

# Seeds of Growth

To Build and Grow  
A Touch-Therapy Business

Issue 4

## Marketing in the Start-up Phase

by Jay Van Schelt and Michael Gaeta

This month's newsletter deals with the elements of marketing your practice during the start-up phase. As we have outlined in past articles, the start-up phase of your practice is from your first paid treatment through the first 6-12 months of practice. Everyone can move through this stage successfully if they understand the simple fact that they need to get the word out to as many people as possible that they are in practice. Unfortunately, some clinicians make the mistake of not putting much effort into this area. They believe that clients will somehow find them without marketing. They often rely on friends and family, or on the idea that they will suddenly get lots of referrals, like other practitioners they know. The simple truth is that if you can get through this crucial first stage, and if you do good work, you will create a referral stream. What begins well tends to go well. Set the highest standards for yourself and your work right at the start. What we are discussing today is the question, "How can I most effectively and successfully start my practice?"

The Bible starts with the book of Genesis, which means "In the beginning." As you begin your practice, you will likely have zero clients. A void. That is the essence of beginning. Even if you open your doors and have all your family and friends lined up to come in, you should act as if you are starting at zero. By doing this you will not make the mistake of thinking that you don't need to market your new practice. This keeps you from losing time and money at the critical start-up time. As soon as you open a business you have expenses. Even if you are working out of your home, unless you are financially secure and are only doing this as a hobby, you need to make money to survive in business. This means that the

first steps you take in your practice are vital to your success.

A key first step is a strong pre-opening, external marketing campaign designed to get the word out that you are opening up. This can include:

- Display advertising
- Promotional flyers and brochures
- Web site and e-mail marketing;
- Direct-mail announcements to friends, family and acquaintances (remember you are starting at zero): "Jane Smith, L.M.T., is pleased to announce the opening of her massage-therapy practice at ..."
- An open-house event with a lecture, demonstration and healthy refreshments. Let people know about it in your announcement mailings.
- All of your efforts should include a grand-opening special offer. This should be designed to let people know that you are opening your practice. This type of marketing effort will be the most effective if you can get the word out to as many people as possible before you open. (In this newsletter, you will find a response card from us at *Massage Magazine* and *InnerChi Methods and Systems* which you can mail in. You will receive a professionally designed ad that you can use for your grand opening campaign, at no charge; because we want to help you succeed.)
- A key to an effective start-up campaign is timing. If it is done too soon, you may lose clients who would like your services right away. If you start too late, you really do not lose anything; it only affects how soon people know that you are there and that they can come in and see you.

Let's look at a few of these efforts in more detail. The first is display advertising. This type of marketing is typically thought of as marketing done in local newspapers. But it also includes the phone book, local directories of holistic-health professionals, and any setting where you

are not the only one advertising. When you open your business, you will find that those who sell advertising will find you.

This type of marketing costs money, and requires repeated and consistent effort for best results. One ad in one issue of a publication will often not produce much return. Display advertising should be seen as only one part of a larger marketing effort. Your return on investment is often not realized right away. This means that you must be conservative with your expectations and your money, because you will probably not have a lot of it to go around at first.

But avoid the mistake of thinking that you do not have to invest in this type of marketing. Look around for newspapers that people in your area look in for advertising. Most people read the local newspaper for news, not ads. But many towns have a shopper-type paper; these usually contain ads for a variety of things—some from businesses, some from individuals selling products, services or things they no longer need. These publications are usually less expensive, and people who read them are looking for bargains and local offers.

As we said before, your grand-opening marketing should have some sort of a special offer built into it. This can stretch your advertising dollar far beyond the cost of a placement in a large regional newspaper, because the local paper is targeting a narrower demographic, which, in this case, is exactly what you need.

The second approach is posting flyers and brochures. These are relatively inexpensive. Brochures are typically smaller than flyers, and printed on a heavier paper stock. These can be useful when you want people to take information about your practice home with them. You can create something on your computer, or have someone design it for you. Remember that you want to convey as professional an image as possible, so do not skimp on creating your marketing materials.

Once you have created your marketing pieces, then you have to distribute them. Visit as many local establishments as you can, to find places to put your flyers, business cards or take ones. Always have a supply of your promotional materials, tape and push pins in your car or bag. Offering a discount to the owners and employees for sessions can create a win-win situation. They enjoy your sessions at a reduced cost, you get to leave information about your business with them, and they enthusiastically share their experience of you with their customers, clients and friends.

The third approach to start-up marketing, Web-site development, can be very inexpensive or cost thousands of dollars. If you have some facility with computers, there are many programs available to create a Web site yourself. The cost of using a Web designer can range from a few hundred dollars to several thousand. And some designers and graphic artists are willing to barter for treatments.

