



grow and succeed

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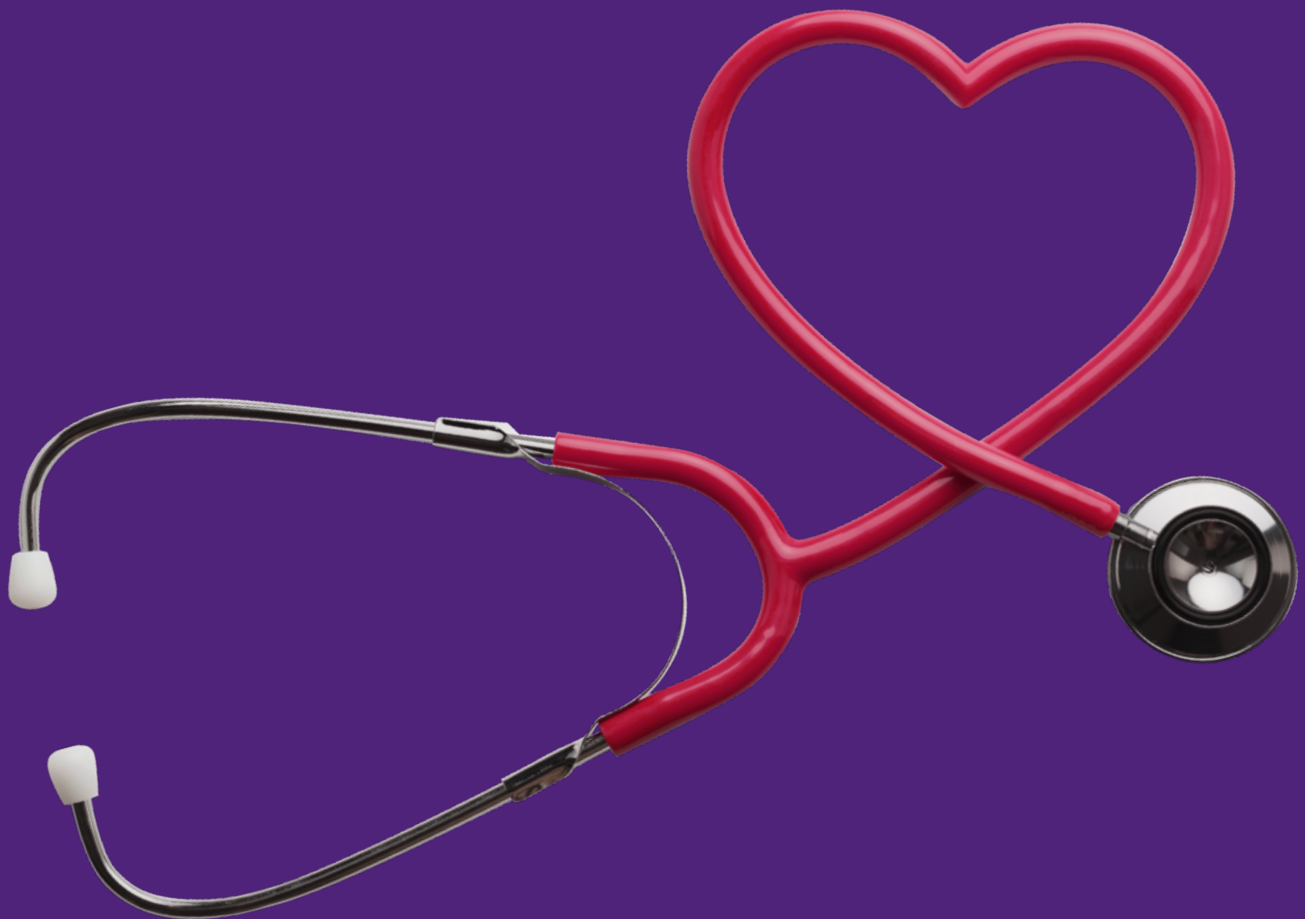
ways to
attract more
patients to
your practice

duologi

For healthcare practices specialising in medical, dental, cosmetic or therapeutic services, finding ways to increase the number of clients you welcome through the door is an essential part of any long-term business growth and sustainability plan.

