



# Retail Therapy

## Create Health in Clients & Your Practice

by Felicia Brown, L.M.B.T.

**S**elling retail to your massage clients is both ethical and beneficial—for therapist and client—and should be an important part of every therapist's practice.

Yet, stand in front of any group of massage therapists or massage therapy students and ask, "Why are you a massage therapist?" or "Why do you want to be a massage therapist?" and most people will respond with one or more of the following answers:

- "I had a chronic pain or health issue and massage was the only thing that helped me recover, feel better and get healthy."
- "I love making people feel good and helping them relax, get out of pain and improve their well-being and lives."
- "I've always been told I had a gift for touch and decided to make a career of it."
- "I want to make a difference in the world."

The crux of each of these answers is we are all called to help people through our touch and related knowledge about health, wellness, the body, posture, relaxation and related areas.

Another way to say this is we do massage to help people find solutions to their health, wellness or stress-management concerns and issues. We are there to meet their needs for creating a better, more relaxed, pain-free life. We want to serve others.

Regardless of *your* answer, selling retail is an integral part of our path and career.

In fact, selling retail products that help clients meet

their needs or improve their levels of pain, stress or overall well-being is a perfectly natural fit for most massage therapy businesses. Honestly, suggesting someone purchase a neck wrap that can be heated or chilled and used between visits is no different than making a referral to another practitioner, demonstrating self-care techniques (stretching, how to stand in alignment) or suggesting a client reschedule additional appointments to help him reach his desired goals.

In other branches of the spa-and-wellness industry, such as esthetics, selling products is an understood and expected part of the client experience. This is how it should be in the massage profession as well.

### Bridge the gap

Why is there so much confusion and so many differences of opinion among massage therapists when it comes to retailing?

It's sad to say, but unfortunately some massage schools, instructors and even state licensing boards insinuate selling retail is somehow detrimental to the client. Some people seem to think by suggesting products—even products that can help clients achieve their goals of wellness or relaxation, or lengthen the relaxation experience—massage therapists are somehow in conflict with the client's main interest of getting massage. Some people even go so far as to say selling retail is unethical and bad for a massage business.

However, unless a particular product is something so off-purpose from the client's goals or is out of the therapist's scope of practice or knowledge base—selling dietary or weight-loss supplements without adequate training or knowledge and appropriate licensure, for example—this assertion is way off-base.

In fact, if therapists are *not* selling products meant to enhance the client's results or wellness, they may actually be doing a disservice to their clients.

Think about it. When you use the word *massage* or *spa*, most people immediately think of a tranquil environment, relaxing and healing services, or they just envision a place to unwind and get away. Combined with that, they think about how great they will feel during a session. They will also want to find ways to extend the experience and effects of the session.

As such, it is also important to remember that most people come to a massage, spa or wellness business seeking solutions for pain relief, stress management or related issues. Someone who comes in for a massage might be suffering from a few aches and pains or general tension, or be recovering from an injury. Clients receiving body treatments like cellulite wraps, self-tanning or body polishes are probably preparing for something special, such as a big event or trip.

When clients have these services done at a reputable clinic, practice or spa business, they expect to be treated by knowledgeable professionals who can not only provide treatments but also make educated suggestions about how to continue to improve their condition after they leave. For this reason, it is vital that massage professionals are prepared to meet those client needs with a proper array of at-home products for body and mind.

## Satisfaction and service

It is also extremely important for massage therapists to think of the retail area as a powerful contributor to a business' financial health, not just in terms of retail revenues but also in client results, retention, satisfaction and service.

I suggest you take a moment before continuing to read this article to do this exercise:

**1.** Make a list of products you could possibly suggest to your clients, in terms of home care, that might have a logical retail component.

## Meet client needs with a proper array of at-home products for body and mind.

**2.** If you are uncomfortable thinking of these as items to sell, begin by thinking of what you would give your clients to take home if you could do so at no cost to them.

**3.** Think only of products that are within your scope of practice, such as items that relate to the body, including body-care, aromatherapy and self-massage products; items that are considered more as gift items, including CDs, candles and boxed gift packs; or reference materials that relate to the work you do, including DVDs and books.

Once you have this list, you will see there are many products your clients can use to support their self-care between sessions—and by offering such products in your practice, you will better support your clients' health.

