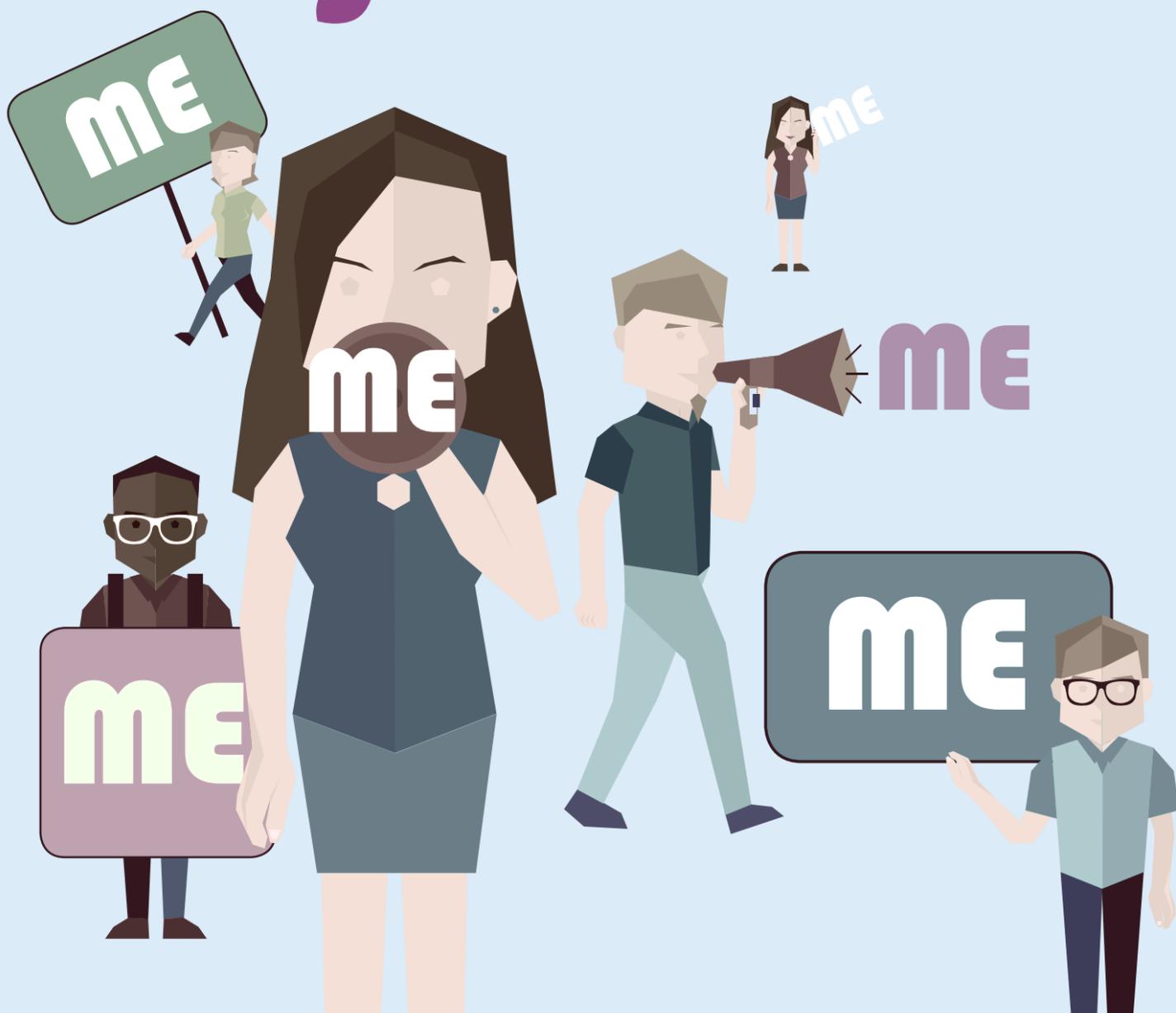


Marketing yourself



If you want to make senior staff aware of the value you add to their business or promote your practice to new customers, you will need skills in promotion and marketing. **Ruth Clowes** explains how best to go about raising your profile

How confident would you feel explaining the value of workplace counselling to a senior member of staff in your organisation? How would you go about approaching a new customer for work? How can you network and use local media to raise the profile of your work?

These questions might appear intimidating at first glance. Many workplace counsellors are uncomfortable with the idea of promoting their work to existing and potential organisations, or feel that doing so will be time-consuming or stressful. However, a few useful lessons from the fields of marketing and the media can help you dramatically increase your confidence, your profile and improve both your job security and employability in the process.

