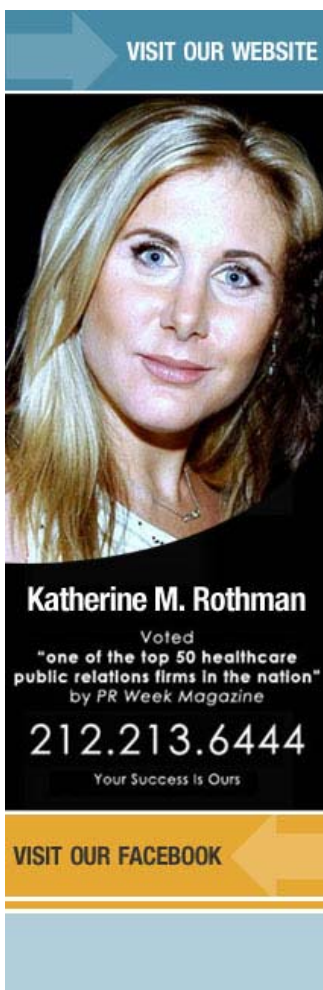


In Depressed Economy, Healthcare Public Relations Gives Plastic Surgeons an Advantage Over Competition



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Katherine M. Rothman

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When the economy is down, specialized public relations firms can help plastic surgeons grow their practices by increasing name recognition in target markets. Public relations experts like Katherine Rothman, CEO of KMR Communications, can help plastic surgeons by providing them with editorial coverage in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and health internet sites.

According to recent data, there are approximately 7,000 cosmetic surgeons practicing in the United States. This figure increases significantly when the definition of a plastic surgeon expands to include physicians and non-physicians that identify themselves as "cosmetic surgeons" and perform cosmetic procedures. Other related specialties, such as dermatology, otolaryngology, ophthalmology, and oral surgery, also have subspecialties which focus on cosmetic procedures. These physicians will identify themselves as "facial plastic" or "occuloplastic" surgeons. When the term "plastic surgeon" is broadened to encompass these physicians and subspecialists, the figure rises from 7,000 to close to 60,000. This number definitely spreads the playing field quite thin. In

a January 9, 2010 interview with CBS's "The Early Show," plastic surgeon Dr. Anthony Youn said: "All plastic surgeons' business is down. It's a luxury item like a new car. In fact, many surgeons are finding their practices as much as 30-40 percent slower than a year or two ago."

According to New York public relations CEO [Katherine Rothman](#), there has been a noticeable shift in attitude regarding advertising of medical practices in the past several years. "As recently as a decade ago, most physicians who had achieved a certain level of peer and patient recognition were loath to advertise their practices until HMO's began to dictate patient care and reimbursement," states Rothman, CEO of [KMR Communications, Inc.](#) Soon after, sub-specialists such as gynecologists and internists were performing lucrative elective procedures that were once the sole domain of plastic surgeons and dermatologists. As the stakes in elective medicine were raised, even the most conservative plastic surgeons and dermatologists knew they had to change with the times or risk an empty waiting room. Advertising was the first phase in the evolution of practice promotion. Soon, practitioners realized that advertising might only serve to maintain the status quo of a practice without taking it to the next level. Those cosmetic surgeons and dermatologists who sought an upper income market began to feel that advertising did not impact their target patient.

"The reality is that those with disposable income for cosmetic procedures typically find their physicians through referrals or editorial coverage, not advertising. This is where public relations for plastic surgeons is essential," states Rothman.

