

# Marketing Your Dermatology Practice During and After a Crisis



Think twice about slashing or eliminating budgets for marketing. It is an essential lifeline for financial recovery.

**BY NAREN ARULRAJAH**

>> Times are tough right now. Dermatology practices—like most other businesses—experienced a sudden reduction in revenue and availability of supplies. Some offices closed, some drastically reduced services, and some had clinicians or employees personally impacted by COVID-19.

A pandemic was likely the last thing on your mind in late 2019 as you prepared this year's budget. Yet, here we are. As of this writing, many dermatology offices remain closed. Hopefully, by the time you read this, your doors will be open again. However, patients may be slow to return, and there is no quick fix for the losses you've already endured.

The question is how to not only keep your practice afloat but also return to the thriving—and growing—business it once was. No matter how bleak things may seem, this goal is achievable, but it requires some careful planning and smart business decisions.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Dermatology practices, like most other businesses, are looking to trim non-essential expenses. That is a smart move in lean times, but be careful of what you deem “non-essential.” Many doctors are slashing or eliminating budgets for marketing, which is an essential lifeline for financial recovery.

As circumstances improve, more and more people will return to dermatology offices. Some are making plans and researching options in preparation for that day. Whenever they look, if they don't find you, they will find your competitor. Instead, adjust your strategy to the situation. And keep adjusting it, as the situation keeps changing.

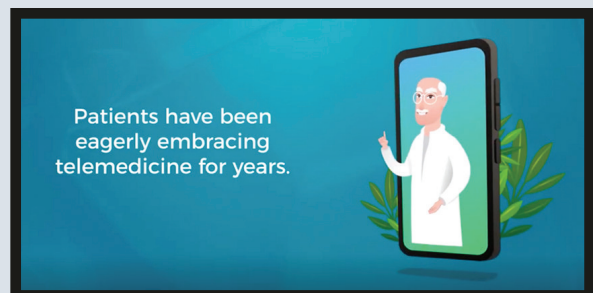
## KEEP YOUR DIGITAL PRESENCE STRONG

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ity to add, change, and update information quickly. That is especially true in a fluid situation, when gaining and maintaining patients' trust is more important than ever.

- **Update basic info.** Office hours and other basic information should always be accurate on your website, social media, Google profile, and other listings. Even if changes are temporary, update as often as needed to keep it current.
- **Don't leave patients wondering.** Are you limiting the number of people in the waiting room, requesting that those who don't feel well stay home, or taking temperatures at the door? Make sure people are aware of these or any other changes before they arrive. Of course, don't forget to notify scheduled patients immediately of any cancellations or postponements.

## WATCH NOW



Telemedicine is in high demand, now more than ever. This Ekwa Marketing video explores how well it fits with dermatology practices, and what it takes to implement it.

Watch now: [PracDerm.com/EkwaTelemed](https://PracDerm.com/EkwaTelemed)

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- **Demonstrate your trustworthiness.** Trust is a crucial component of SEO, as well as branding. The last thing you want to do during or after a crisis is go silent on social media and other channels. Instead, demonstrate your commitment to patient safety. If you aren’t currently seeing non-emergency patients, explain your reasoning. If you are seeing patients, explain why you believe it is safe and discuss what precautions you are taking. Help people feel confident that they are safe in good hands at your practice.
- **Focus on SEO.** Be aware of changing search patterns. For example, a quick look at Google Trends will show that searches for “dermatologist” fell sharply from mid-February through March of 2020, while searches for home skincare rose during the same period. This is a good time for educational material, helping patients cope with skin conditions and choosing the right products.
- **Shore up security.** There are always stories of people stepping up to help their communities in times of crisis. Unfortunately, there are also those who see it as an opportunity for malice. The coronavirus pandemic was no exception, as evidenced by Checkpoint’s Global Threat Index. Trusted medical providers’ websites are ideal for cybercriminals to launch health-related scams and malware. Make sure yours isn’t vulnerable.

### **EVOLVE WITH THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF ONLINE MARKETING**

In the short-term, patient behaviors are easy to predict. Fear of infection coupled with financial hardship will cause more people to postpone treatment. What is more difficult to anticipate is what will attract those still seeking dermatological care, and how to attract a robust patient flow once normalcy returns. After all, experts expect this experience to have lasting psychological, sociological, and economical effects.

Simply stated, your audience is changing, and your marketing needs to keep up. This is clearly indicated by the Consumer Energy Index, by Forrester Research, which had dropped sharply as of March 2020. It measures four key aspects of public behaviors and attitudes that impact spending patterns:

- **Isolation vs community identity.** People are gravitating toward isolation, making them less interactive and less interested in doing the popular or trendy thing.  
*The takeaway:* Marketing materials should focus less on why everyone loves this treatment and more on why this treatment is beneficial to the individual patient.
- **Vulnerability vs efficacy.** Fewer people feel confident that they will get what they want, or are even capable of coping. Instead, there is a sentiment of loss of control and uncertainty.  
*The takeaway:* Patients are less responsive to high-pressure advertising or upselling; they are tired of feeling like they “have to.” Instead, focus on building patients’ confidence by helping them take control of their appearance or troublesome skin conditions.
- **Distrust vs trust.** Expectations of normalcy and daily life have been shattered. Not surprisingly, people are less inclined to believe that an individual or business will deliver what is promised.  
*The takeaway:* Perhaps the most important element of marketing and branding in the coming months is building trust. Highlight your expertise, experience, and community leadership.
- **Comfort vs novelty.** Excitement and adventure are not so appealing in times of uncertainty. Instead, people are seeking comfort, familiarity, and reassurance.  
*The takeaway:* This goes hand-in-hand with trust building. Remind patients that you’ve always been there for them and show potential patients that you are a solid and reliable provider. They aren’t looking for the next big thing; they are looking for doctors and treatments they feel safe with.

### **CONSISTENT, YET FLEXIBLE**

SEO, and digital marketing in general, is not something you can stop and restart—at least not without a significant setback. If you allow brand awareness to fade and search rankings to drop, you will have an uphill battle to regain your popularity and patient flow. The best way to position your practice for long term success in these or any circumstances is with a consistent, yet flexible marketing strategy. ■

*If you’re looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy consult with Naren Arulrajah. He is President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing and has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dermatologists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more.*