

Fill Your Appointment Book

Target the Clients You Want to Work With

by Cherie Sohnen-Moe

Demand for massage therapy is growing; unfortunately, it's demand for relatively inexpensive, convenient massage. There are a lot of people willing to pay for massage from a therapist in private practice—but how do you attract these people into your practice?

Many massage therapists in private practice don't have full schedules, and want this to be different. Contrast this with the concerns from massage chains that don't have enough therapists to meet client demand; in fact, several franchise owners have shared with me that they are turning away 15 to 20 clients per week due to being understaffed.

Still, local private-practice massage therapists aren't getting those clients. Perhaps this is because therapists in private practice charge fees that are usually higher than those charged by franchises. Perhaps it is because private-practice massage therapists don't have the same scheduling options that franchises do. Layer on top of that the fact that consumers might not be able to locate private-practice therapists as easily as they might locate a name-brand franchise.

All of this begs these questions: How can you, a private-practice massage therapist, attract clients to your practice? Do you have to lower your prices to compete with the chains? And how can you build a clientele of your *ideal* clients?

Identify your ideal client

The first step is to identify your ideal client. This is the person who would want to become your client as soon as he or she finds out about you. Further, your ideal client is a subset of your target market/s.

Target markets are groups of people who share similar characteristics, such as people with a certain health condition—whether it's fibromyalgia, pain, stress or something else; similar wellness goals, such as improved overall health, increased athletic performance or enhanced sleep; and people in the same profession, like lawyers, construction workers or performers.

The purpose of choosing specific target markets is to make your practice more enjoyable, simplify your marketing, and increase the success of your promotional endeavors. The world abounds with opportunities, and it's impossible to pursue them all or attempt to be everything to everyone. You need to decide where to focus your marketing energy and resources.

Target marketing is analogous to archery: The goal is to get your arrow as close to the center as possible. The outer rings are bigger and easier to hit, but the high score comes from hitting the center.

The same goes for attracting clients: You can appeal to the general masses (the outer rings), but it takes more money and time (multiple arrows) to get the same return on your marketing investment than it would if you focus on a target market (hitting the bull's-eye with one arrow). In most instances, narrowing your field actually increases your overall number of clients.

Massage is very intimate work. Think about whom you want in your space. Actively seek those types of clients. This doesn't mean you must limit yourself to only working with people in your target markets. While it's fine to work with whoever wanders through the door, invest your marketing time and money toward attracting your desired target markets.

The process of identifying your ideal client involves evaluating your current practice and exploring the type of person you would most enjoy working with as a client. Consider the following questions:

- How would you describe the people who use, or would use, the kind of services you provide?
- What type of person is most drawn to your practice?
- What types of people do you want to reach?
- To which groups do you most relate?
- What are the groups to which some of your clients already belong?
- What types of services would be the most fulfilling for you to offer?
- What qualities do you want your services to exude?
- What problems, conditions and issues do you want to address in your work?
- What type of environment do you want to work in?
- What are the characteristics of the people you prefer to have as clients?

Take the responses to the preceding questions to create your ideal client profile: the person who would be most easily attracted to working with you and who you would really enjoy being around.

Features versus benefits

The next step after identifying your ideal client is to develop strategies to get those people through your door. You need to clearly communicate the benefits of your services in a way that attracts your ideal clients' attention and inspires them to schedule a session with you.

People want to feel that their unique needs are understood. So, even though we know just about anyone can benefit from massage, we need to find



a way to communicate with potential clients in terms and language that appeals to them. Most people receive massage for specific reasons. They are in a current “A” state—tense, in pain, experiencing mobility restrictions; they want to get to a “B” state—relaxed, with decreased pain, increased mobility, and reduced side effects from illness or injury.

Your massage services are the vehicle to get them from point A to point B. You need to convey how you can help them achieve those goals.

With unfortunate frequency, we describe ourselves—and our businesses—in terms of our technical *features*—a description of your service, such as the types of modalities you incorporate, the training you received and your background. A feature isn’t what attracts clients. They want to know how your services will make a difference in their wellness.

A *benefit* is a description of how the client profits from using your services, how the service solves the client’s problem, the differential advantage you provide, and the results the client can expect.

Benefits outweigh features, yet practitioners tend to focus on their features. It’s understandable. It’s why we do what we do. We love our modality. We’ve spent so much time and money learning about it—but even so, this should not be the main focus of your marketing endeavors. Focus on benefits; follow up with features.

Most marketing emphasizes the features, ignoring the journey and final destination that people want. For instance, say you meet someone at a party and he asks what you do. You say, “I’m a massage therapist,” or you give a more detailed response like, “I do this unique combination of reiki, Trager work and shiatsu, and work that reconnects.” Your response seems clear enough, but what if that person doesn’t know what those terms mean? Or worse, what if he thinks he knows what you mean, but doesn’t?

We often assume that people hear about what we do, and they understand it in the way we mean it. But it’s rarely the case. We also assume, often incorrectly, that people want our services. But that’s almost never true. What they want is to go from Point A to Point B. Even when people are looking for a specific treatment modality, if you dig a bit, you often find that it isn’t the modality they want but the results they’ve come to believe it will give them.

Consider the following scenario: A man used to be very athletic. Several years ago he had a prolonged illness. Although he has fully recovered, his sports performance is not up to par. He used to play golf every week; now he barely makes it through a game and his average score is much higher than it used to be. He longs for the days when he can play better and enjoy the game more.

Then, one day, a friend tells him, “You should try some massage for that. It really helped me to loosen up tight areas, strengthen my grip and improve my swing.”

His hope is renewed and he is excited about pursuing massage. Unfortunately, another friend tells him that massage isn’t the answer, but physical therapy is what he needs. His enthusiasm for massage wanes and now he begins to look into physical therapy. His loyalty to massage therapy was short-lived.

Imagine that this same person sees a promotional piece that states, “Regain your athletic edge”—or even better, “Improve your golf score and increase your stamina.” He doesn’t even know right away what that person is offering, be it massage, physical therapy, chiropractic or something else.

Contrast this with a promotional piece that says, “Massage by Tracy.” Which one do you think will grab this potential client’s attention? He is probably not as interested in the type of therapy he receives as much as the results that therapy provides.

The main reason a person wants to become your client is because, at some level, he believes it can take him from where he is to where he wants to go. Period.

If he finds another way that can better help him with his particular issues, he will jump ship faster than you could imagine. And often, price is not a factor. This person will likely choose your services over another’s if he feels that you can address his pain points and help him achieve his goals.

The moral of this story is: Once you have identified your ideal clients and their pain points, you can educate potential clients about the benefits of working with you.



Read “*Create a Target Market Profile*,”
by Cherie Sohnen-Moe, at [massagemag.com/
targetmarketprofile](http://massagemag.com/targetmarketprofile).

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