

WHAT IF

Your Practice Already Possesses the Key to Success?

By Tracy L. Drumm, Vice President, IF Marketing

Sam Walton, the legendary founder of Wal-Mart, knows how to grow a business. One of the core philosophies he shared was recognizing that in business, regardless of the caliber of service you offer, the customer is the real boss. This boss can “fire” everyone from the chairman on down simply by spending his or her money elsewhere. At an aesthetic practice, this boss is ultimately your patient.

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Sushi menu style patient interest form

Since cosmetic procedures fall into a unique segment of medicine as elective patient care, your practice must adhere to guidelines warranted by the retail world. This concept of bridging together retail and medical services is leading us into uncharted waters which we call "Retail-icine." Respecting the physician's Hippocratic Oath, this new paradigm focuses on doing what is best for the patient first and foremost, and then tailoring the rest of the cosmetic experience to mirror the laws of consumerism. In blending these two worlds, your current patients become the heartbeat of your practice and greatest opportunity for growth.

Investing time, marketing budget and energy into your existing patient base is one of the most profitable strategies you can adopt. As Harvard Business School (Cambridge, Mass.) teaches, selling to a current customer has a conversion probability of 1 in 2, while marketing to a new client has a mere 1 in 16 chance of resulting in a purchase.¹ The fact is, if you are looking for a way to increase the profits of your practice and keep your phones ringing, you should look no further than your waiting room.

Before making the leap to reach out to new patients, you should ensure you have exhausted all efforts to effectively reach in, to your current market. Below is a three step strategy, inclusive of specific tools necessary, to ensure each of your patients become a loyal subscriber of your fan club and business.

Engage

From the cover of every woman's magazine to the hot topic on the morning news, women are inundated with information about the latest and greatest cures for wrinkles, folds and cellulite. So how do you effectively compete with the thousands of messages screaming at your patients for their time and money? The key is to engage the patients while they are at your practice. Ditch the celebrity gossip magazines and instead create and display tools that will provide real medical information as opposed to tabloid beauty tips. Time spent in your waiting room is actually time the patient is paying to be at your office. It is in their, and your, best interest to offer real information from a trusted source and transform waiting time into educational time. The key is to use material that will effectively grab and keep your patient's attention.

We are all familiar with the hefty stacks of paperwork that resemble a short story of a new patient's medical history. Many offices use this intake process as a chance to gauge the interest of patients for additional treatments. This Cosmetic Intake Questionnaire is a great idea but seldom reaches its full potential as it becomes yet another form in the line-up. Consider adding a little flavor to this process and transforming it from paperwork to a popular tool patients crave.

Instead of using a typical medical intake form, imagine handing patients a long, narrow menu that is visually engaging and educational. This tool, known within the industry as a Sushi Menu, is an atypical medical form that grabs the patient's attention while familiarizing them with the breadth of your services. Instead of asking a patient if they are interested in having their nasolabial folds treated (a foreign term to many first time patients), the Sushi Menu utilizes before and after photos that pique the patient's interest. The minimalism and novelty of this tool allows the photos to speak for themselves. Simple check boxes next to consumer friendly treatment names prompt the patient to check-off items they are interested in.

Utilizing non-traditional methods and tools such as this is an effective way to introduce a new treatment or give a lift in sales to an older procedure. Trivia or scratch-off cards are an innovative way to teach patients, while simultaneously entertaining them. Derived from common myths in the industry or lesser known facts, these cards will help reassure patients of the safety and efficacy of newer treatments. Asking a question such as: "Approximately how many people per year in the U.S. receive BOTOX® Cosmetic treatments?" and listing answer options, educates the patient about the enormous amount of people seeking this treatment. For a first time neurotoxin patient, these facts help to proactively calm fears. Furthermore, when the patient scratches off the right answer they find a promotional offer, such as a percentage off products, thus the card becomes a retention tool as a gift certificate towards the patient's next appointment.

Educate

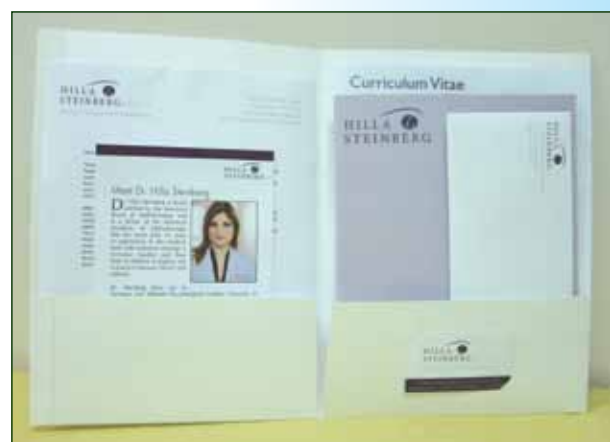
While visiting a practice on the East Coast recently, the receptionist playfully revealed to me that she often felt the office resembled the movie *Ground Hog Day*. She explained that the practice went through the same standard drill with new patients each week. This is a dangerous attitude which can represent lost opportunities to share new treatments and practice updates with patients. A simple remedy when dealing with a case of the routine and mundane is to share the 400 rule with your staff. It is critical that your team remember that although it may be the 400th time they have said something, it is likely the first time a new aesthetic patient is hearing it. To create a safety net that will ensure each patient is fully versed in your practice's brand, consider implementing educational tools that do the work for you.

