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## Hone marketing skills to make headlines

**These days, word-of-mouth just isn't enough to attract new patients; doctors should consider alliances, offer to speak, court the news media**

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Dr. Nassif

**Montreal** - Many surgeons rely on former patients with beautified faces and sculpted bodies to act as walking, talking billboards for a cosmetic practice. However, physicians who create those smooth lines, neat tucks, and symmetrical contours need to market their work to reap the full benefit of their skill, said Paul Nassif, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Dr. Nassif, a facial plastic surgeon, pinpointed effective, inexpensive marketing strategies for surgeons. He has given several lectures on the topic for the American Academy of Facial Plastic Surgery.

It's easier to market a doctor who has a focus, according to Dr. Nassif, who has been partners with a general dermatologist for five years. They formed Spalding Drive Cosmetic Surgery & Dermatology in Beverly Hills. To successfully offer a wide range of services, he suggested partnering with other professionals who specialize in different, but related, fields. As a facial plastic surgeon, Dr. Nassif focuses on revision rhinoplasty, but his combined-specialty clinic offers the professional services of an aesthetician, a general dermatologist, and other cosmetic surgeons.

"You can't be a jack of all trades," he said. "You need to master something specific."

### Let's network

Dr. Nassif recommended that physicians new to an area organize lunches with local, noncompeting physicians, such as ob/gyns and cosmetic dentists, to discuss a mutually beneficial referral system. Another way to become known locally is to offer lectures, he said. Dr. Nassif suggested physicians should contact women's groups, high-end salons, spas, and gyms and offer to speak about their area of expertise.

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He does not recommend taking out expensive magazine or Yellow Page advertisements because, in his experience, they do not bring in patients. However, a physician with a focused practice should consider placing a small ad for a specific procedure in a local throwaway publication, he said.

### Draw media attention

One of the best marketing strategies is to draw media attention.

"Being in the media has been a very, very large draw for me," Dr. Nassif said.

Anything from a local spot on TV demonstrating a new technique to a quote in a consumer magazine or newspaper about a controversial issue positions a doctor as the local expert.

"Patients like to read about the doctor. They want to know, 'Is he the right one for me to see?'" Dr. Nassif said. He keeps a videotape of his media appearances running in the waiting room, and all of his patients receive a press kit.

With the Internet boom, a Web site also has become a crucial marketing tool.

Dr. Nassif said a Web site should have as much content as possible, including "before" and "after" photos, patient testimonials, descriptions of available procedures, and links to media appearances. The more content on a site, the more likely it is to get picked up by search engines. Dr. Nassif said his own site contains many words related to rhinoplasty so that search engines rank it near the top.

### PR firms can 'place' doctors

For physicians with a larger marketing budget, hiring a public relations firm can go a long way toward getting media attention and establishing alliances with noncompeting physicians. Katherine Rothman is CEO of KMR Communications, a PR firm based in New York City that specializes in consumer-oriented representation of clients in the medical arena. For about \$4,500 a month (more for group practices), her firm helps place physicians as "go-to" people for the media, while fostering liaisons among noncompeting clients.

"Instead of a doctor advertising, using direct mail, or going around and lecturing," Rothman said, "we put our doctors in the media from an editorial standpoint." From a patient perspective, media appearances have more credibility than advertising, she said.

The key benefits of a PR firm are its ability to dream up a new angle that gets the media interested and the firm's established contacts with relevant media. "Many doctors think, 'Oh, I can't engage in public relations if I don't have anything new to promote,'" Rothman said. "Nobody has anything new. If you look at 20 dermatology practices, everyone is pretty much performing the same procedures. But a good PR firm can always come up with an angle."

### **Medical knowledge a must**

Rothman recommends selecting a public relations firm that specializes in the medical arena. Otherwise, a doctor will be working with people who don't understand the field and may not have the appropriate contacts.

Of course, Dr. Nassif noted, in the end, the best marketing tool is for physicians to keep their patients happy, encouraging positive word-of-mouth recommendations. He makes sure patients feel comfortable from the moment they first contact his office.

"Put everything together so that when they call, the phone is picked up on the second or third ring at the most," he advised. "That person at the front is the most important, because patients are waiting for an excuse to not come to you. ... You have to have every step from the beginning to the end in a perfect, smooth pattern to make your practice succeed." Visit: [www.kmrcommunications.com](http://www.kmrcommunications.com)