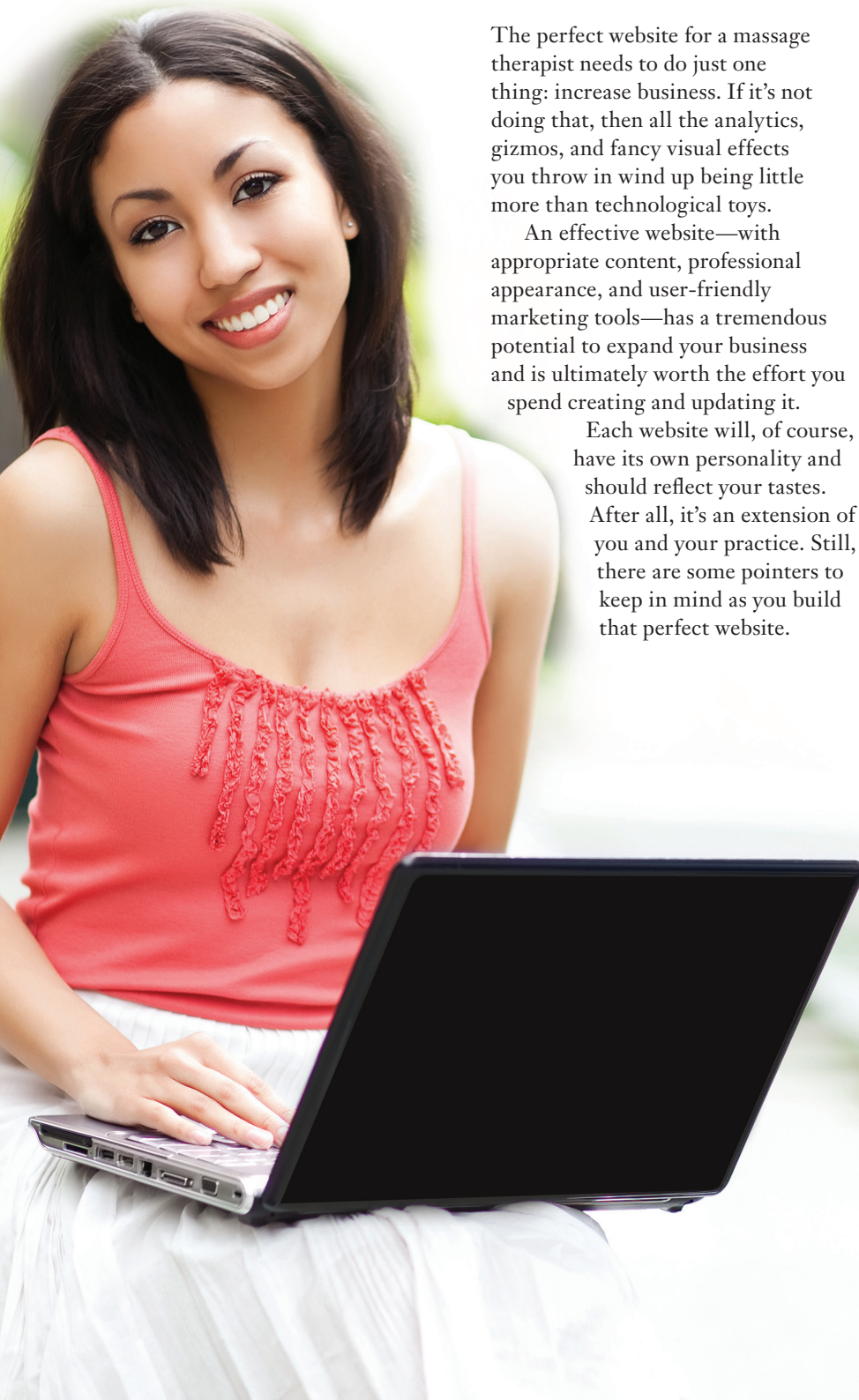


MAKE YOUR WEBSITE POP



The perfect website for a massage therapist needs to do just one thing: increase business. If it's not doing that, then all the analytics, gizmos, and fancy visual effects you throw in wind up being little more than technological toys.

