

# PRACTICE BRANDING

## Increases Recognition and Revenue

By Candace Crowe

**B**randing goes back to the days when ranchers first started marking their cattle to designate ownership. Eventually, as markets and industries became more competitive and customers gained more sophistication, simple designations of ownership and quality were insufficient. Marketing agents augmented the product-centered brand concept with layers of added value, such as emotional attachment, services, distribution, relationship and trust. To many aesthetic physicians, marketing is too expensive and takes time away from treatments or surgery. In reality a strategic, well thought out brand will allow more time to treat patients and yield an excellent return.



# BRAND

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Medical branding strategies are different from other fields, such as retail or industry. Aesthetic practitioners need to keep their marketing respectful and genuine. Hence, some non-traditional marketing tools can be the most effective, but it's important to start with the right building blocks so your brand starts strong.

A brand positions your practice in people's minds. Most patients make choices based on both emotion and intellect, but mostly by what they remember about their experience with you and your practice. By defining your brand, you help establish a network of associations in the minds of your target audience.

Branding should positively draw your target audience to you. Creating a brand can be an excellent way to communicate how you can meet individual needs. For example, a physician who wants to be known as an expert in body contouring should have a consistent emphasis on the specific advantages that the treatment has to offer. Even if you want to be known as a practice that serves multiple needs, branding can clearly state your services and communicate that you are a qualified aesthetic practitioner, if not one of the best in your field.

Having a brand that defines the quality and purpose of your practice sets you apart from the competition. The *American Society of Plastic Surgeons* reports that the number of cosmetic procedures performed per year has grown considerably. From 1992 to 2004, cosmetic plastic surgery procedures increased by 700%. In 2008 more than 12 million cosmetic procedures and almost 5 million reconstructive procedures were performed. With so many more patients seeking these types of services, aesthetic practices need a strong brand to clearly state what sets them high above the rest.

Remarkably, you already have a brand whether you purposely set out to establish one or not. With a little thought and planning, that brand can make building your practice easier. Here are five simple steps to build your brand.

I. Define who you are and what you value. You – whether alone or with the help of a professional marketing company – must decide how you want your brand's identity to be perceived, before communicating it. Write a brand positioning statement that expresses how you want clients/patients to view your brand. Think of this statement as the foundation upon which you will build your look and feel. For example: Paul Vanek, M.D., a board certified plastic surgeon, uses his training and experience to help patients set realistic appearance expectations and meet their goals. Dr. Vanek specializes in surgical and cosmetic procedures for the body, breasts and face. Paul Vanek, M.D. Plastic Surgery can help you celebrate your beauty.

II. Analyze your current situation. Before you start making any changes, take a look at how your brand is currently perceived. Who are your patients and competitors? Knowing which internal and external factors that affect others' perception of your practice will help you understand the context in which your brand will stand. Then, think about how you want your practice to be

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perceived in that context. Use your imagination to visualize exactly how you want to be viewed by your target audience.

Talk to your patients about their needs and perceptions. Think about what makes you and your practice unique. Then, make your brand concept clear to yourself and your staff. Always be aware of others' perceptions of you, and think of ways to clearly state what sets you apart from the others. Knowing your consumer is a basic principle of brand management.

III. Identify all your patient touch points. How do your patients experience your brand? All the steps that a potential or current patient sees, feels and touches along the way are touch points, including your sign, brochures, website, business cards, the patient's post consultation take-home folder, the receptionist's telephone greeting, etc. Build a touch point map by making a list that includes all of these items and then prioritize them. Which touch points have real relevance to your patients' decision making? Remember, in the patients mind, it's all about them. As you well know, a patient will not book a surgery with someone they don't trust. Therefore, put more emphasis on touch points that help build a trusting relationship, followed by the ones that position you as the highly skilled physician and staff that patients want.

IV. Communicate your brand identity internally and externally using professionally designed marketing materials that reflect your values and speak to potential patients. Everything about your practice should make an emotional impact on potential patients. Facilitate their belief in you by reinforcing your promise of excellence through all communication and at each touch point. Consistently reinforce your message – the goal is to have all communication and touch points reinforce your brand promise.

Have a professional design your business cards, practice brochures and website. A total branding package is inclusive of every detail in your practice. By consistently printing your practice logo and tag line, as well as using your selected color palette and unique message on everything your patients see, a strong brand will emerge. Carefully consider every piece of print collateral that your office uses as each one contributes to the image you want to exude. Start with your prioritized list and build your brand over time, as your budget permits.

