

Is Your Practice Recession-Proof?

12 Online Marketing Tactics To Help Elective Medical
Practices & Spas Attract More Patients in Any Economy



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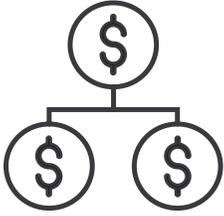
Ryan Miller
Chief Executive Officer

Economic winds are continually shifting, and while there is little you can do to change the climate, there is plenty you can do to ensure your practice is strong enough to weather any potential storm. Etna Interactive has served the digital marketing needs of elective medical practices for more than 20 years—through several economic booms and downturns. We've learned a few tricks about making the most of the flush times while being ever prepared for the lean.

The tactics recommended in this report are designed to help you sustain or increase the demand for your elective medical services, in both good times and bad. We detail 12 tactics clinic leaders can implement to reach a greater share of the available patient population online, make smart marketing investments, and transform even moments of uncertainty into opportunities.

In this white paper, we detail 12 tactics clinic leaders can implement to reach a greater share of the available patient population online, make smart marketing investments, and transform this moment of uncertainty into one of opportunity.

1. Diversify Your Lead Capture
2. Keep Calm and Use the Data
3. Consider Consumer Demand
4. Enrich Your Online Reputation
5. Get Scrappy on Social Media
6. Forecast, Advertise, and Optimize
7. Build Your Subscriber List
8. Work on Your Local Optimization
9. Commit to Search Engine Optimization
10. Fill Your Last-Minute Vacancies
11. Prioritize Follow-up and Lead Nurturing
12. Deliver Exceptional Patient Service



1. Diversify Your Lead Capture

During the recent boom in elective medicine, many clinics were disinterested in communicating with patients who were not immediately ready for consultation. Not surprisingly, the only call to action you could find on the pages of these sites was to “Request Your Consultation” or “Book Now.” When times change, patients may be less certain and will benefit from softer and more varied appeals.

The purpose of any online form is an exchange of value. We trade with prospective patients something they want for something we want—namely, their contact information and permission to start the conversation. So what can you offer patients who are not immediately ready to come to your office for a consultation?

Consider these offerings to entice prospective patients to open the dialogue with your clinic:

- Virtual consultations
- eBooks or downloadable guides
- Text messages and newsletter subscriptions
- Registration for a promotion, contest, or live event
- “Ask the Expert” inquiry form
- Live or virtual event registration

Right now you need every opportunity to dialogue with prospective patients, nurture relationships, and inspire them to book a consultation with you. Look to create new opportunities to connect with prospects online.



2. Keep Calm and Use the Data

At the start of the Great Recession, we observed that many clinics felt a somewhat panicked urge to pursue new marketing channels. While understandable, this reactive approach is rarely profitable. The clinics that proactively analyzed their marketing metrics, identified their strengths and weaknesses, and adjusted accordingly, ultimately had greater success.

Now is an excellent time to take stock of your existing marketing activities and how each is performing. Once you’ve identified the channels that are and are not doing well, you can effectively streamline and focus your marketing efforts.

If you need help with this, download our [Elective Medical Marketing Benchmarks workbook](#). We designed it to help you evaluate the performance of each of your marketing channels. Armed with this information, you can build on what’s performing for you, jettison tactics that are underperforming, and then add one new channel or tactic at a time with mastery.



