

Marketing Technology to the Counseling Profession

by

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MARKETING TECHNOLOGY TO THE COUNSELING PROFESSION

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate Faculty

College of Business and Management

Southern California University
for Professional Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

by

Gary Jon Springer

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Name: Gary Jon Springer Counseling Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Business Administration Awarded: August, 2005

Institution: Southern California University for Professional Studies

Location: Santa Ana, California

Title of Dissertation: Marketing Technology to the Counseling Profession

Scope of Study: The author of this dissertation surveyed psychologists in the United States to determine the forms of technology that are currently being utilized in their practice. Through the use of a survey, the study intends to show that technological applications are currently being underutilized in the counseling profession and there exists great potential for marketing new technology to counselors. The new technological ideas that were explored in the study included the use of computer aided diagnostic techniques, video-counseling and the use of a voice stress analyzer.

Findings and Conclusions: The study determined that technology is being underutilized by the counseling profession. Marketing new technology to counselors will require greater effort and research due to the resistance described by counselors to using the new technology.

APPROVAL

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this dissertation and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

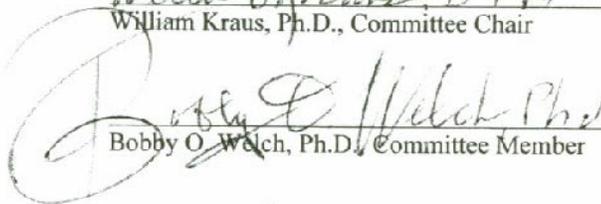
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Being a licensed professional counselor, instructor and “computer nerd,” I am always interested in how I can make my work more efficient. Although the idea of blending counseling and technology may seem on the surface to be contradictory, there are in fact, as this dissertation will demonstrate, many possible technological applications to the counseling profession. Although technology is currently available that could prove useful to counselors, it seems that the integration of technology into the field of behavioral sciences has been moving at a slow pace.

The following excerpts strongly reflect my sentiments in terms of the counseling profession’s slow acceptance of the use of technology:

“Counselors, like many other professionals, are being forced to decide whether or not to make use of technology in their work. A review of the counseling and technology literature revealed existing controversies, and practical vs. philosophical concerns associated with incorporating technology into counseling.” (Abney, Maddux, 2004).

“Rapid change of any kind is never accomplished painlessly, and the incredibly rapid pace with which computers have been integrated with diverse human activities has resulted in a number of problems and controversies. One of these controversies is whether or not computers should be used in the helping professions, and if so, how they

should be used.” (Childers, 1985; Hayes, 1999; Maddux & Johnson, 1998; Morton, 1996; Sharf, 1985; Wagman & Kerber, 1984).

“Currently, one such controversy centers on the proper role of technology, including computer programs, telecommunications, and the Internet in counseling. The critical and growing importance of this controversy in the field of counseling prompted Gary Walz, Director of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse (ERIC/CASS), to suggest that while counselors are currently confronting many challenges and difficult societal problems and concerns, ‘None of these concerns have been expressed with more persistence and breadth than those related to technology and its impact on counseling’ (Walz, 2000, p. xii). Walz’s interest in this controversy led to publication of a book of readings entitled *Cybercounseling and Cyberlearning: Strategies and Resources for the Millennium* (Walz & Bloom, 2000). That volume of readings was published as a collaborative effort of ERIC/CASS and the American Counseling Association (ACA) and has led to a permanent ERIC/CASS Website (<http://cybercounsel.uncg.edu/>) devoted to the topic of technology in counseling (dubbed “Cybercounseling”). The extent of the controversy is also reflected in the fact that the Codes of Ethics and Standards of Practice published by the American Counseling Association (2003), the National Board of Certified Counselors (2001), and the American Psychological Association (1997) are either solely devoted to guidelines for the use of computers in counseling or mention various problems involving computers in many other sections of their Codes.” (Abney, Maddux, 2004).

“The controversy concerning technology and counseling has generated a large body of literature (Farrell, 1989; Smith & Reynolds, 2002; Wolf, 2003). Although this literature is extensive and interesting, it has done little to settle the various controversies related to the use of technology in counseling or any of the other helping professions. Advocates and opponents of the use of computers in counseling continue to defend their respective positions.” (Abney, Maddux, 2004).

History has some lessons regarding how new technology will be assimilated into society. “Economic historians tell us that it usually takes two generations – 70 to 80 years – for a technology to go from initial demonstration to general adoption throughout a nation’s principal economic, social and political institutions. What’s more, during the first 25 years of this 75-year process of techno-economic assimilation, a new technology is so costly, inefficient and unreliable that it finds few applications and has no measurable net effect on a nation’s economy! (For the computer, this *non-productive period* was from 1946 until 1970, when information technology first appeared in factories and offices.)” (Snyder, 1999).

