

Increase your Success: Develop a Marketing Plan

Many counsellors and others in the healing arts begin a practice by marketing haphazardly, never really knowing what they are going to do next, or why. This is understandable, since most service professionals do not have an understanding of marketing and how a marketing plan can help them. However, marketing a practice without a plan can be a huge detriment to your success in private practice.

The idea of developing a marketing plan is often scary and overwhelming for most professionals. They often don't know where to start or what is involved in developing a plan, and therefore avoid it and/or convince themselves that they don't need one.

The fact is, however, that most successful businesses do have a plan. After all, if you don't know where you are going, how will you know how to get there?

The good news is that most coaches and other helping and healing professionals don't need a complicated marketing plan. I encourage my clients to make it easy on themselves and develop a simple plan that they know they will utilize. There is no point in having a plan that is not going to be used.

Below are 7 key areas to include in a basic marketing plan.

Core Elements of A Marketing Plan

1. Do Your Market Research

You will need to do some sort of analysis of your market. Who is providing services similar to you? Where are they located? What prices are they charging? Are there gaps in their services that you could perhaps fill?

Further, it's important that you assess the demand for your services. Are there people who want and need your services? Is there room in the market for another professional offering services like yours?

2. Select Your Target Audience(s)

Focusing on a specific target market is an important part of being successful in your business. Most professionals resist narrowing in on a specific market often because they fear they will close the door on other potential clients. In reality, however, the more narrow your market, the easier it is to get known for what you do, and ultimately, the more clients you will have.

Furthermore, many cities these days have an abundance of helping and healing professionals. If you are going to stand out from the crowd, you will have to market to a specific and unique population.

3. Identify Your Purpose and Goals

What are your goals for marketing your practice? You must be specific and quantify the results you want to achieve. For example, how many clients do you want to attract, and by when? How much income do you want to bring in? How many clients will you need to do this?

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Your goals must be concrete, realistic and measurable. They should include those that are short-term (3-12 months), as well as those that are long term (1-5 years). A marketing plan is intended to be fluid, so don't worry about setting goals too far into the future. They can be modified as necessary.

4. Create Your Marketing Message

Once you have your target market identified, you will need to write a marketing message--a statement of who you work with, what kinds of problem(s) you help solve, the benefits of your services, some proof (i.e. testimonials) that you can help clients solve their problem(s), and a call to action, inviting them to do something (e.g. to contact you for more information).

Many coaches, therapists and healing professionals are reluctant to be this specific about their services. However, unless you are very clear on your marketing message, you will likely find all aspects of marketing that follow this step challenging.

Clarity is key when it comes to marketing. It's important to be able to articulate your services both verbally and in writing if you want to communicate effectively with potential clients.

5. Choose Your Marketing Strategies & Develop a Time Line

Describe the marketing methods you will use to attract your clients. These can include networking, public speaking, writing articles, advertising, direct mail, or any method you use to let others know about your services.

Once you select your marketing strategies, the next step is to put them into a very specific plan of action. What exactly will you do, and by when? For example, one marketing strategy might be that you will send out a brochure, letter and/or flyer to all the people in your network announcing your practice, or reminding them of it. You would specify a date when you would do this, and then perhaps a date for following up with them via phone.

6. Establish Your Budget

Examine your finances carefully and conduct some research on what it will cost you for each marketing method that you choose. It is a good idea to keep your costs as low as possible by selecting marketing strategies that are free or low cost--especially when you are first starting your practice and funds may be low. Many of the best strategies to use when starting to market your practice are free.

You will have to budget for marketing materials i.e. brochure, website, etc. and perhaps for mailing costs if you plan on doing any direct mail strategies. Other expenses you may incur include costs for advertising, letterhead, envelopes, office rental, and costs of running your office.

7. Track and Modify Your Results

Keep track of the results of your marketing efforts so that you can evaluate and modify your strategies accordingly. This way, you will know exactly how effective they are at bringing in clients.

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If, after a while, your marketing strategies are not creating the results you desired, you will have to modify the strategies, or choose alternative methods.

A word of caution: Don't eliminate your strategies prematurely. Most marketing methods take time before they start generating results. Healing professionals often come to me after trying out a method that appeared to not work for them. Often, the problem wasn't an ineffective marketing strategy. Usually, they gave up too soon and/or implemented the strategy inadequately.

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Juliet Austin, MA, is a Marketing Coach, Consultant and Copywriter who assists counselors, therapists, coaches, alternative health professionals and other healing professionals in marketing their private practices. She helps her clients overcome resistances to marketing, implement no or low-cost marketing strategies, create compelling promotional materials, and write attention-grabbing website copy designed to get results.

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