

Setting up a Massage Practice - Part 3

Marketing and Networking

By Gill Westland

Part one of this occasional series looked at building a support system to nourish your own life force enabling you to sustain a Biodynamic Massage practice. Part two explored linking Yourself, Biodynamic Massage and Clients, including financial aspects. This article will look at promoting yourself and your Biodynamic massage practice in the wider community with emphasis on the marketing strategy of networking.

What is marketing? Contrary to popular belief marketing is actually not about selling and advertising. Marketing is “satisfying customer needs.” Daws elaborates and quotes the Institute of Marketing definition: “Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.” Finding out and anticipating what clients (our customers) want and then satisfying those requirements seems to me to fit well with the Biodynamic idea of meeting the client where they are. The elements of the marketing process are complex. Part of marketing involves intuition and reading the signs that are in the wind about what is manifesting in society and how you fit with that, but it also involves careful and systematic preparation and planning. It combines rational processes and emotionally feeling your way.

Marketing Strategy

Marketing involves devising a marketing strategy, relating it to your financial situation and making a time line. The time line is a plan of when different parts of the strategy will be implemented. This enables you to review progress and to redefine your marketing strategy. The marketing strategy is about finding potential clients to talk with about what it is you have to offer them. Or in marketing language: “Communicating your business message to the market”.

In part two of this series the triangle of Therapist - Service - Client was introduced.

THERAPIST

CLIENT SERVICE (BM)

So a marketing strategy is the way you plan to link you and your service to the client.

Elements of a marketing strategy are:

- Direct Mail
- Shop Windows
- Exhibitions
- Publicity
- Advertising
- Talks
- Article writing
- Website
- Networking

For the purposes of this article I want to focus on Networking. Subsequent articles will explore other elements of a marketing strategy and draw on experiences of using them.

Networking is a very effective way of promoting Biodynamic Massage. It costs little financially, although it can cost a lot in time. It can achieve a grounded and targeted response. Biodynamic massage is not as close to mainstream consciousness as other massage therapies, and is often discovered by word of mouth. Word of mouth knowledge seems to work well on a small island, where information can spread from the ground up. However it does take longer than some forms of marketing and patience is needed. Nevertheless there is an organic rightness about putting energy out directly to others, making contact, and being ready to receive what comes back either directly or indirectly. Although networking is very effective, it is not enough on its own.

Biodynamic considerations of Marketing

Before exploring networking further, I want to mention some biodynamic psychology and body psychotherapy principles at work when marketing.

Balancing horizontal and vertical energies:-

It is an inescapable fact that whether you work privately or you are employed somewhere to practise biodynamic massage you will be involved in promoting yourself and biodynamic massage. In private practice on your own you will need to be open and outgoing, if you are to succeed. Putting yourself out in the world entails gathering up your vertical energies, choosing what to put out, and then putting out your energies horizontally. Horizontal energies are more to the fore when you describe your work to a stranger, when you set up first consultations on the telephone, structure sessions and relate more interpersonally with clients.

Horizontal energies, of course need to be constantly balanced with more vertical energies. Depending on your own balance of these energies you may need to cultivate one aspect more than another or find compensatory ways of doing things. For example, if you are so shy that you cannot easily move out towards people at social gatherings you might be better working in a centre, where someone else communicates on behalf of others what Biodynamic massage is.

Styles of Contact:-

Another consideration in putting yourself out is how you make contact with other people or what hampers contact. In the process of inviting potential clients to work with you how do you do this? What is your contact style?

Making Contact With Your Client

This is an exercise you may want to do with a friend, who can read the instructions to you.

Find a quiet place, sit comfortably close your eyes feel the points of contact with the surfaces touching you let your attention become diffuse your first client is about to arrive notice what happens in your body how is your breathing? what thoughts do you have? what feelings? what images arise? And now you realise that you have made a mistake your client is not coming until tomorrow what happens in your body? what feelings, thoughts, images arise? And now you realise that if your client is not coming until tomorrow, you have time to prepare more for your client what is the first, small preparatory step for you to be able to receive your client?

Write your experience down, or draw it. You may want to repeat this exercise at intervals and note changes.

There are likely to be different responses to the exercise. One possibility is bracing yourself, making yourself tight, not breathing out and feel somewhat aggressive as you imagine defending yourself from the attacking client, who will not accept your terms; another response might be withdrawing into yourself, and hoping that the client will not turn up; another response might be to feel welcoming of massaging a new client, but hoping she does not want to talk. Your responses will come out of your particular ways of protecting yourself when challenged by newness.

