

EPISODE 5.12 | FEBRUARY 19, 2025

## FROM PRACTICE TO PERSONAL BRAND: MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR ALL DOCTORS, WITH KRISTY LAGOURGUE & RACHEL VARGA

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### **David Mandell:**

Hi, folks. Dave Mandell, host of the podcast. Thanks for joining us by audio or on our YouTube channel on video, watching us. Yep, we've got two great and beautiful guests with us. Let me tell you about Kristy and Rachel, and then we'll bring them on, and we will get into the topic, which is important today. It's marketing, it's something I can learn about in every doc listening, this could learn about and benefit from.

Kristy LaGourgue is a marketing consultant and boutique agency owner of Agency MCS Marketing Creative Solutions. And has an online course for teaching practitioners how to show up online called Building Your Beauty Brand. Obviously, she does a lot of work, I think they both do in the aesthetic space, and we'll talk about that. She specializes in helping both growth-oriented aesthetic clinics and solo practitioners how to effectively market themselves as the go-to experts in their field. She's known as the secret weapon. I'm not going to comment on that. And help launch new clinics and that positions the practitioners behind the brands as thought leaders in their industry.

Rachel Varga is a double board certified aesthetic nurse specialist since 2011, and has worked with thousands of patients in a clinic setting. She's going to tell me based on a video what I could use. Performed thousands of rejuvenation procedures, and hosted over 400 interviews with leaders in health, technology, and wellness optimization. She has built an online following and an online business called The School of Radiance. I like that. Teaching people how to do the right things at home, emerging aesthetics, wellness and biohacking. So, with that, Kristy, Rachel, welcome to the program.

Rachel Varga (01:56):

Great to be here. Thank you for having us.

**David Mandell:**

Radiance, I like that word. I haven't used it in a while. That's a good one.

**Rachel Varga:**

It's the energy you put out there.

**David Mandell:**

It's going to stick with me. I'm going to start using that more often. So, before we sort of broaden this, tell me, obviously you both do a fair amount of work in aesthetics and that kind of thing. So, in the practices and the med spas that you specifically deal with on a day-to-day basis, what are some things and some mistakes that you commonly see docs making in terms of marketing?

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

So, typically, we find that there's three big mistakes that most service-based providers make. So whether you are in aesthetics, dentistry, or even a service-based provider in any capacity, the same mistakes are always present. It's, number one, no marketing or very little online presence. Number two is piecemealing the marketing, trying a little bit of this, a little bit of that, hoping something's going to stick. Or mistake number three is not understanding how it all works together to really drive that steady patient flow to your practice month over month. So, this might look like hiring an agency that doesn't really know you, or your brand, or hasn't really brought the brand through the marketing properly, because the branding has to start with you if you are a service-based provider in any capacity.

**David Mandell:**

Got it. Rachel, comments, thoughts on that?

**Rachel Varga:**

Yeah. I feel like one of the biggest mistakes that practitioners make, myself having moved, obviously been in the practitioner space since 2011 to then showing up online, is just don't feel ready. And I think this can really relate to anything in business, that

imposter syndrome, you have to kind of get out of your comfort zone and grow a little bit. And to really do the marketing right in the way that Kristy's just identified Rockstar Clinics doing is, who's in the clinic really does have to be front and center for the brand, because people fall in love with people, not brands. So it's getting out of the comfort zone, learning these new skills, and then of course, what Kristy just mentioned, the strategy of tying those three layers together is what makes it all work together.

**David Mandell:**

The thing that jumped out to me, I mean, obviously people who don't do any marketing, and there's some docs listening, or watching, or probably saying, "It's just not what I need to do." Maybe they're an interventional cardiologist and all they do is stance and they just get calls medical from the hospital, and this and that, or the partners. And there's some who don't. But we had a very good speaker, a very good guest on, and I was trying to look for it to season one I believe, is Dr. Ast, Michael Ast from Hospital for Special Surgery. And I wanted him on because he talked about branding. For any doc starting out their practice, that you want to be known as someone who does a good job, who has good patient care, et cetera, because you might get referrals that way. And if that's all that marketing is just getting referrals of good patients, that could be all you need. You don't need to have a podcast and all this kind of stuff. But you still got to think through marketing.