In today's fast-changing and remarkably competitive health and beauty landscape, there are a great many potential ways to approach this ever-present challenge. Amongst them are a host of practical, social, technological and financial considerations. In addition, there's the vital importance of maintaining strong relationships with your established user base while you explore other areas for growth.

With that in mind, we've picked out five simple and effective ways to attract more patients to your healthcare practice.





1. Always focus on existing patients first

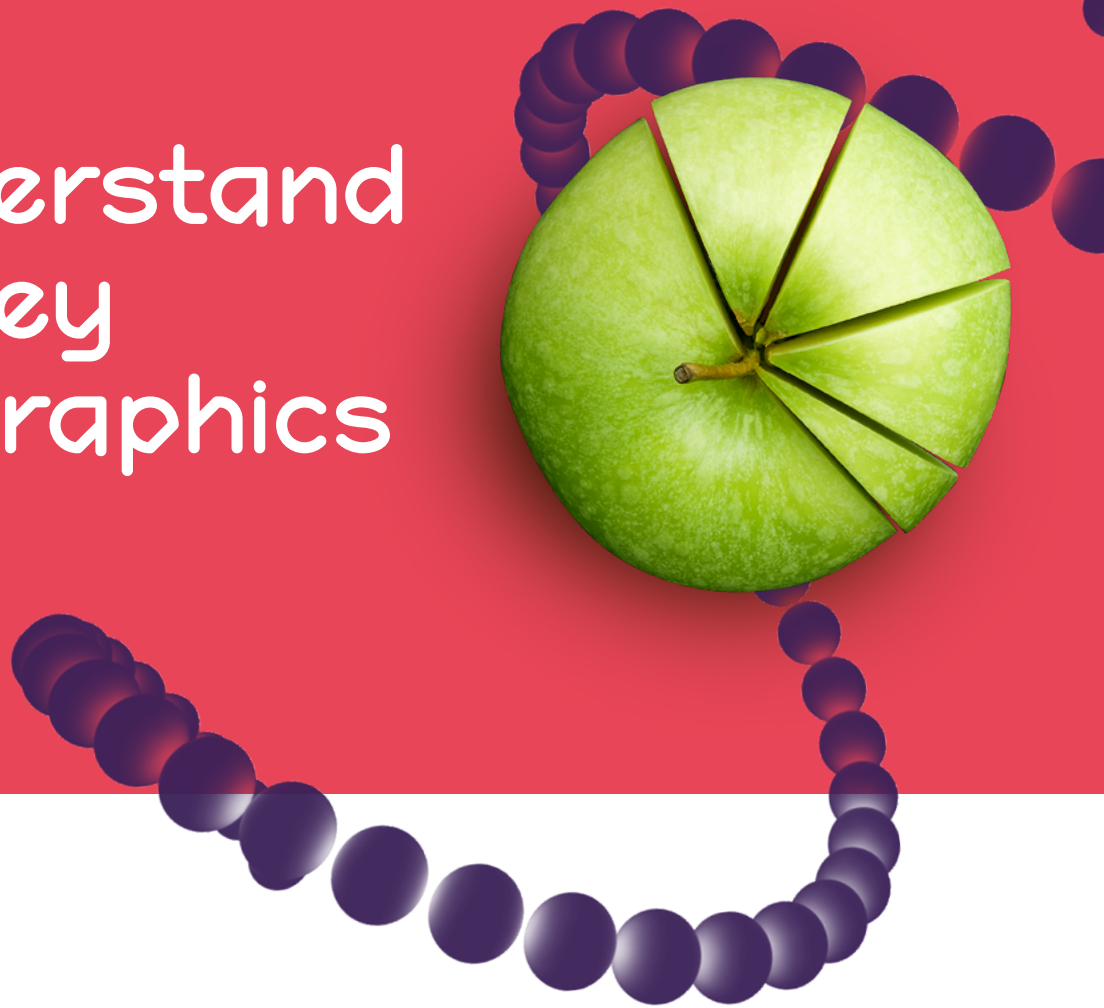
This sounds obvious, but it's always worth underlining – and especially so whenever you're considering cutting-edge new ways to bring in more patients. In short, it's no good concentrating all your energies on future growth and attracting new sign-ups if the existing customers aren't happy.