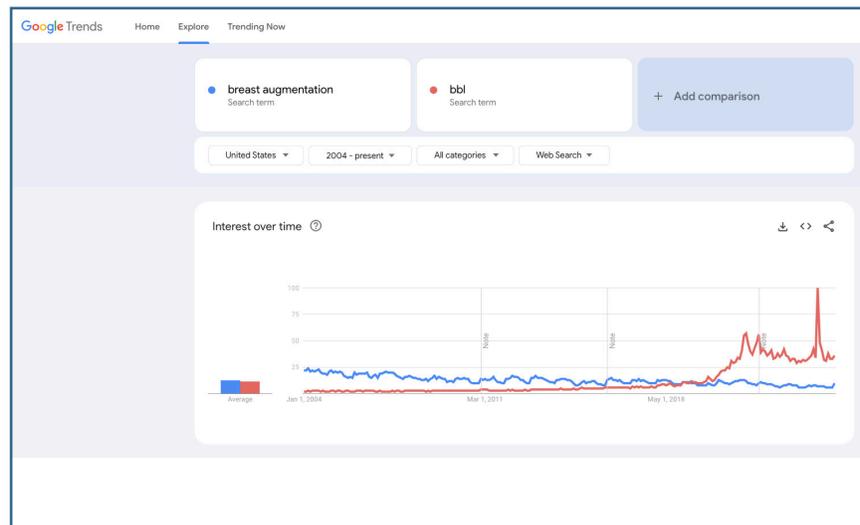
3. Consider Consumer Demand

As you carve out your niche in the market, patient demand should play a role in the lane you choose. After all, the only certain way to ensure cash flow is to offer services patients want. Not every segment of the elective healthcare market shrinks during a recession.

Google Trends (<https://trends.google.com>) is a free service that provides data on consumer search behaviors dating back to 2004 in near-real-time. With the tool, you can compare how interest in procedures and brand names has evolved over time. Consider these examples:

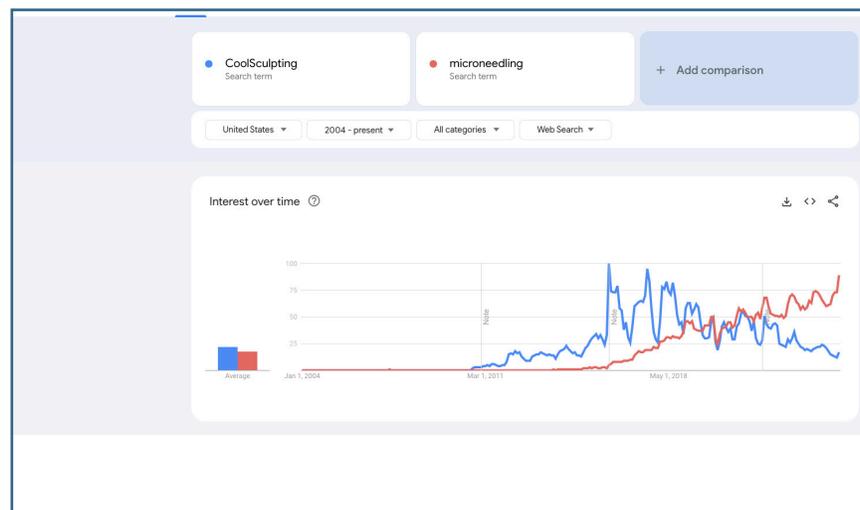
Minimally invasive procedures, value procedures, and procedures with shorter recovery deserve special consideration when evaluating marketing priorities in lean times.

Research into breast augmentation has gradually declined over the last 20 years, but interest in BBL grew modestly after 2016 and took off in 2020.



<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&geo=US&q=breast%20augmentation,bbl&hl=en>

Interest in CoolSculpting peaked in 2018 and has been declining since, while searches for microneedling have climbed dramatically:



<https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&geo=US&q=CoolSculpting,microneedling&hl=en>

Identify those services you believe will see stable or growing demand through economic uncertainty and then align your marketing to capitalize on these trends.



4. Enrich Your Online Reputation

One of the inevitable side effects of delivering exceptional service is a stellar online reputation. That said, most clinics still struggle to achieve a truly representative reputation online. Sometimes, a little nudge is all it takes.

More than 70% of patients cite online reputation and reviews as highly influential in selecting a medical provider. And most report that they actively avoid clinics with sub-par ratings. Even patients who are not actively seeking online reviews will find them crowding search results when researching providers on Google.

Whether business is booming or slow, your office should aspire to earn the best reputation in your market. Patients will assess your reputation based on the total number of reviews, your average rating, and the recency of reviews.

When it comes to soliciting reviews, not all methods are created equal. Our research shows that review requests sent via SMS (text) drive three times more reviews than either email or in-person requests. Whether you employ a reputable software solution or a real-world process to encourage patient reviews, you will earn a stronger, more representative reputation when you actively encourage patients to share their experiences online.

How you respond to online reviews may be as important as the reviews themselves. According to data published by Software Advice, 70% of patients surveyed felt it is “very” or “moderately important” for providers to respond publicly to online reviews. And many platforms, including Google, take into account your response patterns when determining how you rank on their site. U.S. clinics can visit our blog to learn more about [responding to reviews in a HIPAA-compliant manner](#).