“During the second 25 years of a techno-economic transition, the new technology matures; it becomes cheaper, more powerful and more reliable. As the technology becomes more plausibly useful, it elicits increased marketplace demands, shifting producer capital from traditional, proven productivity-enhancing investments to investments in new technologies that are still largely unproven in real-world applications,

most of which fail to improve multi-factor productivity. (A 1996 survey of 360 companies, by Standish Group, International, Inc., found that 42 percent of corporate information technology projects are *abandoned before completion*.) As a consequence, productivity improvement rates stagnate, and both profitability and general prosperity decline.” (Snyder, 1999).

Background of the Problem

Many forms of computer technology are already in use by counselors. Internet based technology includes e-mail, websites, computer bulletin boards, searchable databases, and discussion groups. Other non-Internet based technology used by the counseling profession includes spreadsheets, word processors and computer software. However, the extent to which these technologies are being employed is still insufficient. Catherine Cabaniss demonstrated through her dissertation, Computer-related technology use by counselors in the new millennium (Cabaniss, 2001), that “counselor education programs are not currently incorporating minimal computer literacy standards or providing coursework to optimally train counselors in technological skills.” (Cabaniss, 2001; Stone & Turba, 1999).

Determining what types of technology and the extent of their use has been the basis of other research and extends into this dissertation. “The problem to date is we do not have an assessment of how much CRT tools are being used to accomplish specific counselor tasks.” (Cabaniss, 2001). “In addition, no trend assessment has been made concerning the variety of ways CRT might be used by mental health counselors and counselor educators to perform all aspects of their work, including therapeutic intervention and supervision in the near future. Without these assessments, educators and policy makers lack important information that could enable them to better design training programs for preparing professionals to upgrade their skills in order to remain competitive in a field struggling for independent identity. These assessments would also help establish long overdue computer competency requirements and training standards for the next generation of counselors to meet the demands of a technologically sophisticated clientele.” (Cabaniss, 2001).

In my master’s thesis, Teaching art history: a new approach, (Springer, 1996), I suggested several new approaches to teaching art history that I believed would make the pedagogical experience more efficient and more enjoyable. Much of the research for my thesis included surveying teachers and students to gauge their receptiveness to the new ideas. The method that I employ in this current dissertation is similar in that I am surveying counselors to gauge their openness to the new technology.

As a practicing counselor, I am often frustrated with the inefficient and subjective methods used by most counselors in assessing, diagnosing and treating patients. It is my belief that by incorporating additional technology into the field, a greater level of efficiency can be attained. I define efficiency in this context to mean the ability to quickly and accurately diagnose and treat patients. In addition, I believe that employing a greater use of technology in the counseling profession will lead to more objective and reliable diagnostic techniques and treatment. Reducing subjectivity in diagnostics will bring about a greater respect of the counseling profession as whole. The current health care system in the United States, relying predominantly on HMO's, demands quick and efficient treatment. Utilizing technology can also help to satisfy HMO requirements, without compromising patients' needs.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the extent to which counselors are using technology and their interest in employing new technology. Based on the available review of literature, counselors appear to have limited awareness of the many new forms of technology available to them. The practice of counseling could be made more efficient through the use of new technology that will allow counselors to more quickly assess, diagnose and treat patients. Applying new technology to the counseling profession could also result in more consistent diagnoses and more effective counseling methods.

Purpose of the Study

Through the use of a survey, the study intends to show the potential for marketing new technological methods, based on the introduction of new technology, and counselors' receptiveness to the new ideas.

Theoretical Framework/Methodology

The use of survey sample as a cost-effective method for data collection has proliferated within the last 50 years. This study will pursue its objectives through the use of a two-part survey. The survey questionnaire will be used to collect information through questions that can be answered using a Likert scale rating. The Likert scale allows for the data to be represented in a quantitative fashion. The goal of the first part of the survey will be to establish the underutilization of technology in the counseling profession. The second part of the survey, also using a Likert scale, will determine the level of interest in new technology that may be applied to the profession. Once the data has been collected it will be graphed and interpreted to demonstrate the potential for marketing technology to counselors. In addition, the psychologists surveyed were allowed space to add their own comments regarding their thoughts about this survey and the new technology suggested. This added space allowed for qualitative data to also be collected and presented.

Research Hypothesis

Technological applications are currently being underutilized in the counseling profession and there exists great potential for marketing new technology to counselors.

Importance of the Study

This study will help to expand upon the premise that through increased use of technology, counselors can increase the efficiency of their work in terms of more accurately assessing, diagnosing and treating patients. This increase in efficiency will bring an overall benefit to the mental health profession.

