

## Pilates 2.0

by Leslie Streit

In tough economic times, the tough have to get going and blogs/social networking are a great way to advertise your studio.

My studio, Pilates SF has been in business for over 10 years. I operate from the entire first floor of a 3-story townhouse on a quiet cul de sac in San Francisco. I have a full studio with all the equipment and my practice is exclusively privates and duets by appointment only. My clientele range from professional dancers and athletes to the severely injured and de-conditioned. But this is definitely not a business where people will walk in and explore my studio off the street. So advertising and client screening has always necessary.



My Web Site

When I opened in 1999, the Internet was on the rise and a nice website was an excellent way to attract new customers. I maximized my website visibility with ads on Craig's List and soon there was a waiting list to get an appointment. Because my specialty is Rehabilitation (I worked with cancer patients, osteoporosis, pre-and post-surgery, fibromyalgia clients and others who needed special help), I actually referred fitness-only clients to other colleagues and could afford to do so.

But today the situation is totally different. Many new studios have opened and in fact there are now two or three in almost every neighborhood. All of them seem to offer group classes, special introductory rates and off the street walk-in potential. I do not. How can I compete in this market on a limited budget?

Craig's List had become so over used that it was no longer an effective advertising tool for a small business in San Francisco – you would get lost in the listings. I tried Google Ad-words (a service where you bid \$ on clicks) but could not compete with studios that have larger budgets and full time marketing specialists. So this year I added a blog feature to my website.

Very soon I found that I was at the top of the page in the Google listings for my area and the new client calls began to increase. The focus of the blog was sample workouts, including photos, centering on various injury/overuse issues. – Low Back Pain, Foot Pain – issues my clients talk about all the time. I also included a sample workout of the week. I kept all of these workout



The Studio

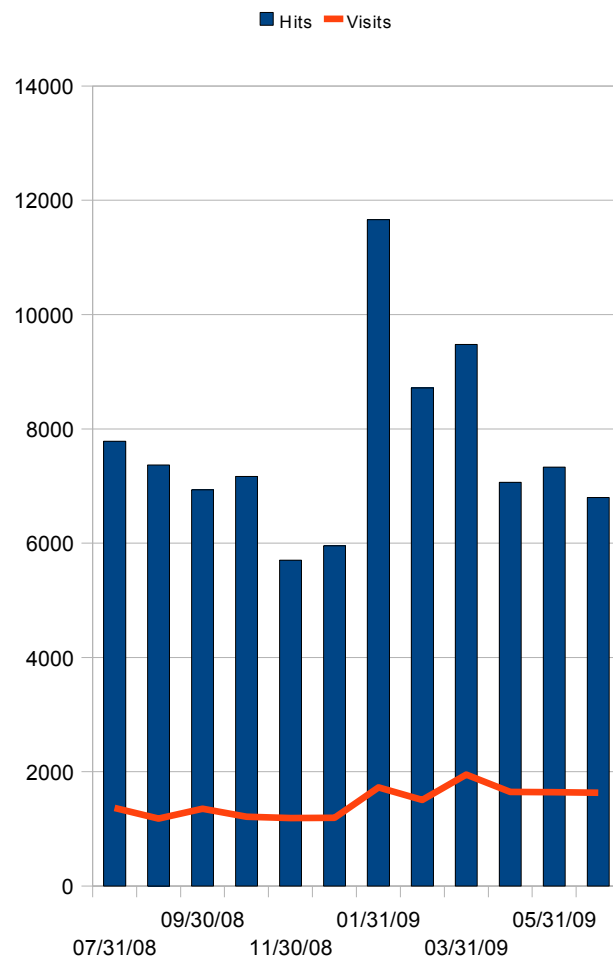
suggestions generic and emphasized the importance of maintaining neutral pelvis and spine throughout. I also stressed that each client must be evaluated individually by a professional instructor in order to develop the most effective program.

Not only are potential clients interested in reading my blog but current clients enjoy it too. The diagram at the left indicates my website statistics chart: the number of hits almost doubled in January 2009 when I put the blog up and the number of unique visits (redline) has stayed above 2008 levels ever since.

The number of hits is not a true indicator of reaching more people but the number of unique visits is. I can expect that as I add new entries to the blog these numbers will be maintained.

