

# Proven Recession Tactics Contribute to Increased Patient Flow

By Lou Haggerty, Patients Unlimited Marketing Consultants

**A**s we enter 2009, every aesthetic practice is asking one question: "How do we keep patients coming in for services?" The first task at hand is to keep all of the patients you presently have and then work on increasing that number.



We surveyed our client base consisting of over 700 domestic and international aesthetic practices and have developed the following five strategic moves that will not only allow your practice to survive, but thrive in this economy. Naturally, some practices will need a more refined version of these tactics but everyone will benefit from a careful review of this list.

### Keep Your Staff on Board and Inspired

Your staff is your key promoter and lifeline to the patients you have and need to attract. If they do not believe in the practice, the services being offered or the skill of your professional

offerings, then how do you expect them to encourage others to invest in your services when disposable income is at a premium? There are several ways to keep your staff motivated.

In tough economic times, it is critical that your staff not only understand the advantages of the services and products that you offer, but that they also be users of those services and products. No matter how young, or mature, the staff is, identify at least one product or service that they can use and have them use it. By doing this you are creating living marketers of your practice.

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Next, each staff member should have their own business cards. This promotes an energetic ownership in your practice. They should know how to use the cards and be encouraged to distribute cards to family, friends and contacts they are making as the new year unfolds.

Another method of projecting ownership is the use of the staffs' names on follow-up letters to prospective patients. Too often we see confirmation letters that are signed by the physician, yet he or she has never seen nor spoken to the prospective patient. Relationships with prospective patients begin with the staff member that spoke to them on the phone, oftentimes the receptionist (many times the lowest paid employee in the office). It is important to

appreciate that the receptionist is the first line of connection between the practice and patient; she nurtures the relationship and is therefore a crucial agent of the practice. Here, at the first point of contact, is where motivational and didactic sales training can help even the most experienced practice.

### Make Certain There is Follow-Up

Prospect follow-up is important in good economic times and absolutely critical in the bad times. If enough prospective patients are not followed-up on there will be plenty of time to see patients, but there won't be many patients to see. Keep in mind, follow-up is not intuitive, it's a program of planned protocols, executed by a staff member that has been trained and motivated to use the protocols properly. We recommend accountability for follow-up at three stages of patient communications: immediately after the initial call – even if no appointment is made; immediately after the consultation – even if no procedure is scheduled; and immediately after the treatment or procedure is completed – to confirm the patient's perception of the results.

How do you execute follow-up so that it is not seen as pushy, desperate or a waste of time? First, your staff makes an appointment for the follow-up. If the patient is told that a call will be made prior to the first office visit to confirm the appointment or determine if there are further questions, then the patient is expecting the call. This same system should be used after the consultation and the procedure. In each case the patient will appreciate the follow-up as they are expecting it.

### Don't Forget the Ones Who Brought You

Although it is good to increase patient volume, the number one method to affect a positive increase in volume



## Proven Recession Tactics

is securing and maintaining the volume you already have. Therefore, it is very important to maintain communication with your current patient base. One of the easiest, yet often forgotten means of keeping the lines of communication open is a simple thank you note to all your patients for either coming in or for referring a friend.

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If the staff is the number one key promoter for your practice, then your present patients are next in line as your practice expansion agents. However, they need to be given permission to refer. Your staff can be trained to use the right words and timing to engage your patients as referring agents.

We live in a digital world, so use the internet to keep in touch with your patients. In today's environment the use of e-mail is not only accepted, but often preferred as a method of contact. Of course you

need to have a system of capturing e-mails so that you can use this as a form of communication. This is an excellent format for introducing new products and services. Remember, if a patient initiated their communication with your practice through an e-mail address they have given you permission to communicate with them and therefore there is no fear of HIPAA problems. Our clients tell us that 25% to 40% of all new patients they see come by way of internet contact.

### Small Items Equal Big Business

At Patients Unlimited Marketing Consultants, what used to be referred to as ancillary services, we call your small ticket items. These are spa treatments and skincare products. Most of these services can be handled by trained or certified staff. You should offer small ticket items in your practice as these services provide opportunities to up sell.

Physicians may feel that these products don't belong in their practice as they are aesthetic/cosmetic surgery practices, not drug stores. However, in this economy, patient options that allow them to test the waters before jumping in with a major procedure, are required. This "water testing" is also an economy stretcher. If an eyelid procedure costs \$3,500 or more, but some type of product, dermal filler or BOTOX® Cosmetic from Allergan (Irvine, Calif.), will at least reduce wrinkles, this option needs to be available to the patients.

Also, the use of small ticket items provides an opportunity for online specials on your website. These promotions often encourage patients to learn more about the specials by calling in or downloading coupons or gift certificates.

### Resolicit

Lastly, remember to resolicit. Every practice that we come in contact with all initially say, "there is no such thing as resoliciting in an aesthetic practice." That is a problem.

Almost every small ticket item eventually needs to be replaced or re-treated, but in most practices the responsibility is left to the patient. Using a reminder method through your e-mail system will notify the patient it is time to come back in for more services or to purchase more products. This keeps the patients coming back to your practice and eventually may encourage them to undergo more aggressive procedures.

A fully trained staff and informed patient base can serve as the greatest promoters of your practice to maintain and increase a positive patient flow for services in 2009.



### About the Author

**Lou Haggerty**, the senior vice president and a partner of Patients Unlimited Marketing Consultants (PUMC) in Los Angeles, Calif. has been a member of the professional consulting staff for more than two decades. Ms. Haggerty is noted for her precise understanding of the wants, needs and desires of the cosmetic consumer. She employs an insightful style of teaching sparked with a rare, down-to-earth and entertaining quality that few have mastered.

According to her students, you will not forget a training experience with Ms. Haggerty. Since 1980, Ms. Haggerty has trained thousands of aesthetic practice staff members throughout the U.S., Canada and Australia. She is a prolific writer about the art of consultation closure and is affiliated with *THE Aesthetic Practice Association's* Certified Aesthetic Consultant (CAC) training program.