

Fall 2009

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## MARKETING TO MAKE IT

Attracting new clients  
in a down economy

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# Retaining

By TRACY L. DRUMM

## CURRENT CLIENTS

**ABSTRACT:** Retaining current clients is an effective and efficient way of staying afloat in a down economy.

**In** an industry where the cost of one filler treatment can easily cover a car payment, many physicians find themselves wondering how to retain clients during an economic downturn. During the past 10 years, nonsurgical procedures have exploded by an astonishing growth rate of 754%, according to a 2007 report from the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS). At a time when the consumers responsible for this growth have committed to living on a tighter budget, you must develop and employ strategies to keep your phones ringing and your syringes filling.

The easiest way to get and stay busy without exhausting your funds is to reach out to those who already know you and have used your services because it is more expensive to gain a new client than it is to retain one. That means to most efficiently spend your time and money, look no further than your database of current patients, past patients and new patient inquiries.

### Speak often

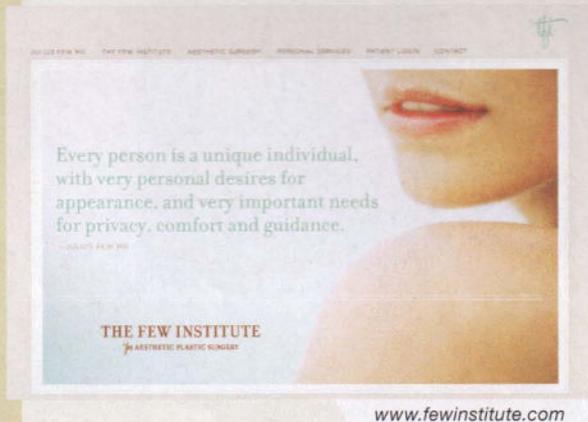
Simply put, if you do not speak, you will not be heard. It is your job to remind patients to come to you, and you must remind them more than once. Although clearly medicine is not a retail business, at times it can be helpful to think of your aesthetic patient as a consumer. There are several simple ways to speak to your patients, and they include options for every budget.

### *Designate a retention captain.*

Designate one person in your office to become the retention captain in charge of patient outreach. Have that person provide reminder calls to patients when they need their next injection or laser treatment. This simple tactic borrowed from the dental industry is seldom utilized in aesthetic practices, and is a surprisingly effective way to stay current in someone's calendar and budget.

*Create appointment cards.* Take this concept one step further and create an inexpensive appointment card that will help retain patients. These cards actually offer the most value with the patients who do not book their next injection or laser treatment before leaving your office. With some inexpensive additions to a regular business card, you can create a powerful retention tool that also serves as a referral card.

Providing a well-maintained Web site helps patients see you as a physician up-to-date on the latest trends and offerings.



There are several simple ways to speak to your **PATIENTS**, and they include options for every **BUDGET**.

After patients' appointments, they should be asked if they would like to schedule their next treatment. If they need to check their calendar or will call in a few months to schedule, pull out your next appointment card that features a few upgrades.

1. One side of the card should feature sample before-and-after photos, and the other side should strategically list followup information, such as the anticipated longevity of the treatment. To incorporate this strategy, have a line that reads, "Your treatment was on: \_\_\_\_\_," and fill in the date.
2. Next, list the most frequently performed treatments from your practice, such as Botox, filler and laser. Then you simply check the boxes of the procedures the patients had and indicate when the patients will be due for their next treatments based on how long the results typically last.

Essentially you are placing an expiration date on the patients' treatments and putting a time frame in their minds for when they should be returning to your office. The before-and-after photos act as a visual expiration by implying, "Around August, when your wrinkles start to appear again like the 'before' picture, you are due for your next treatment." Patients will not only have your contact information in their wallets, but a sample photo of your services, as well.

