



Attracting New Patients

In the
Information
Age

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INTRODUCTION

What the Information in This Article Will Do For You

Promoting your medical practice in order to attract new patients and bring back existing patients is not a new concept, but it is always a challenging one.

Today, there are more options and opportunities than ever before – Social Media in particular has opened up those opportunities – but to be effective in an increasingly-crowded market, careful planning is required up-front, and consistent implementation is vital to long-term success.

In this instructional guide, we will review the most important steps in creating and implementing a plan of action to attract patients. In particular, we will focus on:

- ① How to create a useful and effective practice marketing plan – and how to put it into action.
- ② How to establish your “brand identity.”
- ③ What “Target Marketing” is and how it can dramatically grow your practice.
- ④ How to create, promote and use events.
- ⑤ Why your website is your single most important practice marketing tool.
- ⑥ What SEO is and why you want it – and how you go about getting it.
- ⑦ How media public relations can work for you.

With these questions – and their answers – you’ll be prepared to launch or re-launch your practice. By following a practice marketing plan, you will move toward increased and sustained profitability, allowing you to “do well by doing good” for your patients.

Ask your office
manager or an
objective 3rd
party to **conduct
a focus
group**

in your practice
after hours.



1

The Marketing Plan

Your Road-Map to Practice Business Success

When developing a plan to grow your practice, start by asking yourself, “When is the last time I took a good, hard look at my practice through the eyes of a patient?”

If the answer isn’t “last week” or “last month,” it’s time to ask that question, objectively and with brutal honesty. There is no room here for wishful thinking. Patients make the kinds of physician-affiliation decisions that strengthen or weaken your practice, so knowing what they really want is absolutely essential to ultimate practice marketing success.

Step 1: Research

You’ll need to talk to your patients, current and former. Ask your office manager or an objective 3rd party to conduct a “focus group” in your practice after hours. Invite them via email, incent them for participating, and listen to what they have to say. Write your questions in advance to gain insights into how they really feel about you, your staff, your care and your office environment. You might learn that there is a gap in your follow up process, or that a competitor is soliciting them via direct mail.

Step 2: Planning Process

Once you have a handle on what your prospective patients really want, begin your planning by creating a practice marketing plan that relies heavily on social media and public/media relations for its success. Hire a professional as the rules of engagement and SEO change daily. Social Media platforms useful to your practice may include one or more of the following: blogs and video blogs, Facebook and Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest, LinkedIn and – for videos – YouTube. Take advantage of free doctor listing sites such as locateadoc.com, plasticsurgery.org, smartbeautyguide.com, newbeauty.com and many others. Maximize your profiles and always include an updated headshot photo.

Step 3: Unique Selling Proposition

Focus on translating your marketing message, and don’t try to be all things to all patients. Instead, choose one to two niche markets and know your Unique Selling Proposition, or USP. Any type of introspective review takes a bit of time, which is a precious commodity for most physicians. For this and other reasons, consider working with a professional marketing firm. In our increasingly competitive landscape, primary care and specialist physicians – including those from just about every specialty – are now getting more involved in offering cash pay aesthetics. On the Internet, thousands of websites are competing for top ranking positions. The ever-expanding news media – including the

increasingly-important online news media – is engaging with the marketplace more than ever before. In the face of this competition, how do you go about standing out in the crowd? How do you position yourself to get to the top and have more of a competitive advantage? Spend an hour per week looking at their websites and mystery shopping your neighbors.

Engage a professional firm to review your current marketing budget and your outreach strategy – then learn from them what it takes to manage your practice’s unique marketing program. Don’t try to be either what you’ve always been or what everyone else is. Instead, move forward with something new, unique and fresh. Defining your brand’s identity (covered in more detail below), as well as your target markets, are both critical to creating your roadmap for success.

Step 4: Budgeting

In this competitive and information-rich marketplace, public relations and marketing should be viewed as necessary expenses, and also as an investment in your practice’s future. These tools should simply be a built-in part of your cost of doing business.

A good rule of thumb for marketing should allow for 15% to 20% of your projected gross revenue for the first 2-3 years in practice. This could drop to between 5% and 7% in the following years, assuming your practice has reached your revenue goals. However, because the healthcare marketplace has become so competitive, you don’t ever want to go below that level.

