

What Branding Is and Isn't (and Why You Should Care)



Your brand will directly impact the kind of patients your practice attracts.

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>> Considering today's highly competitive environment of dermatology, you surely understand the importance of marketing your practice. But what about branding? You might think it is less important. Unless you sell your own line of skincare products, you might not even think it applies. However, branding is a core component of every marketing strategy.

WHAT IS BRANDING?

To begin with, the word brand can be a bit deceiving, as it has multiple definitions. The most familiar meaning is "brand name." You think of this when labeling and advertising products, but it does not apply to most services. And that is the source of confusion. In marketing, a brand name is just one facet of branding. A brand, in marketing terminology, is the entirety of an entity's reputation, public image, and identity.

BRAND VS. BRAND IDENTITY

The next source of confusion is the distinction between the brand itself and the brand identity. After all, the word "identity" is included in the dictionary definition of brand. However, in marketing, identity is just one aspect of the brand.

Brand identity is a narrow term. It refers to a specific set of elements that symbolize the brand, usually visually. Components of a dermatology practice's brand identity may include the logo, slogan, brand colors, fonts, and design styles.

Brand is a much broader term that essentially describes the common public perception of your practice. Ask yourself this: What likely comes to mind when someone thinks of it? Probably a lot of things, from your logo to the infectious laugh of your beloved receptionist. All these things meld together, forming an overall image—a brand.

"You can think of your brand as your practice's personality or what people perceive it to be. Think of how an individual's personality attracts a particular type of people and seems to repel others. Similarly, your brand will directly impact the kind of patients who gravitate toward your practice."

Anything that is standout, unique, or well-known about your practice can contribute to your brand. That includes:

- **Team:** Customer service level, employee efficiency, friendliness, and general attitude
- **Office:** Atmosphere in the reception area and treatment rooms, the typical level of activity or serenity, amenities, location, the convenience of parking and access, aesthetics of the building, and interior
- **Online presence:** Social media presence, appearance, and functionality of your website, news coverage
- **Niche:** Specialties, type of dermatology (cosmetic, general, etc.), target clientele (families, adults-only, special needs, etc.), any particular services that you are well known for
- **Pricing:** Upscale, economical, affordable quality
- **Clinical skills:** Notably high (or low) quality, the specific skillset of on-staff dermatologists or clinicians, aesthetics of cosmetic outcomes
- **Brand identity:** Logo and other elements mentioned above

BUILDING YOUR BRAND

You can think of your brand as your practice's personality or what people perceive it to be. Think of how an individual's personality attracts a particular type of people and seems to repel others. Similarly, your brand will directly impact the

kind of patients who gravitate toward your practice. Since the services those people purchase will drive new growth, this will help shape your practice's future.

The problem—or at least potential problem—is that a brand will develop, regardless of whether or not you cultivate it. Your practice will acquire a reputation, an image, a public persona, be it good or bad. It may be a weak brand lacking memorable components, which can impede growth. It might be the wrong image, thus attracting the wrong clientele. If you take a passive approach, it might be anything, and it is out of your control.

A proactive approach allows you to define, shape, and refine your brand, creating a solid foundation for growth in the right direction. How do you accomplish that? Follow these steps:

- **Review your business goals:** Branding, like every other aspect of marketing, should ultimately support your short and long-term goals for your practice. Make decisions within that context.
- **Audit your current branding and overall marketing strategy:** Find the strong and weak points. Determine what you want to change, enhance, or move away from. What is and is not working now.
- **Market research:** Define your target audience and ideal patient personas. What aspects of your brand are likely appealing or possibly off-putting to them? What type of brand are they looking for?
- **Competitive analysis:** Find the strong and weak points in your competitor's branding strategy. Compare that to your current and potential brand. Look for the opportunities to stand out from the crowd and empha-

size what you offer that others lack.

- **Set branding goals:** Now that you have the data and insights you need, it is time to define goals clearly, and document them for future reference. Describe what you want to be known for and what image you want to cultivate.
- **Create a brand style guide:** Visual identity is the most outward-facing aspect of branding and a vital tool for shaping your public image. Carefully choose a logo design, color scheme, and other elements that fully reflect your brand. Record your choices in a style guide for use in both print and online materials to ensure consistency.
- **Develop a branding strategy:** The final step is incorporating branding into all levels of your marketing and business operations. This can include:
 - Be sure your logo and other visual elements are included in all marketing materials; If you have a line of products, make sure the packaging and labeling follow your brand style guidelines
 - Develop a strong online presence with active social profiles and an optimized website
 - Review text for a tone and writing style fitting to your brand
 - Make sure your marketing message is aligned with your mission and brand
 - Improve in-office accommodations to create an appropriate atmosphere
 - Consider staff training if improved competency and customer service are essential to your brand
 - Focus promotions on your targeted services
 - Cultivate a relationship with the local media, improving your brand exposure
 - Review your website, particularly the home and about sections, to ensure that every part of it represents your brand perfectly.

WATCH NOW



If you are among the many dermatology practices with old, outdated, nearly inactive social accounts, check out this Ekwa Marketing video to learn what to do about it.



Watch now: PracDerm.com/MarketingMatters

CONCLUSION

Your brand is at the core of your marketing strategy, which is the roadmap for future growth. If you want to map the path of that growth, then you need to begin with a proactive approach to branding. ■

Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, 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. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren. You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing - Lila, by visiting www.ekwa.com/msm/ or simply send a text to 313-777-8494.