



How to Become a Media Darling

by NATASHA MOHR · AUGUST 1, 2016

Building long-term relationships with consumer editors can help to elevate your profile and drive new patients to your practice.

Wendy Lewis

Gaining coverage in mainstream consumer media can boost your brand and make an aesthetic practitioner into a household name. But it isn't quite as simple or straightforward as it once was to get there. The media has changed and the advent of social media has changed the game plan, from both sides of the aisle.

In today's world, digital media (aka bloggers, influencers, digital editors, etc.) who can post about you or your brand instantly often command more power than print journalists whose lead times can be several weeks to months. Traditional beauty media is shrinking and giving way to a whole new crop of self-proclaimed "experts" who may actually know very little about beauty, skin care, aesthetics or cosmetic surgery. In fact, the sum total of their expertise may be having had a BOTOX treatment or an IPL once. Gone are the days when fact checkers were at the ready to confirm quotes and double check statistics, numbers and spelling. Print publications have shrinking staff, and all but a short list of titles have the budget and manpower to do the requisite vetting necessary to deliver a serious news story with substantiated facts, sources and data for their lifestyle sections.

This new media trend has created opportunities for aesthetic physicians to gain exposure on the one hand, but has made it harder to get included in the kind of stories they really want simply because there are so few of them being written today. Plastic surgeons lament that less and less ink is being given to proper surgery, from facelifts to liposuction to breast reconstruction. Similarly, dermatologists would like to see more features about psoriasis, eczema, rosacea and skin cancer. There are also fewer writers reporting on these topics in general, and many of them are juggling paid gigs as editors with freelance work, blogging and the occasional freebie in exchange for a byline on HuffPo and other mega sites that do not pay writers a penny. In short, it's not an easy way to make a living, which is why it is not unusual for a beauty or mommy blogger to be hunting for paid endorsement deals and sponsorships.

Dealing with Negative Stories

Many doctors are frustrated because they only see bad news stories in the press focusing on aesthetic treatments. That is a fair gripe since many younger members of the media share a rather dim view of aesthetic treatments in general. They are mainly millennials who have yet to spy their first wrinkle or sun spot and do not really understand why any woman (or man) would agree to undergo ablative laser resurfacing and countless injections to look younger. How could they possibly relate to that concept?

Among their many misconceptions are:

- You should learn to accept yourself as you are
- There are big risks from these treatments
- It really really hurts
- It's way too expensive and only for celebs
- You could end up looking like a freak

It is unfortunate that we have all seen women at the supermarket and on cable TV who have had too much done or who look over stretched, shiny and distorted. This is what media who are newbies to the beauty arena sometimes focus on. Every doctor has been on the receiving end of journalists and producers seeking examples and patients who will speak to having 'botched' procedures. Regrettably, these are the stories that sell magazines, tabloids and reality shows. Good news, such as a woman who has a skin tightening treatment and looks and feel younger, is all too common; bad news, as in the man who has his nose operated on and then cannot breathe, is the exception that makes it far more interesting to the media. Unusual news makes great headlines; its gets our juices boiling and stimulates an emotional response, whether it be fear, anger, loathing or laughter. Positive, upbeat, happy ending news stories are harder to place and to get seen.

Another contributing factor to this underlying negative view of cosmetic procedures among the media is that far too many journalists have been told by doctors that they 'need' BOTOX or would benefit from liposuction when they think they look just fine. This has sent a message that cosmetic doctors are just greedy and will talk their patients into having work done even when they don't need it.

This brings me to Rule no. 1: NEVER offer advice or recommendations or suggest that a member of the media have something done unless he or she asks you directly.

How to Get Your Message Across

The old standard media pitch is on life support today. Journalists are inundated with hundreds of press releases and pitches daily in their inbox and via social media. They cannot read them all, nor can they respond to all but a few of them. Frankly, most of these pitches are pretty lame and not so interesting, nor are they typically targeted to the right media at the right time. For example, if you want to place a story with the media about a new technique for liquid facelift using various brands of injectable materials, there are a limited number of journalists in the local or national media who will cover this. If the story is about more invasive procedures – such as a new method of facelifting – that number drops down considerably. There are not too many outlets outside of New York, L.A. and Miami covering expensive cosmetic surgeries anymore, and that goes for broadcast outlets as well. You are much more likely to see a 5-minute segment on a new, less invasive laser treatment for acne or fat reduction on your local nightly news.

All journalists are typically short on time and tight on deadlines, so they need to be able to understand the whole story just by reading a few sentences of the introduction. If you do this well, journalists will be more likely to read a press release and consider writing about your story. If you get this wrong, they will hit the delete button and may not even bother reading the next release or pitch they get about you.

However, news services still do need content and the explosion of social media and emerging online news sources has fueled that appetite to stay on top of the trends. Keep in mind that the story is not just about the doctor; more often than not, the story is about the patient(s), the outcome and how the treatment changed/improved the patient's life or self-esteem.

Building Rapport with Media

Building lasting relationships is all about trust, like any other business relationship. If you make it known that you are open to help journalists with their story needs and to refer them to sources, even if a feature is not all about you, they will more than likely circle back to you again in the future. Do not expect to be quoted in every story. You should also not expect to see every story you worked on with a journalist actually show up. Stories get cut for a long list of reasons; sometimes it is space constraints, often you may get bumped because of major news, a war story, a terror attack or the death of a famous person. Editors can also change the direction of any story at will. There is never any guarantee of showing up in print or online. The media's agenda can be very fluid and subjective. What may seem interesting on Monday might be considered old news by Tuesday.

Establishing a strong relationship with journalists is a long cycle and the rewards may take some time. Before you talk to any journalists, take some time to do your research. Who is he or she? Who does he or she write for? Read some of his or her headlines. Get to know his or her point of view as it affects the story you want to convey. If you are not familiar with the outlet, pick up a copy on the newsstand or look at the website to find out more. Who is the reader? What are their interests? The more information you have, the better armed you will be to establish rapport.

Journalists operate to their own agenda and you have to be willing to meet their needs and their time frame. Be accessible and responsive to their queries, even if it is after hours, or on weekends. We live in a 24/7 world and journalists work when they need to. The news does not stop for a holiday. You need to be easy to find and available at short notice when media reach out to you. Journalists will often go back time and time again to someone who is just okay but who responds quickly, rather than to put in the extra effort to find someone who is fantastic but hard to reach.

How Do Journalists Find Their Sources?

Most journalists will look at who they know first, so having a relationship with the journalist is a huge plus. If they don't know someone relevant to go to as a source, they will do research online first. They will often start with a website and they will judge you accordingly. They may also search on relevant organizations' websites and scroll through news releases to see who was quoted on the topic at hand. They will also ask colleagues and PRs they know and have worked with. They typically want to find someone who is an expert in the subject, or at a minimum, has direct expertise or a working knowledge to share.

If you want media support and you do not have the time or expertise to do it on your own, pay someone to help you in the form of a publicist or PR professional who has direct experience in the beauty/wellness/health space and already has relevant media contacts.

Wendy Lewis is President of Wendy Lewis & CO Ltd, a New York-based marketing and communications boutique specializing in medical aesthetics. She is a frequent contributor to numerous industry and consumer publications, and Founder/Editor in Chief of Beautyinthebag.com. <http://www.wendylewisco.com>