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**Birthday outreach.** Another effective way to reach out to patients is to have your retention captain simply call them on their birthdays, offering them well wishes on behalf of the practice. For those really wanting to maximize their birthday outreach, an effort that has been shown in several practices to yield a significant return is the birthday gift card. No one likes to receive junk mail; however, everyone loves a birthday card and even more impactful is a birthday card with a gift. Rather than sending out cards throughout the month before each patient's birthday, maximize time and efficiency by sending out the cards at the beginning of the month to everyone with a birthday during the following four weeks. Typically, a \$50 gift card works well in getting patients in the

door, and the net gain of their purchase makes the discount a worthwhile investment for the practice.

By giving your patients a gift card, you are rewarding them for being loyal, encouraging them to come to the practice again and helping them justify spending money—you're saving them \$50 without the risk of damaging your image by giving out gift cards. It allows you to lower the cost of your treatments without devaluing them.

To further the impact of the card for a minimal expense, you can have custom birthday cards created with matching credit card-style gift cards that can be tailored to promote your practice. Typically, the birthday gift card program averages four appointments for every 10 cards mailed, a significant contribution to any practice.



A \$50 gift card works well in getting **PATIENTS** in the door, and the net gain of their purchase makes it a worthwhile **INVESTMENT**.



*An example of an aesthetic sushi menu*

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**Are you interested in hearing more?**  
Please  any topic you would like to learn more about.

- Lip Enhancement  

- Cheek Enhancement  

- Eyebrow Arching  

- Acne Blemish Removal - "Clear-Tox"  

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## Don't sell, educate

Ensure that every person on your staff is able to educate patients about each treatment you offer, and also give your staff measurable goals for increasing the number of services each patient is receiving. Set a goal for your retention captain to educate and convert at least two patients a week to have a filler treatment. That individual can reach out to current Botox, laser and skin care patients. Based on the average profit from a filler treatment,\* if your retention captain can successfully convert just two patients a week, that will be an additional \$35,000 in yearly revenue for your practice.

**Aesthetic sushi menu.** How frustrating it is when a patient who has been coming to you for five years says, "Dr. Jones, I had no idea you offered laser hair removal." This common annoyance can be easily remedied with an aesthetic sushi menu.

Because patients are typically inundated with forms, consents and other literature when they arrive at your office, this simple half-sheet of paper is designed to provide patients with a quick and engaging visual snapshot of the variety of services offered. When patients are brought back to treatment rooms, they are given a pencil and sushi-style check-off menus that direct them to "Please check any topic you would like to learn more about." By removing this information from the intake form and adding a picture next to each treatment, it takes away the formality and engages the patients. Menus can be produced very inexpensively by creating a Microsoft Word document and simply printing it on a color printer.

## Focus on current clients

The bottom line for getting busy on a bottom dollar budget is to work with what you have. Focus your efforts and your funds on the clients who are most likely to return. It is more important now than it was even a year ago to constantly be reaching out to your patients, engaging them with the practice and educating them about how you can make their lives better. Remember, in this competitive market, if you are not speaking to your patients, someone else is. 

\*Data based on an average profit of \$373 per filler treatment, calculated from statistics from the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.



*A passion for marketing and a love of aesthetic medicine helps drive TRACY L. DRUMM to manage the day-to-day operations of If Marketing, a firm in downtown Chicago specializing in aesthetic medicine.*

*Drumm has spent the past four years as marketing director and has consulted with more than 400 aesthetic physicians nationwide. She recently co-authored, Keys to Success: Marketing & Practice Management (College of Cosmetic Medicine Press, 2007) and Thrive: Pearls to Prosper in Any Economy (College of Cosmetic Medicine Press, 2009).*

## TAKEAWAYS

- Remind patients often about the value your practice holds in their lives.
- Offer customized graphic appointment cards to put an expiration date on a patient's treatment.
- Provide birthday greetings with customized \$50 gift cards to ensure loyalty and return clients.
- Offer a visual menu of your treatments to familiarize patients with all the services you provide.