The key to this will depend to some extent on your target demographic, but in general it will always pay to deliver a sensitive, responsive, proactive and engaging service. Any successful practice with genuine growth potential will reflect the fact that it provides for a diverse customer base, with a widely varying range of individual needs and expectations.

Most of the other strategies outlined in this list can - and should - apply equally to both new and current patients alike. While there can be enormous benefit in deploying all the latest outreach techniques to engage more effectively with your community, always be alert to the fact that traditional word-of-mouth marketing remains among the most powerful tools at your disposal.

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2. Understand your key demographics



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This goes further than simply being aware of who’s likely to be using your service at any given time - although that’s a very important start point. It involves using all available tools, data and local insight to think carefully about exactly what and who the key demographics in your area are, as well as where and how they’re distributed.

To begin establishing a valued presence in any community, it’s vital to have a clear view of what the existing landscape looks like in terms of service provision. Consider which groups in your community are most likely to need what types of services, and focus hard on any areas where it seems there may be potential gaps.



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Engage your users

The next stage in truly understanding your target groups is to establish a sound overview of their needs and expectations. The ideal way to achieve this is by asking them outright.

Gathering user feedback through traditional satisfaction surveys may no longer appear a particularly modern method for gauging performance. Nevertheless, it remains an important part of any comprehensive market research strategy. The reason? Simply put, it works.

There are still few better ways to ascertain precisely what patients like and don't like about their current provision than by appealing directly to their firsthand experience. If you'd prefer to steer the conversation toward more specific areas, you can use similar techniques to create dedicated focus groups or discussion panels on topics of particular importance.

Going one stage deeper, tools such as sentiment analysis software can be extremely useful in helping gain further insight. These sorts of programmes are now widely used in many customer service environments, leveraging machine learning and AI algorithms to highlight various aspects of user feedback that go beyond what's explicitly communicated.

3. Use a full range of outreach technologies and platforms

A key part of making both new and existing patients feel welcomed and valued is to respond promptly to queries. Today, practices of all types and sizes have easy access to a wide range of online channels, offering various clear and convenient ways for patients to keep track and stay in touch.

Using these channels effectively can deliver dramatic improvements in your overall communication strategy and image, all without having to invest heavily in any new tech infrastructure.



Text/SMS and email

Allowing your users to receive and respond to appointments, service announcements and other important updates by text message or email – rather than having to phone or visit in person – is another hugely important step in building better patient-practice relationships. This goes hand-in-hand with conducting your demographic research, because it allows you to build up a range of more bespoke outreach strategies for key groups. It's fairly apparent, for example, that the aspects of a practice most valued by older patients and long-time residents won't necessarily offer a compelling draw for millennials or young families.

An ever-increasing percentage of contact between practices and their patients is now handled via email and SMS. Sending out the exact same template message to every single user of your service, regardless of demographic, isn't likely to be ideal for any one group. Instead, adopting a more diversified marketing approach can be an extremely rewarding policy for both practices and patients – especially in areas with a more diverse user base.



Web

A good, clear, well-organised and regularly updated website should be a priority for any practice – or indeed any public-facing service provider. It can cost very little to set up and run, both in terms of initial buy-in and ongoing maintenance, and will be among the first things many patients look for when seeking information on a new practice.

Presenting them with an appropriately professional-looking and helpful website, where recent updates, simple bookings and straightforward points of contact are clearly signposted, is a must. So too is ensuring your site is mobile-friendly, and easily navigable for anyone not visiting via a desktop.

A properly managed web presence will provide an effective point of referral and contact. It enables you to curate your own image on both fronts: as well as allowing you to showcase positive feedback and testimonials, it also offers you a far more efficient way to test out new initiatives, gather opinions, and disseminate important bulletins.

