



New Year, New Marketing Plan—Strategies for Success in 2018

By Wendy Lewis

The gifts have all been given, the ornaments are packed up for next year, and you toasted on New Year's Eve, so what's next? It's time to face January head on with a smart, strategic and creative marketing strategy to sail through 2018.

Every year, as the holidays roll around, it is important to take a hard look at your marketing plan to see where you stand. Did you meet or exceed your expectations, stay on track, and grow your practice? Are your marketing efforts getting you closer to where you want to be?

Every practice should do an objective review of what worked and what did not work for the year, so you can refocus your marketing budget in the most effective way and avoid making the same mistakes year after year. It is also the ideal time to think outside of the box and put some fresh strategies in place to expand your outreach for the new year.

The adage, 'If you build it they will come,' no longer applies to aesthetic plastic surgeons largely due to stiff competition from non-core specialties, physician extenders, medspas and spas, and national clinic chains like Ideal Image offering medical treatments. For the first time in 2017, Canyon Ranch Tucson launched CR Aesthetics featuring injectables to capitalize on the lucrative medical aesthetics opportunity.

So, what are you going to do differently in 2018?

First consider where you are in your practice life cycle; just starting out, mid-career, or mature and looking towards an exit strategy. This matters a lot when considering your short and long term goals and the budget to set aside to achieve these goals.

For example, if you are just starting out in practice, you need to plow through the start-up phase and develop marketing strategies to establish a patient base quickly to keep the lights on. The challenge is that you may not have the requisite budget to do so. The most cost effective marketing strategy today for young plastic surgeons is to build a presence across social media channels. Setting up a business page on Facebook, business profile on Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, plus a

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branded YouTube channel can catapult a savvy plastic surgeon into early success. Young plastic surgeons are also clued into how web marketing works and are more able to do some of it themselves without investing heavily with external vendors.

Once you have been out 5 to 10 years or more years and are thriving, you may want to shift gears to grow your patient base through robust lead generation that requires a different menu of marketing tactics. For example, email marketing, Facebook and Instagram ads, e-books, consumer book, sponsored content, influencer campaigns. Public relations can move the needle if you practice in a media hub like LA, New York or Miami, or a good sized metropolitan market, such as Atlanta, Chicago or Tampa.

As you become seasoned and are entering the 'mature cycle' of your practice (20 years plus), you may decide to build your marketing efforts around your brand to position your practice for expansion. You will be better able leverage your competitive advantage; for example, your reputation, history, and position in the market which are key differentiators from all the newbie competitors entering the market. At an advanced stage, you may also be looking at the future with a different set of eyes. For many senior plastic surgeons in solo practice, it may be time to start thinking about winding down, bringing in an associate or two, joining a group practice, merging with another like-minded practice, or even selling your practice to investors or management organizations.

Every aesthetic surgery practice, regardless of the stage you are in, should be continually researching and building on their marketing strategies and tactics to stay on top of market shifts, and ahead of the competition. The global aesthetics market is constantly evolving, especially with the impact of technological advancements and telemedicine. You need to invest sufficient resources into marketing to ensure that you build and sustain your business.

Marketing Objectives

These objectives should be based on an in-depth understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, and should also be linked to your overall business strategy. Focus on the main target segments that you want to market to. Your marketing plan should include key performance indicators to evaluate the results you want to achieve for your practice. Align your strategies and implementation with measurable goals and objectives. For example, how many new patients did you get through personal referrals? How many patients come through your website per month? How many calls or emails did you get after appearing on the 6:00 news?

Keep track of your marketing strategies, programs and tactics and measure results against these activities. Focus on the tactics that produce the best results and devote less time, energy and money on activities that may feed your ego but aren't really driving revenue.

SWOT Analysis

Your situation analysis details the context for your marketing efforts. Take a closer look at the internal and external factors that will influence your marketing strategy.

A SWOT analysis will help you focus on how market shifts are going to affect your practice. Consider your practice's Strengths first. Your strengths may include high profile, reputation in your community, convenient location, and superior results. Then look at your Weaknesses, such as an older facility in need of an upgrade, insufficient space for growth, high staff turnover, or limited spending power of the current patient base. Next, think about where the Opportunities

Continued on Page 79

New Year, New Marketing Plan

Continued from Page 78

may be for your practice in terms of potential partnerships, cross-referrals, mergers, acquisitions, satellite offices, etc. Lastly, keep track of potential Threats inside or outside your market. An example of a threat might be a negative news story flooding the networks of a cosmetic surgery disaster or a grand opening of a top-notch group practice around the corner with investors to boost their marketing spend.

