

Get a Life

www.getalife.net.au

February 2003

Get a Life is a privately owned health advisory service for people wishing to manage their own health. It is particularly orientated towards assisting people with chronic health conditions and when they have failed to find relief from mainstream medicine and alternative therapies.

Get a Life has been associated with Joining Forces, a not-for-profit group providing information to those suffering from cancer or chronic degenerative diseases based on nutritional healing [www.entrypoint.to/joining-forces]

Get a Life commenced in 1997 and is a one person operation.

We talked to Kathryn Alexander, owner, in Maleny located in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland of South-East Queensland, an hour drive north of Brisbane.

Who are your customers?

Consultations to the general public account for about 70% of my activity with the remaining business involving book sales to health food shops, book stores and health practitioners.

Do you have an established customer base?

Yes.

Are you trying to attract new customers?

Yes.

How will they benefit from your service?

I teach people self management of their health through ongoing consultations involving face to face, telephone and internet communication. Customers receive advice from articles on the Web site, from my books and CD sales. I have produced 'Principles of Detoxification' on a CD which is the equivalent of two audio tapes. I also run a number of practical workshops around Australia.

Who are your competitors?

There are many practitioners in this field but I believe my service is unique and so competition is not really an issue.

How have you been successful?

Many chronically ill people cannot resolve their health issues through conventional or standard alternative means. I offer them another way.

How do you use digital technology in your organisation?

I use a digital mobile telephone as I am often on the move. I have a credit card terminal and do not require a PABX.

I have one desktop computer which I think runs Windows XP. I use Microsoft Word, Publisher, Adobe Acrobat Reader and Writer, Indesign and AveryPro for labels. I use PowerPoint in my workshops.

I have a modem connection to the Internet. Once wireless broadband is available through the Maleny Enterprise Network Association Inc (MENA), I intend to have it installed. I believe trials of this service are being set up now. I use online banking facilities for account balances and internal transfers only. I pay suppliers by cheque.

Do you use e-mail?

I use e-mail all the time.

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Do you use a regular e-mail newsletter?

No, but I irregularly put out one about three times a year.

Have you ever had problems with viruses?

Yes, but not often. About a year ago the computer required major surgery following a virus attack.

What measures do you take?

I use Norton Antivirus but it did not seem to protect me a year ago.

How often do you back up your files?

I have an auto backup system and I burn copies to CD quarterly.

Any other equipment?

I have a fax, scanner and digital camera. The camera is used for taking digital images for the Web site and books. I use the scanner to send information to people.

Do you have a Web site?

Yes, it was set up in 1997.

Do you have or are you connected to an Intranet?

No.

Do you use an Extranet?

Yes, I have access to medical information sites.

What is your Web site for?

To deliver information and promote my products and services.

Is this a development of your existing business or a new venture?

The Web site was developed simultaneous to the start of the business.

Do you have an on-line audience?

Yes, customers, suppliers and interested people.

Do you host internally or externally

Externally in Brisbane but I intend to move it to MENA in a few weeks.

Do you allow transactions on your site?

Not currently, but this is soon to change. Once the Web site is hosted at MENA, an online sales facility will be added to the site. Up until now customers have been able to source my products and services online but the financial transaction is manual.

Do you collect information with forms?

No, but I did in the past when I offered a personalised online consultation. A customer using this service would receive a 20 page report after completing a lengthy online form. I discontinued this service in 2001 due to a glitch in the system. Customers would often get 12 pages of generic information only.

How do you update the content of your site?

Up until now I had to use a local contractor to update the site. The new site hosted at MENA operates under Zoep and will allow me to directly update the site.

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How do you promote your site?

I use search engines and the site is promoted on all printed material, books and at workshops.

How much does it cost to promote your site?

The extra cost is negligible.

Do you ask customers how to improve your site?

No.

Do you have an existing customer database?

Yes, I keep it in Microsoft Word as I can manage the information without assistance.

Does your Web site capture new customer information?

No, I collect the information only when I receive e-mails.

Are customers concerned about security for credit cards?

Yes, but in my experience it is only Americans that show the greatest concern.

How do you deal with this concern?

I get customers to post, fax or separately e-mail their credit card details.

What is the best way to get people to come to your site?

Through search engines organized by MENA, word of mouth and through my lectures and workshops.

What is the best way to get people to return to your site?

Probably through placing new articles and information on the site.

What is the best way to get people to buy products?

Through stimulation from lectures and seminars. I also write articles in health magazines and for newspapers which generates publicity for my products and services.

How does your site generate revenue?

Through the sales of my products and services.

How many upgrades?

The current upgrade is the second.

Did you write a project plan before you started?

No, but I know what I wanted from the Web site upgrade. I wanted online transactions, the ability to update the site myself and the provision of video clips online, for example video clips on juicing.

How much time did it take to get up and running?

It will probably take four to five months because it is so complicated. For example I may want to again provide online consultation with the new upgrade.

Where did you go for advice?

My partner, various contractors and MENA.

How did you know who to trust?

My partner is very experienced in IT issues.

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Did you do the work yourself or use outside contractors?

I am using MENA.

Where you happy with the work and help given?

I am happy with progress to date.

What mistakes did you make that you wish you hadn't.

It is too early to tell.

What were the main risks you took?

None to my knowledge.

What advice would you give someone else?

Go for it and stay in control.

What were the barriers to your digital project?

None, other than my lack of experience of IT.

Do you know what technology is used in your company?

No.

Do you understand what it does?

I know it works.

Where can people find useful advice about the subject?

A good book from an IT bookshop.

How did you decide which technology to use?

I decide what I want to do first then I ask what the best method is. For example, I would like to find a book publisher that will print individual copies on demand and use an international freight service to deliver the book anywhere in the world.

Then someone could order and pay for the book online, which would generate an e-mail order to the publisher who would use my nominated freight service to deliver the book. Therefore I would only be billed each month for the actual books sold and the associated freight charges.

What are the business benefits you are hoping for?

A more responsive Web site that I can directly update which should increase the number of customers I can reach. For example I have a workshop in Tasmania soon and based on the current Web site I must pay a contractor about \$100 to add the workshop details to the site. The new site will remove this cost and allow me to update the site more frequently and I can personalise it with comments to express more goodwill, warmth and friendliness.

Are these benefits quantifiable?

Yes.

What is the most important thing you've learned in the last year?

It is really important to be able to personally manage the Web site.

Given what you know... would you do it again?

Yes.

case study

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What are you planning to do next?

After the Web site has been upgraded I would like to produce another book, produce training modules on CD and paper, introduce video conferencing and produce videos for sale.