The other thing that stood out to me, and I think it's pretty common in all businesses, is the error of the second thing you identified, which is the piecemeal. And sometimes we've even had that problem at OJM group. I think we're more marketing focused than a lot of wealth planning firms. Some people have said we are rock stars in our space. Because they don't have podcasts, and write books, and do all that kind of stuff, they just manage assets for clients and that's fine. They're good at what they do. But they're not doing what we're doing.

And when they start marketing, and even us, it's like, "Oh, we did an article, we didn't add here for a couple of months, and then we didn't get anything so we stopped," or, "We did this for a couple of months and stopped." And everything I know about marketing is you can't do that. You can't do things for a little while and just stop. You

really have to decide beforehand how long that cycle is to expect a return, and stick with it, and not judge things too early, not I guess, give up, even on a particular tactic. Is that something you've seen, Kristy and Rachel, that people have done?

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

You go ahead, Rachel.

**Rachel Varga:**

Yeah, they give up too soon. They get in their own way. They think, "Oh my goodness, I'm going to say the wrong things. My colleagues are going to laugh at me." I'll be the first to tell you that some of the best practitioners that I know, surgeons, when they started to show up online, something really interesting started to happen, David. They were able to then make extra money speaking on stages, and being in a consulting contractor capacity for various different companies. And this is actually what I do behind the scenes as well, that actually pays even more than what I do clinically. So, it's sort of like we tend to see marketing as social media, light, fluffy, maybe younger generation to a degree. But what we don't think about is really what's possible. Down the line you mentioned a book, speaking types of things. It's really getting also that validation and accolade from your colleagues in the space too, to then position you even further, which might open up the gates for different opportunities on boards and business development deals as well.

So, the social stuff can seem a little young, things like that, but it really does. There's a lot of power to it. And essentially, showing up online becomes your speaking reel for these different companies. It's almost like your social media presence and profile these days is like your resume, if you will. I know we have LinkedIn and the traditional resumes, but who you are online... Say, for example, you're looking to connect and do something with someone. If you can't find anything online about them, there could be maybe not a good reason about that as well. So, it's the social presence is actually very far-reaching and powerful in ways that you might not have thought about data. I'm curious, what are your thoughts on that?

**David Mandell:**

Yeah, that's interesting. And yeah, you mentioned, and I think this is probably true too, across different specialties, maybe a hesitancy of docs to jump into this, because I think a lot of people who went into medicine, not all, they did it, they certainly are personal because they got to deal with patients every day, and the face-to-face, but the speaking in front of a camera, or even if it's a phone, et cetera, is not something they've been trained to do, or comfortable with. So that takes a little bit of growth and expansion out of their skill set prior to trying it. Kristy, what do you see in terms of the biggest challenges beyond what Rachel mentioned in terms of sort of personality and comfort level?

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

So, biggest challenge is a couple of things that I find most practitioners or clinic owners, they're relying on the wrong things for their marketing, and you do have to have appetite for it. Not every physician is going to want to show up online, create video, really build a brand as a go-to authority in the services they provide. Not everyone wants to do that. But if you are interested in growing a thriving practice and attracting the right type of patients month over month, and really being seen as a go-to provider, that buying behavior happens long before you think it does. They'll find you, they'll start to research. And these are for the elective type of services, for the ones that they need a doctor and stuff that's going to look a little different, but the elective services, they're going to research you, they're going to look at, maybe your reviews, they're going to look at your social media, they're going to see if you have a presence.

So, it's important to create that bonding and trust and really establish who you're for and who you're not for, so that you're getting the right type of patients to your practice based on your brand promise and your dialed in messaging. So, common mistake is that they're not having their brand promise clear and concise in their messaging, and they're not showing up in the right way that's going to attract their ideal patients. So, those are some challenges as well as the competition. The competition is fierce, especially for elective services. So if you are not doing this and you're just relying on maybe word of mouth referrals, you're going to have slower growth compared to maybe a clinic down the street, or within your local area.