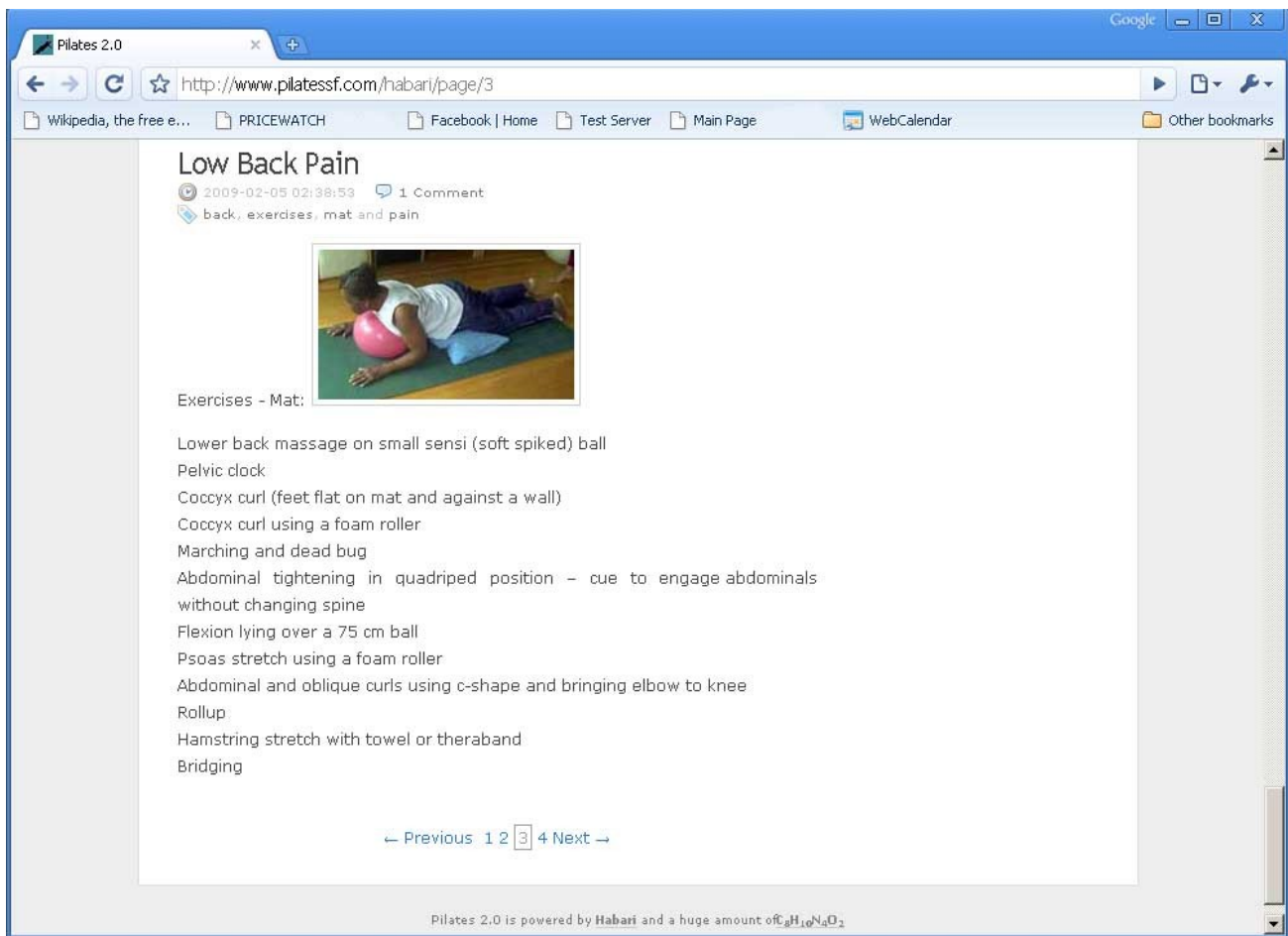
I found that the blogs did not need to be wordy to interest the reader and that pictures were the most valuable asset. All of the 'models' are my clients (and that's me on the home page of my site) and all were enthused about posing for the photos. I don't need to blog on a daily or even weekly basis – once a month keeps things fresh and judging by the statistics that's about what the readers want to see.

Web Site Activity



A few words about social networking sites. Although I have a personal Facebook page and use it quite a bit, I've kept my Pilates activities a bit underground. Because my business is so personal in nature I still want to screen potential clients and make sure they will be an appropriate fit. There was the older man who responded to one of my Craig's List ads in the early 2000's with the remark "...oh you mean this is exercise?" – a lascivious insinuation that I wish to avoid. My current clients are however all part of my Facebook 'family' as is a large San Francisco dance community and they share information about my studio with their friends as well. I keep my entries light, crisp and professional.

Much to my surprise, Pilates SF has been nominated for The San Francisco Chronicle – SFGate.com – Bay List. The voting is still taking place as I write this and I hope I'll be number one!



An example of my blog “Pilates 2.0”:

Leslie Streit is a Certified Pilates Instructor through the PhysicalMind Institute. She is also a member of IDEA, a student of Feldenkreis and Body Code. She owns a Pilates studio in San Francisco.