Competitive Analysis

Determine what your competitive advantages are and be as specific as possible. This exercise will help you to formulate the key messages that will drive your marketing strategy. Review your top competitors by evaluating their websites, marketing activities and profile in the local market. Look at the treatments, products and services they offer, and determine if you have any holes. Enlist a mystery shopper to find out what your competitors are charging for the same services you offer. Ask your local sales reps and practice development partners from the vendors you deal with, as they will know what other practices are charging in your local market.

Market Segmentation

There is no such thing as a 'one size fits all' marketing plan.

It is unrealistic to think that you can attract everyone, and why would you want to? Segmenting your target audience will serve to guide you on where to devote your resources and what promotional methods and key messages to run with. For example, growing a Facebook fan base to a healthy number of users from outside of the U.S. who are never going to become actual paying patients won't really help you achieve your goals.

Plan to target your market by the process of market segmentation. Segment your target audience so you can better target them with your offer. Identify the target audience(s) to reach out to find new groups of potential patients. For example, men, millennials, skin of color patients, hair restoration candidates, women's health candidates, etc. You can also segment patients by demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, marital status) and/or by psychographics (lifestyle, values, needs, wants).

Try to determine and separate the characteristics of each market segment to identify the most viable market for your services. Select the best primary, secondary, and tertiary markets based on this analysis and then choose the optimum marketing tactics to reach each of those audiences.

Best Strategies

Strategies are action steps that detail how the marketing variables of product, price, place, and promotion are used to attain the marketing plan's objectives and overall strategies. Your marketing mix should serve as the basis for your plan. Define every treatment, product and service you offer in terms of what it is, what it does, advantages, benefits, and solutions. Set pricing for each line item on your plan based on the competitive analysis.

Next, determine how you will promote each treatment, product and service. Keep in mind that you will probably not have sufficient budget to aggressively promote every treatment you offer, so prioritize the most lucrative procedures first. For example, you can generate more revenue from big ticket surgeries over injectable treatments. To determine exactly what your profit margins are, you will need to itemize all associated costs including surgeon and staff time, supplies, overhead, office visits, consumables, after care, and marketing to attract more surgical patients.

Setting Clear Goals

To ensure that you choose the best tactics to meet your marketing goals, get clear about what those goals are. Consider both short term and long term goals. What do you need marketing to deliver in the next quarter or the year? Are you trying to expand your presence, generate more leads, attract more patients interested in having surgery, build up your injectables and laser practice, or drive interest in spa services, or break into a new market? Perhaps you plan to add a new energy based system in the next quarter. Start planning early by designating steps leading up to launching the treatments and marketing to your existing patients first.

Plan regular brainstorming sessions with your whole staff and marketing team to review your key messages and timelines. Evaluate

how you are planning all your marketing tactics, including monthly specials and offers, events, health fairs, blog posts, and a social media content calendar. Plan your key messages based on the services you offer and then decide how to differentiate them from your competition.

Tracking & Evaluating

If you are not tracking, you are not marketing effectively.

You need to know what is really working year over year so you can devote more time and energy into those tactics, and weed out the tactics that fall short. Tracking is essential to monitor the effectiveness of each marketing activity and to evaluate your overall plan. This is where digital tactics add substantial value. It is more efficient to track results from web traffic, Google ad words, Facebook ads, and e-blasts than from print ads, media mentions, and billboards, for example. Any tactic that requires manual tracking adds staff time and measurement will not be exact. You may include a dedicated phone line or code in a print ad to track how many responses come in, but someone must be on the ball to take notice and calculate that manually. In a busy aesthetics practice, that may not happen 100% of the time.

If don't have enough staff or the right staff to dedicate the requisite time needed to design a plan and stick with it, you have two basic choices; you can either hire a marketing manager within the practice or enlist the services of an external specialist to help guide you through the process. In a perfect world, you need both a dedicated staff member aided by experienced vendors who can help execute your marketing plan.

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.