

beauty: one click away

Adela Ngai reports on the importance of a web presence when it comes to cosmetic procedures.



Cosmetic procedures are no longer a taboo subject these days, thanks to the overwhelming popularity of makeover reality TV shows and constant publicity about cosmetic surgery among celebrities. The demand for cosmetic procedures has grown tremendously, but consumer awareness has not necessarily caught up. For many patients, their quests for beauty have unfortunately, turned into a failed crusade, yet the right answers to questions that will help make an informed decision about such a sensitive subject are only a click away.

Apart from specialty magazines, consumers have limited points of reference when it comes to researching for cosmetic procedures. The good news is the IT boom in

recent years has transformed Australians into a tech-savvy population. Statistics show that there has been an increase in internet usage of 112 percent between 2000 and 2005. With 72.6 percent of internet users aged between 18 to 24 and 59.3 percent of those aged 35 to 64, accessing information online is no longer a skill exclusive to 'geeks' and 'nerds'.

In fact, people aged between 25 and 40 are heavily reliant on the internet as a source of information, not to mention as a one-stop-shop for services such as banking and shopping. They are more likely to log onto the internet and 'Google' a topic for information than they are to research it elsewhere. Not only are the people from this

group tech-savvy, they are also 'consummate consumers'. They accept that they can change their bodies to attain their own ideals of beauty – and the baby boomers are pursuing ageless beauty as well.

Having a functional and informative website has become an integral part of running any business these days, especially for the cosmetic surgery industry. A website should be attractive, easy to navigate and contain up-to-date information. For medical practitioners, it is their representation to the public. A website is as essential as the company signage on a business card. For patients who are not comfortable discussing their desires to have cosmetic procedures done, the internet offers a readily available source of information and knowledge from the privacy of their own home.

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Setting up a functional and well-designed website is only the first step to promoting the web presence of a practitioner's business. The next important thing is getting noticed among millions of similar sites on the internet – the term is 'search engine optimisation'. The easiest way to draw people to the site is to have it optimised with as many search engines as possible. This can be achieved through various design techniques. One of them is embedding 'keywords' to point internet users to a particular site when they type certain words and phrases into a search engine. But for most, it is mainly done through paying fees to the most prominent search sites.

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While major search sites are necessary for site promotion, certain businesses can benefit from specialised search sites and portals. One of the portals for the beauty industry is www.cosmeticchoice.com.au. The industry-specific website is developed for Australian beauty services with specific categories for plastic surgery and cosmetic procedures. Visitors are connected with practitioners and services within their area via the website. This provides a good starting point for patients' research as well as excellent exposure for practitioners.

With the growing demand for cosmetic procedures and the increasingly widespread use of the internet, practitioners can only benefit from a strong web presence. **acsm**