What is important is to know your style and to explore whether your ways of protecting yourself are so active that they affect the likelihood of you fulfilling your aim of welcoming new clients. Potential clients will feel your lack of availability and not come to you. This can manifest in getting leaflets printed about yourself, giving

talks and putting a lot of energy into starting your new business, but at a deeper level you have not really committed yourself to biodynamic massage work. The busy preparations mask the deeper lack of sureness about your Biodynamic massage practice. Another possibility is procrastination - never quite getting round to the preparation of getting leaflets done, decorating the spare room etc.

Authentic relationship

There are lots of books on marketing and some take into account that in promoting any service the relationship that you form with your client is central. However, little is written about authentic and ethical relationship. Biodynamic massage is about contactful touch, so you will need to be contactful and professional in the promotion of your practice. This means being truthful and talking from your experience. It means not role-playing your view of what it is to be a Biodynamic Massage therapist.

A recent example of authentic and inauthentic behaviour was when I answered the phone to a cold caller promoting something. The conversation started off with my feeling that I was talking to a human being as he checked out my name and my business. I warmed to him and was curious. However, having verified my details, he abruptly broke the contact and went into a robotic monologue about the product he was promoting. While he had engaged me in the beginning, he had lost me as a potential customer, when he became a clone of his company. This robotic way of promotion is particularly confusing when it is coupled with the false intimacy of a stranger e.g. "Hi, Gill, I'm Mike your financial advisor...." It does not fit with my cultural defences of slowly checking out strangers from a distance. It would fit cultures where the norm is to go out towards people in a "friendly" way as a defence. Sadly some books about creating a business foster narcissistic behaviour. That is pretending to be someone other than yourself or the stronger development of a social facade. This may bear fruit in the short term, but is not enough to sustain a Biodynamic Massage practice.

A notable exception to this marketing phenomena is a recent book by Lynne Franks. She writes: "It takes great courage to be true to yourself, but that's what you need to start a sustainable enterprise based on values and ethics. It takes courage to behave honourably, even with your back against the wall. But if you have that courage you will always succeed." For Franks a "sustainable enterprise" is one striving "to meet real needs at a personal and spiritual level, while conserving natural resources and even restoring the environment."

Larkin also links authenticity with being true to your spiritual and ethical values, and if you do this you will be successful. She writes: "Work practice is one of the most powerful spiritual practices available to each of us ... It provides an excuse for letting go of the things that aren't working, of the values that aren't your own. In that letting go a spaciousness is created that gives you mental and emotional room for creating the life you want, for responding quickly to market opportunities, for rapidly addressing the people problems that invariably surface as businesses grow. The irony of this path is that radically honest businesses, businesses of integrity, businesses that respect and cherish all beings succeed ... The very heart of right livelihood is where our values merge with work."

From stimulus to action

Try this exercise from Hearing About To Action (How did you first hear about BM?)

Let yourself relax as in the previous exercise Let yourself recall how you first heard about BM give yourself plenty of time to recall you may remember more than one incident What gave you the impetus to apply for BM sessions? Give yourself plenty of time How long was it between first hearing about BM to making the first phone call? Did you go on to be a client/student of BM? Did it take longer?

Write your answers down or draw them. You may want to add to your writing as other recollections come to the fore.

There is a process from hearing about Biodynamic massage and making the first telephone call. The hearing about phase can have several parts to it over time. For example. one individual remembers seeing a poster in his old Cambridge college on a visit, some weeks later, he saw the same poster in his home town, then noticed an ad in a local alternative health directory and decided to make the first phone call.

In Biodynamic massage terms the first poster is the first stimulus, it is nourished by the two other contacts with Biodynamic Massage and was enough for this person to bring their energy to expression and contact with another by phoning. In completing the Vasomotoric Cycle the energetic impact of the stimulus and its incubation period before manifesting in action takes enormously varied amounts of time in individuals. As in nature some seeds germinate quickly in days, others such as tree seeds need an overwintering. Fortunately clients are diverse and your practice will eventually have different clients living with different rhythms.

Defining what you offer and to whom

Now let us return to the structuring of the marketing process.

What are you offering?

Biodynamic massage has the advantage of being a specialised form of massage that is less well known and less visible. This gives the opportunity for niche marketing i.e. emphasising its uniqueness and differentiating it from other forms of massage. It entails sharpening differences and being more selective about clients. It means that a client who is well served will continue relatively more long term and regularly than in other forms of massage therapy.

The downside of Biodynamic Massage being less known is that as a sole trader your means of promoting yourself needs to be cost effective. That is for minimal financial outlay and effort you get maximum result in the shortest time. This means strongly interested and committed clients. If you are working in an area, where there is choice about a Biodynamic Massage therapist, you will need to sharpen the personal aspects of yourself, which makes you different from others.

Starting with you as therapist in the triangular relationship mentioned earlier, it is important to define what you are offering. The sharper your focus with this the better as you can give the potential client a very clear message. In order to write clear statements you will have to know specifically about yourself and your target client group.

Before you can complete the exercise of what you are offering and to whom you will need to draw up a self and client profile in as much detail as possible.

