

# Retailing is Not a Four-Letter Word



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by Lynda Solien-Wolfe, L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B.

I have visited spas all over the world since the early 1990s. Many of the spas sold products that helped me bring home the spa experience.

I'm sure you've all heard the to-sell-or-not-to-sell-product debate. Some people argue that selling products to massage clients is not only unprofessional, but it may cross the line into unethical behavior.

The ethics issue is raised because of the power differential that exists within the therapist-client relationship. Clients may feel obligated to purchase products out of a need to please the massage therapist, or because they see the therapist as the expert. This is something all massage therapists must be sensitive to; however, if you only sell or recommend products you believe will benefit your client, then selling product will be an ethical and natural solution to building a healthy massage business.

There is never room for used-car sales-like selling tactics before, during or after the massage session. And these tactics can hurt business.

I have personally experienced therapists using hard-sell tactics and felt they were trying to sell me products I did not need. I later learned the therapists were paid on commission.

On the other hand, I recently had a great purchasing experience with a therapist who conducted a thorough client intake and then recommended products based on my profile. She truly

educated me on the products that would best serve my needs. In that situation, I felt legitimate help was being extended to me, and I appreciated it.

Another time, when I needed massage therapy due to a car accident, my therapist recommended and sold home-care solutions that facilitated my recovery. These products never took away from the hands-on treatment provided by my therapist, but rather enhanced my outcomes and kept me coming back for more.

As a client, I experienced a positive benefit in regard to seeing products sold and recommended. I believed my therapist's goal was to help me reduce my pain and live a better life between treatments. So, not selling and recommending product could actually be a disservice to your clients.

I have visited spas all over the world since the early 1990s. Many of the spas sold products that helped me bring home the spa experience. Products offered for sale included the robe I wore during the visit, scents or products used in my treatment and the music that played during the visit. What a great way to bring home spa memories.

When I started my massage therapy practice, I added products for resell right from the start because I wanted to make it



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easy for my clients to have access to the professional products I used in my practice. I also wanted to add an additional revenue stream for my business. My first three product lines were: topical analgesics, aromatherapy and

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bath products. Topical analgesics were a natural choice, as most of my clients dealt with some level of pain. Aromatherapy has therapeutic benefits, while such bath products as lotion, salts and scrubs help extend the relaxing effect of the massage treatment. I knew my clients wanted and needed these products and knew they would buy them somewhere—so why not make them available from a respectable source that has clients' best interest, health and well-being at heart?

The products you sell should be an extension of your sessions. I recommend you offer products that are not commonly sold in department or drug stores. Unique products are wise retail choices for any massage therapy practice, but know your product. Being educated on the product's benefits and believing in the product will make it easy for you to recommend the product to clients.

Massage therapy trade shows are great venues to see the latest products and get firsthand experience on how they work. I like to try every product I sell in my practice, and try to have them at home to experiment and play with. My regular clients now get excited when I return from a convention or trade show, as they know I'll have new treatments and products to share.

Once you've decided what products to offer clients, you need to find the right source for buying the product:

- Look for the best price and quality.
- Evaluate factors, such as customer service and shipping and return policies.
- Look for companies that support you in your marketing and selling efforts. Choosing companies that back you up with tools, such as brochures, eye-attracting posters and point-of-sale displays, can make a big difference. I look for manufacturers and distributors that support the massage therapy profession and understand the specialized needs of the massage therapist.
- Select products with a profit margin built into them,

so you will benefit financially from all your education and product-marketing efforts.

- Look for products and companies that have worked to brand themselves and are consumer driven.

For example, the company I work for, a market-leading topical analgesics company, can drive business right to your door with its unique where-to-buy online referral program. When a consumer or potential client is looking for a resource to buy their

product, your business information will be made available to them.

With the growth of the massage industry, many new, exciting and innovative products for massage and self-care are being brought to the marketplace, and many products and tools have become popular with the massage consumer. Simply remember to believe, use, sample and sell (BUS) when thinking of retailing products in your massage therapy practice. The BUS will help you drive business to increase your profit. (BUS stands for: believe in the products, use the products, and sample and sell the products.)

By coupling the right products with great client service, retail will never be negatively perceived in your practice. Instead, it will be a welcome addition that supports a thriving and successful business. Remember, retailing, done right, will never be a four-letter word.

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