

# Beyond Telehealth: Three Ways Dermatology Is Going Digital in the Wake of Coronavirus



These digital opportunities can set your practice apart from the competition.

**BY NAREN ARULRAJAH**

>> Telemedicine has been in the spotlight since the emergence of COVID-19, and rightfully so. It provides a crucial, contactless link between clinicians and patients. Many dermatology offices, particularly those focused on aesthetics, have closed for weeks or months, with virtual visits providing the only revenue. As valuable as it is, telehealth is not the only emerging star in this unprecedented situation. In fact, all things digital have taken on a new level of importance.

## **ONLINE COSMECEUTICAL AND SKINCARE PRODUCT SALES**

Society and business have been gravitating toward technology for decades. Shopping, banking, and chatting with friends online are much more convenient than personal visits. Realtime global interaction facilitates communication and transactions that simply would not be possible in person. These are strong motivators—but so is familiarity.

A percentage of people simply prefers what is comfortable, what they are accustomed to. Those people default to the familiar. Suddenly, they were not able to. Lockdown orders and shuttered businesses forced people online. They are looking for ways to care for their skin at home, and they are not visiting a brick-and-mortar store to buy products.

Nearly half of American consumers have made an e-commerce purchase during the pandemic, with 36 percent purchasing beauty-related products online for the first time, according to a WSL Strategic Retail survey. Notably, nearly three-quarters of those consumers intend to continue shopping online. Out of necessity, people are overcoming the hurdle of unfamiliarity, and they are discovering the benefits of convenience.

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Moreover, it will continue long after the pandemic passes. How can you adapt your practice?

- If you do not sell products, consider it as an adjunct to your services. People will be doing more home-treatments than ever, and they will want professional product recommendations. You can add an income stream and provide convenience to patients by selling quality products that you believe in and recommend.
- If you sell products in your office, now is the time to set up a shop online. You can add a shopping cart on your website or set up a separate ecommerce site. In either case, customer experience is paramount. It should be intuitive to navigate, easy to complete a transaction, and secure.
- Once you have perfected your online store, consider expanding your products, marketing channels, or both. Promote your store, and even sell via shoppable posts on social media.

Expand your selection of resale products, or even add your own branded line. The possibilities are virtually endless. However, there is one thing you do not want to do, and that is choose quantity over quality. Anything you choose to sell and recommend will reflect on your professional reputation, especially if it is branded in your name.

## VIRTUAL EVENTS

From international conferences to local organization meetings, the business of dermatology and aesthetics offers a full calendar of events—at least, in a normal year. As we all know, 2020 is not a normal year. Social distancing is a crucial component in the fight against COVID-19, and large gatherings were among the first activities banned. In many regions, such events are still forbidden, or at least highly discouraged.

Again, technology is bridging the gap. Seminars become webinars, lectures become video livestreams, and conferences become Zoom meetings. Like with online shopping, there are numerous benefits besides the obvious COVID-19 safety factor. They are far less expensive for organizers and attendees alike. Additionally, without the prohibitive time and cost of travel, more people can participate. Although real-world events will surely return when safe, do not expect the virtual ones to disappear.

Make the most of this emerging trend:

- Embrace online industry events. Attending a webinar or giving a presentation via zoom may be new territory and might be uncomfortable at first. However, it is the way of the future and early adopters will establish themselves as leaders in this space.
- Host online events for the public or your patients. People unable or unwilling to venture out are seeking skincare solutions without the benefit of regular facials and spa treatments. They are also facing new and unique skin problems, such as mask-related acne, eczema flares from handwashing, and contact dermatitis caused by handling disinfectants. Consider live video, group chats, or even a simple Q&A session on Twitter to address these and other common concerns.

## DIGITAL MARKETING

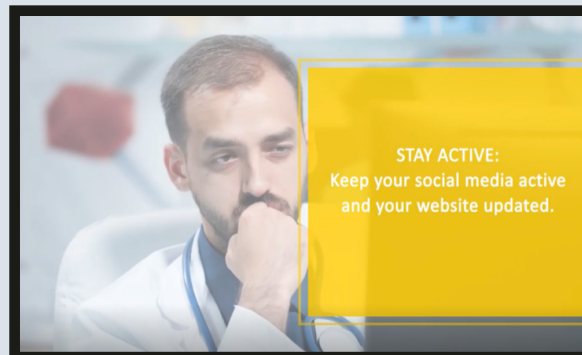
Last (but certainly not least) on our list is marketing. Word of mouth has long been a favored patient acquisition method for most doctors. After all, it is free, and you like to think that your work speaks for itself. However, long before the pandemic struck, a strong online presence had become an important element in your professional reputation and practice branding.

Most patients are in the habit of researching dermatology online. They turn to social media when asking friends for recommendations, check review sites to see what practices had the best reputation and use Google to find nearby offices. With more people than ever going online, using social networks, and finding their comfort zone in the virtual world, the impact of digital marketing will only increase.

Here's how you can ramp up your digital marketing:

- Use social media to communicate changes in your practice hours, policies, or services.

## WATCH NOW



### Content Marketing in the Era of COVID-19

Content marketing has become more challenging—and more important—than ever. Check out this video from Ekwa Marketing to learn what to do (and what not to do) for successful content marketing.

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

- Add informational content on your blog that addresses relevant current issues.
- Keep your patient relationships strong by maintaining communication via email updates and newsletters.
- Be sure to promote your telehealth services on your website and social accounts. If this is new to your patients, consider adding explainer videos or infographics demonstrating how easy it is for them.

## THE HI-TECH NORMAL

You have surely heard (and probably said) the phrase “new normal” many times in the past few months. Yet, as much as we talk about it, no one really knows what normal will look like on the other side of the pandemic. There is one thing, however, that we can count on: it will be far more high-tech and internet-based than the old normal. Embracing it is the key to future-proofing your dermatology practice. ■

*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.*