Each year, medical organizations provide reams of data about the total number of cosmetic procedures performed during the previous year. Though these lookbacks provide interesting information, an office is highly unlikely to alter their practice in response to the data. For instance, would you adjust your website content with news that Botox is more popular than ever, or that chin implants have declined nationally?

In an effort to uncover additional trending data that could be put to use, we conducted a year-on-year (YOY) analysis of RealSelf audience traffic patterns across more than 113 million visits to 250,000 questions and answers about facial aesthetic procedures. The questions that consumers use in their online research shine a light on their current and prospective interests, concerns, and aspirations.

The analysis uncovered numerous, often surprising patterns and a wealth of consumer sentiments that can help aesthetic practices address key consumers’ information needs. For brevity, we’ll highlight three trends (for a more comprehensive view, feel free to tweet us @realself):

1. What filler or toxin will accomplish my aesthetic goals?

Last year we noted a pronounced increase in research related to choosing the right injectable. Questions with significant interest growth included:
- Where exactly is Botox injected in order to create a browlift? Traffic up 463%
- Which one is better: Botox or fillers? Up 254%
- Which product do I use for vertical lines? Botox or Restylane? Up 124%

To capitalize on the soaring interest in injectables among aesthetic consumers,1 it’s important to recognize that consumers often feel overwhelmed by the options and are unfamiliar with product benefits, safety, and cost differences.

**DOCTOR TAKEAWAY:**
You’re not supporting the consumer decision journey when you post on your website, simply, “we offer Restylane and Juvederm.” While these brand names have consumer recognition, brand features are not well understood. Consider shaping your online content to support comparison-shopping (such as a grid lining up the treatment options). Comparative shopping is a concept that we all appreciate when trying to make an important purchase.

2. How can I accomplish my aesthetic goals, without surgery?

The increasing interest in toxins and fillers is driven by many factors—price point, accessibility, and increasing acceptance among a larger swath of society—but our research highlights another compelling factor: A strong desire to get results without undergoing surgery. As the increase in web traffic to the following questions suggest, many potential patients are more amenable to the needle than the knife:
- Are there any non-surgical ways to fix under-eye hollows? Up 204%
- Is a facelift the only answer for marionette lines and jowls? Up 131%
- Non-surgical nose job procedures to reduce nose size? Up 46%
- Droopy eyelids — what alternatives to surgery? Up 26%

**DOCTOR TAKEAWAY:**
As Dr. Steven Dayan has noted, “the tide of aesthetic medicine is moving toward a blurring of the traditional lines between ‘surgical’ and non-surgical’ procedures.”2 Content that clearly and honestly explains what each alternative can and cannot accomplish leads to more realistic expectations, a key determinant of patient satisfaction.

3. Is the procedure I’m considering safe?

Fear of what can go wrong is an obvious barrier to purchase in aesthetics, and this is nothing new to a practitioner. Top trending fears, however, are more nuanced than the garden-variety, “How do I make sure I get a good outcome?” High growth concerns include:
- When to stop drinking alcohol prior to surgery? Up 317%
- Why not Restylane or Juvederm while pregnant? Up 241%
- I didn’t know I was pregnant and I had Botox. Up 124%
- How do I know if I had an allergic reaction to Juvederm injections? Up 81%

**KEY IN ON CONSUMER INTERESTS**

**BY TOM SEERY**
DOCTOR TAKEAWAY:
While fixing a perceived flaw or countering the passage of time are triggers to the pursuit of cosmetic surgery, these safety-related queries are evidence that patients want guidance on how to incorporate their aesthetic efforts into their existing lifestyles.

The primary barrier to consumer purchasing in aesthetics may not be affordability, but instead are fears and concerns about side effects or long-term safety. Addressing these matters in your online postings sends the message that you care and relate to your patients emotions and needs.

CONSUMERS ARE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS IN NEW WAYS
In the era of the ‘empowered consumer’, consumers are researching and looking for answers online in new ways that go beyond standardized search queries. Consumers now know that they can get more specific with their online questions and get reliable results back in return. Rather than searching on “fillers” consumers are asking more sophisticated questions that are personalized, “what product do I use for vertical lines?”

Known as “long tail search,” 80 percent of searches online are now these types of inquiries. For us at RealSelf, the impact of this evolution has propelled us to optimize our site for very specific long tail questions. Consumers get directed to a response that can very closely answer their question — with the added benefit of giving us insight into trends on consumer needs, concerns and aspirations.

Going forward, this evolution in consumers’ online search patterns is only going to accelerate as more people use so-called “natural language search,” either by typing in specific questions or speaking directly into their phones via Siri or Google Voice Search. The result is a virtuous circle in which consumers provide the search engines with very specific insights into what they’re looking for, which the search engines can then use to zero in on the sources that provide the best possible match.

Doctors whose content addresses both the latest aesthetic trends and the evolving nature of online search will be well-positioned to provide it.

Tom Seery is Founder and CEO of RealSelf (www.realself.com).