



Attracting the Gay Male Patient Requires Specialized Approach

By Jeffrey Frentzen, Executive Editor



In the medical aesthetic realm, the gay male may be the most important patient type to recognize and understand. He inhabits a uniquely diverse niche, often embracing certain geographic regions, political stances and physical categories. His demographic profile encompasses all ages, races, professions and incomes. Along with the larger lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) population, gay males are typically well-educated and have more discretionary income than heterosexuals. In addition, according to Angelo Cuzalina, M.D., a cosmetic surgeon in Tulsa, Okla., the gay male patient is usually more concerned with physical attractiveness than the average heterosexual male.

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Before Tx



After rhinoplasty and chin augmentation treatments
Photos courtesy of Angelo Cuzalina, M.D.



Before Tx



After gynecomastia using liposuction plus direct mammary tissue excision via an intra-areola incision
Photos courtesy of Angelo Cuzalina, M.D.

"Gay males tend to be much more sophisticated, want to look their best and make great patients," Dr. Cuzalina said. "A lot of the time the gay male patient will ask for procedures they have probably researched extensively. While a heterosexual male is not going to come in and think anything about



Angelo Cuzalina, M.D.
Cosmetic Surgeon
Tulsa, OK

their lips or their high cheekbones, my gay male patients on the other hand, will ask for an extremely sculpted appearance. Although some are older, no doubt about it, many are starting to get treatments at a younger age."

Additionally, gay men are good promoters of what they believe in, Dr. Cuzalina shared. "Not just to other gay men, but also to straight men and women. In general, my gay patients will intermingle and talk more readily and honestly, especially compared with straight men," he expressed. "Some of my best referrals for both men and women have come from my gay patients. Going back to the 1990s, over the years, gay males have gradually become more accepting of getting cosmetic surgery."

With the improving economy, all men — not just gay men — are seeking aesthetic procedures, stated Gary Alter, M.D., F.A.C.S., a plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills, Calif. "In the past, outside of the bigger cities, the idea of men getting cosmetic surgery was pooh-poohed. However, today it is more acceptable. There is no longer a negative image of gay men getting

procedures. In terms of attitude and interaction with the physician, the gay male patient is closer to the female



Gary Alter, M.D., F.A.C.S.
Plastic Surgeon
Beverly Hills, CA

than the heterosexual male. Overall, our society as a whole is more interested in the aesthetics of looking good and better health."

The gay male is more sensitive and aware of their appearance than your average straight male, said Joseph Niamtu, III, D.M.D., a facial cosmetic surgeon in Richmond, Va. "They are more 'metro' in style and are usually very loyal. If a practitioner can get in-roads into the gay community, then he can become a go-to person for this group. His name will circulate like wildfire. In cosmetic surgery, there are some great niches to get into. For instance, exotic dancers and breast implants. Having hairdressers as clients is a good referral source. If you want to



Joseph Niamtu, III, D.M.D.
Facial Cosmetic Surgeon
Richmond, VA

capture the gay population, remember that in terms of marketing it is a niche market like any other and should be approached that way."

As niches go, the gay male market is lucrative, but the patients can be picky, expressed Daniel Man, M.D.,

a plastic surgeon in Boca Raton, Fla., who shared that in the earlier days of this specialty, patients would sometimes react negatively to outcomes. "Members of the gay community have



Daniel Man, M.D.
Plastic Surgeon
Boca Raton, FL

been trying plastic surgery for a long time, some at times when fewer surgeons offered aesthetic procedures and outcomes were not as good as patients desired. This caused a great deal of skepticism, which is still reflected in the present, but outcomes have improved greatly."

Compared to heterosexual males, the gay male patient is more body conscious at a younger age, Dr. Man added. "We see a lot more liposuction cases because of this awareness."

Recently, *The Gay & Lesbian Times* reported that liposuction is one of the most popular procedures among the gay male population, along with gynecomastia, hair transplantation, face-lifts and injectables. "Outside of that, it's across the board," Dr. Niamtu noted. "Gay males are sophisticated and seek a big city look, a more sculpted appearance, as opposed to the average cosmetic patient who doesn't want to be too noticeable and just wants to look younger. Yes, the gay male patient wants to look younger, but desires more of an enhancement than rejuvenation. They are discriminating and more fashionable than the average straight male, and are very focused on exactly what they want."

Interestingly, "both straight and gay men want no-downtime procedures," Dr. Man highlighted. "In many cases, your marketing should be directed towards these types of treatments. Also, when marketing procedures to men, consider how you can cut down on scarring. Scars on men are much more visible, so it is important that you create subtleties and choose the least noticeable incisions."

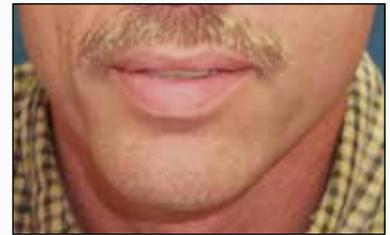
Leif Rogers, M.D., F.A.C.S., a plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills, Calif. is familiar with treating gay males. In his experience, practitioners must also create a subtle approach when marketing aesthetic procedures and related services to the gay male community. "You have to understand that



Leif Rogers, M.D., F.A.C.S.
Plastic Surgeon
Beverly Hills, CA

what these men are looking for is different," he asserted. "They want their physician to not only be friendly with their culture, but to also be someone who has experience with what their culture seems to want. If you are just starting out in your practice, that may be difficult because you are going to be under their radar. Even if yours is an established practice, it is hard to get them through the door. It helps to self-identify as a trendsetter, and make certain they know you actually do work on gay men."