An effective website—with appropriate content, professional appearance, and user-friendly marketing tools—has a tremendous potential to expand your business and is ultimately worth the effort you spend creating and updating it.

Each website will, of course, have its own personality and should reflect your tastes.

After all, it's an extension of you and your practice. Still, there are some pointers to keep in mind as you build that perfect website.

1. BEGIN WITH A GOOD TEMPLATE
Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP) can help you with this. “When creating a website, many people are intimidated and just don’t know where to start,” says Lara Evans Bracciante, ABMP director of information services, who, along with a team of talented individuals, recently deployed the super-friendly ABMP Website Builder. The program provides professionally designed templates and a road map for content, making website creation easily accessible, even for the technology-challenged. “Using a good template program allows you to choose a design and color scheme that conveys professionalism right out of the gate,” Bracciante says.

2. ADD STRONG CONTENT
“It doesn’t need to be extensive, but it does need to be relevant,” Bracciante says. The ABMP Website Builder can provide you with existing content, such as features on the benefits of massage. But don’t be afraid to come up with your own messages.
The really adventurous might want to commit to doing a regular blog. “This is very powerful,” says Randall Craig, author of the Online PR and Social Media series, who has hundreds of tips for website building on his own site, www.randallcraig.com. “Then, not only is there good content, but a blog allows you to syndicate your content outward. You can put your blog posting on your Facebook or LinkedIn page.”

A caveat about blogging: once you start, you need to do it regularly. “Like food you leave out on the counter too long, it will go bad after awhile,” Craig says.

It’s important to give readers what they want. Your blog—just like all the content on your website—is there to promote your business and build your reputation as a health-care professional. It’s not there to comment about fashion, restaurants, or upcoming class reunions.

3. DISPLAY YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

Obvious as this seems, it’s surprising how many websites force viewers to hunt—sometimes in vain—for a phone number, email, or physical address. In addition to having it on your home page and on a contact page, consider adding it to your footer so it appears on every page throughout your website.

4. MAKE YOUR WEBSITE POP UP ON GOOGLE

There’s a science behind this. It’s called search engine optimization (SEO), and there are some steps you can take to make it easier for Google and other search engines to find you when someone searches for “massage therapist” and your town.

Relevant content is, of course, critical. But equally important is ensuring metatags—the keywords that describe what you do—are built into the code you use on your website, as well as the content.

“Make sure you’re using the right words so people can see that you’re a professional, and any of your specialties,” Craig says. “Think how your customers will be looking for you.

Obviously, *massage* is an important word, but what other words might people look for? It could be *sports injuries*, *rehabilitation*, or *relaxation*. Figure out what’s right for you, and make sure in the copy you write you’ve got these words sprinkled throughout.”

Don’t forget pictures and graphics. When you load an image onto your website, there’s a place in the code for alternative text. Don’t leave those boxes blank. Even though the words themselves will be unseen to most viewers, Google will see them. Filling in those boxes with the right information makes it more likely your website will be among the first Google uncovers as it searches the web.

5. CONSIDER ADDING ONLINE SCHEDULING

Online scheduling can free you from the hassle of playing telephone tag with clients and offers customers the convenience of scheduling appointments in real time, 24/7. It also reduces the risk that a potential client will call, get dumped into voice mail, and move on without ever scheduling an appointment.

“Because they’re already online, the customers’ expectation that they can make the appointment online seals the deal,” says Chris Korol, cofounder and vice president of marketing for Full Slate (www.fullslate.com), a Seattle-based company that provides online scheduling software. “We’ve found that 70 percent of consumers would prefer to make an appointment online rather than picking up a phone and calling. This lets people take action before they leave your website, and the key is to convert those clicks into a confirmed appointment.”

Adding an online scheduling option to a website is straightforward. It simply requires copying a snippet of code into your site. Accompanying software serves as a digital appointment book. Therapists input the days and hours on which they’re available, and the software keeps track of the schedule, automatically filling in appointments as they are booked.

