

## USING INFLUENCER MARKETING TO PROMOTE YOUR PRACTICE



WENDY LEWIS - UNITED STATES

The principle behind influencer marketing is fairly straightforward. When someone who is trusted by many people expresses a favorable opinion about a service or business, there is a reasonable chance that at least some of those people will take notice and become a customer.

In its infancy, influencer marketing was a relatively affordable way of getting the word out about a product or business, especially when compared to the cost of celebrity endorsements, TV spots, or print ads in glossy magazines. The explosion of social media, in particular the popularity of Instagram, has taken this marketing tactic to a whole new level. Being an 'influencer' is lining the pockets of high-profile people who are enlisted to convey a sponsored message to millions of their followers in seconds. Celebrities and reality stars are the largest group of influencers online. For example, the Kardashians have built their fortunes on it. Kylie Jenner is said to get paid a whopping \$1.26M for a single sponsored Instagram post to her 140M followers, while big sister Kim only commands a modest \$910,000 to broadcast to her 143M followers. Beyoncé gets \$785,000 in case you were wondering.<sup>1</sup>

Social influence has shifted from brands to individuals, which has opened numerous possibilities for plastic surgery practices to engage with authentic social ambassadors to raise their online profiles. Today's influencers are not necessarily supermodels, TV stars or even famous. They can just be real people who are active on the social channels that matter

to your practice and have developed a loyal audience. Their followers, who can range from a minimum of tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, give them influence over others. Once you get up to the million mark, the fees for working with these influencers are cost prohibitive.

### Choosing Brand Ambassadors

Influencer marketing has become intertwined with medical marketing in recent years. Just as companies have capitalized on the advantage of seeking out medical experts that carry weight in their fields, individuals who are willing to share their own experiences having a laser or a filler treatment with their followers can take your practice to the next level.

Consumers are flexing their own muscles through their social media accounts, primarily Instagram and YouTube. Many practices have seized the opportunity to network and collaborate with relevant individuals in their markets who can shape consumer opinions. These relationships may prove to be an invaluable component of comprehensive digital marketing strategy, if they are managed well.

The digital influence of 'micro-influencers' or 'nano-influencers' can drive awareness of the experience in a plastic surgeon's practice, and thus boost new patient consultations and increased procedures. These 'brand ambassadors' have the ability to create compelling content to blast out to their own communities online and offline. Their 'in real life' experiences resonate with followers by adding a personal touch.



Consumers tend to trust the people they follow on social media.

With the current state of increasing competition for aesthetics patients worldwide, many plastic surgeons are experimenting with ways to forge valuable connections online. The way to do this is to seek out potential influencers who are local to your practice and share your values and aesthetics, with a following of greater than 10,000 as a starting point. Check out their profile, followers, and engagement (how many comments, shares, and questions each post gets). An account that has many thousands of followers yet low engagement (only a handful of interactions) can be a sign that the followers are fake and have no value. Take notice of any posts that are relevant, such as a plug for a skincare brand or a video of a spa experience. Initiate contact by engaging with the influencer in their platform of choice.

Think of it this way; influencer marketing can be compared to the digital version of word-of-mouth. When I started out in plastic surgery managing an elite practice on New York's Fifth Avenue in the 1980s, word of mouth was the only marketing we needed to have a crowded waiting room and full surgical schedule. Having someone talk about you to their circle of friends is still a powerful tool; however, as social media has become immersed in every aspect of our lives, it has naturally evolved as the method of choice. Influencers can be very effective as defacto salespeople because consumers tend to trust the people they follow on social media. We self-identify more with our friends and peers than with footballer's wives or stars on 'Strictly Come Dancing.'

For many practices, their influencers of choice may range from a loyal patient who is killing it on Instagram, the owner

of a popular salon, spa, or gym that refers clients to you, an in-demand makeup artist, or minor celebrity in the community. The type of influencers that are most attainable for plastic surgeons tend to be normal people who are switched on about aesthetic treatments and live within a 60-mile/92-kilometer radius. In the Middle East, for example, a single Instagram post from a model or a singer can put an aesthetic practice on the map.

### Legalities of Influencer Engagement

When working with influencers, there are rules that need to be adhered to by both parties, and it is best to have it in writing at the outset. A contract should itemize exactly what is expected from the influencer and the time frame; for example, two Instagram posts, one Instagram story, two tweets, or one YouTube video. This will also require the usual consent forms and local regulations on patient privacy that are to be adhered to. The influencer is responsible to disclose any monetary, product/treatment compensation or both, as in free lip filler or a non-invasive fat reducing laser treatment. Social media audiences appreciate authenticity and being honest up front will make them more likely to believe the influencer's content. This is typically done in the form of adding hashtags to their posts to delineate some kind of financial relationship, such as: #sponsored #spon #ad.

These rules will vary by geography, but in general, it is best practice to adhere to this policy. If you are not sure how this works, consult with a legal expert on disclosure guidelines to be safe. Influencer marketing appears to be widespread at least in some English-speaking countries, such as the US, UK, and Canada. It can be perfectly ethical as long as disclosure is clear and consistent, depending on your market.

Influencer marketing is less direct than traditional forms of marketing and advertising, but it can effectively create authentic ways of connecting with consumers who may ultimately become your patients.

*Wendy Lewis is Founder/President of Wendy Lewis & Co. Ltd., a marketing communications boutique in New York City since 1997. She is the author of 13 books, a frequent contributor to many journals, textbooks and websites in the US and Europe, and her next book "Growing an Aesthetic Surgery Practice: A Modern Roadmap for Success" shall be published by Thieme.*

*HopperHQ.com*