The self profile will help you to identify particular markets and enable you to highlight the special features of your Biodynamic Massage practice. Clients are likely to be somewhat like you and your interests and/or have characteristics in common with other students/Biodynamic Massage therapists.

Self Profile

Try another exercise. Take a large sheet of paper. Take lots of time to do a self profile and then put it up on a wall and add to it over the coming days. In drawing up your profile consider the following and anything else that comes to mind.

Life history - Childhood - Schooling; Teens; Twenties; Thirties and so on. Include your interests, significant life events, work, relationships, and key values.

The following is a brief fictitious example. You will need to be more detailed.

Regular family, interest in swimming - county champion, accident when 11 yrs - operations on arm - hospitalisations, became avid reader of fairy tales. Left school with no qualifications. Married at 18 years. Children early 20's - boy, girl. Both home births. National Childbirth Trust baby massage self help group. Learned about yoga pre and post childbirth from another participant. Went with her to a group and continued to practise yoga and do some short residential courses. Got involved as helper at local nursery, co-opted to management committee. Took Access course and did well. Acquired confidence to apply for Biodynamic Massage training. Part time work in a Day Centre for the Elderly. Mother has heart attack - minor, but through her brought contact with self help group. Husband's job gave opportunity to live in U.S.A. for one year. Took up offer with view to starting Biodynamic Massage practice on return to U.K.

Client Profile

Use your own profile and then fantasise about potential clients to draw up a client profile. Your clients will be the sorts of people that you can relate to or you “understand” in some way out of who you are. You may want to write about your potential clients or to draw pictures until they take on concrete form. Using the fictitious personal profile potential clients could be for example:

- Women, 25-60, employed or with healthy pension;
- Interested in complementary health;
- Probably eat organic food some-times; Might be vegetarian;
- Aware of inner life, “spiritual”, yoga, martial arts;
- Parent; Busy, perhaps working in and outside the home;
- Might be active in Parent Teacher Association; childrens’ club;
- Likes circle dancing, world music; non-mainstream film;
- Camping holidays, outdoor life;

What does the client need?

When you have the self and client profile in place, you will need to go out and find some women, who might fit your profile. Talk to them and try to find out what is missing, or what common problems they have. As you gather information bear in mind (loosely) how what you are learning might link in with you and Biodynamic Massage. What themes emerge?

Possible answers could be: lack of time; conflicting demands; pressure; tiredness; irritability. The common theme could be: wanting more space for oneself and wanting more energy.

Next try to find a way of how the problem could be linked to yourself and Biodynamic Massage.

Communicating your message

The next step is to consider how to communicate with your client in a manner that will attract their interest quickly and specifically. As the interest and availability of complimentary health increases the potential client has a lot to choose from. If clients have to work too hard to understand what you are offering they will not listen or read your leaflet. Clients want to know how much it will cost? How long it takes? And what will I get for my investment of time and money?

So any communication needs to engage your client so that they want to see you. Your opening statements will need to speak to the potential client’s life experience.

What do you do?

In social situations over the coming weeks and months, practise different ways of responding to the following common questions. What do you do? What are you doing nowadays? How’s life with you?

Notice what responses you get. Do people look interested or glaze over? Do they ask more? Are they polite, but disinterested?

Try to refine how you respond each time taking into consideration your audience.

The following is an example of what not to do taken from another recent book writing about the promotion of psychotherapy. It gives mixed messages and is too much focussed on the psychotherapist’s struggle to integrate her therapeutic approach. In answer to the question what do you do the author responds: “I’m a psychotherapist, I do therapy with adults who feel depressed or anxious. I specialise in a type of group therapy that is very experiential. (Deep sigh, eyes rolling up.) I guess you could call it neo-Reichian, or maybe it’s more post-Gestalt, although I add in elements that are clearly psychodynamic. I am eclectic, so I integrate the emotive aspects of the field with a cognitive approach, no wait, I see I’ve lost you.”

Compare this with the following example giving information and conveying your enthusiasm and belief in Biodynamic Massage. “I am a Biodynamic Massage therapist. I specialise in work with mothers who also have careers. I help them to liberate stuck vitality, and to find balance in their busy lives.”

It helps to write key words down about your practice and to be able to produce them easily on demand. In thinking about this article I came up with some key words about Biodynamic Massage. These were: energy (having more of it available), balance, space, less pressure, nourishment, time to regroup/collect oneself, life

force, lack of contact with the meaning of life, spiritual, more than average okayness. These reflect my particular thoughts just now in thinking about a stressed Mum who has asked me about Biodynamic Massage in the school playground. My thoughts could well be different in 6 months time as I reflect on Biodynamic Massage differently or am prompted to do so by whom I meet.

