

# Harnessing the power of PR for business success in medical aesthetics

With more aesthetic clinics arriving on the scene, standing out from the crowd and building a great reputation has never been more important. But is an inconsistent (or non-existent) PR strategy damaging your business? Can you navigate between PR and advertising to find the right way to engage with your customers? Julia Kendrick outlines how you can employ trusted techniques to achieve business success

To succeed in today's dynamic medical aesthetic industry, being a skilled practitioner is not enough; you have to be the proverbial Jack of all trades, adding branding, marketing, PR, customer service, HR and financial skills on top of your clinical expertise. Understandably, this can feel overwhelming and the biggest danger is to abdicate yourself from one or more of these core areas and still expect your business to successfully compete and thrive.

When used effectively, PR can build your reputation, help you stand out from the crowd, and generate loyalty and trust—all of which result in increased patient retention, business opportunities and new sales potential. However, time and again, I see practitioners cutting PR from their business plan because they don't understand its value or feel unsure of how to get started. This article will guide you through the basics of PR, how it can drive your business forward and, most importantly, how you can quickly and easily start harnessing the power of PR to increase business potential and success.

## What is PR?

PR stands for public relations and, ultimately, it all comes down to reputation. It is the combined result of what you do, what you say, and what others say about you. PR is used to gain trust and understanding between an organisation

and its various audiences. In the case of aesthetic businesses, this could be your patients (present and future), the media or industry peers.

The real power of PR comes through third party endorsements; it is all about positively influencing what people say about your business when you are not there. A common misconception is that PR is just about media relations—in fact, PR is about how you (your business and employees) interact and communicate with everyone. PR activities could include:

- ▶ Patient and/or media communications
- ▶ Product or clinic launches
- ▶ Information/awareness campaigns
- ▶ Promotions
- ▶ Trade conference presentations.

While there can certainly be 'quick wins', PR is generally a long-term strategy. Like any relationship, it takes time to build meaningful engagement with audiences and requires sustained presence to bring in lasting business rewards, such as:

- ▶ Driving sales
- ▶ Building customer loyalty
- ▶ Establishing and growing your reputation
- ▶ Influencing audiences
- ▶ Building trust and engagement
- ▶ Creating high-value products and services
- ▶ Managing crises
- ▶ Standing out from the competition
- ▶ Getting media coverage
- ▶ Increasing enquiries.

## Advertising vs PR

Ultimately, PR and advertising both aim to influence your target audiences (new or existing patients), to make a certain decision (have a treatment); they just approach this in different ways. An advert may contain all your brand messages verbatim, but there can be a lack of 'independent verification' to

help push consumers through the decision-making process. However, think about the power of a personal or independent recommendation—because PR uses other people to do the talking, it has access to a more credible and influential path to help influence decision-making. A comparison of key characteristics of advertising and PR can be seen in *Table 1*.

Advertising, marketing and PR work synergistically by tapping into different influencing opportunities, methods and techniques. While advertising can help bridge the gap to get your messages out there for some short-term quick wins, it absolutely cannot compensate for the broader circular effect of building a meaningful business reputation, increasing patient loyalty or growing your business in the long term. Use with caution!

## Learn from successful clinics

The most successful clinics employ the same four power strategies:

- ▶ They build a solid PR foundation—these are rock solid messages that communicate who they are, what they stand for and what makes them unique
- ▶ They create a wealth of accessible, published content across multiple channels—this includes their press releases, blogs, media articles, newsletters, and tweets
- ▶ They actively shape their profile and reputation—this means actively engaging with patients, peers and the media
- ▶ They create strategic partnerships to help grow their business (e.g. manufacturers, suppliers)—generating opportunities for mutual business benefits (e.g. being a key opinion leader ambassador for a brand).

The problem is, most practitioners jump straight into pushing out content, without



**JULIA KENDRICK**

Founder and Director,  
Kendrick PR, London .  
e: julia@kendrickpr.uk

getting that solid PR foundation into place. This is like pouring petrol in before you have built a car.

### Build a foundation

A secure foundation is the basis for all PR, marketing and advertising activities, and will help set up your business for success. Don't worry about doing everything straight from the start; if in doubt, start small and work your way up. It might be that you want to focus on a specific business goal—perhaps improving your patient retention, or launching a new treatment. Keep this in mind as you do your homework and consider the following questions:

- ▶ Who are your audiences?
- ▶ Who are your competitors?
- ▶ What are your goals and objectives from PR? Enhanced reputation and media profile? Driving more new patients through the door? Growing your existing business? Becoming a media spokesperson? Promote or launch a new clinic, product or service?
- ▶ How will you measure success?
- ▶ How much budget can you allocate?
- ▶ Who will do the work? You? A clinic manager? An external PR supplier?

All of this information will not only help you craft that all-important foundation, it will be an invaluable brief should you decide to bring in external PR support later on down the line.

The core of the PR foundation is your 'pitch'—the short, succinct paragraph that sets out who you are, what you stand for and your business' unique selling points. Think about what you want to be known for and build that into everything you communicate. Consider your company and personal values; tell prospective audiences what your mission is and why they should trust you. Ensure these messages are tailored to your target audience, using strong verbs and the active voice, and avoid jargon or any messages that are too similar to your competitors.

Writing short, powerful points is much more difficult than it looks, so start big and whittle it down. What you want to end up with is a powerful set of messages that you can put at the core of all your communications. Test it out—can you read it aloud in less than 30 seconds? Would it convince someone in the street? What looks



iStockPhoto/d9171

*PR can drive sales, build customer loyalty, increase enquiries and give your clinic media coverage*

succinct on paper can be deceptively long when you read it aloud, so keep testing and refining until you are happy with the result.

### Conclusion

Once your PR foundation is firmly in place, then and only then should you begin considering activities from the other PR power strategies, such as developing more

content, engaging with the media, and building strategic partnerships. These activities can be phased in as your time and budget allows, and there is a wealth of information and support available.

If in doubt, reach out to the experts and they can provide additional skills, training or services to bring your business the success it deserves. ◀ JAN

Advertising	PR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Pay for an advert slot and fill this with content which you control completely</li> <li>▶ Control the timing of publication</li> <li>▶ Run the same advert repeatedly (budget permitting) to get your messages through</li> <li>▶ Pros: clear costs and total control</li> <li>▶ Cons: costs can be high, depending on the outlet. Need to carefully identify/prioritise which outlets to use to hit your target audiences. Audiences know they are being sold to, so can be less receptive and more sceptical about your product/service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Pitch your story to a journalist to get your product/service/business written about for free</li> <li>▶ Journalist has control of if, when and how they write about your story</li> <li>▶ They will only write about something once—fresh approaches and 'new news' are needed for more coverage</li> <li>▶ Pros: audiences see your story as independent, with more credibility and chances to create engagement. Story can be picked up multiple times by other outlets with no additional work</li> <li>▶ Cons: Less control over publication, potential longer term strategy</li> </ul>