Social media

Social media activity should complement and support your core website activity, and can play an important role in establishing a credible overall web presence. Again, it provides unrivalled opportunities for cost-effective direct contact and feedback, and puts a degree of control over your public image back in your own hands.

A well-run social media account should be responsive and regularly updated. Use it to share important updates, as well as other types of relevant information or engaging insight that patients may not otherwise have such easy access to.

Social media also provides a valuable opportunity to give positive responses to negative feedback, and to foster engagement. Remember that well thought-out posts based around quality content will likely be shared among both existing and potential users of your service. The more this happens, the better you will fare in terms of visible search engine results for both your website and your practice.



4. Offer multiple payment methods (including 0% finance)

The past decade or so has brought about huge and sweeping changes in the way many patients view their relationships with the practices they use. This has been keenly felt across the sector, perhaps most notably as a pressing need for ever-greater adaptability and responsiveness in providing a more individually tailored service.

Now, for a fast-growing percentage of users, it's an expectation that equally applies to all aspects of billing and finance. Affordability and flexibility are absolutely key to attracting and retaining new patients for any type of healthcare practice.

Being able to offer patients a more flexible choice of payment options, particularly through financed monthly repayment plans, can be enormously beneficial to both a practice and its users. Case studies for all sizes of healthcare, dental, cosmetic surgery and beauty businesses frequently highlight an immediate uptick in cash flow and sales figures, along with rapid growth in client numbers.

In a fiercely competitive health and beauty marketplace, allowing patients to spread the cost of more expensive treatments or procedures can often be what makes one practice stand out over another. Enhanced even further with an attractive range of 0% finance and interest-bearing options, it can offer a compelling draw for a much broader range of clients and customers than would otherwise be reachable.

Whether a 0% finance option suits your business best, or an interest-bearing programme, healthcare finance is a great way to boost both short- and long-term revenues while creating a seamless, stress-free experience for your clients.



5. Create a well-planned referral programme

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Many health and beauty practices now offer some form of rewarded referrals scheme. Typically, they involve both existing users and new referrals gaining some form of discount or bonus for bringing their custom to a business. However, these sorts of programmes shouldn't be treated as an afterthought - simply offering a slightly reduced price, or throwing in a token free gift, doesn't usually prove to be an effective long-term strategy for sustained growth and retention.

A better approach is to return to the concept of personal engagement with your service users. You can actively approach clients to request referrals, but in doing so, always be sure to make the approach personalised and empathetic. Highlight your understanding of their individual needs and expectations, making it clear that this type of engagement is something their friends and family would also benefit from.

However you choose to set up and run your patient referrals or loyalty scheme, there are several key steps to the process that you should always pay close attention to:

- Setting realistic, measurable and achievable goals
 - Be clear in your own mind about exactly what it is you want to achieve
 - Differentiate between specific aims – growth in customer numbers, better retention rates, improved sales, raising your company profile, building trust, and so on
- Making well-planned lists of potential referral sources
 - Understand what it is that specific clients and their friends might most value in your practice
 - Think about potential referral pathways through other types of contacts, besides just current patients
- Making a structured and appropriate plan for your various outreach methods
 - Consider the similarities and differences between existing client relationships, focus on the sorts of referrals that will be most beneficial, and be mindful of what constitutes good timing in terms of making an approach
- Being clear and upfront about benefits and rewards
 - Offer rewards your users actually want, and don't feel compelled to over-promise
 - Regular smaller benefits can be more attractive than larger one-offs
- Publicising and marketing your programme effectively
 - Make good use of your website, social media, tailored email lists, newsletters and more
 - Consider other markets that you might share a common user base with
 - Make the process appear as clear, simple and straightforward as possible, with accessible, user-friendly tools and resources for customers wishing to make use of it
- Establishing clear referral tracking systems, keeping detailed records of
 - Who referred who, when, and how
 - Why the referral was (or wasn't) successful, and how the system could be improved further in future
 - Which customers you need to personally thank and reward



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