Consider posting signs within your office to alert patients that you welcome social media posting within the office and reminding visitors to respect and protect the privacy of other patients.



5. Get Scrappy on Social Media

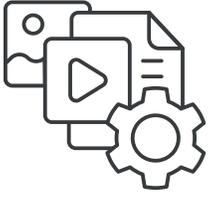
Because social media platforms limit the visibility of posts from businesses, as few as 0.1% of the people who like your clinic on the social platform may be exposed to your communications. Hubspot offers a fantastic article on the [changes in organic social media post reach](#). Today, there are two ways the average clinic can reach patients on the most popular social media platforms: indirectly through the posts of patients and directly through paid advertising.

While many clinics aspire to social media stardom, few attain it. Try to count on your fingers the number of social superstars you know within your medical specialty. Did you get past 10? The bottom line is that if it were easy for anyone to “go viral” on social media, there would be more doing it.

If you’re already a star on social media, keep doing what you’re doing and skip to the next section of this white paper. For everyone else, read on.

The severely restricted visibility of posts by business accounts does not apply to posts from individual users. There’s no algorithmic throttle on the photos, memes, and videos from our families and friends. This means that today a massive number of followers for your business may be less valuable than a smaller number of followers who are posting about, or sharing content from, your clinic. So be sure that you’re posting content worth sharing or celebrating. While you can reuse the same content on different social media sites, try to tailor the content for the platform. A little editing can go a long way.

You’ll also want to support and encourage your patients to share their experiences with (and even within) your office on social media. While we need to be mindful of the privacy of other patients within the practice, consider how you can partner with your patients to empower their social posts.



6. Forecast, Advertise, and Optimize

The allure of online advertising is targeted immediacy. In a matter of hours, you can position your clinic in front of any number of prospective patient populations. But there's a downside to paid promotion online—the cost.

If you consider that it will require thousands of impressions and hundreds of clicks to attract even a single paying patient, the allure of online advertising can fade. Indeed, many clinics report past disappointments with programs such as Google or Facebook Ads. Today you can largely avoid subpar performance or outright financial loss with predictive modeling.

By combining data provided by the advertising platforms about search volumes and click-through rates with compiled data on average landing page-to-patient conversion, it is possible to forecast an estimated return on your online advertising investment before you ever spend a dollar.

“The most visible ads are rarely from the advertisers who pay the most.”

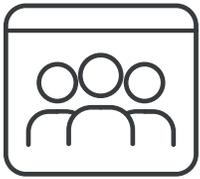
While this analysis may be difficult for many clinics to perform on their own, you can partner with an agency to identify the procedures and spending levels that are most likely to deliver a positive investment return.

Additionally, clinic leaders are often surprised to learn that the most visible ads are rarely from the advertisers who pay the most. All the major ad platforms use algorithms that reward ads that demonstrate exceptional creativity and congruity. When ads trigger high user engagement and remain relevant throughout the user experience, the platforms show those ads more often for less money.

Those same algorithms cut both ways. The platforms penalize erratic advertisers. A start-and-stop approach to paid advertising will undo any advantage you can earn on the platform and ensure you pay the maximum price for any outcome.

Savvy clinics will model their paid campaigns before they invest, carefully craft campaigns for relevance and engagement, invest at a sustainable level, routinely audit advertising investment return and then actively optimize to improve on that return.

If you're looking to fill your schedule right now, give Etna Interactive a call at **(844) 902-2756** or [contact us online](#). We'll design a paid advertising strategy that gets you the quantity and quality of leads you need with a healthy ROI.



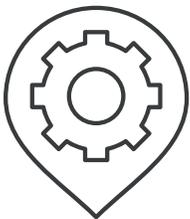
7. Build Your Subscriber List

Today, online subscriber lists come in two flavors: email and SMS (text messaging). Subscriber list marketing is one of the most inexpensive and effective ways to reach the ideal audience of patients and prospects. Your list(s) will include people who have a past connection to your clinic and who have given you permission to market to them. Growing and segmenting your subscriber lists is a smart move in any economy.

With email, the bigger your list, the more cost-effective each communication. On most platforms, there's little difference in effort or expense to broadcast an email to five or 500,000 subscribers. Text messaging works a little differently, so you'll want to be strategic about which news is text-worthy, and whom to target.