This article looks at how to go about promoting your work in a way that is practical, effective and time-efficient. Think of what follows as a 'communications toolkit' of guidance, tips from the professionals and examples of good practice to help you integrate self-promotion into your everyday activities or even kick-start your own marketing and media campaign.

Raising the profile of your work with current customers

If you are working as an in-house counsellor, your biggest challenge may be demonstrating your value to senior members of staff, something which is of vital importance. If senior staff members aren't aware of the breadth of the services you provide and the many benefits that your work brings to their

company, they won't value it. This can lead to your contribution being overlooked, unappreciated and judged as an indulgent 'nice to have' add-on at best, and at worst as a waste of money. The consequences of this kind of attitude among decision makers during times of restructuring or financial pressure are obvious.

I spoke to Rick Hughes, Lead Advisor for BACP Workplace, who offered the following five key pieces of advice to counsellors wishing to promote what they do within the company they work for:

1 Meet with senior staff members and explain what you do and the difference you make

Recruit some ambassadors from senior management who have an interest in mental health and can act as champions for you/your service and your work. Put effort into maintaining these contacts: provide them with a 'cheat sheet' of key statistics and make sure they know that their effort and time are valued.

2 Provide an accessible 'face' for your service

Organise some free lunchtime information seminars about what you/your service offer(s), get involved with health promotion and awareness-raising days or collaborate with your company's occupational health staff to champion mental health policies.

3 Make sure you have an online presence on your customer's intranet site

Update this regularly with tips and advice on how to tackle common problems – you could

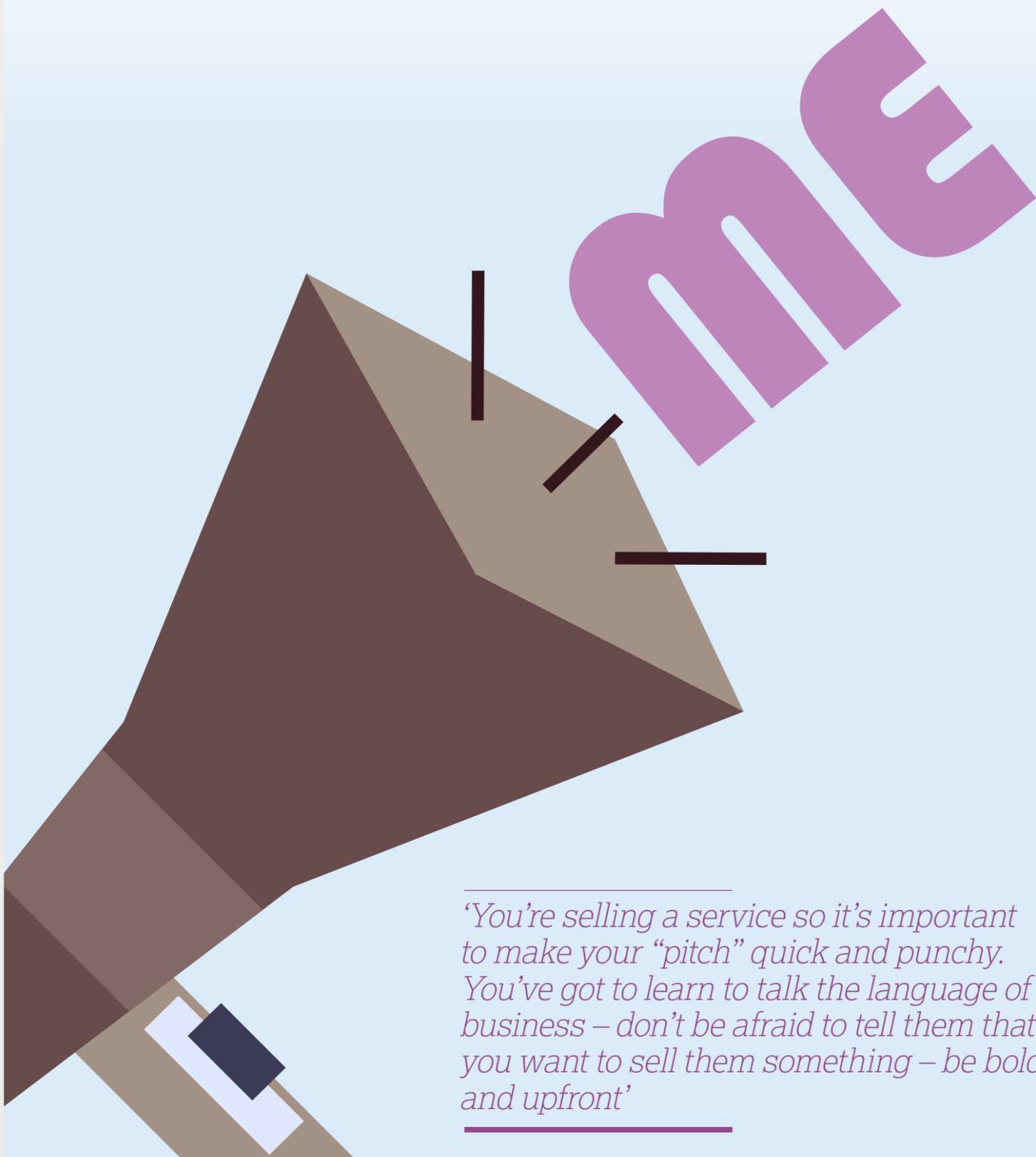
take some ideas from BACP's press releases¹ aimed at lifestyle, and workplace publications. Back this guidance up with further information about your counselling service, and how it can help. Put effort into keeping these pages up to date and reflective of the full range of work you do – this is a valuable resource to point people to who want to find out more about your work.