A welcome kit, folder or packet is one of the simplest ways to ensure that each patient learns about your experience and services. Consider having a staff member create a bulk set of welcome kits, utilizing either generic or customized folders. Items to include are your *Curriculum Vitae*, a list of services, a glossary of commonly used terms in the office, a calendar of events, promotions and a welcome letter from the physician or office manager. The little effort it takes to create these welcome kits will warrant a strong return, as well as make a lasting impression on all first time patients.

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Non-traditional patient education and promotion via trivia / scratch-off cards



Welcome kit

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Custom designed practice branding / patient education books

Say goodbye to the days of homemade photo albums with dark, inconsistent and blurry before and after prints. Instead say hello to the future of photo albums with custom designed, professionally printed, hardcover books. Offering an incredible first impression to patients, these books can be completely personalized to reflect the individual physicians brand and showcase everything from before and after pictures to articles, media placements and patient testimonials. These books are giving patient education a face-lift and becoming a standard part of the marketing strategy of practices throughout the country.

Experience

Few would dispute that Walt Disney had an unparalleled ability to orchestrate the ultimate consumer experience. One of Mr. Disney's core philosophies was to "do what you do so well that consumers will want to see it again and bring their friends." Today we are striving to prosper in a depressed economy where consumers have an influx of options for spending their hard earned dollars. With the explosion of aesthetic providers in recent years, many physicians wanting to grow must now strengthen the overall experience patients have during their appointment. The fact is, even though consumers have tightened their spending, up to 60% of clients are still willing to pay more for a better experience.² The good news is that adding a few inexpensive touches to your office, such as refreshments and décor, will point you in the right direction for creating an experience that patients seek time and time again.

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Customized name badges

Remember the happy helpers that warmly greet you at Disney's magical parks? Not only do they have an ear-to-ear smile as part of their uniform, but they also typically wear a name tag that shares a personal fact about themselves, such as their hometown or favorite ride. These small name tags contribute to the overall greatness of the Disney experience. Serving as an icebreaker and tool to build relationships, name tags offer a personal fact about the staff that helps to generate conversation among strangers. Practices across the country are adopting the simple name tag idea as part of their strategy to create a warm and welcoming environment. Consider having name tags made for your team that offer a personal touch such as each staff members' passion, favorite treatment or simply a fun fact. This small effort will help turn an often intimidating experience into a comfortable atmosphere that becomes the foundation for a memorable relationship with the practice.

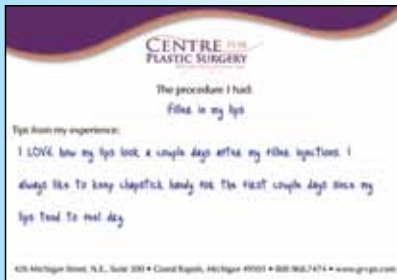
In addition, the need to create an exceptional visit, partnered with the desire of modern consumers to exchange peer-to-peer reviews, establishes the perfect opportunity to utilize a tool known as a Patient Tip Binder. Using a custom binder that matches the look and feel of your practice, this booklet uses clear sleeves to hold cards with testimonials from past patients. Give patients a blank card at their follow-up appointment and allow them to leave a tip from

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Patient tip binder



Patient tip cards



Customer appreciation tool

their experience for future patients. Having patients handwrite their advice offers a superior level of credibility for the review. Often, the cards have grammar or spelling errors and excel at portraying a patient's original voice. As the cards are collected you can add them to the binder and even double their reach by scanning them in and adding the images to your website.

Tools that continually educate about the latest and greatest treatments you offer will ensure your patients keep you as their choice provider for care.

Lastly, always end on a positive note. After you have worked so hard to engage and educate your patients, don't let them walk away without ending on a positive note. Oftentimes, the last interaction a patient has before they leave is to pay for their service. This however, is a missed opportunity. Don't let handing over hard-earned dollars be the last exchange a patient has with your brand. Instead simply pair a positive with a negative to sweeten the payment process. Having branded giveaways such as chapsticks, key chains or lotions available at the checkout make a great thank you gift. Alternatively, you can simply have chocolates or other treats available to partner something positive with the bill. The main point to remember is that at checkout, your patient becomes a consumer and the laws of the retail world warrant that you show appreciation for the patronage of your consumers.

A strong marketing strategy will keep your patients engaged and excited throughout their entire appointment. Additionally, tools that continually educate about the latest and greatest treatments you offer will ensure your patients keep you as their choice provider for care. By following this formula and making sure your guests leave with a smile, your practice will enjoy a healthy heartbeat and continue to thrive for years to come. ■



Tracy L. Drumm

Ms. Drumm, vice president of IF Marketing (Chicago, Ill.), specializes in the development of innovative marketing tools for aesthetic practices around the world. She is known for her unique, creative and easy-to-implement marketing strategies that have proven to deliver explosive results. Ms. Drumm has co-authored two books, *THRIVE: Pearls to Prosper in Any Economy* and *Keys to Success: Marketing & Practice Management*. Additionally, she regularly contributes editorial content to leading trade publications. For more information please visit www.ifmark.com.

Resources:

1. Earl Sasser of Harvard Business School
2. Harris Interactive, Customer Experience Impact Report