Networking

Networking is concerned with exchanging information with others about the specific needs of others (either themselves or those they are in contact with); reaching in a targeted way individuals who might become clients and generally building your visibility from the ground up in your local community.

An example arose this morning as I was writing this article, I received a return phone call from a local NHS unit, which I am curious to visit to discover more about their service. The visit was arranged, there was some social talk and a “do you know that there is a Family therapist talking in Cambridge next week. You can book through X. It would be nice to see you there.” This is the essence of networking - sharing information that the other might be interested in and building social/business friendships. Done in an authentic way it involves genuine desire to share with others information about opportunities which they might be interested in and vice versa. It is not about using others in a manipulative way.

Networking can help with finding hidden niches and with differentiating Biodynamic Massage from other therapies. It gives the flavour of developments and trends, and can identify people trying to solve problems. For example: “Did you know, this might interest you, the local Housing Department are looking at the stresses of working directly with the general public - they might be interested your massage. What is it Bio..something... for their staff training sessions. Why don't you give them a ring? You can mention my name..” The old saying “It's not what you know, but who you know” remains true because it is about contactful relationship. As you live your life people will share with you because they like you and vice versa.

Within organisations and the wider community there are significant key people. Key people in organisations may not be those who officially hold significant positions. For example: When ordering stationary, there may be a routine, form filling in way to get supplies. Mostly this works, but if someone wants something urgently a visit to the store and a talk with the storekeeper can quickly get something and the forms can be filled in later. A person who has not built a good relationship with the storekeeper may not get this level of co-operation when it is needed. In society generally key figures in networks are those in overlapping and different networks from your own.

The wider the spread of interest and involvement of the key figure the greater your potential access to information. Some key figures are also significant in that a recommendation from them carries a lot of respect and value. For example: At CBPC a client who was head of a large organisation was very satisfied with Biodynamic Massage for her work stress. She liked the discretion of our service and that her G.P. was not informed about her seeking help as it would not look good on her medical record given her status. On completion of her Biodynamic Massage therapy she recommended that various staff contact us.

So satisfied clients will recommend you to others, but even if they don't directly Biodynamic Massage usually means that people look better and are a walking advert. “You are looking really well now you looked so tired 6 months ago, what's happened?”

Identifying your Networks

What are your existing networks. These will be the first place to start promoting your practice. For the next day keep a record of all the people that you have contact with and name what networks they represent. Then reflect on a week of contacts, a month of contacts and more infrequent contacts. Write the person on the right and the network on the right.

For example:

- Partner - teachers, swimming club
- Children - school community, musicians
- Postman - young men, workers, fit

- Neighbour - mother, school governor
- Neighbour - community worker
- Supermarket checkout - semi-retired
- Hairdresser - stressed hairdressers
- Health Centre - nurses, health professionals etc.

Let your list expand. Put it up on the wall in the kitchen and add to it over time.

If you have fewer than 2 or 3 contacts per day, you will need to get out and about to cultivate more contacts. Part of networking is to keep making new contacts and to keep up your current ones.

Increasing your social network

The main ingredient in this is to stay alive and to live a full life. This will naturally keep you meeting new experiences and people. If it is not coming naturally, you will need to work at it.

One thing I do from time to time is to do something new and outside my usual circle, which I am curious about. It might be attending a meeting of a very different therapy from my own, go to different sort of social gathering or try a new leisure pursuit. It gives me experience of meeting different sorts of people and broadens my experience. In the process of purchasing the new centre, I dealt with estate agents, builders, planners, solicitors, accountants, architects, which my work does not normally entail. Over this two year period, I learned a lot about their work and the problems of conflicting demands, co-ordinating jobs, frustrations in building etc. In time they also became interested in my work and took information about the centre for future reference.

Obviously this sort of contact needs to be ethical and to not involve dual relationship. I would not be able to have a solicitor as a client if I planned to use his services in the future. However, I can recommend a colleague to work with him.

Suggestions for network building

Participate in your community - residents group, pressure group; Join the friends society of the local cinema; Go to a training event at other therapy centres; Pick a magazine at random from your newsagents - read it to find out what goes on in that world; Be active in AHBMT; Host a meeting of a local group in your home; Offer to help in a voluntary group; Visit a place of interest; Get to know all the local therapists; Appropriately refer clients on etc. Add to this list and keep active.

Keeping the Network Alive

If your social network is to remain helpful to you and others in it, you need to keep it alive by revisiting it regularly, remembering who people are, asking for help within it, giving feedback and thanking people for their help, giving help and so on. If you pull back on networking for some reason, people who are acquaintances will forget who you are. In the short term this will not matter, but as networking is a long term venture it will begin to matter and you will need to put more effort in for a while to rebuild your practice.

Conclusion

The best way to build your practice is to live your life consciously and to dare to use the opportunities life brings to communicate your enthusiasm for your work.

Further reading

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