

The Marketing Power of Business Cards

by Daniel Shirey

The statistic is elusive. One expert thinks the number is 4.5 billion, another said closer to 8 billion; a newspaper article in 2001 put out a more specific number at 5.78 billion, while a web site claimed almost three times that figure. Whatever the number, there are a lot of business cards being printed each year in the United States. And the reason is simple: it is the first, best, and sometimes only marketing piece a small business needs.

Every business needs new customers if it is going to grow and succeed. Massage therapists have a special bond with people, so increasing client numbers is the life's blood of a practice. Marketing your business educates and informs potential customers about you, the bodywork techniques you employ, and how to get in contact with you. It's the way you begin to create an image for yourself, and nothing encapsulates that image better than your business card. A business card is the portable marketing piece, providing instant opportunity to make contact with a prospect. Business cards sit in their holder next to the massage table, inviting satisfied clients to spread the word to their friends and neighbors.

The good news is that the business card is the most effective marketing tool available for networking and building clientele. There are not many other low-cost marketing opportunities which represent the personal nature, informational impact and customer retention of a business card.

There is no bad news. The bodywork professional who thinks through the design process of a business card, and uses it to accomplish a specific objective, can build a business without resorting to more expensive advertising. It's tempting to run a local newspaper ad or spread fliers around town, but these marketing dollars can be better used on more focused promotions with a greater chance of positive results.

The first reaction to a statement like "*your business card can be the only marketing tool you need*" is whether it is believable or not. Finish this article and then make a decision. If you embrace this notion, the second reaction is to pack the card with as many words as possible in an effort to communicate everything at once. While it may seem logical to try to create one piece that fits every situation imaginable, this kind of information overload breaks three basic rules of successful marketing: promote one message at a time, target the message to a specific audience, and give potential customers a reason to contact you.

A Touch of Marketing

Rule #1: Keep It Simple, Make It Clear

Think of the last magazine ad, billboard or commercial which made an impact on you. It was either because you were interested in the product, or the ad communicated a very narrow message in an interesting way. Even the simple business card needs an underlying marketing structure to be effective, the operative word being *simple*. Potential customers take your business card for one reason: to retain your contact information for future use. They are either interested in getting a massage, or were attracted by some information on the card.

It should go without saying that all basic contact information needs to be displayed. Best to get it all in order before printing cards – name, phone, fax, address, email, web site – nothing is more unprofessional than a business card with an old phone number scratched out, and a new one scribbled in. If your contact information changes, get new cards printed immediately.

When designing a card, other intangibles need to be thought about as well. A logo, type face, card stock color and texture can add interest and convey the image you want your business to have. Think about the clientele you're dealing with: bodywork exclusive for women will have a different look and feel than sports massage for athletes.

Make sure all the elements are concise, neat, clearly printed in a readable type size (some of your clients wear glasses) and have enough space around them to communicate each effectively.

The goal is simple. You want the card to go into the pocket or purse of an interested person, who can refer to it in the future or pass it to a friend.

Rule #2: Help the People Who Want Your Services See Your Message

According to the old marketing axiom, it is better to use a rifle than a shotgun. And it applies to your business card as well. List a few specialties on your business card which cater to the kind of clients you seek. Even if you have a wide range of experience in different techniques, customers look for

continued on page 48

specialists. You are trying to catch the eye of a discriminating audience, especially if you plan to retain those customers as regular clients. The massage therapist who lists a dozen specialties is in the same boat as the one who doesn't list any specialty at all. Too much information will overload and be treated with indifference; no information will cause the reader to toss the card.

This may sound funny, but it's not up to you what services you market. The level of success for your massage practice will be reflected in the features and benefits that bring clients back to your table. If you do not know why people come to you, ask. There's always time for small talk before and after the session. If you think you know what brings people back, it's even more important to ask. Knowing as much about your "typical" customer and the benefits he or she receives from your services will directly impact the number of entries in your appointment book.

When you know those two or three special techniques or benefits that are important from the client's perspective, put them on your business card.

Rule #3: Provide a Good Reason to Contact You

Marketing is broadly defined as everything you do to promote your business. Successful marketing is when the effort results in more sales. Most bodywork professionals don't consider themselves salespeople, which is why a good promotion is one of the most valuable commodities in growing a business.

A good promotion ties directly to the audience you plan to target. As previously stated, if you know the most attractive services benefiting your clients, those services should be promoted. And by invoking the "rifle approach," one promotion at a time is the best course of action.

Every promotion for every massage therapist is unique, based on the nature of the business, target customers, and strategy employed to attract them. An easy way to start is to wrap a promotion around an event or holiday. Another method is to target certain groups of people, like women or seniors. Perhaps you want to provide massages for a chiropractor or other health professional, this is another promotional strategy. It's difficult to be specific because each business is unique, but promotions can be generally classified into four basic types:

- Obtaining new customers
- Getting first-time customers to come back
- Using existing clients to recommend new customers
- Receiving additional business from existing clients

A good rule of thumb is to run a single promotion for a period of 30 to 60 days. After three or four months, the majority of your leads and appointments will have occurred. Track the cost per lead (calls and email inquiries) and cost per appointment, and total all the sales you make. This kind of

analysis is critical to determine if the promotion is successful. The good ones can be used year in and year out. The others can be modified next time around until they bring the desired results. After regularly executing promotions, you'll know what makes customers respond. This knowledge will improve all subsequent promotions and help you avoid the guesswork and expense of trying new advertising.

There are Two Sides to Every Situation

If you have been reading closely, you're probably wrestling with some conflicting information. How in the world are you supposed to convey all essential contact information, list a couple specialties, and use a promotion all on one business card, while keeping the elements clear and readable?

Put the promotion on the back of the card. Since your card is the one piece of business information people will likely keep, it makes sense to give added incentive to use the contact information on it.

Promotions are most effective for short periods of time, so they should not be part of the permanent information on front of the card, printed hundreds of times. Promotions belong on the blank side for use as a mini billboard. The billboard analogy is a good one, to the point that the most effective ones communicate a single message in simple words and images.

Like all successful advertisements, your promotion needs to stand out. Being on the back, by itself, is a great start because there is nothing competing with the message you're conveying. Visually, a handwritten note can add a personal touch, especially if you can do calligraphy or have exceptional penmanship. If you consider that a business card is held and touched as much as it is looked at, perhaps a different texture of a label or sticky note will do the trick. Whatever the choice, it is critical that the promotion be rendered as neatly and professionally as the business card itself.

* * *

This small, 2 x 3-1/2-inch stiff piece of paper can be the most important marketing tool you have. The same way you build a business by the quality of work done with your hands, growing your practice may depend on the quality of the business card potential clients hold in their hands.

Daniel Shirey is a marketing professional in Portland, Oregon. With 25 years experience helping small businesses, his marketing insight for massage therapists comes from being a devotee of bodywork. Taking the client's point-of-view, he uses that perspective to help LMTs market their practice. Dan can be reached by email at dan@BusinessCardBooster.com.