

# MARKETING

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## STRATEGIES FOR MERGING ENERGY-BASED BODY CONTOURING TECHNIQUES INTO A PLASTIC SURGERY PRACTICE



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ASAPS dubbed 2018 the 'Year of the Body' which speaks to consumer interest in this exploding market segment. In fact, non-surgical fat reduction was ranked as the third most popular non-surgical procedure with 174,244 treatments performed.<sup>1</sup>

It should come as no surprise that non-invasive body shaping has shown unprecedented growth in recent years. The new generation of minimally invasive technologies has shown considerable improvement over past generations, with improved patient safety, outcomes, reduced treatment and recovery time, as well as minimal discomfort. The result is that patients of all ages and genders are seeking out these treatments across the globe.

Today's patients not only want to treat their face, they are very body conscious as well. Driven by social media images, celebrity behavior, and beauty and fashion trends, more consumers of all genders are seeking quick procedures with none to minimal downtime and reasonably low discomfort to get back to their daily lives quickly. The emerging range of laser and light treatments and non-surgical services can now effectively address many common aesthetic concerns.

Although liposuction and surgical procedures may deliver more dramatic and longer-lasting results, many patients are unwilling to undergo surgery, anesthesia, hospitalization

and a prolonged recovery. Therefore, offering an alternative and less serious treatment option can fill an unmet need in a traditional plastic surgical practice.

For these reasons, the addition of non-invasive body contouring shows great potential for a busy surgical practice with a robust patient base. It serves as a new modality to offer surgical patients, as well as a viable option for many patients who are resistant to undergoing invasive surgery. In addition, if the system you choose can be delegated to staff, it can serve as an excellent source of passive income. In essence, a plastic surgeon can be in the OR performing a tummy tuck or facelift, while a nurse may be freezing fat cells or toning patients' muscles under the same roof.



Figure 1 - Before and 60 days after one CoolSculpting® treatment (Allergan®). Procedure by Bruce van Natta, MD

### The Business of Body Shaping

The emergence of energy-based systems and innovative technologies has paved the way for more companies to enter the aesthetics sector, so there are many new choices available and more on the horizon. The business side of incorporating energy-based systems into a plastic surgery

<sup>1</sup><https://www.surgery.org/sites/default/files/ASAPS-Stats2018-Top-5.pdf>

practice starts with doing your research so you can make a quality purchase or lease and integrating it into your current service menu. It is highly recommended to speak with several colleagues who have direct experience with any devices you are considering to get the true story.

Body treatments have become more comfortable over time and most energy-based devices have greatly improved patient safety features. The ease of use of these devices has also advanced and results are more reproducible, which allows for most treatments to be delegated to physician extenders. Depending on your local regulations, this may include a medical assistant, medical aesthetician, LPN, RN, NP or PA. If only an MD can perform the treatments, your cost per treatment will rise substantially.

### Key Considerations to Know Before You Buy:

- Average fee charged per treatment in your market
- Brand recognition
- Capital equipment cost
- Clinical evidence and research
- Comfort and safety for patients
- Competitive advantages
- Consumables per treatment or area
- Direct to consumer marketing
- Ideal patient selection
- Maintenance contract, warranty fees
- Manufacturer or distributor support
- Number of devices sold in your market
- Number of treatments suggested
- Regulatory status in your market
- Size/dimensions of the device
- Sizes and shapes of available handpieces
- Training or certification required
- Who can perform treatments in your market

From a safety standpoint, the manufacturer or representative should be able to provide all current information on the system's clinical research, physician experience, and patient satisfaction. Reliable brands that are known to consumers in your market through their popularity and marketing programs offer the advantage of attracting new patients faster due to critical name recognition.

The system you select should fit into your current patient demographic to bypass substantial marketing expenses to bring new patients into the practice. If you choose the wrong system for your practice, it may end up being an expensive coat hanger or take up coveted floor space in your treatment rooms.

If you plan correctly, the system could ideally be used on a consistent basis from introduction. With multifunctional systems, you may be able to use them as a stand-alone treatment or with other devices to obtain superior outcomes. Many practices that are serious about body shaping may bring on multiple devices that can be utilized in different ways, and work together synergistically to establish a body shaping center theme.

