As the “silver tsunami” of Baby Boomers enter their golden years, aesthetics should look ahead and adjust to the new wave of potential patients. Millennials represent the future of aesthetic medicine—they account for roughly 80 million individuals who are favorably disposed toward cosmetic surgery.

Who are Millennials? Although there are no precise dates that define Millennials, aka Gen Y, they constitute the demographic cohort following Generation X. Ranging from roughly 18 to 35,

Millennials are also:
• Connected 24/7 through social mobile technology
• Comfortable going online to share deep personal information, including medical experiences
• Passionate about self-expression and open to using the full range of beauty strategies to express their individuality.
• Predisposed to dealing with businesses who understand them

Put it all together and you have a formula that promises to radically reshape the market.

Millennials consider aesthetic medicine acceptable, achievable, and a part of normal life.

Relative youth notwithstanding, Millennial women are more likely to be unhappy with their bodies than their older counterparts: According to a RealSelf commissioned survey, 91 percent of younger Millennial women (those ages 18–24) and 90 percent of older ones (ages 25–35) say they’re unhappy with at least one aspect of their bodies. And many are willing to look beyond retail to resolve their concerns, with 63 percent of younger Millennials and 67 percent of older ones saying they’d be willing to visit a medi-spa, medical clinic, or plastic surgeon, more than any other age group.¹

Chalk it up to the proliferation of less-invasive procedures or the parade of celebrities opening up about their age-defying and body modifying efforts; whatever the reason, having some work done is increasingly seen as a natural extension of a regular beauty regimen, not something to be kept hidden from public scrutiny. When we asked women ages 18–34 if they thought cosmetic procedures ranging from skin treatments to breast augmentation were just a part of life today, more than two-thirds (68 percent) said yes.²

Millennials seek engagement, seamless experiences, and speedy responses from businesses.

Surrounded by technology from an early age, Millennials have grown accustomed to finding information in seconds, purchasing products with a click, and being connected with others 24/7, trends that are further enhanced by their round-the-clock reliance on their mobile devices. According to eMarketer, 78 percent of Millennials say they spend more than two hours per day using their smartphones and 87 percent say their phones never leave their side day or night.³

Such trends have prompted some observers to characterize Millennials as impatient and self-absorbed. They use technology to streamline their lives; they value interactions with others who accommodate their anytime, anywhere lifestyles, and they know they can quickly find other resources when their needs go unmet. Our data on response time to email inquiries to aesthetic practices find that doctors on average respond to “leads” in 28 hours. This performance is entirely unlike any experience Millennials have when conducting other major purchases. For instance, an email contact to a car dealership receives a response in three to five hours, on average.

Millennials seek the opinions of others—and love to share their own.

Facebook, photo-sharing, and FOMO, aka the “fear of missing out”: For many Millennials, being connected online is woven into every aspect of daily life so it’s not surprising that they’re the most avid users of social-networking sites. According to the latest data from Pew Research, 90 percent of young adults (ages 18–29) use social media vs. 77 percent of those ages 30–49, and 51 percent of those ages 50–64.⁴

And they’re not just posting pictures of what they had for breakfast. More than any other demographic, Millennials rely on social content to gather information about the subjects they’re interested in, to read online reviews from others in similar situations, and to share their own experiences in a way that’s not about narcissism, but rather, creating connections and paying it forward.

Our research found that 78 percent of aesthetic shoppers consider patient reviews a critical part of selecting a doctor
to contact. In fact, reviews were the number one piece of critical research in the decision making process above Board Certifications, cost of procedure, and doctor’s website.

**BETTER UNDERSTANDING SETS THE STAGE FOR INCREASED ENGAGEMENT**

Millennials, of course, are not a monolithic demographic—the aesthetic interests of a college student who dislikes her nose and a 35-year-old mother hoping to get her pre-baby body back are completely different—but you’re more likely to reach both if you pay attention to their aesthetic interests, shopping preferences, and lifestyles:

- **Provide content that addresses Millennials’ concerns—and their values.**
  According to ASAPS, patients ages 19–34 accounted for 51 percent of breast augs, 55 percent of labiaplasties, and 48 percent of rhinoplasties last year, making those procedures ideal subjects for blog posts, videos, and newsletter articles. For many Millennials, photos are particularly compelling: When we asked them to rank the most important factors in choosing a doctor, 57 percent included before and after photos in their top three compared to 51 percent of those ages 35–44 and 44 percent of those 45 and older.

- **At the same time, many Millennials are looking for more than proof of a doctor’s skills; they want to know the person behind the credentials.** “Authenticity” may be an over-used buzzword but demonstrating that you’re genuine and transparent aligns well with an audience that factors such values into their buying decisions. Sharing who you are, not just what you can do, puts your practice philosophy front and center and can be a key differentiator in a crowded market.

- **Share your expertise where they’re likely to find it.**
  These days, having a Facebook page and practice website aren’t enough. Millennials, in particular, are sophisticated searchers, incorporating insights from medical websites, review sites, and their own social networks. Participating in the arenas where these potential patients congregate is crucial for anyone who hopes to engage them before they’ve made up their minds.

  And increased exposure is only part of it. Social sites, in particular, can provide crucial insights about what’s being said about you—especially among Millennials. According to a recent survey by Nuance, 60 percent of those 18–24 who are unsatisfied with their care tell their friends but only 15 percent tell their physician. Doctors who ignore that fact can find their reputations tarnished without ever knowing why.

- **Encourage others to tell your story for you.**
  Let’s face it; in our multi-screen, media-saturated world, getting consumers’ attention is harder than ever. That’s especially true for the millions of Millennials who filter their email, download ad-blocking software, and get their news from Facebook rather than the local paper. Forgoing traditional marketing channels, they rely instead on friends, family, and, thanks to their always-connected lifestyles, the opinions of the vast online community that keeps the conversation about procedures and providers roaring.

  So how do you get these hard-to-reach but increasingly important consumers to hear you? You do it by tossing out old marketing tactics that turn them off and enlisting the help of people they’ll actually listen to. You do it by facilitating peer-to-peer conversations and by sharing your expertise when asked. And you do it by demonstrating that you understand what matters to them.

  Of course, there are always those doctors who say, “I have an older clientele so these trends don’t apply to my practice.” Maybe so, at least today, but consider your potential patient base five, 10, or 20 years from now. As the Baby Boomers and Gen X-ers age, those 80 million Millennials will determine who’s still around to treat them.

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1. RealSelf data
2. RealSelf data
6. RealSelf data

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Tom Seery is the founder and CEO of RealSelf, an online resource for medical aesthetics. PSP Magazine recently called Tom “plastic surgery’s answer to Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg” and a Top Influencer in 2015.

RealSelf reaches a vast, global consumer audience. 65 million people visit each year to obtain important information about aesthetic procedures and to find the right doctor or practice. 8,000 physicians get in front of the RealSelf audience by providing answers to questions and by sharing photos and videos. These experts have contributed over a million postings. Prior to RealSelf, Tom was a member of the founding team at Expedia, where he developed a $500M private-label travel business and introduced search marketing long before Google was a household name. Tom recently followed his passion for giving back, and joined the board of ReSurge International. ReSurge brings life-transforming reconstructive plastic surgery to 2,000 children a year in developing nations. Tom holds an MS from Drexel University, MBA from University of Washington, and BA from Connecticut College. He resides in Seattle with his wife and two highly energetic toddlers.

He is @seery on twitter, should you wish to connect.