



Decisions, decisions

Pam Underdown explains how understanding the patient decision making journey can help you attract new clients



How do you buy? You're not just a business owner; you're a consumer, too. Have you ever thought about how you have changed the way you buy things today, compared to 10 years ago? Back then, you probably searched through yellow pages, asked a friend, saw an advert in the local press or perhaps even sent off a stamped address envelope for more information. What about today? Consider the last time you needed a new car, or a restaurant for a night out. Did you search on Google to see which options you had? Ask for a recommendation on Facebook? Check reviews on Google+ or Trip Advisor? "Like" or follow a business that you were considering? Use your mobile phone to search for a phone number while out and about? The chances are that you did some, or all of these, which shows just how big an impact the web, social media and mobile have on the way we buy.

Have you ever taken the time to really think about the buying journey and decision process your patients take to find you, research you, compare you to competitors, and ultimately choose you?

Before the internet, consumers had limited ways to discover a new business, so the decision journey was quite straightforward, but now, nearly every step takes place online. This shift online has made it much harder for businesses to reach potential customers because we (as consumers) are all bombarded with so many messages that we often ignore them. In addition to this, we have so much information available that it means choosing and buying isn't easier, but more complex than ever before – with pages of listings, directories, blogs, videos, reviews, social media and websites to sort through and decide, or ignore and delete.

So, what is the impact on your aesthetic business? Today, the average consumer uses over 10 sources of information to make a purchase decision, up from just five sources in 2010*. Turning these highly educated consumers into paying patients is more complex than it used to be. In fact, it requires you to be in the right place at the right time in order to give prospective patients the information and the confidence they need to make the decision to contact you instead of a competitor. (*Google 2012).

Have you ever taken the time to really think about the buying journey and decision process your patients take to find you, research you, compare you to competitors, and ultimately choose you? Sometimes, it's not easy to think like a patient and put yourself in their shoes, simply because the majority of aesthetic professionals have never been a full paying patient before. Your prospective patients are online searching for your treatments and

services and socialising on the social networks. You need to be everywhere your prospects are, so they can find you, learn more about you, and ultimately choose you. Consider this:

- Your prospective patients are using the web and mobile to instantly research a treatment, product or service anywhere, anytime.
- Your prospective patients are forming powerful and quick, impressions of your business after seeing pictures, videos, posts, and reviews.
- (Some) of your patients will instantly share their experiences with hundreds, even thousands, of others.

There is a huge amount of information available online that enables consumers to make more informed decisions on what to buy and who to buy from. But at the same time, it creates a whole lot of work and additional marketing expense for business owners who are trying to reach them. Think about your own experiences.

I know for a fact I have taken days to choose a hotel for a weekend away, simply because I was overwhelmed with the choice and the options available to me. I spent hours reading reviews, looking at photos and trying to work out exactly which one to book because I was overwhelmed and had 'paralysis by analysis'.

In order to reach prospective patients at the right time, you need to create a strong web presence that influences them at every stage along their decision making journey. You need to provide both helpful content, that you build, and engaging advertising that you buy, across the many places your prospective patients will be 'hanging out'. And, to pull it all together, you need a robust website with fresh content that helps you get to the first page of Google, creates a great first impression with visitors, and compels them to contact you. Since patients are influenced emotionally and logically all the way through their journey to buy, you can't just market to them at the beginning and expect to win their business. It is your job to use multiple online and offline marketing tactics during every stage of their journey to help them discover, contact, and choose you.

HOW BUYING DECISIONS ARE REACHED

Since consumers buy based on emotion and then justify logically (buyers' remorse), it is your job to remind them (in subtle ways) that you are more qualified, more experienced and more skilled than others. The decision-making process is a vast subject; however, here are some basics to consider:

- Decisions are quickly reached by emotion and then justified with logic.
- People base their decisions on prejudices, habits and past experience much more than on knowledge.
- It takes a split second to make a buying decision, but getting ready to make that decision can take a long time.

The point here is to address your patient's emotional motivators for wanting enhancement but also equip them with the logical reasons why you are the perfect choice so they can easily relay that back to their family and friends if they are challenged. The prospective patient is doing a cost/benefit analysis in their heads to decide if what you



are offering them is worth the time, money and effort and if the benefits will outweigh the risk. Help them see and feel what you offer is more than worth it. The aesthetic patient is always asking, "Is the price worth the time, money, effort or can I get the same result for less elsewhere?" To attract and keep them, you must show them why they should choose you over your competitors.

The first thing you should do is to ensure you have a comprehensive web presence everywhere your prospective patients are searching, surfing, and socialising. This involves claiming key sites on the web (such as Google +), buying targeted advertising (such as Facebook Ads or PPC), and creating a steady stream of fresh, authentic, and engaging content (blogs, articles and FAQ's) and then designing all marketing communications to really 'talk' to your prospective patients in a way that appeals to their needs, emotions and desires. You must make sure that all of your online and offline marketing:

1. Creates awareness and makes a good impression when they visit your website, reviews and social media profiles.
2. Increases the likelihood that your business will be seen when they search for your treatments or services.
3. Makes sure you stand out from your competition.
4. Reminds those who aren't ready to buy yet, about your business, so you are at the forefront of their mind when they are ready to get in touch.
5. Catches their attention and holds their interest so they learn more about you, then contact you.
6. Engages and entertains them so they share it with their friends.

All of your online and offline marketing must work together to greatly increase your chance of winning new patients. First, you need to define your ideal patient, then identify how they buy your treatments or services and ensure all of your marketing communications is focused on the benefits and the results; "what's in it for them" and not all about you. Having this key information will help you develop a marketing plan that influences the right people at the right time with the right information and messages. To get started ask yourself:

1. What influenced your existing patients to choose you?
2. Which parts of your online and offline presence drove them to buy from you?
3. Which produced the most return? (You will only know this if you have been tracking and measuring): Was it offline marketing (word of mouth print, radio) or online marketing? (Banner ads, search engines, social media, or email).

To differentiate your business and attract your ideal patients, you must really understand the needs of your patients and the outcome of their experience: both from a tangible and intangible perspective. For example the tangible results you provide mean that lines are softened and complexions are more radiant. However, it is the intangible results they provide to your patients that really matter and make the difference: improved confidence, self-esteem and an inner glow. Remember, your patients aren't buying what you do – the science, the technique, or the new equipment you're using – they are buying the results, the benefits and the feelings – aka the outcome. **AM**



>> Pam Underdown is the founder and owner of Aesthetic Business Transformations, a business growth specialist working exclusively to help medical aesthetic business owners increase their profits and reduce their costs. Pam has more than 25 years of business development, sales and marketing experience and has been specialising in the aesthetics industry since 2005.