



Pause for thought: Websites that work

By Trevor Eddolls

Most hypnotherapists are heavily involved with marketing, and their website is the biggest 'shop window' they have for potential customers into their business and their way of working. In this article I want to look at some considerations when creating a website.

Let me start by telling you a story and asking you a question. Let's imagine that there are two young girls playing together – Alice and Betty. Alice has a basket with a red ball in it. Betty has a box with a lid on it. Now, let's suppose that Alice goes out of the room and Betty takes the red ball from Alice's basket and puts it inside her box and shuts the lid. Now here's the question: where would Alice start to look for her ball? Most people would think that Alice would start looking where she last saw her ball (i.e. the basket) and then widen the search. This is an example of the Theory of Mind (ToM), which is the idea that other people have minds and can think about things separately from us.

According to Wikipedia, theory of mind is the ability to attribute mental states – beliefs, intents, desires, emotions, knowledge, etc. – to oneself, and to others, and to understand that others have beliefs, desires, intentions, and perspectives that are different from one's own. Theory of mind is crucial for everyday social interactions and is used when analysing, judging, and inferring others' behaviours. So, what's that got to do with websites and hypnotherapists? Well, as stated above, most hypnotherapists work on their own and are responsible for the content on their website. All too often, small businesses' websites are all about the business and how good it is and how highly trained the hypnotherapist is, and the pages are organized along the lines the business owner thinks are logical, and the language used on the pages is very technical. And those sites wonder why ordinary people don't visit their websites very often – and if they do, those people don't stay very long, and don't book an initial consultation.

Why theory of mind is important is because you need to think what your potential customers/clients want from your website, not what you want to tell them. Their model of the world may be different from yours and so the current organization of your website pages may not make logical sense to them. It should. When you design your website, or when you review your existing website, you should imagine what your potential customer is thinking. When you're planning the navigation, think about it from the customer's perspective. This is called persona-based navigation. And you will have different types of customers, so you will need to plan the navigation for these different personas. The idea is to avoid friction or pain points – pages or forms where the customer isn't quite sure what to do or what information you want from them. In some cases, you could possibly prepopulate forms or at least you can make it totally clear

what format you want them to enter information, such as dates etc. (in fact, using drop-downs for this is so much better).

When building or reviewing your website, you need to keep in mind three things:

- What you want people to know.
- What you want them to remember.
- What you want them to do (calls to action).

And when you write the content for a webpage, you want to keep the pyramid model in mind. So, you have very few words at the top saying what the page is all about. That way, if the information is not relevant to the potential client, they can search elsewhere. They don't have to read lots of text before reaching that conclusion. Below that top text you have some more detailed information – which will clarify that they are on the right page and getting some information that's useful to them. And below that, you have all the details that interested customers may need. It's a bit like writing a press release. People should realize right at the start whether they are on the right page or not.

Interestingly, if you're talking to a group of people about your website and your company, you could use Kahoot (kahoot.com) for a bit of fun. Kahoot describes itself as a game-based learning and trivia platform used in classrooms, offices, and social settings. You can sign up and create a quiz about your hypnotherapy business. People can play along on their phones or tablets (kahoot.it). You can put the questions up on a screen and they need to be quick to press an answer. The app will tell them who is the fastest and their position in the order of speediest respondents. It's a fun and engaging way to give potential customers information about your company and what you do.

So, rather than thinking about what you need to tell customers and using the language you are familiar with, visualize your potential customer's journey through your website and make it as easy as possible for them to find the information they need and to book an initial consultation with you!



Brainbox: The benefits of nature

By Trevor Eddolls

Wherever you or your clients spend time, i.e. the environment people are in, affects their mood, how stressed they feel, and how well their nervous, endocrine, and immune systems work. Being in the countryside, or even simply looking at pictures of nature, can help to reduce a person's stress, fear, and anger, and increase more pleasant feelings. It might even help a person to live longer.

A study conducted by the University of Derby and The Wildlife Trusts tried to measure the impact of the "30 Days Wild" campaign, run by the charity. The study found that there was a significant increase in people's health, happiness, connection to nature, and active nature behaviours, such as feeding the birds and planting flowers for bees. And this lasted for months after the challenge had been completed.

Note: "30 Days Wild" encourages people to perform Random Acts of Wildness in the countryside near them. It involves small actions (like stopping to smell a flower on the way to the shops or taking a moment to watch squabbling sparrows in a hedge) to big things (like giving up single-use plastics for a month or writing to your MP about why nature matters). It's all about getting people to reconnect with the natural world around them and doing a little bit of good for wildlife.

A fascinating 2009 study found that the closer someone lived to a green space or nature area, the healthier that person was likely to be. In addition, people living close to parks, nature reserves, or wooded areas, were less likely to suffer from anxiety or depression.