There is an increased need for the ability to efficiently diagnose and treat mental illness. A research article from the “Schizophrenic Bulletin” echo's the author’s statement on the need to increase efficiency in diagnosing and treating mental illness.

“Despite this rapid progress, more might be done to advance the diagnostic and intervention framework. New methods are required to exploit emerging concepts about the multi-determined nature of psychiatric symptoms, particularly those that cut across diagnostic boundaries such as anxiety, affect dysregulation, and psychosis. As investigators search for subtle interactions that produce disturbed functioning, they will undoubtedly grapple with signal detection problems associated with small effects sizes, measurement error, and variance restrictions imposed by categorical DSM-IV diagnoses. Difficulties inherent in traditional longitudinal research designs, such as integrating new

technologies into fixed assessment protocols, will become increasingly apparent as prospective studies attempt to track pathological mechanisms over time. To address these obstacles, the next generation of early- illness studies should plan to recruit large samples, to broaden inclusion criteria to encompass cross-disorder phenomena, and to adopt a more flexible approach to longitudinal inquiry.” (Heinssen RK, Cuthbert BN, Breiling J, Colpe LJ, Dolan-Sewell R., 2003).

Scope of the Study

This dissertation surveyed psychologists in the United States to determine the forms of technology that are currently being utilized in their practice. Through the use of a survey, the study intends to show the potential for marketing new technological methods based on the introduction of new technology and psychologists’ receptiveness to the new ideas. The technological ideas explored in this study included the use of computer-aided diagnostic techniques, video-counseling and use of a voice stress analyzer, also known as a “truth detector.” The scope of the study is limited to practicing, licensed psychologists in the United States that have listed themselves on-line in the Psychology Information Online database.

Definition of Terms

Technology/Technical Applications - the practical application of science to commerce or industry.

New technological methods – specifically, computer aided diagnostic techniques, video-counseling and voice stress analysis, but can also include any computer related software applications that can be used by the counseling profession.

Counselor's receptiveness – the degree to which counselors are interested.

Underutilized – not being used by the majority.

Counseling Profession – licensed counselors, psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists.

Computer aided diagnostic techniques – computer software that helps a counselor to form a diagnosis.

Video-counseling – counseling a client via a computer through the use of video cameras and computer software that allows a counselor and client to communicate in real-time.

Truth Detector – a voice stress analyzer, that is purported to detect whether or not someone is speaking truthfully, based on measuring stress levels and other variables in one's voice.

Summary and Organization of the Remaining Chapters

In the remaining chapters, the author will review the current available literature, discuss the methodology for the study, describe the new technology and their possible applications, summarize and interpret the data, and discuss conclusions. In addition, based on the data, the author will describe a plan to market the new technology to counselors.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of studies have been done that reflect on the relationship between technology and areas of behavioral science. In the following chapter, I will summarize some of the previous research studies done, their outcomes and their relationship to this dissertation. These studies are listed in reverse chronological order, beginning with the most recent.

Summary of major contributions

Study #1

Clinical counselors and the Internet: A National Survey Evaluating the Impact of the Internet on the Counseling Profession. (Green, 2003).

The purpose of this exploratory dissertation was to gather data regarding information technology and the Internet as it related to clinical counselors. A survey was used to gain the following information: a) the extent to which counselors are knowledgeable about computer technologies, b) the extent to which their clients make use of the Internet, and c) the extent to which they believe computer technology contributes to their professional practice.

The results of this study found that clinical counselors in this sample rate themselves highly in terms of Internet competence and their knowledge of information technologies. However, despite these high rates of knowledge, counselors are not implementing the Internet in their counseling practices at very high rates.

This study was useful to my current research by supporting my hypothesis. My own research reinforces and supports these conclusions by demonstrating that counselors are underutilizing existing technology.

Study #2

Effects of Internet Behavioral Counseling on Weight Loss in Adults at Risk for Type 2

Diabetes. (Tate, Jackvony, Wing, 2003).

The purpose of this study was “to compare the effects of an Internet weight loss program alone vs. with the addition of behavioral counseling via e-mail provided for one year to individuals at risk of type 2 diabetes.”

The results of this study showed that patients who received behavioral counseling by e-mail lost more weight than those in the basic Internet group. Adding e-mail counseling to the basic Internet weight loss intervention program significantly improved weight loss in adults at risk of diabetes.

This study demonstrates how technology can be used to reinforce and enhance weight loss therapy through the use of e-mail. One of the underlying premises of my current research is that technology can be used to enhance therapy, noting that computers can be used as a tool in conjunction with human beings, rather than replace the human element.