So you really want to learn from others who have done it before, can give you the exact strategy to follow, and really put you on what Rachel and I call the fast path, as opposed to taking the slow path and really just relying on the old traditional word of mouth type of marketing. And you're going to miss out on opportunities that Rachel mentioned that you don't even know exist yet. So, if you have appetite for it and you want to build a practice that's going to have a lot of goodwill and be attractive to maybe a buyout or something in the future, you really need to create a strong brand with patient flow month over month.

**David Mandell:**

Especially in this day, which again, we've had a lot of guests on talking about mergers and acquisitions, and the value of practices, and EBITDA. And again, not every practice is set up for that, but more and more are. When I started my career, it was very few that really were getting this kind of interest, and now it's many specialties. And that might even increase in the future, that having a proven marketing system that provides new patients, not only to the head doctor, and I say head like the idea that there's one founding doc and some other younger partners, but even in a group that you're marketing the practice itself.

So, if you're listening or watching, you might be a doc in, let's say, a group. Gastroenterology practice. And you're busy, you really can't take any more patients. So it's not about growth for you. But you have other partners who aren't that busy. And there's the idea of marketing the practice so that everybody gets there, and eventually when everyone's so busy, then you hire someone else. That's to some degree the law firm model, the wealth planning model, is that you have partners who have their own practice, they may be working together, but they're not all equally as busy, they're not all equally as profitable, they're not all equally as generating the same revenue.

So, even, I guess what I'm saying is, even in a group practice where there are some of the professionals, some of the physicians, or the dentists are at capacity and they don't really want to or can't grow anymore, it doesn't mean that all of the docs in that

practice, or especially you're thinking about hiring someone new, you want to get them busy as soon as possible

**Rachel Varga:**

There's also another layer. Sorry to jump in here, but it's worthwhile sharing this. So say for example, one of my colleagues is a neurosurgeon. And he just started... Well, no, he's been doing this forever. But exosomes, stem cells. These are kind of new things. These are sometimes private pay or people have insurance. And when you sort of show up online and have your branding set up, you attract the right type of clients. And that actually can alleviate a lot of stress for practices, and practitioners, and owners, when you're attracting the right clientele, that are actually a pleasure to work with. It's almost like you're doing this to, in a way reduce your liability.

Now, the other thing here is, maybe a practice just picked up a new piece of technology, and medical equipment is the price of a Ferrari. \$150,000 laser, \$150,000 piece of cardiovascular equipment. This is in every type of space. So then it comes to the point of paying off that piece of machinery quickly.

And then the other angle here is, we are in a very quickly moving and advancing biotechnology space, whether that's technology or things like stem cells that are just huge now, and also the biohacking side of things. So there very well could be practices and listeners here that are adding new things into their offerings, which is fantastic, so they can serve their patients and help them be better. So that's also another angle, is maybe there's something new that they're bringing in that actually providing some education online will then position them as the go-to practice for the technology and services that they provide.

**David Mandell:**

Yeah. We've had some guests on here, in fact, I think earlier this season, those of you watching or listening, I'm talking about cash-based practices. Last year we had Jonathan Kaplan, who's a plastic surgeon, talking about adding in a weight loss element to a practice. So even, I think to your point, it could be something where you're not really, essentially... Well, you may want to get more clients, or more patients, but the goal may be actually to just get different patients, meaning more

cash-based, more concierge, more patients to use a particular piece of equipment or technology that you're integrating. So you're going to be target marketing, let's say a cardiologist. My brother might say, "I got enough cardiology patients. I want some more concierge patients, I want some more weight loss patients; I want some more biohacking, or lifestyle medicine patients. And I want to use marketing to increase that. I don't really need any more, like patients just need statins and all of that." So that's something that you folks see and help clients with quite often?

**Rachel Varga:**

This is the future, concierge medicine, adding the biohacking, all that stuff. Not to mention when someone's been doing something for the same thing for 10, 20 years, it's kind of fun to breathe new life into the practice, and a new skillset, and serve your patients in even deeper ways than you could have, based on research in tech 10, 20 years ago.

**David Mandell:**

Hey, maybe after 20 years in practice you start a podcast. Who knows? You get bored like me. No, I wasn't bored, I'm kidding.

