



## The Big Brand Theory

Aesthetic business founder Roydon Cowley discusses branding strategies and how you can separate yourself from the competition

**As small business owners, our expertise will often lie in only a few specific areas of our business's total operational requirements. As an aesthetic practice/clinic owner, this is likely to be the hands-on element and day-to-day running of the clinic and treatment application.** The thought of accounting, legal requirements and other peripheral duties can fill some business owners with dread. These individuals may choose to delegate these responsibilities to qualified third parties, however there is a risk they might totally neglect these areas of running a business. From my experience of working with aesthetic businesses, I have noticed that branding is one of the areas that is often significantly lacking. Have you considered the importance and relevance of branding when planning your business strategy?

When discussing my brand I am often told how lucky I am, as if it has in some way stumbled into success. I generally answer, "Yes it's strange, the harder I work the luckier I seem to become!" In truth, using many years of experience, good and bad, my brand was more likely to succeed from day one as I had a very specific plan and branding strategy. It is this I would like to share with you, as I believe it can be applied to significantly improve any company's performance in the increasingly competitive market of aesthetics.

### What is branding?

Firstly, we need to appreciate what branding is and why it is so important to our businesses. Branding goes way beyond just a logo or graphic element. When you think about your brand, you really need to think about your entire customer experience. This is everything from your logo, website, social media experiences and treatments, to the way you answer the phone, and the way your customers experience your staff. When you look at this broad definition of branding, it can be overwhelming to think about. In short, however, your brand is the way that your customer perceives you. It is critical to be aware of your brand experience and have a plan to create the experience that you want to allow your customers/patients to have – a good brand doesn't just happen – it is a well thought out and strategic plan. Many small organisations and startups neglect spending necessary time thinking about their brand in this broad sense, as well as the impact it has on their business.

#### 10 reasons why focusing on your brand is important:

1. Promotes recognition
2. Sets you apart from the competition
3. Tells people about your business 'DNA'
4. Provides motivation, structure and direction for your staff
5. Generates referrals as customers love to tell others about brands they like
6. Helps customers know what to expect
7. Represents you and your promise to your customer
8. Helps you to create clarity and stay focused
9. Helps you to connect with your customers emotionally
10. Provides your business with value

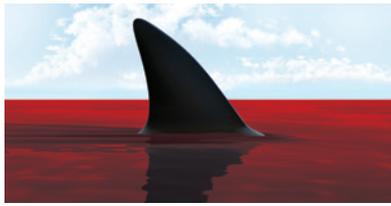
All of the above is relatively basic stuff when assessing how important branding is and what I would regard as the solid foundations of any strategy. The best branding is built on a strong idea; one which you and your staff can hold on to, commit to, and deliver upon. More importantly, you need to be different if you want to swim alone in the big blue ocean!

### Blue Ocean vs. Red Ocean strategy

In business, we use the 'Blue Ocean' and 'Red Ocean' strategies, which are analogies that define what sort of market you are in. The 'Red Ocean' represents all of the industries in existence today – the known market space. In this ocean, boundaries are defined and accepted and the competitive rules of the game are well known. Here, companies try to outperform their rivals to achieve a greater share of the product or service demand or, as this space becomes more crowded, prospects for profits and growth are reduced through price wars. A product becomes a simple commodity, and cutthroat competition turns the ocean bloody; hence, the term 'Red Ocean'.<sup>1,2</sup> Our 'Red Ocean' is the business of aesthetics, which we all know is becoming a more crowded space with plenty of sharks circling in the bloodied waters. 'Blue Ocean' on the other hand, is defined in contrast of the industries not in existence today – the unknown market space, untainted by competition.<sup>1,2</sup> In the 'Blue Ocean', competition is irrelevant because the rules of the game are yet to be set. 'Blue Ocean' is an analogy to describe the wider, deeper potential of a market space that is not yet explored and where you swim alone (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

### How to use the 'Blue Ocean' strategy

So what is the relevance of this strategy and how can you benefit from it? As an aesthetic practice, you are likely to have a price list of services that is accepted as standard within the industry. This positions you firmly in the 'Red Ocean', swimming with the rest of the sharks and fighting for market share in an increasingly competitive environment. I am making the assumption that you are striving to be the best and have already looked at some or all of the 10 reasons why focussing on your brand is important; making a concerted effort to implement these ideas in your practice. You might also have stunning premises, excellent techniques and treatments and other successful elements of



- Compete in existing market space
- Beat the competition
- Exploit existing demand
- Make the value-cost trade off
- Align the whole system of a firm's activities with its strategic choice of differentiation or low cost

**"Defend Current Position"  
Perspective**



- Create uncontested market space
- Make the competition irrelevant
- Create and capture new demand
- Break the value-cost trade off
- Align the whole system of a firm's activities in pursuit of differentiation and low cost

**"Innovate & Pursue New Opportunities"  
Perspective**

Figure 1: Blue Ocean vs. Red Ocean.<sup>2</sup>

your aesthetic practice, which puts you in good stead against your competition. However, I guarantee that your price list will be full of services that can be compared to your competitors, and decisions to come to your clinic could be made purely on price before a patient even comes through your door.

