

ten for today

BY NAOMI MANNINO

TECH-SAVVY WAYS TO CONNECT WITH CLIENTS



High-tech is hot. You need to be connected to your clients, who are connected to their cell phone, laptops, Blackberries, etc. Learn how your clients prefer for you to communicate with them—by phone, e-mail, and/or text message—and take advantage of technology to boost your business in a cost-effective manner.



1. CREATE A FULL SERVICE WEBSITE

Update it often with news, pictures, new services, and monthly specials. Offer online gift certificates, coupons, online scheduling, and anything else to make your site interactive, appealing, and easy-to-use. Be sure it includes your contact information for any and all communication methods



you use regularly. Various companies, such as Bodywork Sites (www.bodyworkerwebsites.com) offer website creation services; you may also be eligible for a free website through your membership status in a professional association, such as Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (www.abmp.com). Online scheduling functions can be added through www.clickbook.net or www.genbook.com.

2. OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE FOR SEARCH ENGINES

Submit your website/URL—free of charge—to search engines, so they know your site exists. Include appropriate keywords and a description in your website program. Submission sites for major engines include Google (www.google.com/intl/en/submit_content.html), Yahoo (<https://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/submit>), and MSN (<http://search.msn.com.sg/docs/submit.aspx>). For added visibility, consider a sponsored search, such as Google AdWords (www.adwords.google.com).

3. COORDINATE A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING PROGRAM

Create your own marketing materials or work with companies such as Massage Marketing (www.massagemarketing.com) that can help you construct all elements of a complete campaign, including blogs, e-mail newsletters, or other support. Services like www.spaboom.com and www.spaclientele.com have great blogs that offer free do-it-yourself marketing suggestions, too.

4. CREATE AN E-MAIL NEWSLETTER

Provide updates about your practice and custom services, include staff bios, offer healthy living ideas, and link to wellness events in your area. Companies such as Natural Touch Marketing (www.naturaltouchmarketing.com) have a library of newsletter options you can choose. E-mail fresh issues as often as you wish to maintain contact with your clients.

5. SEND APPOINTMENT REMINDERS

Whether it is done by e-mail or text message, sending an appointment reminder is crucial. Do it yourself or utilize a service (such as www.clickbook.net or www.genbook.com, already mentioned, but also www.mindbodyonline.com, www.myreceptionist.com, www.smilereminder.com) that includes automated appointment reminders among its various client management services. You can always send an additional text message or e-mail when you haven't heard from a client in a while, when you're offering a new service, or the time is right to offer them a free service upgrade. Give clients reasons to stop by for a regular service sooner rather than later.

6. UTILIZE E-COMMERCE PAYMENT OPTIONS

Accept forms of payment that your clients are likely to use: credit cards and PayPal. Services like CellCharge (www.cellcharge.com) make credit card processing possible from any phone or online, and by signing up for an account at www.paypal.com, you allow clients to shop with you without exposing their financial information. The Small Business Administration also provides useful information about how to incorporate e-commerce and other electronic tools into your business; visit www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/manage/technology/index.html.

7. SURVEY YOUR CLIENTS

Utilize a survey service, like www.surveymonkey.com, to learn how you can best serve your clientele, finding out what services, hours, techniques, and products they prefer. E-mail your clients with a link to the survey and offer a discount on an upcoming service to all clients who give you feedback through this useful tool.

8. EMBRACE ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Register for a page at www.facebook.com and/or www.myspace.com for yourself or your spa and see how quickly your network builds. Update your pages regularly to keep clients checking back. Use the site's privacy settings to ensure you're only allowing potential customers on your page.

9. WRITE A BLOG

Write about news in the wellness business, products you love, pet peeves, your philosophies about massage, trends and tips, and related news—anything that moves you to encourage comments from readers and invites them to interact. Check out www.blogger.com and www.wordpress.com for free, easy-to-use platforms. Link your blog to your website and your social networking pages.

10. LEARN FROM OTHERS

Hone your Web search skills and look for sites and blogs for practice-building ideas. Some even offer free advice tailored to holistic practitioners. Some (www.massagegeeks.com or www.spacientele.com) offer tips for massage therapists and spa professionals. Others (www.emarketer.com or www.imediaconnection.com) offer more generalized information, insights, and freebies useful for small businesses of various types. **m&b**

6 Naomi Mannino writes about health, beauty, and fashion for many national publications. Her work has appeared in *Day Spa*, *Delicious Living*, *Hair's How*, *Inside-Fashion*, and *Parenting*, and on chefsbest.org and sheknows.com. Mannino can be reached at nmannino@tampabay.rr.com.

