

Fall 2009

Merge™

medical aesthetics meets business

www.MergeOnline.com



MARKETING TO MAKE IT

Attracting new clients
in a down economy

BRANDING

Stand out from the crowd

STEVEN H. DAYAN, MD, FACS

Making a difference—locally and globally

Allured business
media

MARKETING to make it

By Melissa Kelz

ABSTRACT: Despite a rough economy and fewer discretionary dollars, there are patients to be had out there. Finding and connecting to those patients creates an appropriately targeted marketing strategy.

The country has stumbled into tough economic times. The current recession is likely to be the worst in 50 years in terms of job losses, according to an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank, and many people no longer have the same ability to invest in aesthetic well-being. Even if times are rough, however, there are those who have navigated effectively through this economic climate, and in today's competitive marketplace, there are specific things an aesthetic practice can do to ensure patients find them, refer others and keep returning for services.

Knowing your audience can help you create marketing materials that specifically target your ideal patient.



Target marketing

Don't shoot in the dark. A physician can spend less money and get better results with target marketing. Figure out who your audience is by creating a database to learn more about your patient population. The database should be driven by answers to questions you collect on a new patient form.

Patient information gives you knowledge, which translates into better understanding of the likes and dislikes of those you want to and do serve. Be creative but basic. Find out what newspapers, magazines and blogs your patients read. Decipher whether they listen to terrestrial or satellite radio. Discover their hobbies, and learn how they spend their free time. This type of information is vital to helping you understand how to reach your target audience.

WELL-KNOWN WEB SITES

These Web sites are sources many potential patients check for procedure information. Perusing them can help you keep up with what's going on in the industry.

- WebMD, www.webmd.com
- RealSelf, www.realself.com
- Beauty in the Bag, www.beautyinthebag.com
- iVillage, yourtotalhealth.ivillage.com
- The American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, www.aafprs.org

Operating online

In this digital age, developing an online strategy is imperative. All the time, people are logging onto popular health-related sites to discover the latest and greatest procedures and treatments. They regularly monitor these sites to see what procedures are popular, what recovery times entail and who else is having them done. These sites provide the opportunity for you to offer expert commentary or even banner ads.

Potential patients are also searching your Web site to determine your areas of expertise, your credentials and whether you are board-certified, as well as what types of procedures you offer, so display this information where they can see it.

TOP BLOGS

Log on to these blogs to learn what else is going on in the industry, as well as to pick up pointers about how to begin blogging on your own.

- health.blogs.foxnews.com/category/more-than-skin-deep
- blog.plasticsurgery.com/blog
- www.bellasugar.com
- www.my-no-no.com/blogs.aspx
- www.blogdorfgoodman.blogspot.com
- www.blogger.com
- www.totalbeauty.com



Media attention can be a great way to market your practice, getting your name recognized and creating top-of-mind awareness.

Digital strategy can include consumer reviews and testimonials about services. This also may incorporate blogging on your part, which is more powerful than most imagine. A blog provides updated headlines and news articles from other sites that are of interest to the user, and it also may include journal entries, commentaries and recommendations.

Blogging is not about controlling the dialogue—it's an organic evolution of a conversation. Some businesses do it as a special subsection of their Web sites, and even if you don't have your own, you should monitor blogs in the industry to see what your audience is saying.

EFFECTIVE PR

Public relations can be effective with the following:

Client retention effect: Reassures patients they have chosen the right provider to safely and effectively treat them.

Business tool: Creates marketing collateral.

Marketing effect: Nudges a patient to pick up the phone.

Selling effect: Positively influences patients contemplating seeing or referring you.

Brand-building: Strategically positions your practice in the market.

If you do decide to start a blog, important things to consider include:

- Blogs are essentially real-time cyber focus groups.
- Honesty and openness are essential to the successful execution of a blog as a marketing tool. It's okay for a blog to be associated with a corporation—just be upfront about it.
- Blogs aren't right for everybody.
- Do your research.

Grassroots marketing works

Many patients live in a relatively close proximity to a practice, and consequently, physicians have excellent results with direct mail targeting those households. In this way, you can get your message delivered to those most likely to become new patients. You may also reach out through a regional television show, sharing patient success stories and breakthrough treatments.

Creating powerful offers at the grassroots level is another tactic that works. Practices should try to make it easy for people to experience their procedures and treatments. An excellent solution is to offer a free consultation. This provides a risk-free way to test the waters for potential patients. Offer discounts to patients who refer friends. And, as always, patients sharing excellent experiences build great word-of-mouth.

Use public relations

Public relations can be a very effective method to create positive awareness for your business. For the media component of your outreach, it's best to be prepared when you contact journalists. Before you do anything, select a newsworthy topic. Stories on the popularity of Botox among middle-aged women have been done ad nauseam.

Once you have your topic, be prepared to speak to it in layman's terms. Try to put yourself in the reporter's shoes. Ask yourself, "What is significant about what I'm saying? Why would anyone care?" Keeping your talking points brief and simple is a winning strategy, and one that will help communicate your story more effectively. Treat the media as you would your patients; take advantage of the time you share by answering questions with patience and candor.

A phone call can be the best way to introduce yourself to a journalist or producer, and an initial e-mail is also a nice way to break the ice and gauge interest. Typically, the best time to call is in the morning, and you should follow up in writing after your conversation, being sure to include your contact information, title and credentials.

Keep in mind successful public relations may also require getting the outside help of a consultant, publicist or even a public relations firm, so be prepared to take your efforts to the next level.

Your patients matter

The best way to convey this message and build a strong following is to treat each individual with respect, patience and kindness. Take advantage of the one-on-one time you share with each patient by responding to questions with tolerance and sincerity. One of the most powerful things a physician can do is to call patients at home in the early evening immediately after procedures. This builds a warm feeling that you care, and it encourages them to return.

Ignite a dialogue with your patients. While it is important to use layman's terms, you want to be cognizant to use language that does not talk down to your patients. The more patients trust you, the more they will be likely to return and refer friends.

Getting your name out to the right people and

building solid relationships are time-tested marketing tactics. These strategies have worked for many practices and businesses, and with diligence, teamwork and determination, they can collectively empower you to grow and maintain a patient base through both good and rough economic times. 🍷



Melissa Kelz is a communications professional with nearly 15 years of experience in the fields of beauty, consumer products, health care, e-commerce and corporate communications. She is an award-winning

writer, and before starting Melissa Kelz Communications, she was a vice president at Behrman Communications in New York City.

TAKEAWAYS

- Focus on learning more about your patients to get an idea of who comes in to see you.
- A strong Web presence can help draw in more patients.
- Word-of-mouth and being visible in the media aids in name recognition and credibility.
- Creating close relationships with patients can be your best marketing tool.