Using the Web to Promote the Alexander Technique and Your Practice

by Imogen Ragone

The internet is well and truly part of our lives these days. It is where people go to look up information, shop, watch videos, listen to music, connect with friends, network, and much more. It is an increasingly interactive environment, and you don't even need a computer to use it: more and more people connect to the web from phones and other handheld devices.

If, as Alexander Technique teachers, we do not embrace these new ways of interacting with the world (and with our potential students), our profession will be increasingly marginalized. We cannot afford to dismiss the power of the web and social media as means for getting our message heard.

Eric Qualman, author of *Socialnomics: How social media transforms the way we live and do business*, writes in his blog, "Facebook surpassed the previous most popular site, Google, in terms of overall traffic for the week [of March 13, 2010] in the U.S. Globally Facebook has 450 million users and would be the third largest country in the world behind China and India." [1]

According to Alexander Technique teacher Robert Rickover, in the last couple of years, Twitter "has emerged as the most powerful way to quickly and efficiently share ideas with a wide and diverse audience worldwide. It provides a unique opportunity for Alexander Technique teachers and students to help the Technique gain the recognition it deserves—taking it from a tiny niche in the field of alternative health and bringing it into the mainstream." [2]

Need more convincing that social media is not just some crazy, irrelevant fad? Watch this video about its significance: www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFYPQjYhv8&feature=player_embedded. You can also find a link to the video at: alexandertechnique.com/ats/twitter/.

Some of us are resistant, for a variety of reasons, to using some of the most basic web tools at our disposal. So, here's some basic information to encourage you to take advantage of these powerful resources.

Internet Basics!

E-mail

I hope that by now we all have e-mail addresses and list them on all our publicity materials, from the AmSAT Teacher Directory to business cards, brochures, and other hand-outs. BUT just listing your e-mail address is not enough. Check your e-mail regularly (at least every couple of days) and respond to inquiries promptly. More potential students contact me by e-mail than by phone, and in these days of texts and instant messaging, people expect an almost immediate response. If you leave it for more than a day or so, you could lose the business. One note for those who already have websites: please check that all links on your website to your e-mail actually work! There are many sites that have non-functioning e-mail addresses or links to e-mail addresses that have been abandoned. This obviously will not help potential students reach you!

Website

Having a website is a must for any small business these days—just as important as having a phone number. I moved to Wilmington, Delaware, less than a month after graduating from ATTC-V in Charlottesville, Virginia, and for many months felt at quite a loss about how to start my practice. Getting my own website was a turning point for me. While my practice is still small, almost everyone who contacts me has seen my website first. Having a website shows that you are "open for business" and offers people a chance to find out about you and the Alexander Technique, helping them feel more comfortable before they take the plunge and call or e-mail.

What is Social Media Anyway?

Think of regular media as a one-way street: you can read a newspaper or listen to a report on television, but you have very limited ability to give your thoughts on the matter.

Think of social media as a two-way street: you can receive information—as well as communicate with the site and with other visitors to the site, too.

These are the main types of social media websites:

Social News (Digg, Propeller, Reddit): Interact by voting for articles and commenting on them.

Social Networking (Facebook, MySpace): Interact by adding friends, commenting on profiles, joining groups and having discussions.

Social Photo and Video Sharing (YouTube, Flickr): Interact by sharing photos or videos and commenting on user submissions.

Wikis (Wikipedia, Wikia): Interact by adding articles and editing existing articles.

Blogs (Blogger, Wordpress): Interact by posting blogs (essays, articles, "thought of the day," commentary, etc.) which other people can comment on.

Twitter: Interact by posting "micro-blogs" (tweets), following and commenting on other people's tweets. Twitter is in the unique position of having its own category. It's a cross between micro-blogging, instant-messaging, social-networking, and much more!

Social Bookmarking (Del.icio.us, Simpy): Interact by tagging websites and searching through websites bookmarked by other people.

These websites are only a few of the many social media websites out there. Any website that invites you to interact with the site and with other visitors falls into the definition of social media.

Source:
http://webtrends.about.com/od/web20/a/social-media.htm

Having a website is not a big deal! It does not have to be expensive—you don't need to spend more than $200 to have a site, and there are even some free options available—*and* you do not personally need any technical knowledge. If you would like more information on inexpensive websites, please see: www.alexandertechnique.com/ats/internet.

It is my belief that often the simplest websites are, in fact, the most successful. For your website to be effective, there are, however, a few main points you should be aware of.

Tips for an Effective Website

Location, Location, Location…

It is extremely important for the location of your practice to be prominently displayed on your home page, preferably near the top. When most people search for a service using Google or an alternative search engine, they are looking for a practice near where they live, e.g., they might search for "alexander technique delaware" or "back pain wilmington." If your location is not near the top so the search engine can find it, you are not likely to be found. In addition, potential students landing on your site will want to know where you teach, so don't make it difficult to find this information!

Simple, Jargon-Free Language

Most of the potential visitors to your site will not have much or any knowledge of the Alexander Technique. We are used to terms like "primary control," "inhibition," "use," and the like, and we forget that these terms are meaningful, at least not with the meaning we attribute to them, to most people. Use simple, jargon-free language to convey the essence of what you would like to say, e.g., you might use "coordination" instead of "use."

