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Winning the “turf war”

Pam Underdown on how to outgrow and outsmart your competitors

Having been involved in the business of medical aesthetics for more than 12 years, I have seen first-hand how the industry has evolved. When I opened my first aesthetic business in 2005, things were very different. Today it's certainly not easy. There are a number of reasons why maintaining a competitive edge has become so difficult in the business of aesthetics. In brief, these relate to a lack of differentiation, the rise in different types of competition, public perception, minimal regulation, price wars and last but certainly not least, a widespread obsession about what the local competition is doing.

The pace of change also seems to be ever-quicken. This is a highly competitive and demanding industry and just having great clinical skills does not guarantee success. There is an abundance of well trained and experienced aesthetic practitioners but very few would agree that their business gives them the freedom they truly desired when they left their day job. Those who have been involved in aesthetics since the early days should never underestimate the power of being first, however, that power only helps you if you continue to evolve, innovate and change. Regrettably, many have not evolved; they have been playing it safe, remaining comfortable and complacent. However, they are now starting to learn the hard way that playing it safe is a dying strategy. The aesthetics marketplace is constantly changing, new competitors are opening daily and patients are even more demanding than ever. Change really is essential if you want to have a successful practice that not only survives but thrives.

So how can practitioners thrive in this marketplace? Certainly not by doing nothing, or “dabbling” in private practice. You can't keep repeating the things you've been doing, hoping that it will be sufficient to cope in the future. Whilst most people are determined to avoid change, it's key

to remember that change and evolution are the very essence of life. What worked six years ago, or even six months ago, won't necessarily work today. Taking massive action, being focused and continuously innovating and improving will enable you to stay one step ahead of your competitors.

If you are finding yourself constantly obsessing about your competition then:

1. It allows the competition to write the rules of the game.

When you compare yourself to the competition, you are implying: “They are the standard. It's their pace, their achievements, their pricing, their agenda, that I've got to match.”

2. It advertises your weaknesses, not your strengths. If you spend time and energy trying to belittle a rival practice or practitioner, you run the risk of beating yourself to the punch. You need to show your potential patient exactly what you and your practice can do for them and why you are the number one choice in your area instead.

3. It deflects attention from the patient's concerns. A competition-obsessed strategy is a response to your needs, your anxieties, your projections and your fears about losing business you don't even have yet. If that's what's driving you, you will find it hard to define and communicate the benefits of your practice in a way that matters to your prospective patient. You'll be perceived as “average”, or you will find yourself in a constant price battle.

Instead of obsessing about the competition, here's some food for thought...why don't you turn those thoughts into positive action? The following exercises will provide you with a much better understanding of your competitors' strengths (or perceived strengths) and in the next article in this mini-series, we will be finishing the exercises and I will be explaining exactly how to use the results to outgrow and outsmart your competitors.

EXERCISE 1: WHO IS THE MOST VISIBLE ONLINE?

Please do the following tasks for you and your competitors:

Task 1: Using your smartphone, Google the common name of a treatment you want to be “found” for and the town or city of your main target market (e.g. “lip fillers Barnsley”).

Task 2: Using your smartphone, Google the type of clinic or practice you run and the town or city of your main target market (e.g. “skin and laser clinic Barnsley”).

Task 3: Using your smartphone, Google the name of your practice.

Task 4: Using your smartphone, Google your full name without your title.

Then repeat the exercises for your biggest competition.

CHECKS	You	Competitors
Visible in a Google Plus Local Business and Map listing?	YES/NO	YES/NO
Featured in a Google AdWords listing?	YES/NO	YES/NO
Featured in the top five organic rankings?	YES/NO	YES/NO
Featured in any videos? (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo)	YES/NO	YES/NO
Featured in any blogs, articles or publications?	YES/NO	YES/NO
Featured in any directories, forums or review sites?	YES/NO	YES/NO

EXERCISE 2: WHO IS THE MOST LIKELY TO SURVIVE THE “EIGHT SECOND RULE”?

Task 1: Using a desktop or laptop computer, visit the website home page of your biggest competitor and perform the following checks.

Task 2: Repeat the process for your second biggest competitor. Finally, visit your own website and perform the checks.

CHECKS	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	You
Are you greeted with a professional looking photo or video of the practice owner and/or their team?	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Is there a compelling headline, statement or strap line that immediately grabs your attention and summarises how they can help you?	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Can you quickly access information that is specific and relevant to you? (e.g. your age, gender, skin condition or area of discomfort)	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Do they clearly explain or demonstrate to you why you should trust them and why you should contact them as opposed to another practice?	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Do they offer you something useful for free that you can download in exchange for your name and e-mail address? (e.g. a free skincare guide)	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Do they have a clear “call to action”? (e.g. do they invite you to book a consultation?)	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Do they look like a professional and credible business?	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO

EXERCISE 3: WHO IS THE MOST HELPFUL?

For this exercise, you will also require a telephone and the assistance of a trusted friend or family member.

Task 1: Using a desktop or laptop computer, visit the website of your biggest competitor and browse through their treatment information pages. Perform the below checks and then repeat the process for your second biggest competitor. Finally, visit your own website and perform the checks. >

CHECKS	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	You
Do they clearly explain or demonstrate to you what each treatment is, in simple terms? (i.e. without technical jargon)	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Have they included their own video demonstrations of the treatments being administered?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Do they clearly explain or demonstrate to you what physical and subjective benefits you can expect?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Have they included genuine before and after photos of their own patients along with educational information to give you examples of actual outcomes?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Have they used any videos to demonstrate that they have achieved these outcomes for other people just like you?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Have they acknowledged and addressed the most frequently asked questions about each treatment?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Are there any treatment guides or brochures that you can download instantly for further reading?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Are all pricing and payment options visible?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Do they have a clear "call to action" on all treatment information pages? (e.g. do they invite you book a consultation?)	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO

Task 2: Mystery Calls - It's time to put yourself into the shoes of a prospective patient. The objective here is to judge how professionally your competitors handle a telephone enquiry. Then ask a trusted friend or family member to do the same for YOUR practice.

CHECKS	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	You
Was the call answered within three rings?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Did the call handler ask for your name and telephone number? (as a minimum)	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Did the call handler sound warm and friendly?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Did the call handler do a good job of "positioning" the practitioner?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Did the call handler provide enough information and encouragement for you to want to book a consultation?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Did you feel that the call handler was interested in you as a person as well as your needs?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Did the call handler ask any questions to build a connection and establish rapport?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Did you feel valued, understood and appreciated?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO
Did the call handler ask for the appointment at least twice?	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO

In my next article I will be sharing the final three exercises and explaining how you can use the answers in the right positive way to help you to "win the turf war and outgrow and outsmart your competitors" – ethically of course! **AM**



Pam Underdown is the founder and owner of Aesthetic Business Transformations, a business coach, trainer and speaker working exclusively in the medical aesthetic industry. After establishing her first aesthetic business in 2005, she is uniquely placed to help aesthetic professionals understand exactly how to grow their practice, improve their marketing and increase their profits. Pam holds regular training workshops across the UK and has her own online training programme covering all aspects of business, marketing, social media, branding, sales and finance. For more information please visit www.aesthetic-bt.com and connect with Pam across all social media channels for free training and tips.