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WORKING WITH PHYSICIANS

A MASSAGE THERAPIST'S GUIDE

Written by:

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Owner, Thera-ssage



Introduction

How I got started

I opened my own clinic almost nine years ago, and one of the first moves I made was to start marketing my massage therapy practice to physicians. I had big plans for growth, and big plans to be recognized as a member of the health care community. I also had no money to speak of, and couldn't afford to go crazy with advertising. Besides, I figured the personal touch was more the way to meet (and impress) doctors and other members of the health care profession that I wanted to cultivate referrals from.

This is a guide explaining how I got started and what you can learn from my experience.

WE WILL COVER:

- ▶ Creating a database of physician prospects
- ▶ How to present yourself as a partner
- ▶ How to use research to establish credibility
- ▶ How to get access to physicians via the receptionist

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I hope you enjoy this short guide and that it helps you grow your massage practice.

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Building Your Database

Your foundation for prospecting

My first act was to create a database for myself of all the local health care providers. Your database is the key to managing all your clients and prospects.

Some good tools for managing your database include Highrise, Salesforce, or even just an Excel spreadsheet. A database is also sometimes called a “CRM” which stands for “Customer Relationship Manager” and will make your prospecting much more efficient. You might also consider using a massage-specific database like the one that comes with Schedulicity or Massage Office.

The first few weeks I was in business for myself, I wasn’t exactly rolling in clients, so I spent my spare time creating the database. I accomplished that by going through the phone book (now you will probably want to use Google) and entering the names, contact information, and specialties of all the providers. That enabled me to do a mail merge to create a letter and address labels with a click of the mouse. Once I created the initial database, it’s easy for me to update it annually when the new phone book comes out by just deleting the ones who are no longer listed and adding any new ones. If you live in a large city, you may just want to choose the providers who are within close proximity to you.

Another method I use is to keep a check on the website of our local hospital. Every hospital has a community education department. On any given day, you'll see an announcement like this: "Dr. Smith will be giving a presentation on 'Living Well with Fibromyalgia' Tuesday at noon. A healthy bag lunch will be provided." I attend as many of those as I can. They are usually a half hour to an hour in length. Not only is it a learning opportunity; I also go armed with business cards, introduce myself to the doctor when it's over, and talk to them about how massage can benefit their clients. I print out a research article relating to the subject of the session and give that to the physician as well. Doctors are impressed by research—not wild claims or promises of instant cures.

GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING YOUR DATABASE

- ▶ Choose a good CRM
- ▶ Keep it up to date
- ▶ Use both online and offline sources to find prospects

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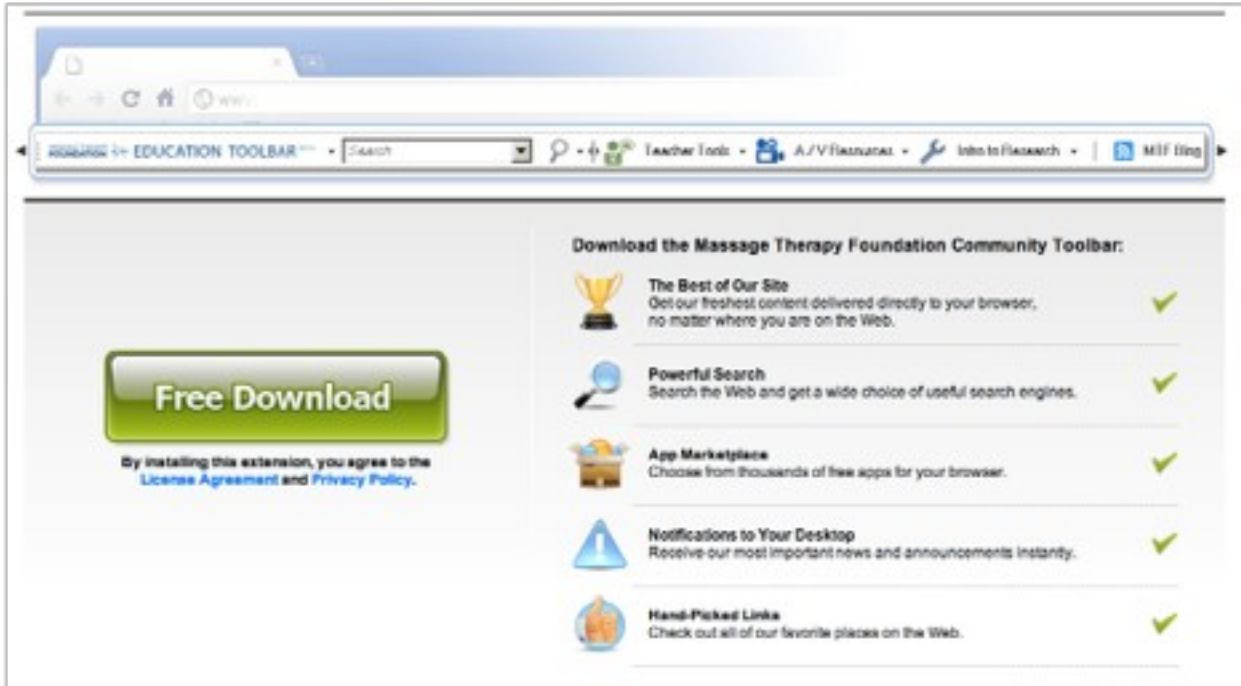
Using Research to Build Credibility

