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From Acupuncture To Sound Healing: The Alternative Therapies That Are Moving Online



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Leadership

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Cookies on Forbes

Sound healer Charlie Christie with her Tibetan Singing Bowls EMILY WALKER

When Facebook launched in the UK in 2005—initially available only to students at select universities, one of which was mine—I remember thinking: but why would I need this? I just want to talk to my friends in person.

And yet, within a few years, I was reconnecting with old school friends on the social media platform, as well as sharing photos with close friends and family who were scattered across the country.

Soon, Facebook was very much part of my every day life. Mine, and [2.45 billion other people around the world](#).

We came to see that it was actually quite useful to transition at last some of our communication online; that it helped us to feel connected to people we couldn't see in person.

More recently, as the world has moved in and out of lockdown, we've seen so many more traditionally 'in-person' activities shift online.

Work meetings on Zoom, evening quizzes online instead of in the pub, school teaching delivered through Google Classroom. Not to mention the rise in online shopping, which saw [Amazon's share price increasing by more than a third in less than a month](#).

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While real human contact cannot be replaced entirely by a screen—we [do need touch](#) and to at least occasionally be in a room with actual people—many industries have been impressively innovative.

One such industry is the wellbeing industry. But more specifically: alternative therapies. After all, we assume that many of these therapies rely on a physical

connection between practitioner and client.

For instance, how can acupuncture be delivered via a screen, or sound healing sessions happen over Zoom? Is it possible to receive reflexology online, and can hypnotherapy work from afar?

Charlie Christie, founder of [Thyme With Charlie](#)—a wellness brand offering sound healing workshops and teacher training—had been considering moving at least part of her business online prior to the pandemic.

She'd been attending online training sessions and receiving holistic therapy treatments online herself, so was seeing firsthand how effective it could be operating in this way—with the flexibility of being able to connect from anywhere in the world.

And so during the first UK lockdown, Christie started selling the Tibetan Singing Bowls she usually sells in-person from an online shop. It worked well. Next, she began designing an online version of the sound healing training courses she delivers, too.

“I'd only ever taught it in person and didn't know where to start with creating an online version,” she says. “I even wrote a rather passionate Instagram post about why I didn't take my course online. Sound healing is an energy-based learning and to me, nothing compares to the intimacy of being together in a room.”

But that was no longer an option—at least for a while—and so she transferred the workshops she'd been leading for a few years, teaching people how to become qualified sound healers themselves, into [an online programme](#).

Now, she's able to see how this new offering is not only great for her business but also for her clients.

“Taking any course online is much more convenient on a practical level. You can be anywhere in the world, on your own schedule, and taking an online course. You can have something baking in the oven. You don't need to find anyone to look after your pets or kids. You can wear whatever you want.”

Christie is keen to return to traveling the world, delivering sound healing sessions and training people who'd like to become sound-healers, but feels committed to continuing with online sessions, too.

“Even though I teach at studios all over the world, people aren't always able to make the dates of my trainings so they reach out to me and ask when I'll be back again,” she says. Now, they can sign-up online instead, if they want to.

“I already have students in the UK, Europe, Asia, South Africa and the US waiting to take my new course,” she says. “This year has been a time of reflection for me and my brand. If Covid-19 hadn't happened, I would probably still be debating with myself about whether or not I should put my course online.”



Rebecca Mathiszig-Lee treating an acupuncture patient in her clinic REBECCA MATHISZIG-LEE

For Rebecca Mathiszig-Lee, an acupuncturist, the idea to transition her services online was prompted by her governing board, once the initial lockdown was announced.

“They recommended it, and so we got insured to consult and ‘treat’ online. I practiced and designed how the session would go, and then let past clients and social media followers know,” she says.

With acupuncture being a very physical therapy—“where instruments like

needles and cups are physically put into and on the body”—Mathiszig-Lee initially felt concerned about whether it would work.

“I had huge doubts,” she says. “But if you google ‘acupressure point for headache’ for example, there are self-help video demos dating years back, so a tailored acupressure session felt just right.”

And that’s what she started offering: acupressure sessions, where she’d explain to her patient how to put pressure on certain parts of their body, so that they were essentially treating themselves, with her guidance.

The benefits to working in this way are vast. “People were and still are self-isolating, shielding and can’t leave their homes to visit the clinics,” she says. “As a practitioner, I can now extend my offering to anyone in the world. That’s very cool. I can help a pregnant woman looking to induce her own labour in New Zealand whilst she’s sat on her sofa. That’s a radical way of healing for energy workers.”

Also, she notes, “online, people are very much at ease from the start. They are in their own safe, comfortable environment so a perfect setting for self healing work.”

At first, there was some resistance from people but now, she says, “people take classes, socialise, work, date - everything and more goes on online now.” It’s become the norm.

“This isn’t to say that human contact and practice in the clinic is replaced, though. It’s a brilliant addition to my offering, and for people who can’t get to me for either geographical or Covid-related reasons.”

During the UK’s second lockdown, Mathiszig-Lee is able to continue working in her clinic but [she will also offer online sessions](#) to people who are shielding, self-isolating or live further afield.

“Acupuncture has been proven to be so effective in Covid recovery,” she says, “so being able to treat people for this in-person and online is something I hadn’t seen coming. It’s a really exciting and positive way to expand a

business that traditionally heavily relies on face-to-face, and if someone can help themselves with a guided session of acupuncture then more power to that.”



Hypnotherapy Sophie Parker stands by the sea SOPHIE PARKER

Hypnotherapist [Sophie Parker](#) took a little while longer to consider moving her practice online. In fact, she spent the first few months of lockdown shifting existing appointments a few months ahead before realising that this was a longterm issue and her work might need to change shape.

“It wasn't until June that I really acknowledged the new reality,” she says. “Enquiries slowed down, so I started to pivot online.”

She was initially resistant: “I didn't know if it would work,” she says. “Success with cognitive hypnotherapy relies on building rapport. I was worried I wouldn't be able to build the same intimacy I get from being in the same room with someone.”

Partly, this was because she usually monitors the client's body language during treatment. “What is unsaid is just as important as what is spoken,” she says. “I wasn't sure I'd be able to read body language and facial expressions.”

Also, some of the techniques she uses in her practice rely on touch. “There are

techniques like EMI that I use, that works with eye movements, and I worried about whether I'd actually be able to successfully deliver them via a screen.”

But as the world grew more accustomed to being online, Parker found the enquiries coming in again. And she actually found that clients were committing more easily to making bookings. This was partly because they wouldn't have the hassle of traveling to get there—but also because they could attend sessions more discreetly.

“You can't ignore the stigma that still persists with seeing a therapist,” she says. “But now my clients don't have to worry about making excuses for why they need to leave the office on time, or what they're doing in their lunch break or after work, because they can flex appointments around their day. In short, you get the same experience online as in-person but with the added benefit of seeing someone from the privacy and comfort of your own home.”

For [reflexologist Gabriela Slater](#), the first lockdown was spent homeschooling her young children and so she wasn't able to work. “But this led to a significant reduction in my income,” she says. And so now she's realised that moving her business online “is the only option to move forward.”

“Reflexology on the feet is not really a possibility via Zoom,” she says, “But after a return to work in August, I realised that many of my facial reflexology clients did not come back for treatments, possibly due to fear of the very close contact.”

So she has decided to investigate the option of virtual facial reflexology. “This can be done using Zoom, from the comfort of my client's home,” she says.

“The facial reflexology sessions are deeply relaxing and rebalancing. They can help to combat stress, anxiety, tension and to lift the mood during these difficult times,” she says. Feels like we could all do with a bit of that right now, doesn't it?

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