Study #3

Enhancing Counseling Services with Internet Web Sites

(Sampson, Carr, Makela, Arking, Minvielle, Vernick, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to “explore how counselors at college counseling and career centers can design Web sites that may be more effectively used by counselors.” A Web site design strategy that explicitly focuses on client needs (need-based design) is described that offers an alternative to Web sites that focus on the resources available to clients. (resource-based design.)

The results of this study showed that “Web sites of college counseling and career centers employ a primarily resource-based approach for delivery of information to clients.” “By initially focusing on the potential needs of audience members, instead of the resources available, Web sites for counseling and career centers can increase the likelihood that clients can find and use resources that are available.”

This study serves as a reminder that when developing technology for use in human services, we should keep our focus on the end-users and the purpose of utilizing the proposed technology.

Study #4

Career counseling and the information highway: heeding the road signs.

(O'Halloran, 2002).

The purpose of this study was “to guide discussion of, and possible resolutions to, challenges posed by incorporating the Internet into career counseling.”

The results of this study demonstrated that using the Internet in career counseling can pose additional challenges to counselors. It is imperative to review ethical standards and apply those standards when using the Internet for career counseling.

This article was also useful in helping to remember the main focus when implementing technology with human services. It is important to continue to recognize that our clients are human beings. My current research brings up several issues regarding challenges that technology can impose when combined with basic counseling services. Many of my survey responders expressed resistance to some of the ideas that appeared to remove the human element from counseling. Ethical standards and assurances must not be compromised when combining technology with human services.

Study #5

Computer-Related Technology Use By Counselors in the New Millenium.

(Cabaniss, 2001).

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the extent to which computer related tasks are being performed by counselors, including “cyber-counseling,” marketing, record keeping and professional development, including future goals and recommendations. Areas assessed: e-mail, websites, computer video-conferencing, list-servers, computerized simulation, databases, chatrooms, and software.

The results of this study concluded that counselors can no longer perform their jobs without some computer assistance. Counselor training programs should adopt mandatory minimal computer skills in order to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new technologies.

Cabaniss’s research gave me a strong basis and fundamental road-map for my current research. Her dissertation moved me to further her research in this area and look for potentially new uses for technology in counseling.

Study #6

Computer technology and the 21st Century school counselor. (Van Horn, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to focus on different ways school counselors can utilize computer technology to work more efficiently and help students succeed.

Computer technology methods mentioned include e-mail, websites, electronic newsletters, online journals, distance learning, video-conferencing, and online high schools. Using computer technology as a counseling tool was also discussed.

The results of this study indicated “computer technology has changed the way professional school counselors must fulfill their role. (Myrick, 1997).” The prevalence of computers in schools has provided a new tool to enhance counseling interventions, networking, training and supervision.

Based on this study, it is the author’s opinion that school counselors must continue to update their expertise and understanding of the existing technology in order to better meet students’ needs. Similarly, it is the author’s belief that counselors would better suit their clients’ needs by integrating the new technological tools available at their disposal.

Study #7

Identifying young people's guidance needs through telephone counseling.

(Cruz, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to examine the phone counseling needs of young people in Guadalajara, Mexico. Researchers have reported that the most common topics that young people use telephone-counseling services for include peer relationship issues, family relationships and sex issues. Other less common topics included self-esteem issues and substance abuse problems

The results of this study indicated that “the phone calls allowed the identification of primary counseling needs of 345 young people: sexuality, reproductive health and mental health, and to a lesser extent, family problems and STD's/AIDS. There were gender and age differences. The findings point to the advantage of using the telephone to establish the specific needs of young people, with the additional goal of developing and implementing programs that take into consideration gender and age.”

This study proves once again how simple technology, such as a telephone, can enhance and expand counseling services. Similarly, other forms of technology mentioned throughout this paper could have analogous advantages.

Study #8

The Utilization of Technology to Assist Collaborative Efforts Among School Counselors and Special Educators. (Gillam, Hendricks, George, Baltimore, 2001).

The purpose of this dissertation was “to gather data regarding information technology and the Internet as it related to clinical counselors.”

“The study found that clinical counselors in this sample rate themselves highly in terms of Internet competence and their knowledge of information technologies. However, despite these high rates of knowledge, counselors are not implementing the Internet in their counseling practices at very high rates. This research suggests that clients are increasingly becoming more Internet savvy and are using the Internet in their own mental health research. As such, counselors need to begin to implement Internet components into their practice when appropriate.”

This study further clarifies the idea that although clinical counselors may consider themselves proficient in technology use, they are still not using the Internet in their practices at a high rate. This data helps support the idea that counselors are underutilizing technology.