

# The Right Mix

By Lesley Ranft

The goal of marketing is to develop a series of strategies that will leverage patient acquisition, strengthen patient loyalty and produce a strong return on investment. The mainstay in traditional marketing has been word of mouth referrals. However, with increased competition and a tight economy, many practices are diversifying their marketing strategies in an effort to keep their appointment books full.



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According to Jupiter Research, 63% of healthcare information seekers on the Internet indicated that they would switch doctors if they found credible content online.

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Crutchfield Dermatology includes a wealth of indication-specific information plus patient testimonials on its website to build credibility with prospective patients.

## Where Patients Find New Providers

A successful marketing campaign combines internal marketing efforts to increase bookings among existing patients and encourage word of mouth referrals, with external marketing efforts to attract new patients.

Consumers interested in aesthetic medicine typically research providers through a variety of means before selecting a physician. They talk to friends, family members and co-workers; investigate doctors they've seen in paid advertisements, on television or in print publications; and search the Internet before contacting the practices that pique their interest. According to Jupiter Research, 63% of healthcare information seekers on the Internet indicated that they would switch doctors if they found credible content online.

Whichever media you choose to reach out to patients, your message should be geared toward building trust and credibility.

"In today's day and age, internal marketing is still the most effective means to

generate trust between patients and the practice," says Richard Greco, MD, of the Georgia Institute for Plastic Surgery in Savannah, Georgia. "Successful internal marketing programs may include: quarterly newsletters, educational seminars, patient testimonials, and before-and-after patient photos. But the Internet remains a critical component in practice building."

## Online Marketing

There is no doubt that most consumers who are interested in aesthetic medicine search the Internet for information. Accordingly, developing some form of web presence has become a must for practitioners. Building a website for your practice is a great start. But with so many practices online, today's practitioners must also formulate a strategy to bring visitors to their sites. Free and paid directories, like locteadoc.com, docshop.com or those offered through professional associations are valuable patient acquisition tools.

Search engine optimization (SEO), the practice of adding content that will push your site to the top of search engines, has also become more popular in recent years. One of the keys to optimizing your standing on search engines relates to how often new content is published to your site. The more often you update your content through blogs, newsletters and postings, the higher your standing.

The use of "pay per click" text advertising is also growing in popularity. Pay per click campaigns give your website immediate prominent positioning on Internet search engines when consumers search select key words that relate to your offerings. As Charles E. Crutchfield, MD, of Crutchfield Dermatology in Eagan, Minnesota, explains, "I like the concept of Google Adwords, because you only pay when a patient actually clicks through to visit your site, as opposed to other marketing efforts where you pay regardless of whether patients are calling or not." But he notes, "The most

important thing in marketing is to take a multifaceted approach and track the results." Dr. Crutchfield uses print, radio and direct mail advertising in conjunction with his Google Adword advertising campaign.

## Internal Marketing

Before-and-after portfolios, manufacturer-supplied brochures and posters, and email newsletters, all help to trigger interest in new aesthetic procedures among your existing patient base. In 2008, The American Society of Plastic Surgeons found that 44% of cosmetic patients are repeat patients. Are 44% of *your* patients returning for additional procedures? If not, you may want to reexamine your current efforts to rebook existing patients.

One of the latest tools used to foster patient loyalty and increase rebookings is text messaging. When offered by providers like Smile Reminder (smilere-reminder.com), a simple software component is added to the practice management software system that allows you to create customizable email and text messages for members of your database.

The messages can be used to remind patients of upcoming scheduled appointments or to advise patients if the office is closed or running late. Many practitioners are finding that it helps to increase rebookings when used to notify patients that it's time to schedule their next Botox or dermal filler injection.

Practices can set parameters for specific demographics, appointment confirmations or reminders, and cancellations. Imagine the extent of improved productivity with a software component that can pull cancellation and reminder lists off the practice desktop and automatically send an appropriate message to targeted contacts. "Electronic communication is low cost and high return," says Mitchell Chasin, MD, medical director of Reflections Center for Skin and Body of Livingston and Bridgewater, New Jersey.

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"The software for text messages integrates easily with our software system, improves quality of care, and leverages office efficiency."

### Reaching Prospective Patients

In addition to building word of mouth and increasing multiple bookings among existing patients, you want to create a marketing strategy that will consistently bring new patients through your doors. External marketing campaigns, including direct mail, paid media advertising and PR campaigns can help keep your name front and center in your community.

**Direct Mail.** Direct mail campaigns are most effective when sent to: current and past patients; referring doctors; and a purchased, targeted list of prospective patients. Direct mail traditionally provides a response of 1% to 2%. But as mailing lists have become increasingly targeted those response rates have grown to between 14% to 24%. An online search of "direct mail lists" will bring you a variety of companies that can help you create a targeted list based on gender, age, income and proximity to your practice.

Direct mail messages may include

outlining the procedures you perform plus special offers currently available to patients. The magazine is sent to current and prospective patients, and can also be placed in the waiting room of your medical practice and the reception area of local businesses you cross-promote with, including spas, beauty salons and highend retailers. Sherry Simmons, MD, of Body Perfect Medical Spa in Springfield, Illinois, successfully uses multiple platforms to leverage patient acquisition, including *Radiant Life* magazine ([radiantlifemagazine.com](http://radiantlifemagazine.com)). "*Radiant Life* contains pertinent information about the treatments offered in my practice," she says. "It also offers me the ability to add content about special offers, products and procedures. It helps to position me as the expert in my community, which I find is essential in today's competitive environment. Combined with my weekly cable and call-in radio shows, my practice has grown by 30% through these marketing methods."

