Mastering the Art of the Aesthetic Consult: Part 2

First Impressions

When Your Patient Arrives
In the first of our five-part series, “Mastering the Art of the Aesthetic Consult,” we covered the aspects of this critical interaction that take place before your prospective patient ever reaches your office.

Part one underscored the importance of shaping the new patient’s image of your practice from the moment they encounter your name. Your goal is to establish your expertise and trustworthiness, using every avenue available to you. This means that everything from your website to the voice answering your phone must reinforce the image of your practice that you want to convey.

If you’ve done your job well, the patient will have decided to take the next step and visit your office for a consultation. In this second part of our series, we will cover all the aspects of the aesthetic consult that occur between the prospective patient's arrival and his or her initial interaction with the treatment provider.

Aesthetics practitioners in more than 60 countries look to Venus Concept for the most innovative devices and a partnership that helps them achieve their financial goals. We have seen how even small details can make a big difference in their success and are excited to share some of these insights with you here.

The subtle psychology of aesthetics consumers
Increasing the conversion rate of your aesthetic consultations (the proportion of consults that leads to paid services) requires a strong understanding of the psychology of your target audience.

You know that consumers approach aesthetic services with the hope that they will achieve the results they desire, but also trepidation that something could go wrong or that their provider lacks expertise. That is why the overriding objective of the aesthetic consult is to display your knowledge, professionalism, and trustworthiness.

In addition, life is busy these days, and the typical aesthetics consumer has a full schedule—possibly a demanding job, a family with children, a home to manage, and/or the disposable income to travel frequently for leisure.

So, while it isn’t everything, convenience is another very important attribute to potential customers.

Make a good first impression: From parking to check-in
First impressions are formed quickly. Research studies have found that it takes anywhere from a tenth of a second to 30 seconds to form an impression. So, you don’t
have much time to assist the consumer in making an accurate judgment about your practice.

Once the prospective patient has made a decision to come in for a consultation, their initial impression begins to take shape the second they arrive.

This is important to bear in mind when choosing your office location. Is your building easily accessed from the neighborhoods where your patients are most likely to live or work? Is traffic frequently snarled in your area? Are there subway or other rapid transit stops nearby? Is your building easy to find and well-signed?

A 2014 study published in the *Journal of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons*\(^1\) analyzed consumer preferences in choosing aesthetics clinics and found that travel time was the third most important variable in consumers' selection with a weighting of 14.2 percent. (Years of experience was first.)

Don’t forget about parking. If prospective patients are most likely to drive to your office, try to ensure that they are not forced to hunt for a place to leave their cars. Ideally you would have plentiful street parking, a dedicated parking lot, or spots in a shared parking facility. Validating patients' parking receipts so they receive free parking in a nearby paid lot is another solution.

Essentially, what it comes down to is making every effort so your potential patient does not arrive for his or her appointment late, stressed, or, worst of all, regretting their choice of provider. If they walk in the door harried and unhappy, you are already at a disadvantage.

**Consumers form opinions about your expertise from subtle cues**

Next, cast a fresh eye on your office’s curb appeal. Your signage, exterior, and entry should be inviting and communicate what you do and what your brand stands for. If anything seems dated, cheap, or dingy, that will negatively affect the new patient’s assessment, even if they aren’t consciously aware of it.

Maximize this first impression of your office. Most aesthetics patients do not have the expertise to evaluate your clinical skills, so they heavily weight subtle cues that speak to your abilities and value proposition.

Considering this, professional design can be a very worthwhile, and quite possibly essential, investment. So, ensure the overall look of your office is reassuring, memorable, and pleasant. A designer will make sure your signage, colors, finishes, lighting, and furnishings are coherent and convey an impression that aligns with your objectives.

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Check-in is the client’s entrée to your world

The potential patient’s next stop on their journey is check-in. This will most likely be their first in-person encounter with a member of your staff, so it is a critical interaction. It is imperative that the receptionist is friendly, greets each person as they arrive, and makes eye contact. This seems obvious, but it is often not the case.

If the receptionist is busy on the phone or helping another patient at the front desk, the newcomer may feel ignored. Any nervousness he or she was already feeling is heightened. This scenario is not acceptable. Each person should be acknowledged within a few seconds of walking in the door. This can be as simple as a front desk staff member looking up, making eye contact, and saying, “I’ll be right with you,” as the new patient walks in.

