



Dropped Leads, Why They Happen and What to Do About Them

Karen Zupko

After mystery shopping over 150 aesthetic plastic surgery practices through their websites and by phone, we've come up with a pattern of kerplunked leads. Whether the "lead," (AKA "prospective patient") calls or writes your office you'll be surprised how many inquiries are not answered or answered well.

Here are six recommendations on how to avoid dropped leads which are the 'termites' eating away at your promotional return on investment follow.

No Auto Responder

Picture your potential patient, a busy working mother of two, who finally on a Saturday afternoon when the kids are out with Dad has time to look into that breast augmentation she's been thinking about.

She visits three surgeons' websites recommended by friends. All have good ratings and reviews. Her inquiry receives an immediate acknowledgement from two of the three. Something like this from their auto responder: *"Thanks for your inquiry. Dr. So and So's staff will be back in the office on Monday. Please go to our website and look around. We'll contact you!"* It's a plus that an acknowledgement of her inquiry came through. Given that her contact came from your website, it's odd to direct her to return, but she has those responses in her inbox. The third office is now somewhat out of mind.

Live chat is a feature that the jury is out on. Some people they feel like they are being "chased." One friend describes it as "cyber stalking" and another as "creepy." Others are glad for the opportunity to make the appointment on the spot. It may be an age related reaction.

Recommendation: If your site doesn't have an auto responder, call your web developer today.

An inquiry, we pointed out, is not the same thing as a consultation appointment. Prospects sometimes need to be charmed into scheduling and that takes multiple contacts and time.

After mystery shopping over 150 aesthetic plastic surgery practices through their websites and by phone, we've come up with a pattern of kerplunked leads. Whether the "lead," (AKA "prospective patient") calls or writes your office you'll be surprised how many inquiries are not answered or answered well.

Short Staffed on Monday Morning (And, the rest of the week!)

When Monday rolls around and the office is booked solid with new patients and post-ops, plus injectables for the nurse, the front desk staff, try as they might have no time to write thoughtful responses. A recent visit to a noted plastic surgeon's office found the receptionist, pulling charts (yes, they are still on paper), answering calls as first phone, greeting new patients and checking others out. Answering web inquiries was the last thing on her list of "must do's." She saves that "for his surgery day."

As consultants to plastic surgeons we ask this question:

"Do, they have the right person, doing the right job, with the right tools and the right training?"

Clearly, in this case, the answer was "No" based on the first two criteria. Moving on, she had mediocre writing skills and no sales skills. Her idea of attracting the prospect into becoming a patient was to refer to the surgeon's CV. More on the content of replies in a minute.

Another prominent plastic surgeon prides himself on keeping his overhead very low. About to make a \$45,000 investment in all forms of promotion to reenergize his dormant practice, he was shocked when asked, *"What will you do if you're successful?"* He seemed puzzled that if the new site, spot on SEO, ads



Plastic Surgery Mystery Shopping Snapshot from July–November 2015*

Website Inquiries

Web inquiries made: 151

Practices contacted: 137

Responses received (excluding auto responses): 69.5%

Responses received in less than 1 hour: 17.7%

Responses received same day: 46.1%

Responses received within 24 hours: 58.2%

Auto responses received: 23.4%

Inquires followed up with a phone call: 12.1% of the time

47.1% of responses did not answer questions about pain, scarring, or other concerns raised in the inquiries.

66.7% of responses did answer questions about fees.

Continued on Page 53

Dropped Leads

Continued from Page 52

in city publications and special events generated solid responses, that his one employee, an office manager would be overloaded answering inquiries. This on top of her usual work load. An inquiry, we pointed out, is not the same thing as a consultation appointment. Prospects sometimes need to be charmed into scheduling and that takes multiple contacts and time.

Recommendation: Generating leads without a solid plan for how they will be answered by email and phone is not a good investment. Every office needs accountability for lead management. Take a realistic look at responsibilities and the overall schedule before making an assignment. Some client practices have hired part time interns, who they train well, to answer web inquiries and handle calls responsively.

Speed and Consistency of Responses to Leads Is Important

We sent four inquiries to some practices. Responses were sometimes received in an hour, two over the course of a day and half and one inquiry out of four never received a reply. 25% of leads were dropped completely. In an article in the Harvard Business Review entitled, "The Short Life of Online Sales Leads" the author's research "indicates that many firms are too slow to follow-up on these leads." Their audit of 2,241 companies showed that 37% responded to their lead within an hour, 16% responded with one to 24 hours and 24% more than 24 hours. 23% of the companies never responded at all.

Recommendation: Monitor the staff lead response time over the last month.

- How many leads came via the web?
- How many prospects picked up the phone and initiated a call with your office directly—preferring not to leave a web inquiry.
- Does anyone track?

Impersonal Responses Don't Cut It!

Assuming your website has a free text box where prospective patients can write what their interests and concerns are means that your staff must read and respond accordingly. Our mystery patient inquiries included concerns about scars, recovery time or pain.

What matters to prospective patients is that they are heard—that their questions are answered. Explaining that you have an active program of scar healing which is reviewed in the consult is a plus. Saying Dr. Star is a great, not good listener is a plus. Point out that your post-op patient surveys indicate a 96% satisfaction with your pain management protocol. These things matter to patients.

Surprisingly, 47% did not answer those questions. Inquiries about fees, however, were answered 66% and often in the first paragraph which is not ideal, since the value proposition wasn't stated. Solid, accurate answers that help a patient get over a scheduling hurdle are a must not optional.

Misuse of "credentialing" the surgeon is all too common. As if a recitation of your training and board certification makes you "uniquely qualified" when there are 15 surgeons within 6 blocks of your office with identical credentials. What matters to prospective patients is that they are heard—that their questions are answered. Explaining that you have an active program of scar healing which is reviewed in the consult is a plus. Saying Dr. Star is a great, not good listener is a plus. Point out that your post-op patient surveys indicate a 96% satisfaction with your pain management protocol. These things matter to patients.

If you are the surgeon reading this article, you need to know how leads which cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$70 to \$200 to generate are nurtured or simply handled in your practice.

Spelling and grammatical mistakes damage your brand.

On a recent visit to a Florida practice, the auto responder said that "surgery" cases were booked on Monday. (That was the web developer's error.) A variety of other spelling errors and left out words were found. You are in a detail business.

Recommendation: Either the doctor, a literate office manager or your consultant should randomly pick a week from last month and read through staff replies to inquiries. Evaluate responses based on how long it took to reply, responsiveness to prospects comments or questions, overall content, spelling and grammar. And, then of course, check the schedule. Are those prospective patients scheduled for a consult?

Phone Skills Despite Decades of Pointing This Out Remain Weak

A practice who invests thousands of dollars in websites, promotions and lead generation, requires skilled staff with the time to nurture prospects.

Nurturing a prospect is different than 'processing' them. Saying, "You'll learn everything in the consult" may mean the prospect lets the fingers do the dialing or keying in search of someone more articulate, more charming, who sounds like she believes in the surgeon she works for. Telling a caller, "You'll find all the answers on our website" throws cold water on a warm lead.

Ask yourself:

- Are my staff trained to handle commonly asked questions?
- Do they have the time to convey what they know—or they overly tasked?
- Do my phone staff have the ability to convey enthusiasm and interest in the patient? We call this the 'gal pal' syndrome.

For the highest return on your marketing investments, ensure that the responsiveness of your team match the front end spend.

Karen Zupko is President of Karen Zupko & Associates, which advises physicians and healthcare managers about the challenges and trends impacting the practice of medicine. www.karenzupko.com