So, let's talk about branding for a second. How do you start, let's say, Kristy, if you're starting with a new doc, helping them create their brand, find their brand even? Define what it is they are other than Joe Smith MD, or Rachel Smith MD. How do they do that?

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

Well, the first thing is looking at who are they as a practitioner, as a physician. What do they want to do? What type of patients do they want to serve? What is their, what we call your unique value proposition? Where do you fit in the market? Where are the gaps? What do you fill? Maybe you set your own bar, maybe you offer more comprehensive treatment plans, maybe you offer the latest and greatest, most innovative trending treatments that are out there. You really have to know who you are and what you want to be doing for the next year, five years, 10 years down the road. And what that big vision is. Once you understand that, then you understand the



ideal patients that you want to call in. And then your marketing has to reflect your brand promise that is created based on your unique value proposition.

And then you attract your patients by speaking to their pain points and desires. And then, what's the problem you solve? How do you solve it? And why people should then come to you? So you make it about them, and you find out what they want, and then you tie that back to how you uniquely provide that for them. And you have to have, if you are any type of service-based provider, you have to have a website, or at least a basic landing page that is connected to Google My business, because that's how people will find you through Google search, and that's where they can leave reviews. You have to be showing up on social media to attract your ideal patients, so you could be the best physician out there for any of these elective services, but if no one knows you exist, word of mouth alone isn't going to cut it when it's so competitive.

So, you want to be showing up on social. There's a way to do it. It's really about informing and educating and answering the questions on video, because people want to see you, that you're probably answering every day in your practice anyway. And then you want to have an email opt-in where people, whether they're existing patients, or potential patients, can opt in to learn more about your services over time. So you're building a relationship in a world where we're so connected yet so disconnected, what matters more than anything is connection, especially when you're talking about service-based providers.

**David Mandell:**

Yeah, yeah. I have an idea here, and I don't know if it's actually feasible, but I'll throw it out there. So, I think there's probably docs who they say, "You know what? I really get all of my patients from other docs." And could I apply some of these principles where the marketplace is other physicians, not the general public. And I don't know if you guys have done this before, and it's okay if you haven't because I'm just sort of coming up with, but the idea would be like, I would have a website, let's just say I'm a cardiologist that specialize in one particular procedure or something I do. And basically I only get patients from other cardiologists who are comfortable. They still could create a website and create a bit of a following. It would be totally different. It

would be very technical. It would be very business to business, rather than business to consumer.

But that might help that kind of person, or let's say an oral surgeon, who gets most of their patients from dentists around town, when they get a complicated case that they can't handle. Having, let's say, a website, or material, or videos, some of it to the general public, but also a piece where it's really just for other docs, because that's going to be the level of conversation. I could see that being very helpful. Is that something you've ever come across, or a new idea that maybe you could work out with her?

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

Well, absolutely. And Rachel herself gets approached all the time by the companies that sell the lasers, the injectables, to be a KOL, a key opinion leader for them, because they find her online, they see her showing up, and then they go through the interview process with her, and do all the things that they need to do. But that's how they find her. And by her showing up, as a go-to expert, and then knowing the new things that are coming out with biohacking and wellness and all the things that she does, that's why they want to also work with her, because she can already prove that she can talk on a stage, or that she knows how to speak properly, and she knows what she's talking about. So absolutely. It might be a little bit more strategic and as far as how you're doing the advertising, maybe it's more of a LinkedIn play, but it's still relationship-based, it's still about providing the value and positioning yourself as a go-to authority, and the things that you're doing in your practice every day anyway.

**David Mandell:**

Right.

**Rachel Varga:**

It's not just speaking, showing up on stages. It's like medical faculty position.

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

Yeah.

**Rachel Varga:**

This isn't just light stuff, this is the big boys situation over here. You just don't know what's possible.

And the other thing, as I was hearing you speak, David, I had an idea. And I was actually thinking of something that I've seen work for a number of my colleagues that can actually make their practice life easier. And I'm thinking about one of my colleagues, Dr. Evans, he helps people with fatigue. And he does this through group coaching, through video trainings. And his business generates over seven figures just from that alone. So that's kind of like an add-on to what he's already doing in as practice. And this could apply to different practices that are, say for example, doing weight loss, nutrition, hormones, fatigue, anything and everything. So you just don't know what's possible until you start to go down this path.

