



# WHY TALK TO THE PRESS?



## TINGY SIMOES

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**T**he aesthetic industry has been receiving some bad press recently, following the PIP and remote prescribing scandals, and practitioners are understandably wary about speaking to the media. With 10 years experience in PR and dealing with the media, Tingy Simoes has recently published an online book, *How to Cut It in the Media*, advising aesthetic professionals on this tricky subject. Here we summarise a chapter looking at why you should speak to the press.

At their most basic, aesthetic professionals (whether clinicians, such as doctors, surgeons, dermatologists, nurses, dentists or clinic and hospital owners/managers) can be divided into two types:

- (i) Those who actively seek to interact with the media – whether to advance their own profiles or generate business – and;
- (ii) Those who feel that the limelight is thrust upon them in spite of their wishes or inclination. They see the press as a ‘necessary evil’ and mistrust journalists.

Either way, to ignore the power of the press in today’s media-led society is foolhardy. This article will provide

the tools and insider knowledge to take ownership of your PR endeavours, in whichever of those camps you consider yourself to be. Under what circumstances would a journalist ever need or want to speak with you? The answer is EVERY time they write or report anything having to do with aesthetic treatments or news in the sector, they will need comment from ‘an expert’. I’ve lost count of the amount of times I have been asked by industry players: “What is that clown doing on TV?” The reality is that, whether you agree or not, the person they end up using actually qualifies as an expert, it doesn’t change that ultimately the media needs someone – anyone – to quote and give their story validity. And for better or for worse, the selection of expert mainly comes down to one thing: PR. Either you enjoy the relationship yourself with a journalist, or have a publicist with the right connections ... or you don’t!

You may choose not to proactively engage with the press, but to ignore the power of the media is more than disingenuous, it’s outright stupid. On the other hand, there are dumb reasons to hire a PR agency and one of them is simply wanting to ‘be on television’. I’ve met experts throughout my career who feel that they entirely missed their calling and actually they just want to appear on TV chat shows. They don’t technically have a unique viewpoint, or any specific news to impart, but feel they themselves are a gift of greatness to be unleashed upon an unsuspecting world. This has a short lifespan as a PR strategy. We might be able to get you on a couple of programmes here and there, but there must be substance behind the gloss and actual value to provide to the media. If you want your life to be more *Entourage* than *Scrubs*, consider getting an agent. Another no-good reason – doomed to fail, in fact – to engage a PR agency is because you actually want to spend less time on marketing. A PR agency will need

you to provide material to take to the press and we require your involvement and commitment. To every client I say: "I'm only as good as what you give me." Having a PR agency will not reduce your hours, if anything quite the opposite, but it will multiply your rewards in terms of recognition.

## WHAT THEY NEED FROM YOU

So why does the media need you? Because, make no mistake, they need you. They require:

- Information
- Explanation
- Illumination
- Expertise and knowledge
- Opinion

The press just wants a good story! The sooner every medical spokesperson arrives at the understanding that a journalist's job is simply to produce one, the easier it will be to deal with the media on a regular basis. It is the underlying reasoning and objective to everything they do. Know that journalists are NOT there to inform, rally, reassure, educate or inspire for the greater good. They are not there to make the human race better people, promote safety or encourage commonsense decision-making; their mission is to sell newspapers and magazines, and get their viewer and listener figures up. This is their job. And anyone who helps them to look good in front of their boss will earn their gratitude and a fruitful, long-term relationship. Make it snappy! If you can make sensible advice and viewpoints sound interesting or appealing, you're halfway there.

## CELEBRITY DOCTORS

With advances in the sector and new aesthetic treatments being touted everyday as the 'latest craze from Hollywood', the urgent need for expert view has risen exponentially. As the new century dawned, a new phenomenon was also making its way into our collective consciousness: the meteoric rise of the celebrity doctor. Of the hundreds of physicians I have worked with over the years my team and I always knew who were the media stars (or 'media sluts', as some of their colleagues more rudely put it) who were willing to do interviews anytime, no matter how obscure the outlet.

Suddenly the public knew the names of doctors and knew them well – from dramatic makeover shows to reality 'fly in the wall' documentaries – the fact that certain medical luminaries had chosen to descend from the perceived Olympian

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heights of their consulting rooms and walk/ Twitter among the common folk was regarded by the media as nothing short of manna from heaven. Suddenly you could call them by their first names, you knew what they ate for breakfast and they also shared their fitness tips. The most successful ones not only publish books but they're also on TV, Facebook and Twitter. Clearly it doesn't translate that they're necessarily better at what they do than any of their colleagues, but just that they know how to harness the power of media in their favour. In particular, the cosmetic surgery sector, having been seen until relatively recently as the preserve of the rich and famous and somewhat shrouded in an aura of mystery, became one of the areas most sensationalised in the press. A succession of makeover shows exploded onto our screens, showing us what transformations could be achieved. We read in magazines who did so-and-so's face-lift, so-and-so's boobs. In some circles, surgery has started to be seen as a badge of honour and some patients want acquaintances to ask "who did your nose?"

Doctors, surgeons and professionals in aesthetic healthcare eventually woke to this dawning reality – some more quickly than others – and jumped into frenzied marketing and publicity activity with gusto but rather mixed results. The 'Wild West' analogy is used quite often to describe the sector, as providers of aesthetic treatments can seem untroubled by much in the way of statutory limitations on what they can and can't do. The reality is that, whether provided by board certified, appropriately trained and qualified practitioners or not, the idea of cosmetic surgery has become firmly entrenched in today's popular culture. There is even a sense of entitlement among the public, with many feeling they 'deserve' a little pick-me-up in the form of wrinkle-relaxing

injections or a neck-lift in the same way they view having a haircut. One could posit the theory that the ubiquity of cosmetic surgery advertising and marketing has contributed to its trivialisation in the eyes of the public, leading to their own dangerous undoing in many cases. It is in this environment that it's more important than ever that reputable clinicians make themselves heard. Sometimes even those dead set against the idea of interacting with the press ('whoring' themselves out) in any way may still be forced to give statements to the media if they're involved in a high-profile case, or they're – God forbid – 'doorstepped'. We will be looking at the difference between 'reactive' and 'proactive' PR in an upcoming article. The reasons for engaging with the press should be clear. Below-the-line marketing (known this way historically because it is not a direct cost like buying an advert, which is considered 'above the line') such as public relations is done mainly to foster awareness and generate goodwill from the press, thereby gaining recognition and valuable mind 'real estate' among their audiences.

Whether ultimately it's because you want to drive patients to your private practice/clinic, or you want to warn or educate the public about certain trends or dangers, the result of engaging with them is that the media get to know you. The more you make yourself available, the more they'll call upon you. It's a well-known marketing adage that, if you don't seek to secure a position yourself, your competitors and customers will do it for you. Start thinking of PR like going to the gym: paying your membership alone isn't going to get you any benefits! You need to invest more than money; think creatively, engage and commit to the cause. You know that, if you do, you could be looking pretty hot just a few months from now ...