Two words of caution. You cannot add just any email or mobile number to your list. Common courtesy, and patient privacy laws, require that you get explicit permission before adding a subscriber. And even after you have the proper permission, subscribers can be fickle. The surest way to shrink subscriber count is to send irrelevant or overwhelming amounts of messaging.

If you're ready to take steps to grow your list, visit our blog to learn [10 ways to build your subscriber list](#).



8. Work on Your Local Optimization

Grab your phone and perform a search on Google for your medical specialty or top service alongside the name of your city (e.g., "dermal fillers San Francisco"). Odds are that after a few paid advertisements the search results will be dominated by a map highlighting three to five local businesses. Securing one of those coveted local rankings requires different tactics than traditional search engine optimization.

Despite its prominent position atop Google search results, it's easy to overlook the map. As a clinic leader, you need to understand the value of appearing among that limited set of featured local businesses. Today, calls and clicks originating from those Google map search results often outnumber those from the traditional "organic" web search results, and you could potentially double the number of referrals coming from Google by earning one of those three spots in the "map pack."

Many clinic owners wrongly assume that their agency's SEO support automatically includes optimizing for the map—but it rarely does.

So how will you get in the map pack? For you or your agency partner, it all starts with your Google Business Profile (GBP). This free tool empowers business owners to manage how they appear on selected Google searches and the Google map. GBP listings today can be enriched with media uploads, answers to common questions, posts, text messaging integrations, booking links, detailed service menus, and most importantly, business reviews. The more you enrich your GMB listing, the better your chances of earning top rankings. Simply updating this content and adding a few images could be an easy win for any business.

Other factors improve your ranking potential. Sites with strong search engine optimization are more likely to also earn top spots in the map. The consistent application of one name, address, and phone number across the Web also helps. Consistent citations, or mentions of your business, on prominent websites, is further help, as is the accumulation of positive reviews on trusted third-party websites like RealSelf, Facebook, Yelp, and Healthgrades. Check whether you appear in the Google map results for the searches important to your clinic. If not, engage your team or agency on a campaign to secure this important real estate.



9. Commit to Search Engine Optimization

The majority of North Americans still rely on Google to inform their every health and wellness decision. Those who receive a referral to a specific provider ITRW (in the real world) will almost invariably turn to Google to validate that recommendation. So, for clinics hoping to reach more new patients, Google represents the single most influential online opportunity. Even modest success with search engine optimization (SEO) will help you attract more new patients than any other online channel.

SEO is about momentum. Google keeps a close eye on both your site content and the nature and number of third-party websites that link their pages to yours. Google is especially interested in how your site and backlinks change over time. If you abandon either, leaving your site static or failing to attract new links for extended periods, Google will abandon you in return.

In our experience, abandoning SEO for even three months will result in slow but steady ranking declines. Worse than the loss of rankings is the loss of momentum. Upon resuming SEO tactics, six months or more may pass before rankings begin to climb again. And you can count on some of your competitors to sustain or accelerate their SEO investments to take over market share; as these players push their way up, any idle sites are faster pushed down.

With few exceptions, bursts of activity can be as detrimental as abandoning SEO. Site owners who have recently undergone a redesign, or been subject to various forms of link hacking, know this to be true. During a website redesign, when there are even small changes to nearly every page of a site, it is common to see major ranking fluctuations as Google tries to make sense of the new site. And a variety of linking scenarios that result in the massive accumulation of new inbound links in a short time can appear to Google as unnatural linking patterns and trigger ranking penalties.

While certain aspects of “technical SEO” are increasing in importance, the steady investment in content optimization and the accumulation of relevant inbound links to your site remains the cornerstone of contemporary SEO.

While it might be tempting to abandon SEO efforts, even for a time, the best advice we can share is to keep your momentum. Clinics hoping to hold their ground must commit to at least one SEO tactic each quarter. Clinics that aspire to take market share will need at least one tactic monthly. This is your baseline for long-term, efficient marketing growth.



10. Fill Your Last-Minute Vacancies

It's common among aesthetic clinics and medical spas to keep a waiting list to fill unexpected openings in the best of times, but how will you fill an opening if you've already worked through your waiting prospects? Clever clinics will create systems to both communicate and incentivize just-in-time bookings. Specialty email lists, opt-in text alerts, or invite-only Facebook groups can all serve this purpose.

