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Smart Business: Weathering Economic Downturn, Part One

It is mid-July and summer is in full swing. Regular clients are taking vacations and missing standing appointments. As the weather heats up, business gets a bit slower. You are probably used to this summer slowdown; however, you might not be accustomed to the pace of summer in a poor economic environment. Take advantage of these slower months to put business practices in place that will increase your income and bring in new clients.

Make your services more accessible

Accept credit cards. For better or worse, these are still the days of credit. Many people do not even carry their checkbooks with them anymore, let alone enough cash to pay for a treatment. Although implementing a system to accept credit cards will cost you more, it might actually help you bring in and retain customers whose cash flow might be a bit slower at the moment. Shop around for the best credit card processing rates, not only at banks but also at places

like Costco that offer the service at reduced rates.

Sell packages. You might look at a package deal and think that you are losing money because, for example, you are only getting paid for three treatments instead of four. The other side of the coin, however, is that you are guaranteed payment up front for three sessions - three sessions you might not have booked otherwise. You've also potentially gained a new long-term client or enhanced your relationship with a current customer. Apart from "buy two, get one free" and those kinds of packages, think about how you can create packages that focus on specific issues, perhaps even combining acupuncture and herbs in the price. People are often more willing to commit to treatment when they know at the outset how much it might cost them and how many treatments it will likely take to address their problems.

Market more effectively

Get people talking. Encourage your clients to refer their friends by giving them a tangible incentive.



Soak the dried red dates in warm water for 30 minutes before you wash & cook with them.

COOKING WITH HONG ZAO

Steamed Chicken and Red Dates

- 1/2 lb chicken breast or lean pork tenderloin, sliced
- 1/3 c Chinese dried mushroom (pre-soaked & sliced)
- 1/4 c dried red dates (sliced or halved), pre-soaked
- 3 slices ginger
- 1 t Chinese oyster sauce
- 1/2 t cooking wine
- 1/4 t sugar
- 1/2 t cornstarch

Marinate the meat with the oyster sauce, wine, sugar & corn starch for 5 minutes. Then mix the mushroom, ginger & red dates in with the chicken. Put everything into a shallow dish & steam for 15 minutes or until cooked.

Serves 2-3 people.

Offering your clients a specific amount off (percentage or fixed dollar amount) on their next treatment when a friend of theirs comes to see you for a paid service is a great way to not only show appreciation for your current clients but to hopefully grow your business.

Create a professional network. Develop partnerships with other local businesses in related fields. Foster relationships with health food stores, chiropractors, gyms, masseuses, etc. to establish a network of health services that cross-refer. Instead of just dropping your fliers off quietly, set up an appointment to talk face-to-face so that you will be the first person they think of when a customer comes in wanting to try acupuncture. You, in turn, may refer your clients to a particular store for their groceries or vitamins or to a chiropractor after a back injury. Be sure to develop these relationships with people you trust and believe do good, healing work.

Head to the net. These days many people look to the internet when they are searching for service providers. You might think web ads are expensive,

and they certainly can be. With pay-per-click ads, however, you can choose how much money you want to spend and to whom the ad is shown. Target people only in your location and your market. You are able to evaluate whether your ad is drawing in the right people based upon how many leads you get and adjust accordingly. Don't have a website? Post your phone number. Consider getting an 800 number or a number within your area code that has letters associated with the numbers that relate to your business and are easy to remember.

Make sure you are listed in localized searches through [Google](#) and [Yahoo](#). You can publicize your business, make it show up on maps, highlight specific services and even generate coupons to lure in customers. Encourage your current clients to post reviews on website like Yelp and Citysearch or whatever might be popular user-generated search engines in your area.

Next month we'll have more tips on how to tailor your products and services to increase your earnings, as well as where to save money without hurting your business.

Recipes: Hong Zao



Visit any Chinese market or herb store and you will notice that jujubes, also known as Chinese dates, are abundant. Known for tonifying the qi and nourishing the blood, the jujube also moderates harsh qualities of other herbs.

How to look for & prepare the dried red dates

There are two kinds of dried red dates on the market. One is pitted already, the other one is still with a stone. It is better to buy the ones that are pitted, otherwise you have to take out the stone from each one. In the third edition of Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica, the authors suggest looking for dates with "full, thick, light red fruit of uniform size with a sweet taste and small seeds."

Beef soup with dried dates

(excellent for winter or people with anemia)

- 1lb. beef shank, cubed (may replace with pork or chicken if preferred)
- ½ cup dried red dates (sliced, halves or whole, however preferred)
- 3-4 thinly sliced pieces ginger (optional)
- 6 cups cold water

Put all the ingredients into a medium size pot. Cook on high until boiled. Then turn the temperature to medium low. Cook for 1 & half hour until only 2 or 3 cups of soup left. *Serves 2-3 people.*

Dried dates are also delicious & healthy when eaten uncooked.

Like other dried fruits, just wash them & enjoy.

Pre-soaking is not necessary.

Dried red dates dessert with lotus seed

- ½ cup dried red dates (pitted & halved)
- ¼ cup lotus seed (pre-soaked for half an hour)
- 2 pieces white mushroom (optional)
- 6 cups water
- ⅓ cup sugar or to taste

Soak the white mushroom for a half-hour until soft. It will expand a few times its size. Trim & clean the bottom of the mushrooms. Separate it into a few small pieces. Put all the ingredients into a medium sized pot & bring to boil on high heat. Then turn to medium heat & cook for 1 hour until the lotus seed is soft. Add the sugar into the soup. You may serve it hot, but the dessert is especially delicious when served cold after chilling in the refrigerator. This dessert is good without the white mushroom as well. *Serves 3-4 people.*

Dried red dates tea

Put ½ cup of pitted & roughly chopped dried red dates into 2 cups of water. Cook with medium heat until 1 cup of tea left.
Serve hot or iced.

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