Japanese sushi bars set a good example in this regard. Every customer who walks in is greeted by a refrain of “Irrashaimase” when they enter, and the sushi chefs don’t miss a beat in their work. The expression means, “Welcome, we are prepared to serve you,” and it sets the tone for the customer’s visit.

You don’t want the newcomer to wait more than a minute or two at check-in, especially not to stack up around the reception desk with other patients like planes waiting to land at a busy airport. If for some reason a short delay is unavoidable, have the receptionist suggest they take a seat.

When the receptionist is free, he or she should come out from behind the desk, find the patient, and invite them to come up and check in. Each of these actions speaks to how much your practice values each individual it serves, and it makes a powerful impression on the prospective patient.

Some offices have even gone so far as to eliminate reception and waiting rooms entirely. Instead, they have an assistant who greets patients at the door and escorts them immediately to exam or treatment rooms. This frees up space for additional service areas and enhances privacy and a sense of individual attention.

Either way, consider for yourself: Would you feel more cared for if you experienced an impersonal process designed for the convenience of the staff, or if you were treated as an individual whose time and feelings mattered?

The excuse we often hear is that the staff is too busy to greet each patient at the door or to come find them when they wait. But in reality, it takes only a few moments, and the bigger task is retraining old habits and expectations among your staff.

Forms and waiting rooms offer opportunities to convince consumers

The new patient’s first activity in the office is often filling out intake forms. These are necessary, but it’s a tedious process. Most clinics make these forms available on their websites, so patients can fill them out in advance at their convenience. Make sure these
forms are clear and easily readable. Avoid asking for the same information more than once.

Another time- and cost-saving approach is to have patients enter their information via tablets in your office. This immediately digitizes the information, reinforces the perception that your office is fully up to date, improves efficiency, offers greater privacy, and saves paper as well as staff time. Check-in can also be done in self-service kiosks using this technology.

Once the new patient has cleared those hurdles, he or she may have a few minutes to wait. Of course, keep this to a minimum.

Make sure your waiting room offers a pleasant experience. Comfortable and attractive seating is a must. Different types of seating, rather than a set of the same chairs, provides options for people of different ages and body types, and it makes everyone feel more welcome and comfortable.

Be careful that your waiting room is not too spacious. A large waiting room implies to patients that it's the norm to wait a long time in your office, and sitting in a crowd of other waiting individuals lends the impression that your practice is impersonal.

In a 2014 U.S. study of physician offices, researchers found that patient confidence in the provider and perceived quality were negatively correlated with wait time.²

Moreover, a 2015 study of 394 dermatology offices reported that patients identified in-office wait time as the primary area that needed to improve for better patient satisfaction³, while another study showed that satisfaction declined from 93.1 percent with a wait of five minutes or less to 80 percent after 30 minutes of waiting.⁴

Use décor and design to enhance your office experience

In the waiting room and reception area, the right artwork, such as a statement piece, creates a memorable impression, while plants and good lighting create a soothing atmosphere. Natural light and windows with a view outside can also ease anxiety. Helping patients to relax while they wait reassures them.

Other essentials are recent and varied reading material, such as magazines and reliable free Wi-Fi. Amenities such as coffee, tea, bottled drinks, or spa water (water beautifully enhanced with slices of fresh lemon, cucumber, or berries) are a nice touch.

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The waiting area also offers an opportunity to communicate your expertise and trustworthiness.

While being careful not to overly clutter the area, consider displaying your degrees, awards and recognitions, photos of patient success stories, or proof of your involvement in non-profit activities. Create informational displays on your treatments, or play videos that orient the patient to office procedures, what to expect, testimonials from other happy patients, and details on services they might not have considered yet. Make a retail sales display of any products you sell, such as skin care lines, easily accessible.

**Conclusion**
With the groundwork you lay before and as the prospective patient arrives in your office, you are paving the way for a successful aesthetic consult. The next part of this series will cover crucial interactions that are even more decisive in a successful outcome. If you have any questions, get in touch with us at 888.907.0115 option 5. Venus Concept is committed to your success.