

# How to establish a successful practice in aesthetic medicine

BY NIKOLAOS METAXOTOS

What does it take for a medical practitioner to become a successful business person? Why does it make sense for a plastic or reconstructive surgeon to include non-surgical solutions in his or her practice? What is it that our patients want, and need?

It is no secret that today's aesthetic patients tend to seek non-invasive, non-surgical solutions as opposed to invasive treatments. According to the latest statistics published by the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery ([www.surgery.org](http://www.surgery.org)), there were over 11 million surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures performed in the United States in 2013. Surgical procedures accounted for 16.5% of the total number of procedures and 58% of the total expenditures, with non-surgical procedures making up an impressive 83.5% of the total number of procedures and 42% of total expenditures.

We practitioners are required to take into account the latest trends and data and make sure the practices we set up and maintain are sustainable in a long-term way. After a decade of running my own private practice in aesthetic medicine, it seems to me that a combination of both offerings – surgical and non-surgical solutions – is the most

sensible path to take in order to establish a successful aesthetic practice.

You may ask: "How should I market my practice when competition is growing all around the world?" or "How can I differentiate what I do from what hundreds, thousands of others offer in the same competitive market?" Well, there is a simple answer to this: differentiate yourself and your services from the competition and make sure you give your patients all the more reason to keep coming back. This is essentially the difference between what a hospital doctor wants and what we want: hospital doctors wish for patients to recover and not return. We wish for our patients to come back as often as possible. But why would they do that?

It is true that today's patients have a wealth of experience as consumers, travellers, or even shoppers. Thanks to the internet, they also have unlimited access to information, and thus unlimited choice. They like to indulge in new experiences and are not satisfied in having things done over and over again in the same way.

For a successful practice in aesthetic medicine, this means that our patients do not only seek the medical act itself. They – and this is perhaps the most important thing – seek the experience, the ritual, something they can take along and share with their friends, family, physical or social media contacts, as a memorable experience worth repeating – and worth recommending.

Some statistics may further serve as eye openers here: if we increase our customer retention by 5% we will raise income by 25-30%. Over 80% of

customers expect better service than five years ago, while over 90% of patients who switch do so because of the service, not because of the way the medical act is performed. Dissatisfaction may come from details such as the waiting time patients endure, how clean the premises are found to be or whether they were treated with a smile or not. Only a very small percentage are dissatisfied with, and actually switch practice because of, the medical act itself.

The above is data we religiously collect in the Symmetria Health and Beauty Clinic, established 10 years ago in Athens, Greece. I am proud to say the clinic has survived the financial crisis and is still able to offer holistic health and beauty services of high standards not only to local but also to international patients.

To avoid losing patients because of bad service, what you are urged to do is standardise your services through clearly articulated and well tested policies and procedures. These may have to do with your customer flow, administration work or the treatment protocols themselves. Once you have set up those policies, keep monitoring and evaluating their outcome on an ongoing basis. You will be surprised at what you may find and how the data you collect can help you improve those elements of your practice that will make the difference between you and the competition, and will make your patients want to come back, over and over again.

Having said that, it would be unrealistic to suggest that a medical practitioner alone can keep an eye on everything, from the medical services

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per se to the operations of the clinic, and, even further, to the promotion and marketing services that are needed to enhance your services. You therefore need to employ a group of dedicated people, each one an expert in their own area, but also, and importantly, all of them willing to form an effective team that will support your practice. In essence, attracting the right people and making effective use of them is an essential part of creating a successful business formula. This is a long process that includes several considerations. But at the end of the day, it is the team you will rely on, and it is also their job to keep your patients happy.

The appearance of your staff is key to your patients' experience, so do not underestimate the importance of a polished image. Choose your staff outfits carefully, and do insist that everyone wears the clinic outfit every day. If you sell cosmetics as part of your services, provide free of charge access to what you sell for your staff. They will learn to appreciate each aspect of your products through their own experience and thus become trusted ambassadors of your brand.

Having stressed the importance of people, it is equally important to stress the importance of high end technology equipment. You may have in mind things like lasers, the new technology for facial rejuvenation, weigh loss and skin tightening; and clearly that is all important. But in my opinion, maybe the most important equipment for your business is computer software for your data and customer relations management. This system will be there to provide all the marketing data you need in order to reach what might be the most valuable target group of consumers – the patients that have already visited your practice.

I have deliberately left the aspect of a tailor made marketing plan for the end of



Symmetria Health and Beauty Clinic

this contribution, as this is an extremely complicated task to perform and obviously you will require a dedicated team to do so. The challenge we are all faced with is that in today's complicated market, with all consumers having the ability to act as media correspondents or marketers themselves, thanks to the tremendous rise of social media, it is very hard to rely on a single marketing strategy. So, while you need to take into account everything your marketing team suggest (e.g. the physical and obviously the digital aspect of your presence, including your website, e-newsletter, social media channels) perhaps the best advice I can offer is to try out new tricks and learn from the mistakes you have made. At this point, I would like to turn to the invaluable lessons offered by the Swedish Professor Ksell Nordstrom, who teaches that in today's environment, everything competes against everything. Our potential clients have an amount of money to spend and they are free to choose perhaps having a facial treatment, buying a designer handbag or flying away for the weekend. Thus the marketing approach is essential – and this is true for a surgeon as well. An element of business understanding that

does not overshadow the medical ethos and methodology is, I believe, key to surviving in today's competitive world.

Ultimately, we are medical practitioners and what we mostly rely on is the establishment of relations of trust. Trust is key to our relationships with patients. Trust is also key to building a successful and sustainable business approach for your practice. And long-lasting relationships based on trust and respect help create word of mouth testimonies by happy patients that forms a strong base for growth and expansion.



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