

# Work out a plan to follow

In the fourth of her essential series for doctors in the aesthetics world, **Pam Underdown** shows why you must have a marketing plan



ONE OF the most vital aspects of any business is the marketing plan, but it's sad that many businesses don't have one.

But what is even sadder is that in a high proportion of those businesses which are destined to fail in their first year – now as high as one in two – the lack of a plan is cited as one of the main reasons for failure.

Truthfully, marketing is one of the single most important places you can focus your attention on, particularly if you hope to create a successful business. Marketing equals the ability to attract and retain enough patients, which ultimately means profits when it is done well.

You can't make bread without flour; however, most business owners don't put nearly enough time, focus, attention and investment into their marketing as they should do to get hold of the flour.

#### A business's purpose

Exactly how much time should you spend on your marketing? Before I answer, I have a question for you: what is the purpose of a business?

It's a trick question that catches out most people. Most would say that the purpose of a business is to make a profit, but, in fact, the real purpose of a business is to create and keep a customer.

You can have the finest products and services in the world, but if you don't have a customer, there is a high chance that you won't have a business very soon.

A business cannot really get off the ground until they sell something and ultimately create a customer. And that is what marketing is all about.

If marketing is how sales are made, then a marketing plan is about figuring out how the sales

will be made. No plan equals no sales and no sales equals no profit and ultimately no business.

So the purpose of an aesthetic business is to acquire and keep a patient, and if you do this enough in a cost-effective way, using strategies you have tested and continuously improved, then a profit will be the result.

Out of the many aesthetic business owners I have interviewed over the years, I've discovered that every profitable business owner makes the time to acquire and keep enough of their ideal patients, while also ensuring they have a thorough understanding of exactly what is happening and why.

When you look at those struggling businesses, you will find owners who complain they hardly have any time to master the marketing side of their business.

#### Poor planning

I have also spoken to many business owners who feel out of control, because they haven't given themselves the time or the space to stop, take a step back and really plan and structure their business properly.

Often business owners are inadvertently planning their way into a crisis because they are simply not aware of what is happening. When the business is going well, the lack of controls probably didn't matter too much.

But when a crisis hits, the deadly error of ignoring issues such as consistent marketing, competition, facts and figures and a drop in profits means that the need to then change is then instantly born.

Every successful business owner knows they can't afford to stand still if they want to still be in busi-

⇒ p16

MidexPRO 

...cuts into  
lost fees!

**“MidexPro thinks like a doctor, not a computer expert”**

All you need to run your private practice including document management, diary, clinical data, even test ordering and lab reports from TDL.

From paper billing (incl. VAT) to electronic billing (EDI) to management of bulk purchase contracts.

Grow seamlessly from a small solo practice through to a large group practice, remote access network system.

MidexPro is the cost effective practice management system with support second to none.

Free download of the full working package (30 day limited) from [www.midexpro.com](http://www.midexpro.com) or call for a CD.

Try it for yourself with no sales pressure.

**“MidexPro has revolutionised our lives; it is just so easy”**

**Call: 0330 999 3399**

[sales@midexpro.com](mailto:sales@midexpro.com) [www.midexpro.com](http://www.midexpro.com)

ness next year. They know that what works today may not work tomorrow. They are constantly asking themselves what can be improved.

How can they improve their patient experience? How can they improve their marketing results? What else can be improved? They listen to their teams, they encourage open communication and, more importantly, they listen and really hear their patients.

They understand that if their patients are not at the heart of everything they do, they won't have a business next year.

A marketing plan, the way I help my clients build them, is for internal use within your business, and serves as a map to help you and your team get to the destination you've chosen for your business.

It will prepare your business to be proactive and enables you to monitor exactly what works and what doesn't work. Without one, you are simply reacting to the marketplace and to your competition, which means you are always a step behind those who are already prepared.

A marketing plan will also ensure you are ready to deal with the peaks and troughs of the aesthetic market. It's always better to anticipate and plan for changes ahead of time rather than find out about it later on. You need to be in the leading edge and not the following edge.

### Who are your patients?

Before you start, it is best to get a better understanding of why you are in business for yourself. All businesses understand 'how' they do what they do – their treatments and services – they talk about everything they sell and provide, they become product- or technology-obsessed, but many never really understand 'what' their patients intimately want and what motivates their patients to buy.

Ask yourself: who are your patients? What are they really buying and how will you use your marketing to really connect with them? Who are your competition? You need to understand what they do well and what they don't do that well, because you can be sure that they know you.

**It is essential to have a picture of what you want to ultimately create and cultivate: a realistic working blueprint**



**“ Many businesses never really understand what their patients intimately want and what motivates their patients to buy ”**

What are you going to offer that is different to your competitors and what will you offer that no one else does? Ultimately, what will make you stand out from the crowd in a way that matters to the patients?

And how will you put your treatments and services into the hands of your potential patients? What's the most effective marketing strategies to do so?

It is essential to have a picture of what you want to ultimately create and cultivate: a realistic working blueprint. Any investors or banks will need to see that you have a clear vision of where you want to go and how you are going to get there.

### Do your research

They will also want to be sure that you have done your research thoroughly and have carefully thought about the way you will hit your forecasts in year one, with turnover sustaining enough income to keep cash flow strong and allow for re-investment.

Remember, it may not be that you see a profit until year two, depending on your overheads. A well planned plan means nothing, though, if it's not well executed. We will be discussing more of the 'how to' in next month's article.

Ultimately, if you want to succeed, then you must make the time now to master the marketing yourself. Focus on no more than three strategies at a time to see what works, what needs to be improved and what doesn't work.

Spend small, test small and fail small.

**“ Most successful business owners say they have learnt more from their mistakes than they ever have from their successes ”**

Overall, if you have a good marketing plan in place, you will have a business that is in control of itself. When you're in control, you can steer it towards profits.

Measurable milestones will let you know if you are on track and a good plan will tell you exactly what to expect to see and when to see those results.

What happens if you don't have a workable plan? Quite simply, there will be lots of activity and very little productivity.

You'll end up bouncing from task to task, probably never completing any to the level that you want. Additionally, you can be absolutely certain that, as a result, you will have missed a number of potentially lucrative opportunities.

The bottom line is that without a plan, you can get hopelessly lost and never reach your destination and if the worst does happen, you may just end up going back to your day job.

### Learn from your mistakes

It goes without saying that you will make mistakes along the way, however well you plan in advance. These mistakes form the essential learning curve that will help you to develop and grow your business.

Most successful business owners say they have learnt more from their mistakes than they ever have from their successes. Also, don't forget that having unrealistic expectations can be a huge demotivating factor.

Any sense of failure can give you an emotional setback, knocking your confidence and pride, but also denting your enthusiasm. The key is to expect that things will go wrong, but that you will learn from them, adapt and move on. Cultivating the ability to pick yourself up and dust yourself off is one of the best business skills you can develop.

**■ Next time, I will be focusing on exactly how to build your marketing plan and will give all readers a free template to download, as well as discounted access to my live online marketing training programme – The 6D Patient Attraction System**



*Pam Underdown (pictured left) is chief executive at Aesthetic Business Transformations*