



By Jillian Fraser

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Make Your Connections Count

A referral means one of your networking partners has found someone who might need your service, given the person your information or business card, and told him or her that you would follow up.

Developing extraordinary networking skills and putting them to use among local groups and online communities is an inexpensive way to build your practice in this challenging economy.

Networking is a reciprocal process based on the willingness to share information and contacts with other business owners. It requires a clear vision dedicated to building relationships, helping others fulfill their goals and giving sound advice to those asking. How do you begin? The first step is to identify the perfect group.

Not all networking groups are created equal. Take the time to research those in your area so you don't waste time attending meetings that do not deliver results. Most groups will allow you to attend a meeting or two before making a commitment. Watch for these telltale signs of successful practices.

1. Has the group limited membership to one person from each industry? A group consisting primarily of real estate agents is not going to be as productive as one that includes a mixed bag of professionals from a variety of local businesses. By limiting enrollment, the entire group can create synergistic relationships rather than competitive ones.

2. Are the contacts being shared by members in the form of referrals or leads? A *referral* means one of your networking partners has found someone who might need your service, given the person your information or business card, and told him or her that you would follow up. When you call, the prospective client is



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already open to doing business with you. A *lead* is where someone gives you a name and says, "I think this could be a good source of clients," but has not spoken to that person specifically about you. If the group you are considering appears to be turning over leads instead of referrals, move on to the next.

3. Can you realistically commit to regular attendance? To develop visibility and credibility with fellow networking members, you need to attend meetings consistently. If you are not a morning person and struggle to communicate until you have two cups of coffee, perhaps a group that meets during lunch or evening hours is a better choice.

Refine Your Story

Networking can be intimidating even for an experienced professional. One

way to overcome nerves and guarantee that you are representing yourself and your medical aesthetic business appropriately is to prepare a 60-second "commercial" about who you are and what you do, preferably in story form. People are much more apt to listen if you are prepared to share examples of client experiences that demonstrate the skills and services that make your practice unique. Here's an example: "My name is Meghan DePalma and I help clients achieve beautiful skin. Last month, a client was having a problem with what she thought was dry skin and acne. She actually had oily skin and had been using incorrect products. I performed a skincare treatment customized for her and told her that her skin type needed the appropriate homecare regimen. She has come in for two facials and within four weeks her skin has had a complete

turnaround. I am looking for men and women who want to have healthy and vibrant complexions."

Another key to successful networking is the creation of a defining statement, a shorter version of the commercial. It should become your response to the standard "What do you do?" question. A defining statement should:

- Include two distinctions about you and your business.
- Open the door for additional dialog by creating an opportunity for questions. Opening a conversation with a defining statement such as, "We combine age management treatments along with traditional spa therapies to enhance your face, body and mind," will have a much greater impact than starting with something

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like, "I am a medspa owner, director or esthetician."

Practice Patience

It takes time to build the kind of relationships that will bring new patients into your practice, so it is important that you stay committed to the networking

process for at least six months. Try not to expect too much too soon. People need time to get to know and trust you, and to recognize that you are giving as much as you are getting. A surefire way to get referrals from networking is to first give referrals. Make an effort to learn as much as you can about

your networking peers and pay close attention to the needs of everyone you come into contact with. Ask questions. Be genuinely interested in what others are doing and what they need to succeed. When you listen with the intention of connecting people, it is amazing how many opportunities you will find to make great referrals. Pay it forward and it will come back to you tenfold.

One great relationship is not enough to grow a medical spa business. The only way to protect your business against the effects of a naturally diminishing referral base is to consistently expand your network and establish a history of mutual assistance with others in your community. By assisting others to reach their goals, you are building the credibility of your practice and yourself. Follow up with your networking colleagues, whether you have a referral for them or not. Through regular and consistent follow-up you can stay updated on their changing needs and goals, and remind them of your own.

Connect Virtually

Networking has traditionally been a game of face time spent with colleagues in your own community. However, online social networks are presenting a unique opportunity for medspa owners to capture additional clients.

Social networking allows business owners to mix and mingle directly with their target market. With the tremendous growth of online social networking, websites like Facebook and MySpace offer tech-savvy medspa owners the chance to connect directly 24 hours a day with potential patients. The majority of social networkers online would rather accept a "Friend Request" from a business than from the more traditional banner ad running across the top of a web page. You might also want to consider developing online advocates. Recent studies

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Continued from page 26

have shown that in the valuable 18-to-35-year-old market, social network users are willing to act as advocates of local businesses and brands. Basically, there are "Internet socialites" out there who are willing to network for your medspa in exchange for discounted services or preferred status. If you ask around, chances are good that you will find willing advocates ready to build a social network for your business sitting at your front desk or standing in a treatment room.

The spending profile of online socialites is considerably high, ranking 20% above consumers who do not spend time on social networks. Given the increased amount of discretionary income being spent online, medical spa owners would be wise to become networking mavens on the Web. Attract potential clients to the spa by offering reviews and ratings, special offers, product-focused blogs and community-related events. With the tremendous volume of business occurring online, it makes good sense to focus a portion of your time towards developing an Internet networking strategy that works for your medical spa.

Networking in any form takes time and is always evolving. As you meet new people and establish relationships, identify those who can help you. Stay connected and keep your network growing. By attending events and posting your activities on the Web regularly, and keeping in touch with all those you meet, you will guarantee continued growth and success for your medspa. ■

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