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Media Relations: Cincinnati plastic surgeons present new face to public

Craig McGuire - 30 May 2005 00:00

From Fox's *The Swan* to ABC's *Extreme Makeover* to MTV's *I Want a Famous Face*, the endless parade of makeover shows emerging in recent years has made middle America take a closer look in the mirror.

As a result, the plastic surgery business is booming, and not just in Beverly Hills and Manhattan. But while the Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana tri-state region saw a 33% rise in procedures in 2003, Cincinnati-based The Plastic Surgery Group (PSG) reported flat growth for that period.

"As the largest non-academic plastic surgery practice in the region, one with an exemplary record and a long line of satisfied clients, they expected a lot more growth," says Rodger Roeser, VP of Justice & Young Public Relations (J&Y).

Realizing that traditional advertising and marketing were not cutting it, PSG enlisted the agency to inject something special into its promotional efforts.

Strategy

In January 2004, J&Y engaged a strategy leveraging PSG's primary assets: its surgeons. The agency sought to establish the doctors as the experts in the field, positioning them as a regular and ongoing resource for local and national media.

But not everyone was sold on this approach. "I am very skeptical by nature, and I was certainly skeptical of this strategy," says Dr. Lawrence Kurtzman. "It was important that it did not appear like we were shilling because a big part of what we do requires that we build trust with our patients. We did not want to jeopardize our ability to do that."

The effort was also greatly aided by the misinformation and lack of facts driving an insatiable thirst for details in the region during a time when the media and an improving economy were making cosmetic surgery much less taboo.

Tactics

"After creating a powerful media kit and utilizing some of the most state-of-the-art tools available for PR pros, we regularly and tenaciously offered cogent story ideas to the media," Roeser says.

To further establish the practice as a resource for information, the website was over-hauled; services such as Profnet, MediaMap, and Leads were utilized; and an electronic, customized customer tool kit was created, which was a flash animation program that allowed viewers in the centers to view media successes, then download articles while they were waiting.

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Timely press releases and bylined articles were circulated to coincide with events (for example, when news emerged of the possible return of silicone implants), TV programming (like blasting reality shows for setting unrealistic expectations), and seasonal trends (such as the detriment of the sun in summer and the importance of eating right during the holidays).

The group also affiliated itself with Operation Smile, a private, not-for-profit volunteer medical services organization that provides free reconstructive surgery to tens of thousands of children and young adults in 25 developing countries and the US.

Results

Talk-show guests on Cincinnati Q102 usually stay on for only a few minutes. When Kurtzman visited, the avalanche of calls compelled the host to keep him on the air for almost four hours.

Roeser estimates that the value for the placements hit nearly \$2 million in ad equivalency for the \$40,000 investment, a 50-to-1 return on investment. (Ad equivalency numbers were determined based on accepted ad values from Burrelle's, Media Library, VMS, and Bacon's, Roeser says.)

More important for the client, the plastic surgery practice grew sales by more than 60% from the previous year, 2003, and more than 30% above national growth averages.

"I am no longer a skeptic," Kurtzman says. "Our practice has grown substantially, and I attribute a lot of that to their campaign."

Future

Now the AOR for PSG, J&Y's 2005 budget was increased by 50% to \$60,000.

PR team: The Plastic Surgery Group and Justice & Young Public Relations (both Cincinnati)

Campaign: The Plastic Surgery Group

Time frame: January to December 2004

Budget: \$40,000

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