



Retention span

Gilly Dickons explains how to maximise new business and improve your client retention

The aesthetics sector is booming. The number of people undergoing procedures is rising year on year, treatment portfolios are expanding and the number of practitioners offering these services is growing rapidly. As such, prospective clients have a number of practices to choose from. So, how can you stand out from the crowd and ensure you generate new consultations and maximise your client retention?

I propose that you take a step back and review all the steps of the client journey within your practice, making sure you have effective processes in place at various stages. Your clinic staff need to be trained to effectively manage all client contact points, with a view to achieving great outcomes to contribute to your practice growth.

The initial enquiry

During the initial call into your clinic the aim is to create a great first impression and build a relationship with the

enquirer from the outset. If this is done exceptionally then you can expect to book up to 75% of your callers in for a consultation. Bearing in mind that recently quoted industry figures highlighted an average booking rate of 50%, it is worth taking a careful look at your current conversion rate and monitor this closely with your enquiry handling staff.

Appointment confirmation

Once you have gained the callers commitment to attending a consultation don't just leave it there – you need to confirm the appointment via text or e-mail and ideally take a deposit to ensure their attendance.

Deposit taking

We often find that there is a lot of debate around deposit taking. There are various options available:

- Hold a card to guarantee the appointment that requires a 24 hour cancellation period

- Take a refundable deposit
- Take a non-refundable consultation fee
- Take a deductible consultation fee

It depends on what your aim is. Do you want to secure an appointment or would you prefer to obtain a fee to cover your consultation time. Our experience shows a drop of up to 5% in conversion rates when we take a deposit. That is up to 5% of the people that we speak to will choose not to book a consultation when asked to give their card details to secure the booking. Without doubt our clients feedback tells us that they would rather the 5% didn't book in than that they failed to attend the consultation leaving big gaps in precious clinic time!

Non-attendeess

Every clinic has those irritating people who fail to attend their consultation, especially when they haven't paid a deposit. It's worth having your staff pick up the phone to speak to them about why they didn't make their appointment – sometimes people genuinely forget and they will welcome the opportunity to rebook. If they have changed their mind gently probe to find out why – it may be that they are still nervous and need a little more reassurance.

Post consultation

Most people who consult with you will go on to have a treatment and a few will be unsuitable, however, what about those who go away to think? Before they leave the consultation room let them know you will call them in a few days to answer any further questions they may have – if you pre-empt this call you will find that they are comfortable about receiving it. Don't do all of the hard work then leave them to go elsewhere for treatment, give yourself the opportunity to overcome any remaining objections and book them in for treatment.

Post-treatment follow up

After treatment has taken place ensure that one of your staff is trained to follow up your client with a courtesy call. Call them a few days to a week after their visit to ask a couple of questions such as: How are they getting on? How have they found their experience in your clinic? Do they have any questions at this stage? If they have any queries or small issues it is a great time to reassure them and show that you value them. You want this new client to lock in with you and come back. During your pre-treatment consultation, let the client know that they will be receiving this call from your staff and then gently remind them that this is your protocol at the end of their treatment session. Your client will feel valued.

Returning clients

Ideally your staff will book clients a follow up appointment before they leave the clinic at the recommended treatment review point. This sometimes isn't possible so you need to ensure you follow your clients up routinely. At Aesthetic Response we manage outbound campaigns on behalf of practices, calling clients who are two to six weeks overdue for their next treatment. If you leave these clients the chances are that they will move on somewhere else for their next treatment. It takes two to three visits to your practice before someone becomes a regular and loyal client, so these calls are particularly important after a first visit. Don't be tempted to send an e-mail or newsletter instead of calling – it's not the same! Personal contact is always the most effective way. If someone chooses not to re-book it is useful to know why, and you will only get this valuable feedback if you pick up the phone.

Lapsed clients

We consider anyone who is overdue treatment by six weeks or more to be a potentially lapsed client. Again, I would encourage you to pick up the phone to find out why they haven't come back. We hear many different reasons from clients as to why they haven't returned to the clinic and some calls require sensitive handling. Reasons can include clients who are

unhappy with the treatment outcome, illness, changes in financial circumstances or it may simply be that they just haven't got around to booking the appointment.

You may find that some lapsed clients have gone elsewhere for treatment due to cost. Without fail we always manage to re-engage with some lapsed clients to get them to revisit the clinic. It helps to be armed with an offer, such as complimentary products or a facial treatment, as the basis of the call.

Staff have to be able to gently probe if there has been dissatisfaction with the previous treatment experience. It is estimated that 96% of lapsed clients won't let

you know why they are unhappy with your service, so clear feedback can be really valuable as you aim to grow your practice. If you make mistakes along the way it's really useful to understand what they are so that you can address them moving forwards.

Ultimately the aim of all of the post-treatment follow up is to try to increase your client retention rates. I am going to recommend that, if you are not already doing so, you take a careful look at your database to see what your client retention rates look like. This area of the business is often over looked, however, it will provide vital information for you as it makes a huge contribution to your practice growth.

I hope you can see from the client pathway I have laid out in this article that there are many steps you can take to ensure that you offer superb customer service to your valued clients, in turn enhancing your practice growth. **AM**

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Gilly Dickons is the business development director and founder of Aesthetic Response. Gilly's extensive insight into the aesthetic arena arises from a career spanning 23 years in client servicing, with both TMG and Allergan. With a passion for delivering excellent customer service, Gilly's expertise in call handling management is proving instrumental in aiding aesthetic practices in growing their businesses.