4 Use relevant statistics and key messages

There is considerable evidence to demonstrate that having an in-house counselling service in a workplace is beneficial, not just to the wellbeing of individual staff members, but also from a financial point of view. A useful and concise overview of these arguments can be found in BACP's *Guidelines for Counselling in the Workplace*.² Arm yourself with this information, as well as with specific metrics relevant to the individual workplace, so that you can effectively demonstrate your contribution.

5 Highlight the range of services you provide

This is particularly important if you work as an 'ad-hoc' counsellor for a number of businesses or if you're looking to increase the amount of work you do for an existing customer. Make sure that you are actively promoting the additional services you are able to provide. Do you have skills in executive or life coaching, stress management, mediation or critical incident management? Make your customer aware of these services and the additional value they could bring to the workplace.



message

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Branching out: promoting your service to potential new customers

If you provide workplace counselling to more than one customer and you’re looking to promote your services to other businesses in the local area, this might seem an intimidating task. A good starting point is to build on existing relationships with businesses in the area – word of mouth is a powerful tool and can open up all sorts of opportunities. The additional tips below form an action plan for promoting your work to new customers:

- **Build your online reputation**

Your CV, website, and any social media channels you use should create a cohesive and consistent impression of your work. Make sure that you advertise the full range of services you’re able to provide and present it in a clear, accessible way. If you lack technical skills, BACP’s IT team can set up and maintain your website for you.³ Investing some time and effort into this at an early stage will give you a firm foundation, allowing you to make speculative enquiries or to respond quickly to new opportunities.

- **Keep your finger on the pulse**

Stay up to date with what’s happening in the local business world and look for opportunities to get in touch with new businesses. If a company has recently made a lot of staff redundant, for example, or is in the middle of a restructure, it could be an excellent opportunity to approach them and explain how you could support staff during

the transition, and the benefits this could bring in terms of absence reduction, staff retention and morale.

- **Be ‘businesslike’**

Sharon McCormick’s experience in HR gave her a unique business-focused insight into how and why companies employ counselling services. This insider knowledge was invaluable when she came to set up her own EAP, The Listening Centre,⁴ which now provides counselling services to a large number of customers throughout the Midlands. I asked Sharon what her advice would be to people wishing to identify and approach potential new customers. She told me: ‘It is so important to have an organised and businesslike approach. Recognise that you are running a business and selling a service and keep these facts in mind at all times.’

- **Identify your audience**

‘The first step is to work out your target audience,’ Sharon advises. ‘What size of business will you be approaching and in which sectors?’ When you are building your list of companies to approach, make use of all the resources that are available to you. One way of searching for suitable local businesses is through the internet, but don’t discount more old-school methods. Your local library holds a public record of every local business, complete with contact details – a free resource which is easy to access and could save you lots of time trawling the web.

- **Home in on the decision makers**

When you’ve got your ‘database’ of businesses, the next step is to decide exactly who to call, as Sharon explains: ‘Work out who within the company is the chief decision maker when it comes to recruiting external suppliers – this will probably be the head of HR or similar. Find out their direct line number so you can get straight through to them – if you call the main switchboard you may not be able to get past the receptionist or PA.’