Do your research to determine popular procedures and products among the gay male demographic, said Dr. Rogers, but don't necessarily promote



Before Tx



After chin and mandibular angle implants
Photos courtesy of Angelo Cuzalina, M.D.



Before Tx



After gynecomastia and VASERlipo Tx of the abdomen, love handles and waist
Photos courtesy of Angelo Cuzalina, M.D.

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Before Tx



After transgender transformation
Photos courtesy of Gary Alter, M.D.,
F.A.C.S.



Before Tx



After transgender transformation
treatments: tracheal shave, forehead
reduction, hairline advancement, chin
and jaw contouring and rhinoplasty
Photos courtesy of Harrison H. Lee, M.D.

them specifically. "For example, dermal fillers are not going to be a big draw for men. Focus more on body contouring, which is a big market for them. You might be able to market chin implants and sculpting of the facial features. Just realize that when you market individual procedures you are throwing away dollars because there are so few people who respond to this approach."

Keeping abreast of current events and lifestyle trends largely determines how successful one is at leveraging marketing tools to capture the gay market, Dr. Rogers advised. "If you are going to advertise then do so in publications they actually read. We advertise in a well-read, local gay publication. I think that in every community there is a standout, so I just went out and asked around. It takes time to identify the best outlets. Go online; look into Heremedia.com, Twitter and Facebook. Familiarize yourself with gay social network sites, such as Downelink, Gethornet and Grindr."

Though it may seem counterintuitive, "sex doesn't necessarily sell in this market," Dr. Rogers revealed. "Using sex as a sales tool will get their attention, but this is a pretty sophisticated group that knows surgery is not something to take lightly. You may get patients just by doing a sex-oriented type of advertisement, but be careful because the people responding to your sexy ad may not be who you really want as patients."

Establishing a noticeable presence in the local gay community is paramount, Dr. Rogers noted. "Support the parades, such as Gay Pride, and some of the national events like World

AIDS day. We try to get involved. We sponsor them financially, set up a booth, do gift bags or put an ad in the program."

These basic approaches also work when marketing to other submarkets in the LGBT community, but it is a mistake to approach the entire LGBT market as a single group, explained Dr. Alter. "Grouping all LGBT together may be offensive to some people. These are separate communities with differing needs and social habits. Gay women want something different than gay men, and transgenders are in a unique niche all their own."

According to Harrison H. Lee, M.D., D.M.D, F.A.C.S., a plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills, the transgender patient



Harrison H. Lee, M.D., D.M.D.,
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is no longer a mere curiosity in U.S. culture. "Society has accepted them more," he stated. "Practitioners should treat them as they would any other patient, with kindness, compassion and sensitivity to what their emotional and psychological needs are. They may be a little needy and you have to do a lot of hand holding, but in the end they are very appreciative of the work that you do for them. The transgender community is small, they all know one another and they get my name through their friends – it's all word-of-mouth."

Although it takes a highly specialized physician to perform the often radical surgery involved in

transgender transformations, during after care, patients may want to settle on a more traditional type of practitioner for some treatments, such as skincare and hair removal, expressed Dana Elise, N.C.E.A., a Beverly Hills aesthetician who specializes in transgender patients. "The main approach is to build recognition value first, to be known as someone who will talk to the LGBT crowd," she said. "Whether you are straight, gay or transgender, you are going to go to your friends and someone will recommend their doctor. No one is going to just pick somebody out of a hat."

"I haven't specifically tried to hone in on a marketing strategy for attracting gay male patients," Dr. Cuzalina pointed out. "I have plenty of gay patients and it is one of my favorite groups to work with. There's really no outgoing marketing needed, simply because once you start treating gay clientele, even just one or two, and they are happy with the results, they will refer many, many more patients."

Good word-of-mouth is the best method to crack the LGBT community, or any niche market for that matter, but you have to get it started somehow, Dr. Niamtu emphasized, adding that targeting appropriate local or regional media outlets can create buzz about a practice. "You've got to get your name in front of them," he said. "Find out what websites LGBTs visit, what establishments they frequent and what blogs and news sources they read. Also, if you're good at public speaking find someone who is active in the gay community and tell them you're happy to present a seminar, and offer a discount to those who attend."

Nonetheless, marketing aesthetic services to all LGBT patients requires sensitivity, especially when reaching out to transgender patients. "One ad I read said try neurotoxin treatments to make your forehead look less protruding," said Ms. Elise. "First of all, that is not true on its surface. Neurotoxin will freeze wrinkles, but it is not going to shave the bone as in actual surgery. What's happening is practices are looking to capture part of that business, but they should do it in a very delicate way. Gay and transgender people will look at that approach and say, 'you are trying to market to us, but you don't really get us yet.'"

Dr. Rogers confirmed that by far the most successful approach is acquiring good word-of-mouth buzz. "Patients find out about physicians that do the best work," he acknowledged. "Marketing, then, is not the issue here. It is the physician's reputation that makes the difference. He or she must come out, so to speak, maybe even come out of their own little comfort zone and get into and get to know the gay community." ■



Before Tx



After transgender transformation
Photos courtesy of Gary Alter, M.D.