To know what is best for you, think about what you expect from your Web site. Is it strictly informational, or will it be an e-commerce portal for selling products? How will you get your name on major search engines? This can happen through a standard search or a paid display ad with a link to your site. There are also dozens of Web sites for health practitioners to post practice information or articles for free or a small fee. This emerging method of sharing your business with others is becoming more widely used as more people spend time online.

Plan carefully, execute skillfully and have fun sharing your gifts with your community!

**In later newsletters we will present more practical, low-cost, effective methods of sharing your practice with others.**

## Your Professional Team

by Michael Gaeta

Successful business people admit they are not skilled in all areas of business—no one can be. But they focus on doing what they do well, and surround themselves with experts in the other areas. The same principle applies to healing arts practice.

If you are like me, you did not come into this field with a strong business background. My first career was as a full-time musician. I was "into my art," and knew

almost nothing about money and business. As a result I struggled and floundered, easy prey for shifty booking agents.

While it is vital to develop good clinical and practice-management skills, and be well-versed in the many aspects of your business, you cannot master everything. It is often better to do a few things well. As the saying states, "Many hands make light work." It is essential to

gather around yourself those who can advise you in key areas. They will make up for your gaps, and provide the business and clinical support that a well-rounded practitioner relies on. They can be broken down into two teams: your professional team and your business team. This article will focus on your professional team.

Your professional team is a carefully selected circle of health professionals that you consult with and refer to. This team of clinicians can be divided into two groups—those that are essential, and those that are helpful but not necessary.

### Essential:

**Mentor:** All practitioners need a connection with someone more experienced than they are in their field. No one ever outgrows the need for a mentor. You consult with this person on tough cases, and refer to them clients who are beyond your level of ability. This person should have at least 10 years' experience in the field, and be willing to have you call on them for help. Later, as you gain experience, you can continue the cycle and offer mentoring to a less-experienced clinician.

**Psychologist or Psychotherapist:** All chronic health conditions have a mental/emotional component. While all healing-arts practitioners should have basic counseling skills, it is not our job to be a client's psychotherapist. For clients whose mental/emotional difficulties are beyond what our empathic listening and support can encompass, we have an ethical responsibility to refer them to a good counselor. I do not recommend referral to a psychiatrist (M.D.); they tend to rely more on pharmaceutical intervention than on counseling. And a trained psychologist (Ph.D or Psy.D) or psychotherapist (M.S.W./C.S.W.) can accurately assess the need for drug therapy.

**Medical Doctor:** A client came in asking if I could help her with her hypertension. I replied that I would likely be able to help, and took her blood pressure. It was 210/150. She asked again, "Can you help me?" I told that that I would be glad to help her, once she returned from the hospital. I asked her son, who was with her, to take her to the ER, explaining what would likely happen. She called the next day; her blood pressure was now managed with a new drug. She made a follow-up appointment, and we began to address the underlying imbalances that led to the elevated blood pressure. As a complementary/alternative health-care professional, when you see a condition that requires medical attention, you need to refer the client to a good physician. Finding a general practitioner

# De-stress for Success

- **Let go.** Take responsibility only for what's yours and let go of the things out of your control. "When we waste time worrying about things that haven't happened and that may never happen,": says Debra Mandel, Ph.D., "we put our bodies through unnecessary stress."
- **Get your Zzzs.** Never underestimate the restorative power of a good night's sleep. Seek consistency by going to bed and waking up at the same time every day.
- **Breathe deeply.** Shallow breathing affects the amount of oxygen that reaches the cells and can create a multitude of conditions not directly attributed to stress, according to Fred Miller, author of *How to Calm Down*. "Daily breathing exercises will do your mind and body more good than all the vitamins you can swallow," he says.
- **Go for a long walk.** Look up at the sky and smile, suggest massage therapist Julie Donnelly. "You simply can't think negative thoughts while you are doing something positive. The smiling will prevent negative thinking."

(family practice or internal medicine) doctor is a good place to start. Specialists can come later. Look for someone you would go to, who also supports the use of complementary therapies. Clients frequently ask me for the name of an M.D. who will support, not ridicule, their decision to work with me.

### Helpful:

There are many natural therapies that complement bodywork treatment. Each practitioner's team may vary, to include modalities that they are not proficient in. Examples include: Acupuncturist, Nutritionist, Herbalist, Chiropractor, Wholistic Dentist.

Take your time and choose your professional team carefully. To a client, how good these clinicians are will reflect on you as much as on them. Also, referring a client to a practitioner often results in referrals back to you.

One legal liability issue to consider is the small possibility of your being named in a lawsuit against a practitioner you referred the client to. The simple remedy is to refer a client to more than one practitioner, and let the client choose which one they will see.

Developing a team of practitioners in other fields is in keeping with the principles of wholism. It allows you to draw on the vast, combined knowledge of many other health professionals, and develops an often-lacking sense of community among individual clinicians.

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