Step 5: From Plan to Profits

Determining which patient groups you choose to target, as well as how your marketing efforts are applied, will ultimately determine your success. This is especially true considering that, as a rule of thumb, the 80/20 rule – 80 percent of your practice’s profits come from 20 percent of your patients – holds true. In medicine, as in other professions, you shouldn’t just look to fill your schedule. Instead, you should build a relationship with the right patients, those who value your training, expertise and patient experience.

2 What's Your Brand Identity?

When is the last time you had a beverage at Starbucks®? Whether you picked up your beverage from the smiling barista down the street or while on vacation in another state, the experience was probably similar. The Starbucks logo, the company's standard of customer care, the inviting aroma, the clean and comfortable seating, the free Wi-Fi and the sprinkling of retail items to peruse are all part of the core of Starbucks' marketing success. And guess what? You were just immersed in the Starbucks brand!

Step 1

To evaluate and potentially change your brand identity, you first need to know what your brand is truly telling your patients and prospects (see Step 1 in marketing plan, section 1). You need to know what image you're projecting. Reviewing and adjusting your brand should serve to attract and engage your targeted audience. Having an effective and honest brand is an important part of building trust, encouraging loyalty – and especially, standing out from the competition.

But before you can start building your brand's experience for customers, you need to take some fundamental first steps to define your brand. At first glance, defining your brand may seem easy, but in reality, it takes some soul searching,

Step 2

Then ask yourself where you want to be positioned in the community. Do you want to be seen as a high end (and perhaps high-price) practice with extraordinary customer care and service? Or you can choose to be at the other end of the spectrum – the mass/volume discount provider. Or do you want to dominate the mid-range. What procedure(s) do you want to specialize in? Mommy makeovers or fat transfer? Faces or fats? It's your decision to then laser focus on the patient demographic you wish to service.

Step 3

Brand Consistency: Every potential patient touch-point must speak your brand. Everything from office décor to your website, from patient forms



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Most practices have a brand, though they are unaware of this because they “let the brand happen.” That may have worked in the 90's, but no more. Every successful medical practice has to consciously create its own unique brand identity. This brand identity is not born the day that you start practicing medicine. Either through careful management or “let the chips fall where they may,” brand identity evolves over time and is constantly alive.

decision making and data gathering. It may also take a professional consultant who can look at you and your practice objectively, rather than through the eyes of expectation. This means thinking through who your best patients are and what their expectations might be. What does your style of service look like, and what other expert offerings do you bring to the table?

to private-label products, from staff wardrobe to your caring post procedure calls must all reflect the practice brand.

Whatever you include in your marketing mix: newspaper and magazine ads or advertorials, radio and television, your website and your blogs, your social media pages and participation – even community outreach – they must all convey your consistent message. A comprehensive strategy of repeated appearances across your marketing initiatives will reinforce your practice identity. If defined correctly, your message will resonate with your target market. It will foster trust with prospective patients, driving new patients into your practice. Your practice will reap the benefits of regular – even weekly – social media posts, monthly educational eBlasts, regular blogs, and articles, even press releases.

Things to consider when creating your in-office brand environment:

Step 4

Patient Testimonials and Photos: The use of Patient Testimonials in addition to the use of effective Before & After photos that demonstrate your success stories, are both essential to practice marketing success and defining a brand (to protect the practice, have your patients sign a photo release form that covers any use on the Internet). One of the single most searched items for patients interested in cosmetic procedures is a doctor's Before & After gallery. These photos provide the opportunity to showcase your skills and expertise.

A recent RealSelf.com survey found that 83 percent of consumers researching cosmetic surgery said they would not consider a practice that doesn't have Before & After photos¹. Having no photos may leave prospective patients wondering if perhaps you don't perform a particular procedure, or perhaps you don't have any good photos – which might suggest that you don't have any patients with successful outcomes. Showcase photos that reflect and match your target patient and the procedure areas you focus on.

This also applies to patient testimonials. Testimonials from real people give you instant credibility. Have a protocol in place to collect happy patient testimonials including photos or videos. Display photo gallery Before & After books in all of the consulting rooms. These testimonials provide prospective patients with someone to identify with.