Your brand is not just built by printed materials but also by personal encounters. Each of your service encounters need to exceed the expectations of your patients; this builds brand equity. Create positive patient experiences and outcomes that result in referrals for your practice. Establish loyal patients by creating meaningful associations with them. Word-of-mouth, or relationship marketing, is one of the best ways to get referrals for your practice.

Create awareness among your staff members about the brand identity you are striving to achieve. Remember, your staff is often the first contact patients have with your practice. Educate personnel about proper handling of your brand and empower them to present a consistent message to everyone who calls or visits your practice.

V. Assess your progress every couple of months, modify and refocus if need be. Branding is the process of creating distinctive and lasting perceptions in the minds of your patients. A brand provides a consistent, unique business personality. Make sure that everything about your practice – your print and web-based marketing materials, your staffs' customer service procedures, and your own interactions with patients – works in harmony to support your brand.

An excellent way to assess how well you are meeting your patients' needs is by surveying them. Patient feedback can help you decide which attributes of your brand you want to keep and which are not working the way you'd like them to. Take time to listen to your patients to find out what kinds of information they are seeking. Use your experience and feedback to focus on what makes you unique. Tailor your practice to meet patient needs and make each encounter with them (check-in, consultation, treatment) an intimate, personal experience. Remember that going from your current brand to your optimal brand could take time so don't get discouraged.

While these five steps will guide you on your journey to successfully establishing an effective brand, remember, a strong brand is not created overnight. In fact, a properly handled brand continues to get stronger over time, by constantly keeping abreast of how your target audience perceives you, assessing your marketing plan, trying new strategies and defining your goals. An ongoing, consistent brand building process is important to strengthening a brand.

Project a positive, confident personality and make sure it's demonstrated in every aspect of your practice. Show that you are genuinely interested in the patient's cares and concerns. Draw them in by listening first and then be sure to communicate your unique skill set and knowledge base.

Provide superb patient education. Prospective patients have a strong need to learn about the procedures they hope to have. They can learn some of this through reading patient stories, public educational services, such as seminars, an in-office educational system or a patient educational video.

Your branding strategy will flourish when you use the right marketing tools. Some traditional marketing tools that work well include an intelligently designed logo and a short tag line that captures the essence of your brand. An eye-catching, confident business card is often overlooked. Think about how many people you give these to and how long they keep them. In addition to these, a practice should have a brief verbal commercial available to use on short notice. Work with a company who specializes in marketing for aesthetic practices to make sure the commercial highlights who you serve, and what makes your practice special.

Continuity in the message and look of all your pieces, as well as consistency in delivery is key to the success of your brand.

As a medical aesthetic practitioner, you offer unique services in the marketplace; therefore, you use some non-traditional marketing tools in your branding strategies. As recently as fifteen years ago, the medical industry did not

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even need to think about having a website, but times have changed and today's market requires more frequent and more genuine communication with patients. Patients want the ability to explore what you do and how you have helped other people. Collect patient stories and create before and after albums for your waiting room and website. Those interested in a procedure crave real patient feedback. This is a great way to guide and educate your audience. These stories and other specific information about your practice can all be incorporated into a larger patient education program.

An aesthetic practitioner's services are intangible. Patients cannot experience what you have to offer until they have made the decision to have a cosmetic procedure; therefore you must build tangible means to demonstrate evidence of quality.

Every interaction between the patient and you or your staff creates service quality impressions. Effective monitoring of these interactions ensures the delivery of consistent service. There is a fine line between over standardizing your services and giving your employees sufficient flexibility to address distinctive differences among clients and the unique circumstances of each interaction. Employees who embody and believe in your brand are empowered and create a competitive advantage for a service organization such as yours.

Currently there are a number of medical aesthetic practices and many new procedures being developed every day. By defining your brand, you are helping patients decide that you are the best physician for them. Furthermore, a good brand will deliver an excellent return on investment.

You know better than anyone else what you are the absolute best at, and what you can accomplish for your patients. What do you want people to see in their minds' eye when they think of your practice? With a little thought and planning, your brand can make building your practice easier and will work for you all day, every day. ■



Candace Crowe is the president and creative director of Candace Crowe Design (Orlando, Fla.), which has specialized in plastic surgery marketing and patient education since 1999. REVENEZ, their suite of expert marketing tools, leads the way in innovation with customizable waiting room loops, educational videos for your website, tools to improve conversion rates, web design, search engine optimization, e-mail campaigns and traditional practice building tools. For more information please visit [www.candacecrowe.com](http://www.candacecrowe.com).