

HEALTHCARE

Why healthcare practices should keep doors open during the holidays

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Black Friday shoppers set a new record this year, spending **\$6.22 billion online** alone. With Christmas only weeks away, retailers are riding a major windfall.

Stores, whether bricks-and-mortar or online-only, understand that customers want to spend money around the holidays. Why, then, do so many businesses offering premier products and services seem to enter a hibernation state this time of year?

Open-and-shut case

Our marketing agency serves aesthetic practices including med spas, plastic surgeons, cosmetic dentists, and other privately owned practices performing fee-for-service procedures.

It is not uncommon for a medical practice to invest heavily in people, decor, products and new technology, but when it comes to investing in customer service and a premium experience, many drop the ball. This rings true over the holidays, when normally well-meaning practices shut their doors or go to limited holiday hours to make it easy on themselves. Understandable, if you happen to be in general medicine or general dentistry.

This is 1970s thinking when patients met the demands of their doctors. If your intention is to build or grow an aesthetic practice, this is nothing short of practice suicide. If you are not catering to what your patients expect from you, they vote with their checkbook.

For the most part we are talking about female consumers who are responsible for approximately \$18 trillion this year in overall spending. Women make 99 percent of all medical decisions for their immediate and extended families, so let us talk about how this affects you.

Take off your doctor hat for a minute and put on your retail practice hat. The holidays are the perfect time to cater to the needs of this overworked female caregiver by making it easy for her to drop into your practice and treat herself to a service or product that makes her feel good about herself.

Successful practices in the aesthetic medical and dental field understand that their female patients want to see them, on their terms and at times when they can drop the kids off and not have worry about them, treat themselves to something personal that they do not have to feel guilty about.

How to have happy holidays

The average doctor or dentist will likely cut down on hours during the holidays thinking that people have higher priorities than maintenance appointments. The smart aesthetic practices, however, understand that now is the time when they should ramp up their efforts to benefit from the free flow of money during the holiday season.

Here are some tips for businesses and brands in any industry to keep their doors open during the holidays and drive revenue.

1. Host a special event

What better way to keep customers and patients moving through your doors than actually inviting them to your office? The holidays are all about gatherings and good tidings.

Hosting an event at your office gives potential customers a chance to get to know you and enables you to reconnect with existing customers.

You want the event to be both fun and informative to maximize engagement and potential sales.

In addition to the prerequisite non-alcoholic cocktails, hors d'oeuvre and decorations, tie the event back to your business by demonstrating one or more of your products and services, raffling off special offers, or offering customers free consultations or one-on-one sessions with your staff. This is the perfect time to offer special holiday savings, or limited offerings of higher priced non-surgical procedures.

2. Invest in premium print materials

Although most of this year's headlines focus on the record-breaking online sales for Black Friday, **no premium brand should discount print marketing.**

When you invest in high-quality materials and customize your assets, a holiday print campaign of high consumer value can rise above the general holiday marketing buzz that people stop seeing or hearing.

First and foremost, people check the mail more eagerly now than they do any other time of year. Customers on your mailing list will value a glossy, weighty print item more than the dozens of flimsy coupons and fliers they typically receive, especially if you are providing an offer they cannot miss.

Support your print campaign with beautiful graphic visuals when your customers arrive at your office. These need to support your direct mail print materials and support your message with posters, brochures, fliers and other items. This way new and returning clients benefit from a cohesive and high-quality marketing experience. Be sure to remember the calls to action, and do not bury the lead.

3. Optimize and customize seasonal ads

From print to digital, there are many different formats where you can advertise your business. All have different requirements, but one emerging trend is true regardless of platform: Customers want to build a personal connection with the businesses they like.

Any business can design an ad with standard "Happy Holidays" language and stock photos of models in Santa hats. Customers see these messages and images all the time, and they have learned to ignore them subconsciously. But when you add a personal message and custom photos of you, your staff and your office in advertising materials, your clients are going to notice.

Getting your ads noticed is difficult, especially on dynamic and competitive platforms like Facebook, Instagram and sites in the Google Display Network.

Customization is the best way to overcome this hurdle especially when that customization is targeted at your audience's specific interests. And, once you attract customers' attention, they are much more likely to convert.

4. Show appreciation to your customers

When I work with clients in the aesthetic industry, the most successful practices realize that returning business is a necessity.

Despite the promise of "long-lasting results," no cosmetic treatment is forever. Thus, getting satisfied patients to come back again and again is crucial for the bottom line.

I imagine your business, no matter what product you sell or service you provide, is very much the same. It is less costly to re-engage an existing customer than it is to earn a new one, but you must cultivate and maintain the relationship to enjoy the full benefits.

Appreciation can take many forms, but a multifaceted digital strategy often has the best reach. Some of the most effective tactics include:

- Web site updates such as blog posts, banner images and call-to-actions are high-visibility ways to distribute messages of gratitude to your existing customers. When prospective customers see how you make the effort to communicate your thanks, they will appreciate and anticipate the same level of engagement, making them more likely to buy.
- Your social media profiles enable you to send timely messages of acknowledgement to current customers. You can even go a step further and upload images and videos that personalize the message.
- Email marketing campaigns and offline print equivalents function as targeted and personalized thank-you notes. Email is also a great way to communicate new specials and offers that encourage new business.

THE BEST WAY to show your customers how much you appreciate them is to be open and available when they are ready to buy.

Although it might throw a wrench in your end-of-year travel plans, the dividends you reap by tapping into the holiday buying season will make that delayed vacation all the sweeter.



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