CANADIAN COUNSELLING

A Guide to Digital Products and Services for Therapy Practices

MARKETING, WEBSITES, BOOKING, AND MORE.

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A Guide to Digital Products and Services for Therapy Practices

This free guide includes a list of resources and products for counsellors in private practice (either virtually or in person) for running their practice marketing, websites, security, electronic health management, and more. This guide is written by Shaylynn Hayes-Raymond, MA, LCT-C who has 10 years experience as a marketer and web designer and is passionate about ethical and secure practice when it comes to the integration of technology in marketing or offering psychotherapy services.

This document serves as a practical guide for counselors establishing or managing a private practice, encompassing both virtual and in-person models. It offers insights into crucial aspects of practice operation, including electronic health management systems for streamlined administration and data security, and the creation and maintenance of professional websites for marketing and client engagement.

The guide also explains the technical fundamentals of web hosting and domain names, provides information on booking and billing solutions, and highlights the importance of tools like Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) for enhancing online security and client confidentiality, particularly relevant for mental health professionals.

Electronic Health Management

Several Electronic Health management systems exist. These systems often offer an all in one solution for managing your practice. For less tech-savvy users, this can be a great way to ensure that your clients' data is protected and your system is working seamlessly without much tinkering on your end. I always suggest that persons who are not comfortable with managing their own websites, billing, and booking systems use one of these systems. I am focusing on this type of software first as it is the easiest way to manage your practice whether you are marketing through your own website or not. You can easily use your own website for marketing and then have a booking system with an EHR.

Jane App: Jane is a comprehensive, all-in-one practice management solution offering robust scheduling, charting, online booking, and integrated telehealth. It excels in billing and insurance support, including Canadian eClaims, and features a user-friendly interface with strong customer service. Compliant with HIPAA, PIPEDA, and GDPR, Jane prioritizes data security. Its main drawback is cost, typically ranging from CAD $54-$99/month for solo practitioners, making it a significant investment. While intuitive, its extensive features can present an initial learning curve, and it lacks a dedicated mobile app.
Link: https://jane.app/

Noterro: Noterro offers a cost-effective yet feature-rich alternative, including online booking, comprehensive charting, billing, and insurance claim processing (e.g., TELUS eClaims). A unique benefit is its AI-powered scribing for notes, saving time. Users appreciate its strong customer support and free data migration. While generally comprehensive, it might offer less customization in advanced features and requires continuous internet access, without a traditional native mobile app. Pricing for solo practitioners is typically around $30-$70/month, making it a more affordable option.
Link: https://www.noterro.com/

Sessions Health: Designed specifically for mental health professionals, Sessions Health provides a clean, intuitive interface with features tailored to counselors. Its base price often includes unlimited clients and storage, offering clear value.
Link:https://www.sessionshealth.com/

TherapyNotes: Designed for mental and behavioral health, TherapyNotes provides streamlined patient record management, scheduling, charting, and insurance billing with integrated telehealth. It prioritizes security and HIPAA compliance. Like SimplePractice, its main servers are generally in the US, posing data residency concerns for Canadian users. Pricing starts around $59 USD/month for solo practitioners.
Link: https://www.therapynotes.com/

Owl Practice: Built specifically for Canadian mental health professionals, Owl Practice is fully compliant with Canadian privacy laws (PIPEDA, PHIPA), with all data stored in Canada. It offers a complete suite including video therapy, secure messaging, calendar management, and comprehensive billing. Owl is a premium option, with solo practitioner plans starting around CAD $60/month, emphasizing Canadian-specific compliance and robust features.
Link: https://owlpractice.ca/

Websites

I do not suggest using websites like weebly, wordpress.com(this is the blogging platform not the Wordpress coding which the user controls), shopify, or wix. In these cases you do not actually own your websites and control over things such as web forms is nearly impossible. For the sake of this guide, I will be focusing on websites that are created with Wordpress. Wordpress.org is not the same as Wordpress.com which is a blogging platform created with the Wordpress website system. Wordpress is open source, can be secured with numerous settings/hosts, and offers full control and ownership of your client's data. In reality, there are numerous ways to build websites-- but I focus on Wordpress as I have been a designer and developer in that space for 10 years. Websites can be used for marketing purposes, showcasing how you practice, inquiry forms and even booking and billing. I do suggest that billing and web forms are not used for in-depth details unless you have a decent understanding of web security.

What are Web Hosting & Domains?
Your web hosting is where your files live-- think of this like a computer where files are stored. This computer is accessible to the world and holds your files 24/7. Hosting companies vary in security. Domain names are the address that tells the internet where the can find your website. Domains are normally around $20 per year, and hosting is often between $5 a month to $20 a month depending on the plan.

Web Hosting
For hosting, I suggest having your own website with a host and then paying for your own domain yearly. You can also set your own web domain up to work with your email (and in many cases you can have secure emailing).

The following web hosting companies I have used with great success. You can use any host you want but please remember that free hosting or very cheap options can be very unsafe and easier to hack.

