

“Be yourself”

The key to all marketing is to be yourself. I know I’m pretty bold and some things I do are not for everyone. But everyone can be kind and smile—and a smile goes very far. A good friend of mine once told me, “Keep doing what you do. Do it right with honesty and integrity and you will succeed.”

So put that energy out there, and make it good, positive energy. If you are a sincere, good and hardworking person, good karma will come right back to you. I concentrate on being very positive and making my clients feel like they *matter* when they come in. It’s important that people know I really do care about their health. And, sure, you get people that aren’t very clean, or smell, or are very demanding. But they are someone’s son or daughter and they deserve care, just like my family deserves care.

“I missed a lot of my girls’ school activities...”

I got into massage therapy because of my children. I was working for FedEx, which my kids thought was cool because I drove a big truck. The difficulty was that I wasn’t done with my workday until the truck was empty. I missed a lot of my girls’ school activities and soccer games and that wasn’t so great. I was on the lookout for something that would allow me more time with my daughters.

At some point I came across an open house announcement for Professional School of Massage. “Huh,” I thought, “ I have big hands. And I’m tall so I’ll have a lot of leverage.” I went to the open house that weekend. Monday, I quit FedEx.

“Building a business is all about creating a presence.”

For me, building a business is all about creating a presence, all the time, every day. When you’re starting, you can’t do one session and then call it a day. When business is slow, I don’t leave the office. There is always something to do: call to find new chair massage locations, send this week’s postcards, check on ad rates, etc. Even if you only have five minutes downtime in your workday, you can still make one phone call or write one card to a client.

I guess I do a lot of marketing that other people would consider financially risky or take some approaches that are off the beaten path. If I think things through and am true to myself, I have nothing to lose. So I take big steps. For example, when I was finishing my schooling, I went through the Chiropractic section in the phone book, starting at “A.” I called everyone listed to see who was hiring. Somewhere in letter “G,” I found a job.

“I knocked on every door I could think of.”

To build my business, I knocked on every door I could think of. I had business cards made and handed them to everyone and every business that had any connection to the people I wanted to reach. I left my cards at gyms and nail salons. I handed them out to everyone on the street. I ran ads in small papers and church bulletins and coupons in Val-U-Pac. Running little ads or handing out cards don't make a huge impact all by themselves, but collectively they did and still do.

My car is lettered with my contact information, I have t-shirts that I give to my clients with my name and number on them and I have a website: www.donnakimmel.com.

Working hours, when I'm not in session, are pretty much spent making myself known every way possible. I don't stop; I'm always out there introducing myself to people and trying to find new ways to add to my solid customer base.

“People I haven't heard from in months call me up and we get to reconnect.”

Postcards are a big deal for keeping in touch with the clients I already have. I get the cards printed with my basic contact information on the back and then I handwrite a note, too. This lets me give personal attention to each of my clients and gives me flexibility to offer different specials and discounts to specific clients. Birthday greetings come with a \$10 off coupon, which makes people feel special. And I love reminding clients it's been a while since they've been in to see me—people I haven't heard from in months call me up and we get to reconnect.

“Let me tell you, “free” overcomes a lot of fear.”

People love free stuff. They love a deal. A tempting offer will make them more likely to remember you.

When I first started out I took a really huge step and gave massage work for free. Let me be clear: I wasn't just walking up to people and inviting them back to my place for a free massage. These were all people I was at least vaguely acquainted with. Perhaps my doctor's receptionist would mention she was feeling stressed or someone in my building would say something about their tension headaches. When they provided an opening, I asked if they had tried massage and, if they were interested, I would give them a free session.

There is a reluctance or fear in many people about going into the unknown—“What's she going to do to me in that room of hers?” Let me tell you, “free” overcomes a lot of fear. And the fact that they at least knew me a little helped, too. Free sessions generated a heck

of a lot of interest, new clients and more word of mouth referrals. Hard to complain about that.

I don't do free sessions so much anymore. Now I give a \$20 off coupon to every new client for their first session. As always, new folks are much more willing to give massage a try when they're getting a deal.

For my regular clients, I've been handing out \$10 gift cards to customers who refer new clients to me. Clients who bring new people to me are paying me a real compliment and deserve to be acknowledged and rewarded.

I find that when I consider the needs of my clients, my business and marketing planning get focused and clear. I find that responding to clients' needs, during sessions and in the times between sessions, gives my business a stronger presence.

“Water bottles are a lot harder to lose than a business card.”

For example, I started thinking about what people need immediately before, during or after a massage session. Water after a session was the first thing that popped into my mind. So I did a little research and decided to get water bottles printed with my name and number along with a list of “Top 10 Reasons You Should Get Massage.” Three hundred bottles from an online promotional product company cost around \$350 (about \$1.20 ea.). I give them to every new client after their first session. Water bottles are a lot harder to lose than a business card and, of course, they are a reminder of generosity and care.

I've given away about 900 water bottles so far and had them redesigned four times (different colors and lettering, etc.) so I don't get bored with them.

“What's the worst anyone can say: ‘No’?”

The more creative you are with developing client relationships, the better your business will be. TALK to people. ASK for what you need. I cannot stress this enough. Go to a gym and ask if you can get their mailing list so you can tell the members how you can benefit them. Talk to people in your office building or an office building near you. Who are the bosses, who are the event planners? Introduce yourself and ask if you can send them information about your work.

LISTEN to what your clients and friends say about upcoming events or parties. Ask if they would recommend you to the event planner or if they would like to hire you. What's the worst anyone can say: “No”? Well then you're no worse off than before you asked the question.

That being said, you have to take a good, hard look at your marketing plans before you carry them out. You learn as you go along to consider *everything* you can think of to help determine if your idea is a good one. When I call around for new places to set up my massage chair, I have to consider how far I'm willing to drive, how much time I'm willing to spend in organization and setup and what kind of people are going to be there. My safety is also a factor. Some places, while they have invited me to be there, are flat out unlikely to be worth it and I just have to decline.

“Success is whatever you want it to be.”

Quite honestly, any one of my marketing approaches has come out with good responses and contacts. To me, each and every person I meet is an asset to the growth of my business. If I don't generate any business doing a chair massage at a health clinic today, in a couple of days someone from the clinic will contact me about a session for themselves or someone else. My chair massage job at a local paper doesn't generate regular, scheduled appointments from the employees, but they know me and do refer me to friends.

My whole point is that if you have a passion for what you do, if you love what you do, you won't get in a rut and you won't get bored. Have fun out there. Mix it up. Do different things. Create a business you are totally into because you'll be putting a lot of hours in. Because I never hate being at work, I know I'm doing the right thing.

Success is whatever you want it to be. My success is not just in my business, but in the way I live my life and strive to be a good person.