For the most dramatic and lasting results, liposuction or more invasive surgery may be the preferred option. However, there has been a sea change in the mindset and goals of consumers, resulting in slower growth in the surgical category. Although non-surgical or minimally invasive treatments may not be the right fit for obese patients or patients with excessive skin laxity, a large percentage of consumers are willing to accept a lesser result from a lesser procedure.

If you are seeing patients who are candidates for non-invasive body contouring and have the means to have it done, you may consider bringing on a GP or other MD to perform the treatment, or a physician extender to work per diem or part time. This will enable you to keep those patients in your practice rather than losing them to another practice that is unlikely to refer them back to you for surgery in the future.

The two critical questions you should ask before buying a system are: "How many treatments do we need to perform to pay off the system?" and "How long will it take us to pay off the system?"



Figure 2 - Before and after 4th treatment with Emtone® (BTL Aesthetics®). Procedure by Marc Salzman, MD.

### The Body Shaping Market

Advanced technologies enable many wavelengths and energies to be used on all skin types and skin colors. More practices are expanding their treatment menu as myriad effective options for fat reduction, cellulite treatment, and skin tightening continue to evolve. Body shaping encompasses a wide range of procedures that target weight loss, fat reduction, contouring, toning, firming and cellulite reduction.

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## Four Body Treatment Categories

### • Skin tightening

Common areas treated: Abdomen, arms, thighs, knees  
 Modalities: Radiofrequency, ultrasound, microneedling RF, ablative/non-ablative lasers, combination wavelengths.

### • Fat reduction, body contouring

Common areas treated: Abdomen, hips, thighs, knees, buttocks, back, arms, axillary folds, chest (men), submental  
 Modalities: Heat (radiofrequency), cold (cryolipolysis), ultrasound, lasers, injection lipolysis, combination procedures.

### • Cellulite reduction

Common areas treated: Thighs, buttocks, knees, abdomen  
 Modalities: Subcision, acoustic waves, poly-L-lactic acid (PLLA), RF

### • Muscle toning

Common areas treated: Buttocks, abdomen, upper arms, thighs, core, calves  
 Modalities: Electromagnetic energy, multi-directional stimulation

A good way to differentiate your practice is by adding an energy-based non-invasive system that can tighten lax skin in conjunction with fat reduction to offer additional benefits. Body shaping encompasses a wide range of procedures that target weight reduction, as well as toning, firming and cellulite reduction. Skin-tightening procedures address skin laxity and contour defects on the face as well as the body.

Actual fat loss will vary from person to person, results are usually not immediate, and multiple treatment sessions are typically required. Whereas the ideal candidates should be at a healthy weight with localized fat deposits, these treatments are commonly used on patients with a higher BMI, of all sizes, shapes and conditions successfully.



Figure 3 - Before and 12 weeks after 1 truSculpt iD® treatment (Cutera®). Procedure by Stephen Ronan, MD.

Each system comes with its own limitations based on the energy and configuration of handpieces for maximum efficiency. For example, some systems may only offer handpieces that are too large for small body areas like upper arms, submental and knees. It is important to know before you buy exactly what conditions and areas the system will treat at that moment, not just what is planned for the future. Most non-invasive systems mainly destroy fat cells and are not intended for serious skin tightening, so you may need more than one device to treat a wider range of patients.

Consider which areas your current patients are most interested in treating and what their comfort level is vis-à-vis downtime, discomfort, and price point. It can be risky to bring on a new device with the sole purpose of attracting a brand-new segment of patients, unless you have a huge marketing budget. Ideally, you should already have existing patients to target first, and then you can focus on recruiting new patients over time.

As many as 80-90% of post-puberty woman will have cellulite<sup>2</sup>, which accounts for a vast number of patients who have a potential interest in this treatment category. Cellulite patients come in all shapes and sizes; even skinny women can present with dimples and irregularities. Cellulite reduction results have been inconsistent historically, with many treatments focusing mainly on surface irregularities, but new therapies are changing the way practitioners approach cellulite.

Each patient represents a unique set of circumstances, which can make the consultation process especially challenging. When treating cellulite, it is critical to be honest with patients and not to overstate claims. Every woman has heard of miracle cures and most have a healthy degree of skepticism about new treatments. Let patients know up front what



<sup>2</sup><https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25940753%20>