- The first contact on an incoming call must be welcoming, informative and practiced. Mystery call your own practice. It can provide you with valuable feedback. Generally, you only get to make one impression – there are no second chances when it comes to making a good first impression. Be sure your staff knows how to succinctly answer questions about your experience and board certifications.
- Appointment reminders – When contacting the patient, these must be timely and professional. You should use each patient's own preferred method of contact, whether it's email, text or a phone call. Follow up with email patient satisfaction surveys. There are professional companies who can handle this for you.
- Greeting the patient with a smile and addressing them by their name will go a long way toward creating a positive brand identity. Offering refreshments upon arrival is also a nice perk.
- The ambiance in the office should reflect your brand in all aspects – just as Starbucks does. The office must be inviting, warm, clean and comfortable, up to date and well decorated. Ensure wait times are minimal, under 15 minutes. Call the patient in advance if you know you are running behind. They will appreciate the heads up rather than waiting long in your office.
- Discussing payment with genuine care and concern in a private environment is both courteous and compassionate. Introducing promotional financing options such as CareCredit reduces the stress of money discussions. This also helps clarify the cost factor and patients are accustomed to thinking about monthly payments relative to their financial situation.
- Sending a thank you note for a referral is often much-appreciated.

If you knew that investing in your brand would bring you the right patients, would you be willing to invest? **If updating your brand brings you:**

2 new patients per week

100 new patients per year

3 Target Marketing

(Referral Programs, Loyalty Programs and B2B)

If you really want to generate **positive word of mouth buzz**, create cross referrals with other **local businesses**.

Loyalty Programs

Patient referral programs and loyalty programs – which reward patient loyalty and patient referrals with services or products – should be a large part of your internal marketing plan to capture new business and retain patients within your practice. A strong referral or loyalty program helps ensure that you continue to get repeat business. An effective referral program recognizes that patient referrals should be acknowledged with a Thank You. “Refer a Friend” gift certificates are a nice way of getting happy patients to share with their friends and family.

Example: Send flowers to your loyal patients on their birthdays – at least to those who refer their friends. (note: state laws vary regarding gifts to

patients so be sure to check with your attorney first). Even a hand-written birthday card with a \$25 gift certificate for your practice is appreciated and builds brand recognition.

Cross-Referrals

If you really want to generate positive word of mouth buzz, create cross referrals with other local businesses that are not competing for the same procedures. This encourages cross Business-to-Business marketing. Referring physicians are also very effective in communicating your value to their patients. Don't stop building your network of referral sources locally. Reach out to spas, eyebrow and hair salons, juice stores, clothing boutiques and fitness centers to create an alliance. Don't keep your brand a secret!



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Event Marketing is Essential

Most competitive aesthetic practices offer events such as seminars, open houses and perform public speaking engagements in their local area.

Are you confident in your ability to have successful event marketing? If not, ask colleagues, ask a practice management expert for tips, or order CareCredit's free special event kit.



Event marketing builds patient trust and loyalty in your local area and can be used to educate patients, rather than just trying to sell them. This is where targeted marketing campaigns can be extremely beneficial. Here are the steps involved:

- Determine a theme for the event. Create a VIP or targeted group for each event. (Think teacher's day, or beauty wonderland, or makeup pro as a guest.)
- Mail invites to past patients, prospective patients, current patients, and referring doctors and businesses.
- Advertise locally but selectively where your target VIP's are likely reading. For example, if you are targeting patients for facelifts, advertise in the "cruises" section of your local travel newspaper or in a newsletter produced by a local travel agency.

- Invite press to come to your event.
- Have swag bags for each of your attendees consisting of gifts from your vendors, a discount offering and a copy of your most recent public relations appearance like an article or a feature story you appeared in.
- Keep events smaller and more targeted to a specific audience. Think VIP, not cattle-call.
- Lectures in hospitals can help generate doctor referrals. Public speaking engagements with the press or medical organizations can help build credibility for your practice. In short, public speaking engagements and events can be simple, inexpensive and highly effective.

5

Website

When was the last time you gave your website a facelift?

We have all heard or used the term "the information age," which suggests that our society is becoming more and more knowledge-based. Consider the paradigm shift where we ask Siri, "Who's the BEST plastic surgeon in my town, my state?" – Chances are she will come up with 8-10 plastic surgery practices in your area. Are you listed? Why or why not?

A well-thought-out online presence is a must! Because information is bountiful, your online presence deserves time and attention. So in the heavy traffic of the internet, where do you – as a business – begin? Your website.

CareCredit's 2014 "Path to Purchase" Study showed 92% of consumers researched procedures in advance, and of these 77% conducted research ONLINE. 64% indicated the provider's website was their preferred online channel². All online information "roads" should lead back to your website. It should serve as your natural patient or prospect information destination. Educated customers who visit your website are looking for meaningful information to distinguish your practice and services from your competitors. Use the website to highlight your credentials and distinct features offered by your practice. Remember, it's the first exposure to your brand that most new patients have.