- **Begin your telemarketing campaign**

When it comes to the call itself, the key is to keep things straightforward, professional and concise. Explain why you are calling, what it is you are able to offer, and how it can benefit their business (another occasion when having the odd statistic up your sleeve might be useful). Sharon supports the direct approach: ‘You’re selling a service, so it’s important to make your “pitch” quick and punchy. You’ve got to learn to talk the language of business – don’t be afraid to tell them that you want to sell them something – be bold and upfront.’

- **Be persistent**

It’s at this point that being a bit thick-skinned and persistent will pay dividends. Inevitably, for every success you achieve, you will receive dozens of knock-backs. The secret is to remain positive in the face of rejection and to put time and effort into maintaining relationships with those contacts who have the potential to become

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future customers. Sharon says that she called one local business every three months for the best part of two years until they signed a contract. That business is now her biggest customer – proof that being persistent works.

• **Remain professional to seal the deal**

By the time you have secured an initial meeting with a potential new customer much of the hard work has already been done. Your contact has probably already decided that they want to employ a counsellor; you now need to capitalise on your hard work so far and make sure they choose you over another provider.

For the meeting itself, it's once again about knowing your audience and making a professional business case for your service. Do a bit of reading on how to approach this sort of scenario – a book like *The Pocket Pitching Bible*⁵ will be an excellent investment. By arming yourself with this advice, and a series of succinct messages which highlight the benefits of the service you're offering, you are giving

yourself every chance of securing a valuable new contract.

Going further: promotion through the media and beyond

The idea of promoting your work through local press and radio may seem a formidable prospect, but a little time and effort in this area can reap dividends. Research suggests that local newspapers are the most widely read print medium in Britain,⁶ and are more than twice as trusted as any other. With local media websites attracting 62 million unique users every week and local blogs and social media pages becoming increasingly trusted resources, the potential rewards available in this area are obvious.

It is a good idea to start off small and build up to bigger things. While working with the media can be rewarding, it can also be time-consuming. Think about how much time and effort you have to put into this area of promotion and be prepared to be patient and take a long-term approach. The following tips can be used in order as your confidence increases:

• **Get your name out there**

Getting involved in local business events and meet-ups in your area is a great way of meeting fellow business professionals and spreading the word about your work and how it could benefit them. Word of mouth is a powerful tool and by regularly getting your name (and your business card) out there you make sure that you're top of the list when businesses are looking to expand or change their existing counselling provision.

• **Be social**

Get in touch with local bloggers and those who run websites and social media pages devoted to local events, businesses or lifestyle news. Offer to write a short article about a workplace issue, such as coping with difficult colleagues or settling into a new job. You don't have to be an accomplished writer to do this – it's more about passing on your expertise in the form of a series of tips and handy hints. People will find it useful and it gives you an opportunity to mention your business. If you have the time, you could go on to include a blog page on your own website.

• **Become a spokesperson**

Going one step further than this, consider contacting local newspapers and radio stations and offering your services as a spokesperson on the subject of workplace wellbeing. Media outlets generally have a network of spokespeople with different areas of expertise who they contact on an ad hoc basis to comment on breaking news. By responding quickly and appropriately to requests, you'll soon become a valuable contact to a busy journalist. The Media team at BACP can support you in your role with advice on interview techniques and employing key messages. As with the other points on the list, media activity can raise your profile and credibility with current and potential customers.

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• **Help is at hand**

If the idea of promoting your service is a little daunting, the good news is that you don't have to go it alone. BACP's Professional Development Days and CPD courses⁷ offer regular opportunities to improve your marketing skills. There are myriad online resources available too – many of which can be accessed free of charge, such as the hugely popular website BusinessZone.co.uk, which offers a whole host of advice to small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Finally, don't forget to take advantage of your own professional networks – keep in regular touch with other BACP Workplace members to share successful strategies and ideas for new initiatives. Similarly, social media networks like LinkedIn and Twitter can be powerful forums for learning and getting speedy advice. If you're just getting started on social media, or are thinking of using them to promote your work, rather than simply as a forum for learning and connecting with fellow professionals, I suggest a bit of background reading before you dive in. *The Beginner's Guide to Social Media*⁸ is a straightforward, jargon-free guide to getting started.

The idea of 'self-promotion' may not feel like natural territory for you as a counsellor, but the advantages of generating new business in the years ahead, and sustaining it, are great incentives. Start small, think local, be patient and you'll soon develop your own unique way of promoting your work that is both authentic and hugely beneficial.

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