**Public Relations.** Media coverage, whether in print, radio, television or online, can help you reach a large audience and establish yourself as an expert in the field. But you need to let the media know that you're available. This is where public relations comes into play. A PR campaign may include offering opinion editorial (Op-ed) pieces to local or national newspapers, providing educational content to editors and producers, offering yourself as an interviewee versed in a specialized area of cosmetic medicine, or sharing in-depth information on new procedures coming to your community through your practice.

Although there is no guarantee that all of your public relations efforts will result in coverage, PR campaigns tend to be low cost and can help you develop an ongoing relationship with the press, which can be beneficial in the long run. You can distribute press releases to local and national media contacts by email, which keeps costs low. Each release

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Photo courtesy of Radiant Life

Text messaging and custom publications are some of the latest marketing vehicles designed to increase rebookings and new patient acquisitions.

newsletters, practice announcements on new procedures, seasonal specials, or more expansive custom-designed magazines that provide a wealth of information on medical aesthetics and your specific practice.

Custom designed publications, like newsstand magazines, offer diverse content to reach broad a consumer base. The difference is that these magazines also provide content that is customized to your practice including a profile of the treating physician and content

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should include the following:

- The five Ws. “Who are you?” “What are you promoting?” “Where is this taking place?” “When is this happening?” and “Why do our readers/viewers need to know this now?”


Repeat appearances on television, radio and/or in print help to foster patient trust, build your brand and create a call to response.

- Your credentials to establish your expertise
- Visual aids. These may include

photographs, including before-and-after images, or video

As Marilyn Sardo, MD, San Diego, explains, “The numerous press releases we’ve sent out have resulted in both local and national exposure for my practice, and that exposure has brought many new patients into my practice.”

**Paid advertising.** Paid advertising efforts are most effective when they are repetitive. Repeat appearances on television, radio and/or in print help to foster patient trust, build your brand and create a call to response. Getting the best return on your advertising dollars starts by choosing advertising media that hits your target market and then tracking the response you receive from each advertising effort. Daily or weekly regional newspapers and local cable television advertising spots ensure that you’re hitting your target market in terms of proximity. You can also investigate markets that speak to more affluent community members including local symphony or theater programs. Metropolitan and beauty-oriented magazines offer a longer shelf life than television or radio TV ads, as they are often reviewed multiple times by more than one person in a household, but they may not be as targeted in terms of physical distribution.

The best means of developing an effective marketing strategy is to identify your niche in the community, identify your target market and design a multifaceted marketing program that speaks to both potential and existing patients. It may be helpful to assign a staff member in the office to monitor advertising and public relations appearances in order to ensure that they run as scheduled, and to track the efforts that are inviting the strongest response. 

*Lesley Ranft is a San Diego, California-based freelance writer.*

## 2009

**September 10-12** 17<sup>th</sup> Annual World Congress on Anti-Aging Medicine, San Jose Convention Center, San Jose, California. Contact: 888.997.0112, worldhealth.net

**September 12-15** International Congress of Esthetics and Spa, Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach, California. Contact: lneonline.com

**September 15-16** Medical Aesthetics Conference & Expo, Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, New York. Contact: 888.267.3793, medaestheticsconferency.com

**October 1-3** American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Fall Meeting, Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel, San Diego. Contact: 703.299.8898, aafprs.org

**October 1-4** American Society for Dermatologic Surgery and American Society of Cosmetic Dermatology & Aesthetic Surgery Joint Annual Meeting, JW Marriot Desert Ridge Resort & Spa, Phoenix, Arizona. Contact: 847.956.0900, asds.net

**October 2-3** 5<sup>th</sup> Annual European Masters in Anti-Aging & Aesthetic Medicine, Palais des Congrès of Paris, Paris, France. Contact: EMAA, euro-medicom.com

**October 5-8** 2009 ISPA Conference & Expo, Austin Convention Center, Austin, Texas. Contact: 888.651.4772, experienceispa.com

**October 15-17** European Congress on Anti-Aging & Aesthetic Medicine (ECAAAM), The Congress Centre Mainz, Frankfurt, Germany. Contact: germany.anti-agingevents.com

**October 23-28** 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the American Society of Plastic Surgical Nurses, Grand Hyatt Seattle, Seattle. Contact: 800.272.0136, aspsn.org

**October 23-28** Plastic Surgery 2009, Washington State Convention Center, Seattle. Contact: ASPS, 847.228.9900, plasticsurgery.org

**December 9-12** 17<sup>th</sup> Annual World Congress on Anti-Aging Medicine, Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas. Contact: 888.997.0112, worldhealth.net

## 2010

**January 14-18** South Beach Symposium, Loews Miami Beach Hotel, Miami. Contact: 904.309.6262, southbeachsymposium.com

**January 15-18** The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Orlando Dermatology Aesthetic & Clinical Conference, Peabody Orlando, Orlando, Florida. Contact: 646.453.5720, orlandoderm.org


**January 27-31** 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery, Rosen Shingle Creek Resort, Orlando, Florida. Contact: 312.981.6760, cosmeticsurgery.org

**February 20-21** Medical Aesthetics Conference & Expo, Los Angeles Convention Center, Los Angeles. Contact: 877.271.6789, spaandresortexpo.com

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