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SEO

Search Engine Optimization

Because most consumers do not search past the first five lines, you must know how to optimize your website with the right key words in your content. This will assist in organically reaching top ranked positions. Key words or phrases are the most common ones typed into Internet browsers to search. An example is: "Liposuction in Peoria, Illinois."

You must also optimize in other content-rich ways to help obtain top ranking positions. Your societies have online directories they endorse. It's worth interviewing them to see what may be a good fit. Website facelifts can range from \$3,000-\$5,000 and a new website that has a mobile version (called responsive design) can range from \$5,000-\$12,000.

An effective core-content foundation to your website should include:

1. Sitemap
2. Navigation
3. Page Content
4. Link Building
5. Image Tags

SEO is an ongoing process of increasing your visibility and ranking to bring visitors to your site and focuses on the free listing sections of the search engines such as Google®, Bing®, and Yahoo®. Search engines award "points" to websites that have credible and useful information on their Internet outlets. This includes your website, blogs, videos and social media platforms. Professional and effective SEO can cost between \$600 and \$2,500 per month.

Because the Internet search engine is never static, many practices elect to outsource their online needs. Some key website-information areas to focus on are:

- Before & After Photo Gallery
- Testimonials
- Video Marketing
- Blogging
- Keywords
- Directory Listings companies
- Landing pages and micro sites
- PPC-Pay per click Ads

Social media is part of today's "word of mouth" advertising. WOM is highly valuable because of the low cost and high return with patient referrals. This source is not only its own patient acquisition tool, but can also help optimize your website when linking content between media types. For instance, connecting your blog stories to specific Facebook posts pulls potential patients to multiple resources for information on your practice while boosting your organic rankings!



SEO

is an ongoing process of **increasing your visibility** and ranking to bring visitors to your site.

You can consider a social media management tool such as HootSuite, Buffer or TweetDeck. Personally it's not my preference, but many find these are effective social media management tools. Used properly, these tools help to plan your social media interactions easily on one platform, saving time and resources. However, exercise caution, as these tools are not one size fits all.

As with any marketing undertaking, planning is key when it comes to your electronic presence. Once defined, keeping your brand identity consistent across all platforms can range from \$300-\$2,000 per month depending on frequency of posts or writing of blogs.

Educate, Educate, Educate:

With so many websites and paid announcements competing for the attention of your niche target market, positioning yourself as an expert in your field is time well spent. Whenever reporters are covering stories that deal with a particular topic, they will contact an appropriate media source(s) to confirm the knowledge that the reporter has acquired, ask advice and request other relevant information.

These market leaders are known on the Internet as either Subject Matter Experts or even Thought Leaders. Being one of those is an important goal in your online marketing-through-education efforts.

Search engines and reporters in medicine find media sources very helpful. With the large number of medical procedures available, new technology, and forward thinking legislation, it is very difficult for reporters to do their job without the help of medical media sources, specifically those who have substantiated themselves as credible sources of information on specific subject matters.

So how do you position yourself as an expert? Plug these activities into your marketing plan to get on the radar of the local media.

Blogs and Video Blogs: Developing your blog can be a crucial step in becoming a media source. This means you have to focus on who is doing the writing, and what you're going to write about. Create a publishing calendar as part of your marketing plan to make sure you're populating your blog with fresh content on a regular basis. Choose a monthly topic such as:

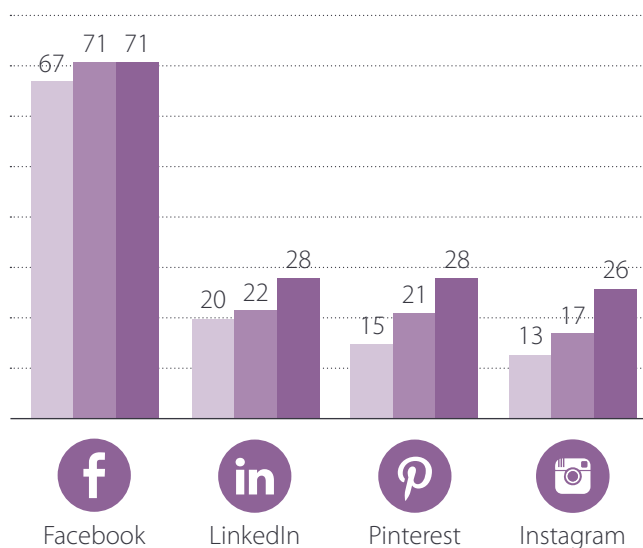
ThermiRF™ new radio frequency technology. Write several blogs about unique procedures and how it's the perfect solution for patients who are not ready for surgery. Be active in following news, trends and making relevant comments online.