Hosting companies

Hostgator: Fast, secure hosting for therapy websites. 24/7 support & SSL included for client confidentiality.
Link: https://hostgator.pvxt.net/e154bz
Liquid Web: Ultra-secure managed hosting for therapists. Lightning-fast servers & PHI/PHIPA-friendly options
Link: https://liquidweb.i3f2.net/09MJzJ
Websavers: Canadian hosting focused on privacy & speed. Ideal for therapists needing secure, fast sites.
Link: https://clients.websavers.ca/whmcs/aff.php?aff=297

Domains:
Since domain names are secured through your web hosting/DNS level, it does not matter which domain service you go with. Some of the hosting options may offer domains free for the first year. I personally use Namecheap as they have been a reliable cheap domain service even when domains renew. You should be aware that many sites with deals for domains ($1, $5, etc) are only for the first year and can renew as high as $30 a year.

Namecheap: https://www.namecheap.com/
GoDaddy: https://www.godaddy.com/en-ca/domains
Webnames: https://www.webnames.ca/

Encrypted Email

For counsellors in private practice, ensuring the security and confidentiality of client communications is paramount, making encrypted email a necessity. While some Electronic Health Record (EHR) systems may offer integrated emailing features, it's crucial that these are encrypted to meet privacy standards. Alternatively, hosting your own email with proper DNS records for your domain provides greater control and a professional appearance. Regardless of the method, robust encryption is non-negotiable to protect sensitive client information and maintain compliance.

Proton Mail: A highly secure email service known for its strong end-to-end encryption and zero-access architecture, meaning even Proton cannot read your emails. It's based in Switzerland, known for strong privacy laws, and includes features like Proton VPN, Calendar, and Drive for a comprehensive privacy suite.
Link: https://proton.me/

Google Workspace: Google's suite for businesses provides professional email (Gmail with your domain), cloud storage (Drive), and collaboration tools like Docs and Meet. While offering excellent features and reliability, Canadian users must consider data residency as Google's servers are primarily in the US, requiring specific compliance checks.
Link: https://workspace.google.com/intl/en_ca/

Zoho Mail: Zoho Mail offers a clean, ad-free email experience with a focus on privacy and security. It provides custom domain email, robust anti-spam, and features for team collaboration. Zoho has data centers in various regions, including Canada, which can be a key advantage for meeting Canadian privacy regulations.
Link: https://www.zoho.com/

Microsoft 365: Microsoft 365 provides business-class email (Outlook with your domain) alongside popular productivity apps like Word, Excel, and Teams. While comprehensive and widely used, its default server locations are often outside Canada. Practitioners must ensure their specific Microsoft 365 plan meets Canadian data residency and encryption requirements for sensitive client data.
Link: https://www.office.com/

Booking

Booking can be done either through your own system such as through a wordpress plugin, or through an electronic health management system. The benefit of running your own booking/management system is full control and better prices, while the advantage of using an electronic health management system is that these solutions are ready to go and often secured with high standards.

DIY Solutions
The following self-booking systems can be used and I have tested them myself. I do caution that you only do self booking portals if you are comfortable with a level of running your own website and security.

Amelia: Amelia is a WordPress appointment booking plugin designed for service-based businesses. What sets it apart for therapists is its combination of ease of use, customization options, and automation features that support a solo or small group practice.
Link: https://tms-plugins.sjv.io/RGNyEb

BookingPress: BookingPress is a comprehensive WordPress plugin designed for seamless online appointment scheduling and booking management. It offers features like customizable booking forms, staff management, and integrations with numerous payment gateways (including PayPal, Stripe, and more than 20 others). Ideal for service-based businesses, it streamlines the booking process for clients and provides administrative tools for efficient business operation. **Note: this is what I personally use in my practice!

Link: https://www.bookingpressplugin.com

VPN (Virtual Private Network)

A VPN can be helpful for Canadian therapists concerned with online security and client confidentiality. It encrypts internet traffic, reducing the risk of data interception when using public Wi-Fi or working remotely. This added layer of protection can help keep teletherapy sessions, emails, and client communications private.

Therapists can also use VPNs to select Canadian servers, supporting compliance with data residency preferences. While not mandatory, VPNs can be a useful tool to minimize exposure to cyber threats, protect personal IP addresses, and maintain professional standards of privacy, especially when providing services online or across multiple locations.

Proton VPN: Proton is one of the most secure VPNs with incredible service. As a bonus, Proton can include encrypted web domain, cloud storage, email and vpns under the same plan.
Link: https://proton.me/

These other options also offer deals regularly and are sufficient for day to day use.

Surfshark: https://surfshark.sjv.io/XmvxBG

NordVPN: https://nordvpn.sjv.io/gOebdg

Safeshell VPN:
https://safeshellvpn.pxf.io/JKvrP2

FULLY-INCLUSIVE DIGITAL PRACTICE STARTER-PACK

A FULLY-FUNCTIONAL WEBSITE
HELP SETTING UP ONLINE BILLING
HELP SETTING UP YOUR PORTAL
HELP SETTING UP SOCIAL MEDIA

Billing

I am only going to touch on billing here, but regardless of the billing system you use, Stripe or Square are most secure for web billing on your own. You should always use a reputable billing system. You may be required to sign up to Stripe or Square even with an electronic health management system.

If you would like consulting for any of this, or would like to look into all-in-one packages, please email contact@shaylynnraymond.com. You can find more free (and premium resources) at www.canadiancounselling.ca

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