According to Rothman, [plastic surgery public relations](#) differs from advertising in that it uses editorial coverage in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and health internet sites to highlight a physician and his or her practice. A campaign can focus on new trends, techniques, controversies, safety issues in a respective sub-specialty, or any host of topics deemed press worthy by a publicist and media representative. Essentially, a plastic surgery PR campaign works by taking information the consumer needs and wants to know and presenting it in the form of actual stories related to dermatology or plastic surgery. Ensuing media exposure in outlets such as Elle or Vogue magazines or on programs like "The Today Show" have a huge impact on prospective patients' medical choices. This media exposure serves to reinforce that a physician is the expert in his or her subspecialty. In addition, it lends a cache and seal of approval that cannot be achieved even by an aggressive ad campaign. "Ultimately, medical advertising translates as biased, while it never occurs to the average person that a doctor employed a healthcare public relations firm to secure a media spot," explains Rothman. Not only can plastic surgery public relations and subsequent [media exposure](#) increase name recognition, it can also translate into actual patients (increased revenue) as well as assure current patients that they made the right choice.

In dermatology, plastic surgery, ophthalmology, and now even holistic medicine, there are physicians whose names have become synonymous with a particular sub-specialty. Have these doctors re-invented the wheel or discovered the fountain of youth to warrant such acclaim? According to Rothman, the answer is usually no. "Most have simply hired a skilled PR firm with solid media connections," she said.

Many cosmetic surgeons and dermatologists wonder why they simply cannot write their own press releases or have their office managers function in a dual capacity as public relations professionals. When doctors attempt this scenario it often impacts their practice

negatively or simply takes time away from the doctor practicing medicine. Rothman states that physicians must understand that the consumer media is not interested in the painstakingly technical depictions of techniques, as would be appropriate for a medical journal, nor are they interested in press releases that are entirely self promotional. The medical jargon must be translated and presented in a way that is palatable for lay people, and writers and producers are indeed lay people. "Developing connections with the media is a full time job," Rothman states. "Only public relations firms, like [KMR Communications](#), have the time to solidify connections with the press and be recognized as a key source for medical or healthcare stories."

Once a surgeon has decided to use [plastic surgery public relations](#), it can often be difficult to find a good firm. The task is made even harder because most doctors are reluctant to admit to their peers or friends that they have engaged a publicist. Doctors can call the Public Relations Society of America for listings of public relations firms registered with them, or the internet is also an option. Many doctors do get "burned" by public relations firms. This usually occurs because the physician has engaged an individual or corporation who has little or no expertise in medical/healthcare public relations, which is an entirely different niche than fashion, entertainment, restaurant, or corporate public relations.

"Just as one would not visit a chiropractor for laser resurfacing, it is unwise to engage a firm that has not worked with doctors or aspects of the healthcare industry. It is of paramount importance that publicists are able to speak a doctor's language," states Rothman.

Doctors who seek public relations on a national level will likely have better success with a public relations firm whose base is New York City. Although this may come as a surprise, the public relations firm need not be located in the same city as its clients. The majority of key media outlets originate in New York City. A public relations firm located there can more easily facilitate personal contacts with these Manhattan editors and producers. Such alliances will undoubtedly be fruitful for clients. Plastic surgeons who elect to go the public relations route must keep their egos in check and adhere to the Hippocratic Oath. Is there a downside to public relations? According to Rothman, the answer is yes - physicians just might become addicted to their newfound fame.

About Katherine M. Rothman

Katherine M. Rothman is the president and CEO of the Manhattan-based public relations firm KMR Communications, Inc. She is a graduate of American University in Washington, D.C., and New York University, where she studied communications. Considered a leading public relations expert for [beauty, health, and lifestyle clients](#), Rothman has authored several articles. She has appeared on CNN and has been quoted and featured in many of New York's leading news publications, including The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The New York Sun, and The Daily News.

About KMR Communications, Inc.

KMR Communications, Inc. is a leading Manhattan-based public relations firm that serves a broad range of health, beauty, and fitness clients. Created in 1998, KMR Communications, Inc. remains a boutique agency, with specialized attention given to each client. KMR Communications, Inc. is recognized as one of the top 50 healthcare public relations firms in the United States. For more information about KMR Communications, Inc. or to request a consultation with Katherine Rothman, please call 212-213-6444 or visit www.kmrpr.com. For real-time updates and information, please visit KMR Communication's social media accounts on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).