

The Connected Consumer

To effectively and proactively market your practice, you must understand patients' needs, aspirations, preferences, and habits.

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The market for dermatology and aesthetic services has expanded dramatically in recent decades due to innovation and advancements in technology, but the competition has grown in equal measure. It is no longer possible to depend merely on word of mouth to build and sustain a thriving practice. There is no way to wish away the need for a proactive marketing effort. The first step in your dermatology marketing effort is to know your patients closely. Once you understand their needs, aspirations, preferences, and habits, you are in a much better position to reach out to them effectively, to give them what they want, and to win their trust and loyalty in a fiercely competitive environment where they are spoiled for choice.

THE MILLENNIAL MENTALITY

A substantive part of your potential clientele is going to be the millennial consumers, popularly known as Gen Y. They are highly sophisticated, well-informed, technology-friendly, and more importantly, almost entirely immune to traditional sales pitches and marketing tactics. The Gen Y members tend to be less brand-loyal, more fickle-minded, empowered by the exponential growth of the Internet and mobile technology, extremely connected, aware, and choosy.

With far more communication and information power in their pocket than what the previous generation could even dream of, their expectations are tremendously raised. These consumers expect the best of services, and expect them right away. This new reality of a highly discerning and demanding average patient has significant implications for your practice.

You are required to be present "in the moment" when this restless, demanding and less-loyal patient is in need of a dermatology or aesthetic service and looking for a physician. These micro-moments are increasingly defining who wins the maximum attention and maximum loyalty, and who eventually outperforms the competition and creates long-term practice growth and value.

CONSTANT CONNECTION SYNDROME

The rise of mobile technology has transformed the world forever and dermatologists, just like any other product and service providers, need to re-adjust their marketing strategies to match this new reality. In its 2014 survey "Mobile Millennials," Nielsen reported that more than 85 percent of Gen Y own smartphones. The constant connectivity that a mobile device provides has made the average consumer increasingly habitual to instant gratification of their needs.

Whether they are at home, at the workplace, commuting, or walking down the street, they are able to access all the necessary information and proceed with further action to satisfy their needs. Mobile devices can deliver very specific information that a consumer needs during these micro-moments—no more and no less—which makes them the quintessential enabler for meeting the aspirations of modern life.

Constant connectivity syndrome spurs these potential patients to behave ever more spontaneously. Their attention spans have reduced, and they tend to take decisions and actions in short bursts. They search for information while on the go and interact and take decisive action primarily via their mobile devices. These vital 'micro-moments' of the consumer are marked by an urgent need or intent to know, do, go, and buy.

For a smart marketer, these micro-moments of a connected consumer are the new competitive turf on which they can win or lose the battle for the consumer's attention.

ONE SEARCH AWAY FROM YES OR NO

An overwhelming majority of your potential dermatology patients are likely to be just one search away from choosing your practice or finding a competitor before they find you. These people will frequently reach out to their connected devices for the following needs:

I need to know: Specific information on a particular health concern related to dermatology or insights about specific dermatology products, procedures or techniques to address the concern.

I need to compare: Checking blogs, articles, social net-

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works, reviews, ratings, opinions, and deals related to your practice, and comparing your website with those of other local competitors.

I need to go: Specific information about where your practice is located, what are its service hours, and how to book an appointment.

Your dermatology website, blog, social media and other forms of online presence must be designed to win these opportunities of engagement with new patients. Your entire online and mobile presence should provide these inquirers easy accessibility to what they immediately need in terms of information and enable them to make a favorable decision.

However, you cannot afford to rely solely on mobile marketing to achieve your practice goals. While it is true that consumers are more likely to begin their purchase journey via their mobile device, they are equally likely to continue it— and even finalize the deal—on their PC or by making a personal phone call. Therefore, you need to be flexible in your marketing strategy and follow the consumers’ preferences about where and how they wish to fulfill their need for your services.

According to a comScore study, four in five local searches on mobile devices convert into actual purchases. It does not require any complex logic to understand that the win-

ners in this battle for consumer’s attention are going to be those who are able to rank among the top search listings on Google page one on mobile devices as well as PC search. In any case, mobile devices are radically transforming the online search landscape and how consumers go about choosing brands and services.

BEING THERE ‘IN THE MOMENT’

In absence of a robust online and mobile presence, it is going to be an uphill task for most dermatology practices to reach the top or retain their dominant position at the top in a competitive environment. It is all about being present for the consumer in the moments that matter. If you are missing or ineffective in these moments, you jeopardize your chances of winning new patients.

When a potential patient is asking questions online, your practice ought to be there at the right place at the right time to provide adequate answers. If you are complacent about this commitment to your potential patients or if you are not a strategic participant in this modern discourse, you stand to lose. Being there for your consumers is increasingly about providing precisely what is required in that context, and providing it immediately.

However, the reality is that while there is a lot of lip service going around, many practitioners have not accomplished much in the way of being present for the consumers in the moment.” ■

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