## How to sell retail products

Let's take a look at a few possible scenarios in which a therapist can ethically sell products to a client, as well as



AFRICA STUDIO/ADOBE STOCK

# Be wary of selling handmade products, oils and lotions that are not regulated or properly insured against client injury or reactions.

some situations in which retail sales might not be such a good idea.

### Professional products

During a massage, you use a variety of professional-grade products, including massage therapy oil or lotion, topical analgesics, heat or cooling packs, aromatherapy, foot lotion, eye pillows and so on. You may also play CDs

or downloadable music tracks, burn candles or use “positive thought cards” on your table.

Unless otherwise stated by a product manufacturer, each of these products—if allowable in your scope of practice—is a logical and

ethical fit for your retail offerings. And as the client has already “tested them” in the treatment room, they are already aware of the general benefits or effects and should be easy to suggest or sell.

### Home-care and relaxation tools

In addition to items used in a massage, there may be some logical items to carry in your practice. For example, if you suggest yoga or stretching as a part of home care, DVDs that show common stretches you recommend make perfect sense.

For people who need pain relief between visits, there are a variety of home-care massage tools that, while not used in a typical massage, are a great choice for clients to use on themselves when they do not have time or funds for a massage appointment.



Read “Retail Success: How to Choose Products,” by Felicia Hayes, at [massagemag.com/chooseproducts](http://massagemag.com/chooseproducts).

### Gifts and general wellness

Depending on your type of client and practice, there are other items that can be an ethical fit for your business, such as clothing, locally made crafts, and books, DVDs and CDs on topics including meditation, holistic health and natural healing. The keys are understanding your clients’ needs and staying within your scope of practice.



### Gray areas

Depending on licensure and what is allowable in your business, some product-related gray areas to avoid or to bring on only with diligent research include makeup, skin-care products and hair-care products. This includes many of the multilevel or direct marketing products out there.

Just because the general public is able to sell them does not mean doing so while licensed as a massage therapist is ethical or suggested.

### No-nos

Of course, you may only offer products that are within your scope of practice as a massage therapist or other licensed specialty.

Stay away from resale products from eBay or other secondhand networks, as well as products possibly diverted from their intended markets or distributors.

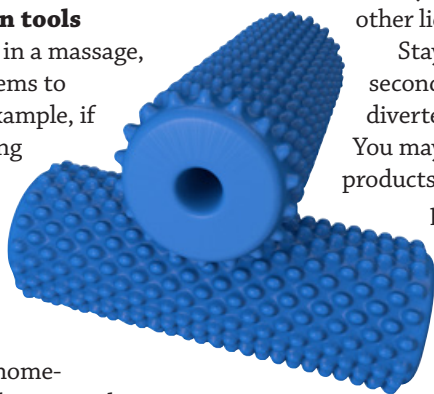
You may also want to be wary of selling handmade products, oils and lotions that are not regulated or properly insured against client injury or reactions, as there is little to no protection for you if a client has an incident.

### Many options

In addition to selling retail products, you can explore other options for providing clients with the home-care choices they need, in ways that are convenient for them and beneficial for you:

### Include with a service or package purchase

Choose something that has a high perceived value but is not too expensive to give away with a client’s first massage, such as an analgesic. If you offer multiple services or packages, you might include a corresponding





product, such as a take-home body polish or moisturizer, that is actually charged as a part of the purchase price of the package.

#### **Include with gift certificate purchases**

Whether a client purchases online gift certificates through your website or at your office or business, including some kind of retail product with the purchase by increasing the price slightly can increase your gift certificate sales.

For example, if your average gift certificate sale is \$50 and you want to increase that amount to \$75, include a free gift with purchase, such as an aromatherapy neck wrap.

#### **Give away as a thank-you or loyalty gift**

At the end of the year or during a client appreciation week, you can give clients a retail gift to thank them for their business. Ideally, this is something you carry in stock in case they want to get more as they use up what you gave them or to purchase for a friend.



## **Improved results**

Selling the right retail products for the right reasons will provide clients with what they really want: solutions to their problems.

By making it easy for your clients to buy those items, you are doing just that and helping them improve their overall level of satisfaction, results and well-being. As a bonus, selling retail will benefit your bottom line and the health of your business.

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Read "Create a Script to Improve Sales Communication with Clients," by Gael Wood, at [massagemag.com/improvesales](http://massagemag.com/improvesales).

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