**David Mandell:**

Right. Yeah, I agree. So, what would you talk, let's just say somebody's starting a practice. We have some young docs on here, or maybe they're kind of like an ER physicians who get burned out and they say, "Okay, what am I going to do with the next phase of my career? I want to do something, I'm board certified, I'm licensed, I want to help patients, but I can't do the ER anymore. That's just too tough. It's a young person's game." So, how do you start? What do you tell docs who are starting a practice to think about marketing and to help them?

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

It would be starting out with an Instagram, Facebook, depending again who they're trying to attract and what their objective is. Speaking to the questions, answering the questions that they commonly get asked in their practice, and just starting to show up and create that visibility. Rachel, you speak all the time about having done that early on, Rachel created a online business at [theschoolofradiance.com](http://theschoolofradiance.com) where she shows up online and markets to people how to do the right things at home, in combination to do the things that they do in the practice to keep themselves looking radiant.

And then, Rachel, I'll let you speak to this, but Rachel had two car accidents. And had she not done that, I'll let you take over here, Rachel and just share your experience. But to your question about having this, it gives you a form of protection too when you start to create an audience.

**Rachel Varga:**

Yeah, thanks for bringing that up. Whether it's life stuff, or economic downturn, or we saw this a couple of years ago with the world getting turned on its head, it's really good to have that sort of listen to that small but quiet voice. And actually take action on it of, "Okay, it's time to do this." Zoom calls back in 2017, E-Commerce back in 2017. Nobody really knew what I was doing, but I just knew that it was where the future was going. And I'm so glad that I did set up multiple streams, if you will, different ways of serving people, meeting a need, that had I have not set some things up for me that I would've been hooked after being in two car crashes and not being able to practice.

So I'm forever grateful. But it took a lot to learn these skills. And I didn't really think that learning a new skill set, like speaking and presenting, would be so valuable to me down the line. And I'm sure there's so many practitioners and clinic owners listening to this right now, and their wheels are starting to turn a little bit like, "This is interesting." But it's a lot easier than you think it is.

**David Mandell:**

Yeah, I mean, every journey starts with an initial step. And Kristy and Rachel, if people have an interest in an initial step, certainly we'll put your contact info and the show notes and all that. People can get it. You typically will have a first conversation with folks, and see if there's a fit, if you can be helpful to them.

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

Yeah, absolutely. We would look at where they are now, where they want to be in a year, five years, 10 years, and then help map out the strategy to get them there through their marketing. It really is taking those first steps. If you're looking at going B2C and you want to get in front of patients and calling the right patients, then definitely Instagram is still king for aesthetic practitioners and providers, and any type of practitioner and provider. I just niched into aesthetics, because that just became something that I decided to do years ago. But the same strategy applies

whether you're an aesthetic practitioner, a holistic practitioner, a dentist, even elective private medical. It's putting yourself out there showing potential patients that these are the way that you do things, this is your brand promise, this is how you take care of people. You're going to be miles ahead of your competition.

And it starts with showing up on social media, providing content of value. What is that shareable, safeable content behind the scenes? Don't worry about the likes and the comments, because those are vanity metrics that don't really matter. And because it's such a private thing when it comes to getting private services, people aren't going to comment the same way that they are and say a viral reel about pets. It's a very different type of industry you're looking for really just providing value. And if you are sharing common questions about the industry, your thoughts on maybe a new trend, just really showing up on video so that people can see you, and then answering the questions, that's going to be the first way to start. And then having a landing page with a website that people can find you on Google connected to your social, and then somewhere they can opt in to get more information about you where you're going to be sending them at at least a monthly emailer, where you're staying top of mind with them for that brand awareness. It's really important to do that.