Research helps you speak their language

I looked through the Massage Therapy Foundation's website, which contains many links to research resources, and printed out a few timely articles to enclose with my physician letter, introducing myself and the services that are offered at my clinic.

The new toolbar on the website makes those research resources even easier to find.

To get the toolbar, [click here](#) and download it. Then you can use it to find all sorts of research articles that will help you approach physicians with credibility.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying "www.". Below the address bar is a toolbar with various icons and text, including "RESEARCH EDUCATION TOOLBAR", "Teacher Tools", "A/V Resources", "Info to Flashback", and "MIF Blog". The main content area features a large green button labeled "Free Download" with the text "By installing this extension, you agree to the License Agreement and Privacy Policy." below it. To the right, there is a section titled "Download the Massage Therapy Foundation Community Toolbar:" followed by a list of five features, each with an icon and a green checkmark:

- The Best of Our Site**: Get our freshest content delivered directly to your browser, no matter where you are on the Web.
- Powerful Search**: Search the Web and get a wide choice of useful search engines.
- App Marketplace**: Choose from thousands of free apps for your browser.
- Notifications to Your Desktop**: Receive our most important news and announcements instantly.
- Hand-Picked Links**: Check out all of our favorite pieces on the Web.

What you'll want to do is find articles that align with your practice and that you can feel good about supporting. For example, if you specialize in working with people with TMJ, you might want to find articles related to massage and TMJ so that your energy is aligned with the research you are using to support your message.

Print these articles and also download them to your computer so you can keep them handy. Additionally, it would also be a good idea to link to them from your website so that you can reference them online if you need to. This also helps your website establish credibility for you as a health care provider.



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Connecting with Physicians

Position yourself as a partner

I always have a little box in my car of business cards and business card holders. When I have time, I stop into the offices of physicians, dentists and chiropractors and talk to the receptionist. It's impossible to get to the doctor without going through the receptionist, and they are often the key to getting your foot in the door. I'll leave behind my letter of introduction, the card holder and cards, and a few research articles in a manila envelope. I invite the receptionist to the office for a complimentary half-hour of massage—which they usually end up upgrading to an hour—so she can give a firsthand account of the professional atmosphere in our office and the skill of our therapists.

The key is to present yourself as a potential partner—not a substitute—for the doctor.

A word to the wise: be sure your letter is perfect—correct grammar, no typos, etc. Remember that spell check doesn't catch words that are used out of context, as long as they're spelled correctly. Ask a pair of fresh eyes to proofread your letter.

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Another way to try to connect with physicians is to simply pick up the phone. If you place a question on your client intake forms that asks the the client's physician and contact information, you will be able to follow up with that physician (be sure to get permission from your client before calling).

You might consider calling your client's physician to introduce yourself and offer to send any of your documentation to him/her. While doing that, you can also take the opportunity to give a little more info about yourself. Also, when you send followup info, this is your chance to include business cards and other background information about what you do. This can get you more referrals from that physician.

Want to see a live example of how this can work? Take a look at this [video of a live call](#) to a physician by Irene Diamond, LMT in the Massage Learning Network. She shows you how to make the call and introduce yourself.



