

The Benefits of Belonging

by Amanda Cuda

You've received the proper training, the necessary licensing, a good location and the right equipment. You might think you have everything you need to be a successful massage therapist—but have you considered joining a professional association? There are professional associations designed specifically for massage therapists that provide a wide range of benefits and services for the price of just a couple hundred dollars a year in membership fees. Once you're a member, you'll have access to a wealth of resources for enhancing your knowledge and skills as both a therapist and businessperson.

Protect your practice

The most important benefit professional associations provide is protection of your practice through liability insurance and other coverage. Liability insurance is an unfortunate necessity in this litigious age. Lawsuits can happen, even if you're conscientious, follow the rules and do nothing wrong. Moreover, many group practices, spas, chiropractors and hotels refuse to hire therapists without this insurance, so you may need coverage whether you think it's a good idea or not.

As part of their liability coverage, associations may also offer legal support in the event you are involved in litigation. They may also offer property insurance to safeguard your investment in a table or other costly equipment.



ISTOCK PHOTOS

You've put a great deal of time and money into getting your massage business off the ground, and liability insurance will ensure your practice has the protection it needs to thrive.

Client appeal

Beyond safeguarding your business, professional associations can make your practice more appealing to clients. When someone walks into your office and sees your membership certificate alongside your other credentials, it proves you're committed enough to go beyond the basic requirements of your job. And with more than 241,000 therapists currently practicing in the United States, it's in your best interest to show your clients exactly what sets you above everyone else.

Associations typically require practitioners to participate in a certain amount of continuing education and adhere to a code of ethics to maintain membership. Thus, belonging to an association indicates you're serious about your work and committed to making your practice as advanced and professional as possible.

Outside of this indirect influence, associations can also push new clients directly through your door. Some associations offer client referral services, which connect people seeking massage therapy with member therapists in their local area. Once your name is on that list of therapists, you open yourself up to a whole new group of clients.

In addition, associations can provide members with free or discounted marketing materials, such as

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business cards, Web-site services and brochures. These tools allow you to get a head start in promoting your practice to the public.

Better business

Associations can also offer a number of services designed to build and grow your practice. The leading organizations offer a variety of books and online resources aimed at helping you run a successful massage-therapy practice, with tips on management, advertising, accounting and much more. Some also provide free or discounted access to office supplies, massage equipment and other valuable business services.

Another important way associations support your business is by connecting you with the rest of the massage industry. The main method for this is through networking, as these organizations are made up of thousands of like-minded professionals across the country with whom you can trade ideas and share information, or team up with to organize promotional or charitable events. The top associations have their own publications that offer industry news, details on the latest techniques and advice for running your practice.

On a larger level, professional associations can provide you with legislative representation, ensuring that you're not only informed of the latest licensing and educational requirements, but that you have a voice in government matters directly affecting your profession.

Gain an edge

While massage therapy is a healing art, it's also a business, and to be successful, you should take advantage of every possible opportunity to gain an edge over your competition. Belonging to a reputable association provides you with credibility and standing among clients and puts you in touch with other therapists who share your desire for success. Associations offer business support and legislative advocacy, while protecting your practice from lawsuits and other emergencies.

You've worked hard to become a massage therapist, so doesn't it make sense to have the best possible protection, support and resources now that you're in practice?

At Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals, we live by the credo, "expect more." Visit us at www.abmp.com, www.massagetherapy.com or call (800) 458-2267.

ABMP Members Can Expect More

Once you've decided to join a professional massage association, it's very important to choose the best value. We believe there's no better choice than the nation's largest massage membership association: Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP).

In 2001 an independent massage publication asked readers, "Which association best serves the interests of its membership and the profes-

ABMP offers the best value in liability insurance, with the highest coverage limits in the field.

sion?" Fifty-seven percent of respondents picked ABMP, while the second-place association received only 15 percent of the vote. Our ranks have nearly doubled since then, to more than 61,000 members.

This speaks volumes, not only about our benefits, but our commitment to customer service. We promise when members use our toll-free number during business hours, 90 percent of the time they'll speak with a real person or receive a call back within an hour. Consider these other essential benefits:

- The profession's best value in liability coverage with the highest insurance limits in the field.
- The highest total coverage for massage professionals—\$3 million in professional liability (malpractice), \$3 million general liability and \$3 million in product liability.
- Legal defense coverage should a client bring a suit against you.
- Coverage wherever you work, even in clients' homes.
- An insurance option for business personal property.
- An online referral tool that safely connects prospective customers to your practice, and free tools to create your own Web site, brochures and newsletters.
- Two ways to network with other professionals, nationally or close to home, without chapter dues.
- The award-winning *Massage & Bodywork* magazine, featuring the latest news, techniques, marketing tips and practice advice.
- *Body Sense* magazine, filled with articles for your clients on living healthier, more balanced lives—perfect for waiting areas or client mailings.
- *The Successful Business Handbook*, a common-sense guide to building and sustaining a practice.
- ABMP legislative representation.
- Member discounts on many products, such as a service to make your business credit-card friendly.

—Text supplied by ABMP