So, if anyone does want any information or they want to book a call with Rachel and I, they can go to [buildingyourbeautybrand.com](http://buildingyourbeautybrand.com), and you'll find all the information that you need on how to work with us. We typically have online trainings that come up that walk you through our four-step strategy of how to create that authority and visibility, whether you're an anesthetic practitioner or any practitioner, any type of physician. It really is the same strategy.

**David Mandell:**

Last comment from you, Rachel?

**Rachel Varga:**

Yeah, Kristy's a boss. She's helped a number of clinics sell their practices within just a couple of years of rolling out the right strategy. Kristy's also well-networked with the companies that actually buy clinics, and are looking for desirable clinics to buy. And from some of our conversations, those are standard medical clinics. There's also the med spa clinics that are then now getting into more of the longevity. They're very appealing to buyers, because people are wanting to diversify their portfolio. And so if you do have a clinic of some sort, it's good to think long-term. The sell, sell your business, retire, that could buy 10 years of your life as what Kristy's docs that she's helped sell his practice says, or routinely.

The other thing that I do want to mention is, when you are on this journey and you're looking to maybe mix things up a little bit, you've worked with the marketing team in the past, nothing really landed, I've actually had the privilege since about 2018 of mentoring with and from the biggest names in the health space. If I said their names right now, you would know all of them. And we're all doing this. And when it comes to concierge medicine, if there's somebody, say for example, you're listening to this and you kind of are aware of someone who's charging top dollar for concierge medicine and is offering a great service, they probably have a social media profile, which is how you heard about them, which then puts them in a higher regard in your mind as, "Oh, that's a great model. I should be doing concierge medicine."

So we don't think about these things of really just the power of social media, and showing up that it can have on your business, but also your personal satisfaction of maybe expanding what you do, adding new things, teaching an old dog new tricks. It can be really great.

And Kristy and I also have a podcast, the Building Your Beauty Brand podcast that's brand-new. I've been in the podcasting space for a long time. It's a fantastic way to learn and share ideas. And I'd actually love to have you on the show, David, as well, because podcasting is a brilliant way to also get yourself out there. It's one of the biggest ways that I've grown what I do as well with my other one. And yeah, just really grateful to be here and share these insights. They're pretty much on the leading edge. Not enough people are really talking about the importance of this. But also in a

way that you can sort of grasp the power it can have in transforming your life, your business, and of course, having more time to do the things that you love that are fun.

**David Mandell:**

And that all sounds good. I think, as I wrap up today, I think for the docs watching and listening, those are those in the aesthetic space, they may know Kristy and Rachel already. And if they don't, they've heard these topics, because aesthetics is out in front on this when it comes to marketing, and the importance of branding and all that. And I say this as someone who's spoken at all the conferences. And when I go to a Senate conferences, it's a big part of it; when I go to an orthopedic conference, not so much. Yet, orthopedic practices are being consolidated, there's M&A in orthopedics, there's same in dental, there's same in lots of different specialties today, ophthalmology, et cetera. And all of those areas, there are patients who are paying cash for some procedures, they want to see certain docs and not others. They're traveling to see those physicians. And there's technology that are changing those specialties to offer treatments that can help patients where insurance is behind.

So, even if the motivation is, I want to get the word out on things that really help patients that insurance isn't paying for, marketing's a big part of that. And for the young docs watching and listening, I think there's investing in yourself and your own brand like Dr. Ast talked about from HSS in Season 1, is so important because it's the only person you can really rely on. I mean, there's hospitals, there's health systems, there's a lot, insurers. They're not always on the side of you as a physician. And if you can build a following and build an expertise, that will help you no matter where you go. And no matter where your career takes you and wherever you want it to take you, and you might've been trained in traditional orthopedics, but you want to do stuff that's not so traditional. You don't want to do surgery more, you want to do other things. If you have a following, you have a brand, you can be successful in doing that.

Kristy, Rachel, thank you so much for being on. It was really valuable. We'll make sure people have all their info in the show notes. For those of you listening and watching, thank you. Tell your colleagues about us. If you're inspired, give me a five-star review, and give some comments. We appreciate you guys tuning in. And in two weeks we'll



have another episode. So, thank you all for watching and/or listening. Thanks, Kristy and Rachel.

**Kristy LaGourgue:**

Thanks so much.