REACHING PHYSICIANS

- ▶ Start with the receptionist
- ▶ Win over the receptionist with complimentary massage
- ▶ Emphasize that you are a partner with, not a substitute for the physician

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Following Up

Partnering with physicians is a process

Follow up on your referrals. I send a thank-you note to the doctor for each client who is referred—along with a note to let us know if he would like to receive our progress notes. I have found through experience that if a doctor sends an open-ended prescription such as “massage for stress,” they may not care about receiving notes, but if it’s specific such as “massage 2x weekly for 3 weeks for lumbar pain,” they may like to receive the notes. Be sure your progress notes are perfect as well, and type them on your letterhead if you are sharing them with the physician—and don’t forget to have the client sign a release giving you permission to share them.



I don't expect doctors to keep me in business; I depend on the public, too, and I like to educate them to massage therapy research, as well. I keep copies of timely research articles relating to massage on a table in my lobby. At a minimum, people who are waiting will pick them up and read them. Many times someone will read an article and comment along the lines of "I don't have TMJ, but my sister does. Do you mind if I take this article home?" I always keep a few extra copies.

Of course, when the client comes out of the room and says "I feel better," that's evidence, and we all know it. But it's anecdotal evidence, and in the realm of research, that's considered the lowest level of evidence. Gathering a few published studies, and using them to market your practice, is a win-win situation, and just plain smart business.

There are some sample letters that I (and others) use to communicate with physicians. We will be making those available for download in our next guide which will be available next week (look for an email about that soon). Feel free to adapt them your own use. They get instant results. Within two or three days of the first time I sent it out, I received phone calls from several physicians...within a few weeks, I had some of those same physicians as clients, and they're still clients today—and still referring their patients to us.

FOLLOW UP TIPS

- ▶ Be specific - leave out updates on general "relaxation" stuff
- ▶ Use professional business letterhead
- ▶ Use proven professional letter templates and stay consistent

About Laura Allen, LMT

After 20+ years as a chef and restaurant owner, Laura Allen had a mid-life crisis and decided to become a massage therapist. She started practicing energy work in 1993, and massage in 1999.

She is the owner of [THERA-SSAGE](#), a multi-disciplinary clinic and educational facility in Rutherfordton, NC. The clinic offer massage therapy, chiropractic, acupuncture, aesthetics, spa treatments, naturopathy, nutritional counseling, and herbal therapies.

Laura is Nationally Certified in Massage Therapy & Bodywork, and an Approved Provider of Continuing Education under the [NCBTMB](#). She is a professional member of both [AMTA](#) and [ABMP](#), a past delegate to the [Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards](#), and a founding member of the [Alliance for Massage Therapy Education](#). From 2005-2011, She was a member of the [North Carolina Board of Massage & Bodywork Therapy](#).

Laura is the author of the Plain & Simple Guide to Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (2nd ed, LWW, 2009) and One Year to a Successful Massage Therapy Practice (LWW, 2008). Laura's new book, A Massage Therapist's Guide to Business, was just published by LWW in January 2011.



About The Massage Therapy Foundation

The Massage Therapy Foundation was founded by AMTA in 1990 with the mission of bringing the benefits of massage therapy to the broadest spectrum of society through the generation, dissemination, and application of knowledge in this field. We do this by receiving donations and granting funds for research, community service, educational initiatives, and conferences. We also do this by providing direct consultation to the medical and research communities, and by educating massage therapists about the world of research.



To support e-books and other work by the Massage Therapy Foundation, please consider making a [donation](#).

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Massamio empowers independent, professional massage therapists to run successful small businesses.

Our hassle-free online practice manager allows independent massage therapists to focus on client relationships, client retention, and building a robust practice.



Massamio helps therapists build and keep clientele, schedule appointments online, market their massage business, manage payments, maintain a client database, manage billing, grow online word of mouth, send appointment reminders, safely screen online bookings, promote their individual brand, and integrate their practice with social media.

We are dedicated to using our online and social-media presence to inform the popular view of massage therapy, highlighting the powerful effects of massage as documented by research and evidence-based studies. We are also partnering with massage educator and author Diana Thompson to create a SOAP-charting app that can eventually be integrated with health-care records, with the long-term goal of allowing therapists to share progress notes with physicians who are treating their clients. Massamio is truly an empowerment company. So join our exclusive community of insured, professional massage therapists at Massamio.com, spread the word, and start growing your practice!

Please visit Massamio's website to learn more at www.massamio.com