Online customers supply their names and contact information, and therapists concerned about no-shows can choose to require payment at the time of booking. In addition, email reminders automatically go out to clients before the appointment, which cuts down on no-shows by about 30 percent, Korol says.

Full Slate offers substantial discounts to ABMP members, which could put monthly service costs at around \$17.

6. SELL GIFT CERTIFICATES ONLINE

“It’s a no-brainer,” insists Gregg Gottschling, founder of TheGiftCardCafe.com, a San Diego company that provides an easy-to-use online sales platform. “In 2011, people expect that. It’s uncommon for a business not to offer gift certificates, particularly in the hospitality arena. If customers go to your website in hopes of purchasing a gift for someone, and you don’t offer it, they’ll go somewhere else.”

Providing online gift certificates need not be a hassle. Companies such as TheGiftCardCafe.com handle the billing and collection. There are no upfront costs to the therapist, no development fees, and no monthly service charges. Instead, the company takes a percentage—usually under 10 percent—of gift certificate sales.



ABMP MEMBERS CAN ACCESS THE FREE WEBSITE BUILDER IN THE MEMBERS SECTION OF ABMP.COM.

7. CONSIDER SPECIAL ONLINE PROMOTIONS

Groupon has set the standard for steep discounts offered to online consumers. Customers love them, and while such deals can entice lots of new clients to a business, it can also be a costly promotion. Still, you can launch smaller, less-costly promotions by offering discounts just to your own customer database. You can control the size of the discount, and you can limit the quantity of discounted services you sell.

Gottschling tells of one massage therapist, a TheGiftCardCafe.com client, who sent out an online promotion to customers and over three days generated \$5,700 in revenue through online sales. In the previous six months, he'd generated just \$900 in online revenue.

8. CONSIDER BRANCHING OUT TO OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

First, be realistic. Yes, Facebook is important, and you can link your Facebook account to your website. Ditto for Twitter. Occasional tweets on massage-related or wellness-related topics can drive business your way. And a YouTube video demonstrating a particular massage technique can tell a powerful and compelling story.

“But if you’re spending three hours a day doing social media, that’s three hours you’re not working on clients or doing other business tasks,” Craig says. “Realize that this has to fit within a particular business plan. If you’re not excellent at what you do, sprinkling some social media juice on top of it won’t make it perfect or solve the problem.”

9. DEVELOP ANCHORS AND OUTPOSTS

No one can be everywhere, whether in the physical world or the cyber world. There are hundreds—if not thousands—of networking sites out there, each offering a slightly different demographic of potential customers.

Rather than attempting to have a regular presence on all, adopt what Craig calls the “anchor and outpost” strategy. Spend most of your media time on a few core sites: your website, obviously, plus maybe Facebook or Twitter. But you might develop a small presence on the more obscure sites, your outposts. “You upload your picture and a narrative about your business on those sites, and put your website address there and say, ‘For more information, visit my website.’ Then, you don’t spend a lot of time on the outpost sites, but you’ve made it so anyone who is on those sites can find you. They just click through to your main site or your anchor site.”

10. COMMENTS:


THE GREAT DEBATE

Do you let people post comments about your business or reviews of your work? There’s always the chance—face it, the near-certainty—that someone, at sometime, is not going to be happy with you. Should your website help provide a forum for negative comments?

Tough question. If you’re going to have a viable web presence, local reviews are important. “You want to register your business with the Google Merchant Center,” says Cyrus Shepard, customer education expert with SEOMoz, a company that provides search engine optimization software. Yahoo and Bing have similar services.

The more people read reviews of your business on City Page, Yelp, and the like, the greater the chances you’ll show up on a Google search. “It’s not necessarily the quality of the review, but the pure quantity of reviews that helps you show up,” Shepard says.

So in the end, maybe that old show business aphorism is true: “I don’t care what you say about me. Just be sure to spell my name right.” **m&b**

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