



Why You May Need to Turn Your Marketing Upside Down

By Wendy Lewis, Founder/President of Wendy Lewis & Co Ltd, Global Aesthetics Consultancy

If your practice feels stagnant, it may be a good time to look at your marketing plan with a fresh set of eyes.

The instinctive reaction to a slowdown in new consults and sluggish procedure bookings is to rev up your marketing machine to increase your reach and spread the word to the right audiences. While that sounds intuitive, it may actually be the wrong way to go.

Here's why.

If all of the enquiries coming into your practice end up turning into longtime loyal patients, then boosting your marketing strategy and budget makes good sense. But for most aesthetic practices, that is far from actuality. While you may be doing all the right things to encourage new patients to come to your practice, you may not realize that you are also losing patients at the same time. This may be due to a variety of factors, including poor service, negative reviews, staff performance, outdated pricing strategy, increased competition in the local market, and that's just for starters.

So, before you throw more money at the problem, do some detective work to identify where the missed opportunities are coming from and fix those first.

The 80/20 Rule

I am sure you know about the 80/20 rule. In most businesses, 20% of customers generate 80% of the revenue. Aesthetic plastic surgery is no exception. We also know that it is far more cost effective to keep current patients coming back than to constantly look to attract new ones.

Focus on them by making sure they are being cared for in the best way possible. It may seem obvious, but it is easy to overlook this in a busy practice, especially where there is high staff turnover so the institutional memory slips away.

Check which patients have been in most recently, purchased more products and services, and most recently, and who actually spends the most money with your practice. Those are your 20 percent. So, focus on stopping the bleed first before you go after new patients to fill up your schedule. For example, acknowledge their birthdays, send them holiday gifts, offer them a loyalty



program, provide them with preferential appointment scheduling, invite them to a special private VIP event, etc. Start with loyal patients and address lapses in customer service and reputation first with a goal of encouraging happy patients who are loyal to have more treatments with you. This approach will force you to address areas that may need improvement from the bottom up. You may be taking your best patients for granted, but not even know it until they stop coming back for their quarterly neuromodulator sessions or take their second child to another plastic surgeon at your hospital for a rhinoplasty. The stronger the relationship you have with your rock-solid patients, the more loyal they will be to your practice, so it will be harder for a competitor to tempt them to leave.

It is so natural to want to pay attention to all of your patients. But the truth is that you don't need everyone. Your practice may actually thrive better with fewer patients spending more than the reverse—more patients spending less per visit and costing you more to get and keep happy.

Action Plan to Dig Your Way Out of a Slump

Start by sending a 10-question survey to patients who have not been back in the last 6–12 months. Make it anonymous to encourage a response. Take any feedback you get seriously, try to find out why they stopped coming and what could potentially lure them back to you. For example, was it a billing snafu, or a scheduling conflict, or were they unhappy with a treatment? If you can turn this relationship around, it's worth a try.

Reach out and ask loyal patients for testimonials and 5-star reviews on the platforms that matter most. Don't be shy about it either. They may be happy to endorse you and tell their friends, colleagues and family, but just don't realize how important this is to your practice and to you personally. Dr. Todd Schlessinger, a dermatologist in the Carolinas, literally asks his patients for a '5-star review' in so many words. I found this so impressive that I have now incorporated this tactic into my teaching courses. Why is this so smart? Because patients may not know the impact of 5 vs. 4 stars. They may assume that

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4 stars is a great review.

Talk to your patients more and more directly. Is there a product or treatment you are not offering that they are interested in? What's hot in your market? Ask them what more you can do to keep them happy.

Take patient complaints about staff members seriously. If there is an issue, deal with it head on. You don't want to risk losing a valued patient over an incident that can be easily resolved. If you get multiple complaints about an individual staff member, the true path should become obvious, unless of course it is a relative, and then you may have to suck it up.

Get rid of problem patients who drive you and your staff crazy. You know the ones I mean—like when their names show up on your patient list, your BP hits the roof and you down an antacid? One problem patient can

take his or her toll on everyone in the practice and wreak havoc, doesn't necessarily add to your bottom line. Divert the problem patients so you can free up your time to caress your relationships with the hassle-free, loyal big spenders and new patients. Note: Be gracious about dismissing any patient to avoid a negative review. All too often the ones you don't want to keep are the ones who don't want to leave.

However, even difficult patients who spend a ton of money with you can be tamed if you have the stomach for it. For example, a VIP can be assigned to one staff member to manage who has a good relationship with the patient and can keep their diva behavior to a minimum. In this way, the VIP will feel that he or she is being treated in a special way and at the same time, the rest of the staff will be

spared the drama of having to cater to her needs.

Dealing with any possible weaknesses in a bottom up order can help strengthen your practice's foundation so when you are ready to beef up your marketing program, your practice will be better positioned to reap the rewards.

Wendy Lewis is Founder/President of Wendy Lewis & Co Ltd, Global Aesthetics Consultancy, a marketing communications boutique in New York City since 1997. She is also Founder/Editor in Chief of Beautyinthebag.com, and the author of 12 books, including Aesthetic Clinic Marketing in The Digital Age (CRC Press) published in January 2018. She is a prolific contributor to many publications, websites and trade journals in the US and Europe, and a frequent presenter at national and international conferences.