Interestingly, a 2007 study found that children who spent at least two hours a day outside were four times less likely to be near-sighted.

One study of patients recovering from gall bladder operations conducted by Robert Ulrich, found that patients who could see trees out of the window tolerated pain better and spent less time in hospital.

"...noticing nature increases general happiness and well-being..."

A study in Mind found that 95% of people interviewed said that spending time outside improved their mood – helping them change from being anxious, depressed, or stressed to feeling calmer and more balanced.

Andrea Taylor and Frances Kuo found that children with ADHD experienced a significant reduction in symptoms after they participated in activities in green settings. All the activities that the children later took part in were affected, from playing basketball to reading a book. The research also found that the greener the settings were, the greater the effect produced was.

Studies by Kuo and Coley at the Human-Environment Research Lab, found that time spent in nature connects us to each other and the larger world. A study at the University of Illinois found that residents in Chicago public housing who had trees and green space around their building reported knowing more people, having stronger feelings of unity with neighbours, being more concerned with helping and supporting each other, and having stronger feelings of belonging than residents in buildings without trees. Plus, for people living near trees and green spaces, there was a reduced risk of street crime, lower levels of violence and aggression between domestic partners, and a better capacity to cope with life's demands, especially the stresses of living in poverty.

Studies using fMRI machines to measure brain activity found that when participants viewed nature scenes, the parts of the brain associated with empathy and love lit up, but when they viewed urban scenes, the parts of the brain associated with fear and anxiety were activated.

Park et al (2010), found that hiking or resting in a forest measurably lowered cortisol rates, heart rates, and blood pressure. Research also found that adults who looked at a

tree for one minute were more generous afterwards than adults who looked at a building.

A recent report published this year by White et al found that spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and well-being. It doesn't say whether that's what healthier people do, or whether doing it makes you healthier. It concludes 30 minutes is good, but 2 hours is better. Going to a park is good, but marine environments and places with mountains seem to be even better. The two hours can be made up of several short visits or one long one. Similarly, Bratman (2015) found a reduction in negative rumination when people spent time in a natural environment.

How does being in nature help?

So, why should being outside be of benefit? It could be that being outside in the sunshine helps the body to make more vitamin D. Vitamin D deficiency has been linked to various types of cancer and obesity, as well as mental health disorders and other health problems.

It could be that we feel better because people naturally do more exercise outside, whether that's simply walking or more strenuous activities. Or perhaps it's just that the air is less polluted in the countryside. Or is it the presence of negative ions? Columbia University found that people with winter and chronic depression got as much benefit using negative ion generators as antidepressants. Being in nature may also provide exposure to healthy bacteria that benefit the immune system and reduce inflammation. Japanese researchers have discovered the benefit of breathing phytoncides like α -pinene and limonene, which are antimicrobial volatile organic compounds emitted from trees. Perhaps it could also be that when you're outside in a natural environment, your prefrontal cortex becomes less



active, perhaps quietening an overly-busy mind. Also, when surrounded by nature, the brain creates more alpha waves, which are associated with being calm and relaxed. People may feel more energized and enthusiastic.

What should you do?

Researchers from the University of East Anglia looked at data from over 140 studies involving over 290 million people and concluded that exposure to greenspace (which they defined as “open, undeveloped land with natural vegetation as well as urban greenspaces, which included urban parks and street greenery”) reduces the risk of Type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, premature death, preterm birth, stress, and high blood pressure, among other benefits. And, it also increases sleep duration. In fact, researchers from University of British Columbia have found that just noticing nature increases general happiness and well-being.

In Japan, ‘forest bathing’ (shinrin yoku) is becoming very popular – so popular, that people are now doing it in the UK, USA, Spain, France, Germany, and Australia. According to the Health and Safety Executive, over 11 million working days are lost every year due to stress. With numbers like that, it’s no wonder people are turning to forest-bathing (sometimes called ecotherapy) as a solution. Forest bathing is simply spending time in woodland in order to reduce stress and feel a sense of well-being. It draws on the therapeutic powers of nature and connects people with the natural environment.

To get the most from forest bathing, firstly, leave your phone and other devices switched off and out of sight. Then, find a woodland area and walk slowly and randomly through it. Take your time and savour the sounds, smells, and sights of nature. Let nature in through all your senses. Take deep breaths. Allow yourself to lie on the ground, if you feel like it.

Certainly, if the countryside could be bottled because of its positive effects, there would be plenty of people wanting a dose of that medication. For us as hypnotherapists, we should recognize the benefits of being immersed in nature so that we are feeling relaxed and calm when we see our clients. Remember the old saying about not being able to pour from an empty cup. And as we generally encourage our clients to engage in more positive activities, we can certainly suggest shinrin yoku, as being in nature can help everyone to feel less stressed, anxious or angry.

When did you last connect with nature?

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