- If despite your best efforts, you still find a hole in your schedule, you can use the time to make a meaningful contribution to your own online marketing.
- Author an in-depth blog post. Today the best-ranking blogs are detailed and rich in supporting media (illustrations, photos, and video).
- Enrich your website. Introduce new text, photos, illustrations or video content to the pages that cover your most important procedures. Find inspiration from real patient queries by entering the procedure name into www.answerthepublic.com.
- Broadcast evidence of your success. Publish new before-and-after photos (with descriptive text) or real patient stories to your site.
- Shoot a video. Grab your phone and shoot a short video to publish to your YouTube channel, social media, or site.

- Get the news out. Write and distribute an email newsletter.
- Enrich your GMB listing by adding answers to common questions, parking information, booking links, media, or service menus.
- Study social media before you post. Become a student of what inspires patient engagement (reactions, sharing, and comments) and participate in crafting social media content. Ideally, you have solutions in place to keep your appointment book full, but vacancies are inevitable, especially when the economy is sluggish. Downtime needn't be unproductive time; use it as an opportunity to invest in your clinic's future growth.



11. Prioritize Follow-Up and Lead Nurturing

When your practice is bustling, you and your staff may not prioritize reaching out to prospective patients the way you might during slower times. But a full schedule and a busy team shouldn't mean neglecting leads. Think of lead nurturing as playing the long game—it's an investment in the continued success of your practice.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

1. Follow up with leads as quickly as possible, ideally within five minutes or less.
2. If you don't connect on the first attempt, try at least three times over several days, documenting each attempted contact.
3. When you do connect, if the prospective patient is not interested in an immediate consult or treatment, respect their decision and document their motivations and concerns. Then, set a specific reminder to follow up in the future that's tailored to their situation.

Turning leads into patients requires discipline, organization, and time. You'll need to establish a protocol, train your team, and stick with it. Thankfully, you have good options for practice or relationship management software with automation features for easily following up on inquiries. These platforms can make it more efficient for you to answer questions, offer support, and stay top of mind for these prospective patients.

If you want to dive deeper, read our blog post featuring six industry experts' advice on tactics for nurturing leads.

Now is the time to actively communicate with existing patients, especially those scheduled or due for service. And begin developing your communication plan for when you can return to normal operations.



12. Deliver Exceptional Patient Service

How can you preserve the relationships you have and attract more patients from the inquiries you receive? Exceptional patient service is at least part of the answer—especially when it’s documented and shared in patient reviews.

We’ve all heard the maxim that it costs 5 to 10 times more to attract a new patient than keep an existing one. Whatever the multiple, preserving valuable patient relationships should be a priority at all times. Many clinics overlook investments in internal marketing and patient retention, assuming that patients are fundamentally loyal.

However, patient loyalty is a myth. Ask most women, for example, about their most loyal service relationship and many will name their hairstylist. Ask them next how many mistakes (service snafus or sub-optimal outcomes) their stylist could make before they defect; the most common answer is one or two.

Patients evaluate you on more than your outcomes. From the thoughtfulness and professionalism of your communications to the experience at check out, it is worth the effort to polish the patient journey from start to finish.

Not surprisingly, service also has a significant impact on new patient attraction. In research performed by Ashley Cloud Consulting, clinics that model a patient-centric approach to call handling attract 3 times as many patients as the average clinic.

The service experience is highly dependent on your leadership and the attitude of your team. Concentrate on retaining your top talent, recruiting service superstars, and talking often about the experience you aspire to deliver. By focusing on the service experience you can keep your “loyal” clientele from looking elsewhere and attract a disproportionate share of prospective patient inquiries.



There Is Always Opportunity for Those Who Are Prepared

Whether the elective healthcare market is growing or shrinking, careful preparation can bring security and peace of mind. At Etna Interactive, we know from experience that, with thoughtful strategy and planning, you can sustain your practice and claim a healthy share of that market. Our hope is that these tactics help you do just that, and even position you to seize new growth opportunities that come along.

About Etna Interactive

Etna Interactive is a digital marketing agency serving medical clinics across North America. Established in 2002, Etna offers strategy, innovative marketing automation products, and award-winning tactical marketing to help private practices and large medical groups attract and retain patients online.

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