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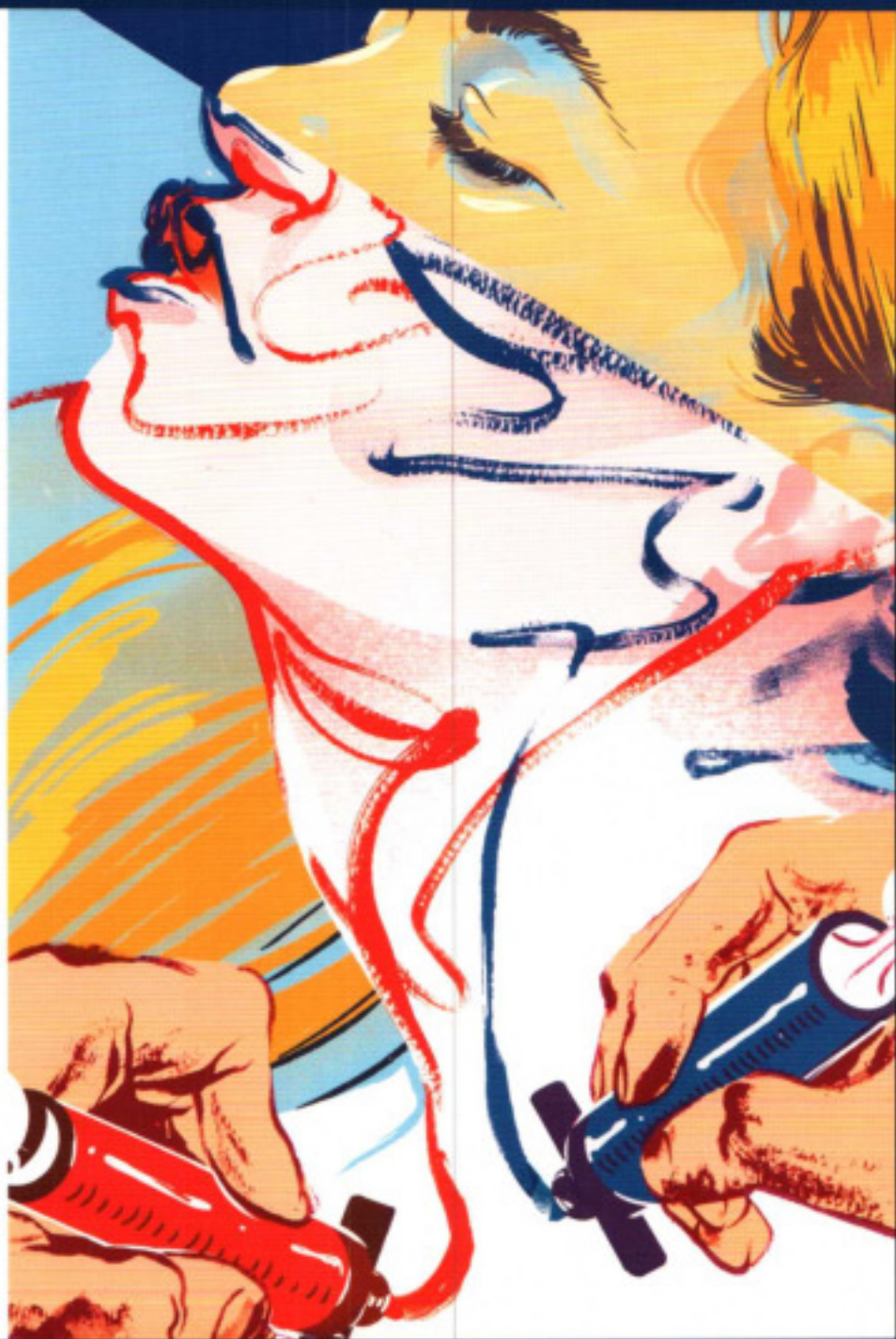
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Collaboration vs competition: how we can work together for stronger results

As the owner of an aesthetic practice, it can be easy to get bogged down in competing against rival companies. However, collaborating with businesses, rather than competing with them, can be a much better use of your time. Mara Shorr and Jay Shorr discuss how to build connections that can be beneficial for everyone involved, turning potential rivals into partners and friends

At a time when the people's looks are becoming increasingly important to them, we are spending more money on our appearance than ever before. Businesses such as specialty gyms and blow dry bars consume the population's paychecks, and the days of dermatologists only handling things such as warts, eczema and mole or skin cancer checks are a thing of the past. It is now the era of cosmetic surgery, injectables and lasers.