Highlight Key Words and Phrases

Most people looking for information on-line tend to scan quickly through a website to see if it is relevant. Don't make them go through multiple pages to find what they are looking for! You may have in mind a beautiful (and probably expensive) graphic video for your home page, but you will likely lose people who do not want to wait around for the beautiful graphics to load before they can get the actual information they want! What I recommend, especially on the home page, is the use of highlighted words, titles, key phrases, or even a short, but very to-the-point quote. Use bullet points or enlarged, bold, or different color fonts so these key words stand out for anyone scanning the page quickly. Imagine what someone might be looking for who would benefit from lessons and make sure you include those words prominently (e.g., stress, performance, posture, back pain, acting, musicians, etc.).

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Links

Having links to and from your website is one of the most important things you can do to increase the visibility of your site on the web. It is one of the key ways that search engines find you and rank you. Connectivity is rewarded! Make sure your website is listed in the AmSAT on-line directory and with the on-line directories of any other professional organizations you belong to. I also recommend you have your site listed at www.alexandertechnique.com (*The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique* provided by Robert Rickover), as this is often the first website people come to when searching on the web. Also link to these sites on your website. Link to any other websites you like, and you can also invite them to link to you. Maybe there are local businesses you can link to, and vice versa. In addition, you can also link to articles, videos, and more that can lead people to more specialized information. The more links you can create, both to and from your site, the better.

Give Something Free to your Website Visitors!

This was a piece of advice I received when I took my first "Creating Web Pages" course on-line. In reality this typically means giving something in terms of free content to your visitors, such as articles, audio or video clips, advice, or tips on how to do something (e.g., I provide information on lying down in semi-supine on my website), book recommendations, etc. Of course, you can also make special offers through your website for a discounted lesson or workshop if you wish.

Keep it Simple and Easy to Navigate

Keep your main pages short and make sure your website is easy to navigate; i.e., it should be easy to move from page to page. Being "user friendly" is much more important than having fancy graphics! If you have longer articles you would like to post, have links to them on subsidiary pages for people who want more information, keeping your main pages uncluttered.

Once you have a website, many other web tools become a lot more useful, and most of them are free to anyone with an internet connection. You can link them to and from your website, and really start taking advantage of the connectivity available on the world wide web.

Twitter, Facebook and other Social Media

Twitter, Facebook, and many other social media sites are increasingly popular and should not be ignored by the Alexander community. I started a Facebook account after some nagging by my step-daughter, who wanted me to be able to look at family photos she posted there. So far, this has been for "personal" use, and, to be honest, I don't really use it that much, but my website is listed in the personal information, and some of my "friends" are fellow Alexander teachers. I know some teachers use their Facebook pages as a business tool. I suspect that those who use it most successfully do not see a divide between business and personal use. I think this blurring of the traditional lines between "work" and "personal" is the reason why social media seems scary for many of us, but it does not have to become personal if you do not want that to happen.

Last December I opened a Twitter account, and I am enjoying getting used to "tweeting!" I use tweeting predominantly as a business tool and a way to promote the Alexander Technique in general, though I think I could do well to follow my own advice and "lighten up" a bit and allow a bit more personal stuff to come out! A "tweet" basically is a short message of no more than 140 characters (20 characters shorter than a typical phone text). Within those 140 characters you can link to other web pages, so you can offer more information on the subject you are tweeting about. You can find useful information about how to use twitter and how we, the Alexander community, could derive a lot of benefit by getting on board at: alexandertechnique.com/ats/twitter/. If you try nothing else, I suggest you investigate Twitter. It's very easy and you need only spend a few minutes every day or so to be effective.

Podcasts and Audio

Some of the most visited pages on the web are those with audio content that you can either listen to immediately or download and listen to later on your MP3 player. Robert Rickover offers a great service for any teacher who would like

to record a short interview about his or her own Alexander Technique practice. This can be linked to your own website. I recorded an interview, and I have a button connecting to it right on my home page. If you'd like to know more about this great service, visit alexanderaudio.com/teachers/interview/.

YouTube and Video

Video clips are also extremely popular on the web. Sites like YouTube make it easy for anyone to post short videos free of charge. If you have a website, you can link to any of the many Alexander Technique videos already posted on YouTube right from your own website—or embed that video into your own webpage so visitors to your site can view it there. All videos posted on YouTube are freely available to the public. If you have a friend with a video camera (and most digital cameras can at least make short videos these days), why not make a video of yourself teaching or talking about the Technique? Then post it on YouTube and put it on your website.

Blogs

Blogs have been increasing in popularity over the last few years. If you like to write about the Technique, why not have a blog? Many of the blog websites (e.g., Wordpress) are free; in fact, you can even use some of the templates to create a website if you wish, though the free templates do have some limitations in terms of content and arrangement of information. Better still, link your blog page to your regular website and vice versa.

In conclusion, the web is a fantastic tool to help us get the word out about the Alexander Technique. In his time, FM used every means available to promote his work, and if he were around today, I'd bet that he would have his own website, as well as Twitter and Facebook pages, at the very least. Unless you have all the students you could ever want, not having a website just does not make sense anymore. But having your own website is just the beginning. By failing to utilize this important, immense, and growing resource, you are not only missing out on a major source of new students, but also losing an opportunity to advance the public visibility of the Alexander Technique—a gift we can each give to benefit all of us.

Endnotes:
1. Eric Qualman, "Facebook Surpasses Google," www.socialnomics.net, March 16, 2010.
2. The Alexander Technique Twitter Project, www.alexandertechnique.com/ats/twitter/.

Imogen Ragone graduated from the Alexander Technique Training Centre of Virginia in 2006. After moving to Wilmington, Delaware, she took two online courses in web design and created her own website, www.imogenragone.com. As well as teaching the Alexander Technique, Imogen now designs low-cost websites for other Alexander teachers. You can also follow her on Twitter at twitter.com/IntelligentBody.