

MEDICAL SPA REPORT

MAY 2005

ESSENTIALS / Q & A

SAVVY MEDICAL SPA MARKETING

PUBLIC RELATIONS EXPERT KATHERINE ROTHMAN SHARES THE SCOOP ON MEDICAL SPA MARKETING DOS AND DON'TS.

Q. What are the basic steps involved in submitting a story idea or information about my medical spa to the media?

A. Stories should be submitted via snail mail or e-mail as press releases directed to beauty, health, and lifestyle editors. They should have a hook that makes them timely and relevant. Avoid press releases that are extremely subjective and self promotional; a press release should impart interesting news to the reader. For example, a press release that reads, "XYZ Medical Spa has a caring, experienced staff and beautiful surroundings" is not news. A press release, however, that says, "XYZ Medical Spa is the first in the area to introduce the Titan Laser" has substance. Press releases must include the medical spa's website and contact information. (It's amazing how often this essential information is omitted.) Sending high-resolution JPEG photos of the spa director and the spa itself is also not a bad idea. Just make sure to label the images appropriately.

Q. Who should handle the public relations for my medical spa, and what does this position entail?

A. An experienced publicist with a background in beauty/health PR should be enlisted, if the budget allows.

This person can work in-house exclusively for your medical spa or you can engage an outside PR firm. If your budget doesn't allow this, then a marketing person can function in a dual public relations role. This requires that the individual be in constant contact with the beauty/health media and issue press releases with continuity to apprise the media of new developments, treatments, or trends in the medical spa

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industry. This individual should have press kits available for the media and invite the appropriate editors and writers to experience treatments at the facility. He or she should also have access to comprehensive media lists and acquire editorial calendars to know what media outlets' editorial needs are and what their lead-time is. Many monthly publications work three to four months ahead of their publication date, so keep this in mind to send timely information. Most of all, this person needs to establish rapport with journalists so that his or her medical spa will become a known entity and a reliable source of information.

Q. What are some ideas for cross-promoting my facility (i.e. renting space for after-hours or special events)?

A. You can and should initiate liaisons with hairdressers, makeup artists, nutritionists, personal trainers, wedding planners, and any others in noncompeting entities of the beauty business. An evening seminar/cocktail party can be arranged with different

experts who can each give a brief lecture followed by a question-and-answer period. Each expert should be encouraged to invite people from his or her client list to this seminar, while the medical spa director can invite the spa's existing client base; the medical spa will benefit from being introduced to prospective clients through the experts present. You can also exchange website links and offer incentives or discounts to each other's clients.

Q. I've just opened my medical spa; should I celebrate with a launch party?

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AN ADVANSTAR PUBLICATION

A. Yes; a good way to let people know your medical spa exists is to hold a launch party or a grand opening event. Keep in mind you don't have to have this event on your first day, week, or even month in business. Give yourself a little time to get your business underway. Think of this primarily as a marketing opportunity, not just a celebration.

First, draw up an invitation list of everyone you want to know about your business, even if you know they can't or won't attend the party. This list can include:

- Potential clients
- Your local media
- Suppliers
- Friends
- Plastic surgeons, cosmetic dentists, and dermatologists
- Trade association or community organization leaders
- Concierges at nearby hotels that do not have on-site spas or salons
- Local trendsetters

Send a nice invitation or announcement and think about issuing a press release, too. Make sure to ask people to RSVP by a certain date so that you will know the quantity of food and beverages to purchase. It's appropriate to invite local newspaper and magazine editors who cover beauty or lifestyle beats. To cultivate a list, search the Internet for local media contacts, or you can use a paid service, such as www.bacons.com, that gives you online access to media contacts or develops a specific list for you. (The latter will be less expensive.) Remember to look for any media exposure that results from the party. Save these clips to display on your website and include in your press kits to promote your business.

When it comes to the food, don't serve anything messy; limit cuisine to bite-size morsels that guests can easily eat with their fingers or a fork while they stand and mingle. Barter with caterers—call several to get price quotes. You can ask caterers for a discount in exchange for including their marketing materials in your party gift bags or displaying their brochures around your medical spa.

of the products your facility uses. Remember that most people won't want to try treatments like facials or masks that mess up their clothing or makeup. Also, if funds permit, hire a photographer to take pictures; you can use them on your website or submit them to the media.

No matter how affluent your clients are, everyone loves freebies. Don't

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Appearances count; make sure that your facility looks spic and span before the guests arrive. Place scented candles and floral arrangements throughout the space and make sure that the restrooms are well stocked with paper goods. It may be necessary to move furniture to accommodate a bar area or to ensure a smooth flow of traffic. Be mindful of the temperature; you may want to crank up the air conditioning in the summertime to account for the number of people in the room. If your guests are sweating and uncomfortable, they will not stay long. For a winter event, check to see that there is ample room to hang coats. You may need to rent an extra coat rack so that jackets are not strewn about.

When people arrive, ask them to sign in and include their e-mail addresses in an attractive guest book. This will be useful for future promotions or informing guests of medical spa news. Making services like skin-type analysis, chair massage, and reflexology available to guests outside of the main party area is a great idea, as is providing samples

forget to hand out gift bags to guests as they leave. Gift bags should be of good quality and nicely designed with your spa logo on the front. Include one or more gift certificates for services, as well as samples of the products sold at your establishment, a press kit, and a business card.

Good parties require lots of planning, and the Web is chockfull of resources to get you started. Try www.bizbash.com (an excellent resource for New York and Florida medical spas) www.specialevents.com, or www.party-creations.com. And good luck! •

Katherine Rothman is the CEO of Manhattan-based KMR Communications, a firm that provides public relations services and media coverage for those in the beauty and health sectors. The firm was named "one of the top 50 healthcare PR firms in the nation," by PR Week Magazine. Its clients have appeared in such media outlets as Allure, Elle, Good Morning America, and Vogue. Visit www.kmrcommunications.com or e-mail info@kmrcommunications.com for more information.