

STAY IN TOUCH WITH CLIENTS

Growing a business requires more than just bringing in new clients—it also requires keeping the old ones. Business experts say a sure way to lose clients is to fail to communicate often enough with them. The old adage is true: out of sight, out of mind.

Fortunately, today's technology provides lots of avenues for efficient, effective communication with clients. Here are some ideas for keeping those connections open and turning one-time clients into steady customers.

1. SEND A REGULAR NEWSLETTER

You can always create your own newsletter, but if graphic design and writing aren't your strong suits, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP) can help its members with this task—for free. "The Client Newsletter Generator is one of the coolest benefits we offer," says Jenny Good, ABMP's director of member development.

Members are able to select a predesigned newsletter template, pick and choose from a wealth of bodywork-related articles, and give the newsletter an individualized name, as well as customize it with contact information, hours of operation, etc. There's also an option to include your own content in the newsletter if you like, but you don't have to write any of the articles yourself unless you want to.

"You pick the articles you think are the most appropriate for your clients," Good says. "You can do it all, start to finish, in five minutes."

The finished product is a four-page newsletter, which can either be printed and mailed to clients, or attached to an email as a PDF.

2. EDUCATE YOUR CLIENTS WITH *BODY SENSE*

Educating your clients about the benefits of frequent massage, or how touch therapy can be part of an overall wellness program, is another way to keep the lines of communication open. *Body Sense* magazine, a professionally-written, quarterly, digital publication geared to health-conscious consumers, does just that. It's designed to educate consumers on the lasting benefits of massage and bodywork and living a healthy lifestyle.

You can email this quarterly magazine to all your clients, along with a note from you thanking them for their business. You can offer

to discuss with them in person any questions they have about anything they read in the magazine. You may also easily load the current edition of *Body Sense* directly onto your own website. Find it at www.abmp.com/bodysense/.

3. EMAIL REMINDERS AND THANK-YOU NOTES

A forgotten appointment costs you money. Given people's hectic lives, most clients appreciate a reminder a day or so in advance, just to help keep them on track.

One easy way to make this happen is to use appointment-scheduling software, like Full Slate (www.fullslate.com). Clients who come to your website can book appointments online, and when they do, their





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contact information is automatically entered into a database that you can then access to send bulk emails.

The software can be programmed to automatically send out reminders of upcoming appointments, thank-you notes the day after the appointment, and other messages you deem appropriate.

“You can request that if they liked the service, would they write a review, which can be posted to your Yelp profile,” says Patrick Behrens, cofounder of Full Slate. “You can also set up messages to go out at certain intervals if a client has not already scheduled another appointment. So two months later, you can send out a reminder on how to book an appointment. These automatic follow-up emails are a great way to stay in touch.” ABMP members receive up to a 40 percent discount when they sign up for this service.

4. OFFER CLIENTS SPECIAL DEALS

Everybody loves Groupon and similar online coupon services, because the deals they offer are so fantastic. But you can put together your own fantastic deal created exclusively for your clients, without the expense and potential overload of going through a coupon service.

TheGiftCardCafe.com, for example, allows you to create your own special deals and discount services for whatever you'd like, for as long as you'd like, and send it to just the contacts in your client database. You might create a coupon redeemable for 50 percent off a one-hour massage, and make it available to the first 10 people who respond. “It's a great way to drive business, but you're marketing to just your database of consumers,” says Gregg Gottschling, founder of the company.

5. CREATE YOUR OWN MOBILE APP

With a mobile app for your business on their smartphone or tablet, your clients can, in essence, carry you around in their pocket all the time. A mobile app can include such things as one-touch calling, GPS directions to your studio, and a built-in reservation form. Clients might also elect to receive push notifications, similar to text messages, which you can send out regularly to alert them to specials or bodywork-related news items.

Not so long ago, the cost to create a custom application like this could run \$10,000–\$20,000. But now, companies such as Bizness Apps (www.biznessapps.com) can do it for you for as little as \$40 a month for a single platform, or up to \$70 a month for an app that works on iPhone, iPad, and Android platforms.

“This really is a new and powerful technology,” says Andrew Gazdecki, CEO of Bizness Apps. “It's a way to be in your clients' hands at all times, and to differentiate yourself from your competition. The number of small businesses who have custom apps is small right now, but it is really growing. It's creating a buzz.”

6. EMBRACE SOCIAL MEDIA

There are dozens of social media platforms out there, and one of the newest—Google Plus—could definitely give Facebook a run for its money. For now, however, make sure you're on Facebook if nothing else.



Create a Business Page on Facebook, and invite your clients to “like” you. Those who do can receive regularly updated information about specials, as well as newsletter articles and other items.

You can even use your Facebook page as a platform for online scheduling. Full Slate, for example, has a Facebook app that lets clients who check out your Facebook page also book an appointment with just a few clicks, without ever leaving Facebook.

7. HAVE AN OPEN HOUSE

Not every effort at staying in touch has to be high-tech. There is a lot to be said for old-fashioned hospitality—especially if it includes food.

Author and business coach Cherie Sohnen-Moe (www.sohnen-moe.com) advocates for quarterly open houses for massage therapists whose salon or studio space permits it. “It’s a great way to have your current clients bring in other people who might be interested,” she says. “It’s casual, relaxed. It’s a way to connect with clients that isn’t just them on the table.”

She suggests scheduling some meet-the-therapist time, as well as a short presentation on some aspect of massage therapy. As an added bonus, see if a local health food store might be willing to supply you with free refreshments in exchange for putting out coupons advertising their business.

8. SEND AN UNEXPECTED GREETING CARD

Birthday wishes—along with a gift certificate for a discount—are a nice touch. Or consider an anniversary card. Not a client’s wedding anniversary, mind you, but the anniversary of their first appointment with you.

“I always recommend at least once a year doing something that actually gets into people’s hands—a postcard or a greeting card,” Sohnen-Moe says.

9. SAY IT WITH CHOCOLATE

With the holidays approaching, consider rewarding your clients—especially the regular ones—with a token of your appreciation for their business. Few things in life express gratitude the way a gift of chocolate does, and a high-quality chocolate packed with antiaging antioxidants and blood pressure-reducing flavonoids is even better.

“It’s a gift that really shows someone you’re thinking about them and you not only want them to have a moment of indulgence, but you want it to be a healthy indulgence,” says Whitney Sinclair, spokeswoman for Chocolove (www.chocolove.com), a Colorado-based company that sells premium chocolate and offers wholesale prices to massage therapists.


Consider putting your own business stickers on the candy bars, and they become a sweet advertisement, as well as a token of appreciation.

10. REMEMBER, PHONES WORK BOTH WAYS

In your rush to embrace online communications, don’t forget about telephones. Make sure your voice-mail message for incoming callers is both welcoming and useful. Supply

all the information customers need: your location, your hours of operation, the assurance that their business is important, and a promise to return their call as soon as possible. Then be prompt in doing so.

But don’t limit yourself just to returning phone calls. If you haven’t seen a client for a while, maybe it’s time to forsake email reminders and electronic coupons. Maybe it’s time to pick up the phone and call to say you’ve missed them and see how they’re doing. That human connection can be the best business-building tool of all. **m&b**

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