### Finding my 'Blue Ocean'

For many years I chased the next technology trend as a distributor. I had to fight for a sale based on why ours was better than another's and, in some instances, it wasn't. I even instigated a huge PR campaign to support one of our brands, which worked well but created a popular platform for others to jump onto. Not only will other companies follow your lead, they might actually do a better job or sell the product or service at a better price. I didn't realise it at the time but I was drowning in the 'Red Ocean' with a group of sharks circling in anticipation.

Learning from these lessons, I set out to do something fundamentally different. My passion is for the development of effective non-surgical technology for the face and body. Over the years, I realised that no one technology or trend treats all indications for the face or body. Therefore, I developed multi-technology affordable devices, aiming to give the best possible patient outcomes on the face and body. This philosophy was to treat the whole problem by adopting a three-dimensional approach to treat fat removal, tighten skin and improve cellulite, hence the name of the company. We strongly market this philosophy ensuring that only my company and clients benefit from our specific treatments and services.

This approach has also worked for some of the most respected brands like Bloomberg Business, Canon, and Apple.<sup>2</sup> Apple created future profits and growth not by exploiting existing demand, but by reconstructing industry boundaries to create new market space and unlock latent demand. As a result, the company's value grew exponentially as the total market value of a firm reflects not only today's performance but also its future profitability. Apple adopted a number of blue ocean strategic moves that transformed the company from a computer manufacturer into a consumer electronics powerhouse.<sup>3</sup> This philosophy can work for you too.

### How to find your own 'Blue Ocean'

In this increasingly competitive environment, as a business, you now have to be smart in order to win. As the saying goes, 'work smarter not harder'. You need to stand alone; create a business strategy that

means you are non-comparable to the high street and seek to make the competition irrelevant. You need to create and capture new demand and break the value to cost trade off – meaning that differentiation AND low cost should be pursued simultaneously to create a 'Blue Ocean' instead of differentiation OR low cost. You too can create bespoke treatments that not only improve your patient's outcomes, but also make you non-comparable to your direct competitors.

You are the expert in your field and through research of the excellent devices and products now available, you are best positioned to create the best treatments, for a variety of indications.

As an example, your antiageing facial might be microdermabrasion layered with radiofrequency and LED, combined with peels following a course of treatments. For a more curative approach your package may include dermal fillers and/or botulinum toxin.

You could create a programme/course and give it a name such as the 'Hollywood Bespoke Facial' and, once you have decided upon a brand name and direction, market it effectively to demonstrate how unique and ground-breaking it is. Alternatively, you might want to brand it in your name to promote your innovation, such as 'The Dr Jones Age Defying Facial'. Like me, you will get a great deal of enjoyment out of creating your treatments and a lot of pride whilst selling them. No longer are you that clinic selling a generic treatment, but a passionate individual and bespoke organisation that spreads the word about their differences, not their similarities to others.

Some good examples of those who have adopted this strategy are, the '60 Minute Bespoke Facial' by Antonia Burrell Holistic Skincare, the 'Made To Measure Facial' by Anne Semonin and the 'Dr Leah Bespoke Facial' by Dr Leah Totton. These are great examples of individuals who stand alone with their strategy and whose services cannot be compared to others. Many create bespoke facials that are tailored to the individual patient's needs. Not only does the patient feel special – they cannot compare this service to any other provider. The final point is that you align the whole system of your company's activities in pursuit of promoting these differences. Ways to achieve this could include celebrity PR campaigns, local editorial coverage through editors and journalists experiencing your unique offering, social media and advertising. Sometimes it is really effective if you seek individuals or personalities who have large social media or blog following to spread the word. Diving into the 'Blue Ocean' is much more rewarding than simply selling what everyone else is selling or relying on short-lived trends to boost your income; I urge you to give it a try.



**Roydon Cowley** is the founder and managing director of 3D-lipo Ltd and he has been involved in the beauty/aesthetics industry for the past 25 years. After seeing a gap in the market, he established his own manufacturing company specialising in multi-technology platform devices and developed his company through powerful branding and marketing campaigns.

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