Although this may not drive business immediately, it will gradually catalog your content online. In your blog, pay attention to smart rich-content writing that makes use of effective keyword research, you will soon start popping up in searches for your area of expertise. Keep content new and interesting. The Goal: Get consumers engaged and following your Twitter or Facebook handles, asking questions, posting comments and sharing online with friends.

Social Media Sites: 2012-2014

% of online adults who use the following social media websites.

2012 2013 2014



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Public Relations

Regional or National?

Media Public Relations (PR) is the practice of managing the spread of information between your practice and the public. If an editor were to call you today, what would you say your number 1 or 2 areas of expertise are? Know this so you can position your expertise with the media.

Create a media list to target your local area. Some physicians may want to target nationally. The cost is higher and as consultants we usually recommend starting within a 10 mile radius of your practice, getting your name out and then in the future consider going national if relevant. Example: publishing a book or inventing a product being sold online.

Putting together a top notch press release:

Journalists all have the same goal – to create an interesting and relevant story within a short time frame. Deadlines are extremely important to the press. A press release offers a snapshot of the story with all credible information necessary to complete the story. This includes:

- The physician's biography and photo.
- At least two quotes; one from a manufacturer's rep or other third party, patient, and physician.
- Before & After photos (all photos must be tagged with keywords for SEO).
- Patient testimonials add to your credibility.
- Statistics are very appealing to reporters.
- Reprints of published articles that relate to your specialty can be beneficial to include in press submissions.
- Video link to your YouTube channel.

These tools help reporters quickly establish credibility to support your brand and point of view. In fact, knowing how the press likes to receive information (in the form of press releases) is very important for a successful campaign. Conducting public relations in-house is not always an effective use of your staff's time. You should consider outsourcing to public relations professionals. However, you must be available any time to answer questions from the media. Most writers or reporters are usually on tight deadlines. If you choose to do your PR in house, be prepared to monitor the progress and manage the public relations results.

Giving back to your community will increase your visibility and will help define you as a community minded practice. Survey your patients for charities they may be active in, to position you as an expert speaker.

The contribution of your time and/or resources to a local charity shows your individual character and translates to the personality, or brand, of your practice. In addition, inviting your staff to participate encourages teamwork and elevates workplace morale. This in turn, pays off in elevated customer service.

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You should consider outsourcing to **public relations professionals.**





Conclusion

You may wish to engage in a meeting with a business consultant to update your marketing and public relations plan. A 12 month timeline would be a roadmap that can help direct your team.

We live in an age of instant feedback, quick decisions, and huge competition for our patient's discretionary dollar, but you can rise above the competition by enhancing your practice management strategies. Never underestimate the power of patient acquisition. Patients have more choices and the industry is becoming more competitive. Focus on customer service; having a skilled and appreciated staff who shares your vision and mission will ultimately create a pleasant memorable experience for your patients.

Marketing is the lifeblood of any practice, and marketing to prospective patients is essential for physicians whose services don't require a referral from another physician. The rise of the Internet – and particularly social media – has made access to the public more accessible than ever before. However, the market is crowded, and quickly rewards effective professionalism while ignoring “me-too” and uninspired or erratic social media outreach. On your own, or with the help of a practice marketing professional consultant, you can take your practice to the next level in terms of both patient satisfaction and profitability.



Cheryl Whitman, CEO, Beautiful Forever, is one of the pioneers of effective physician practice marketing, and a leader in this field for more than two decades. In addition to regularly speaking at professional conferences on issues related to marketing and promotion, sales management and practice operations, Cheryl has written several successful books on practice marketing, including the Aesthetics Business Success System. Her most recent book is Beautifully Profitable/Forever Profitable – a practical guide for marketing medical practices. Through her consulting company, Beautiful Forever, Cheryl has helped hundreds of physicians to more effectively grow their practices.

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¹ PR Newswire, New Study Reveals One in Five Women Plan to Purse Cosmetic Surgery, Feb 11, 2015.

² 2014 Path to Purchase study, conducted for CareCredit by Chadwick Martin Bailey, an independent research firm.