In a game of winning patients, collaboration beats competition. But how can we work effectively with those around us to make sure that we are truly providing the most comprehensive service possible?

Make a note of your main competitors

As a business owner, it is important to always be aware of your competitors. It is also advisable to compile a list of any other businesses that will be taking your patients' money. When assessing your competition, the following should be considered:

- ▶ Other providers who do exactly what you do. If your practice or medspa

performs cosmetic surgery, think of other practices that also perform these procedures and include them on your list of competitors. If your business is a medspa that only provides non-surgical treatments, include other non-surgical medspas on your list of competitors

- ▶ Now, think of providers who complement what you do. If your practice does not perform surgery, this is where collaboration with a surgical practice could fit in. If your practice does perform surgery, look at medspas whom you respect
- ▶ Others in the beauty industry, such as manicurists/pedicurists, traditional salons and blow dry bars, to name a few. You know that their clientele are appearance-driven and you know that this is a trait that your own patients have too
- ▶ Specialty fitness premises, such as CrossFit-type gyms and yoga studios. While you can include chains and franchises, it is sometimes easier to work with independent, local businesses to avoid the headache of navigating through corporate red tape. Furthermore, smaller businesses will most likely value your collaboration more than larger businesses.

starting with colleagues you are familiar with and working your way up to introducing yourself to strangers.

Work together on events and marketing

Always consider what the other business or practice will get out of partnering with you, as well as what you will gain from partnering with them. These benefits could include community goodwill, exposure to an additional audience and continued branding, if you share a similar audience.

Get creative when it comes to your partnerships

Think about new and fresh ways to collaborate with partners. You could include cobranded postcards in each other's reception areas or host events together at each other's facilities, promoting a 'friends' special offer for all who attend. Offer attendees free manicures, a quick blow dry, a tutorial on make-up application and/or free headshots. Get creative, and be sure to cobrand everything at the event with both companies' logos and websites.

Make a deal to never step on each other's toes if there's any overlap in services

After all, if you steal patients away from a practice that you are claiming to collaborate with, consider that relationship dead.

Look at how you can partner with additional influencers

If you are not sure which influencers operate in your area, ask your patients. Find out which podcasts they listen to, which Snapchatters and Instagrammers they follow, and which YouTube channels



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Consider how you can form relationships with each of the above businesses

Look at what you have in common with each of these businesses and how you can complement one another. For instance, will your patients work out 5 days a week but still always have sagging skin around their mid-section? Do your patients love manicures, but their hands have aged over the years? Get creative before you have those conversations with each business, and tailor your introduction accordingly,

they subscribe to. Reach out to each of those influencers on an individual basis, and let them know how you could add value to their channels. After all, you know how they are valuable to you; now you must prove how you can be valuable to them.

Consider creating your own channels

It can also work well to create a media channel with colleagues and competitors. For example, in the US, Paula Di Marco Young, partner of Young Medical Spa (offices in Lansdale and Center Valley, Pennsylvania) hosts the 'It's a Young Thing' podcast, available on iTunes and other podcast hosting services. In this podcast, Di Marco Young not only highlights services that her practice performs, such as CoolSculpting, chemical peels and more, but also brings on guests in the medical and beauty industry to serve as experts

in procedures that her practice does not perform. For example, she has interviewed a well-known photographer to talk about what goes into a quality headshot, as well as several board-certified plastic surgeons to discuss procedures and practitioner-patient relationship techniques in their own practices.

If you are not quite ready to start your own podcast, look to other colleagues and pitch yourself as a guest speaker who can provide an expert opinion that adds quality content and insight to their listeners. This works well for both traditional media (radio, television and local print channels), as well as digital media, including podcasts.

Consider community sponsorships of local non-profit organisations

Look at the events your patients are attending and the groups they support, and consider sponsoring those particular

non-profit events. Are your patients pet-lovers? Look at local animal non-profit walks and runs.

Does your practice specialise in breast work? Consider a sponsorship for a breast cancer gala. Not only will your money do philanthropic work, but also the sponsorship will allow you to network with your potential patient base. In addition to sponsorship, look at providing silent auction packages as well.

Log on to like-minded social media groups

Network with other professionals in specific LinkedIn groups; often conferences and associations have them set up specifically for this purpose.

Conclusion

None of us are an island, and working together truly is better than focusing on competing against each other. **◆**



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