

# Branding and the Business of Dermatology



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## KEYWORDS

• Ethical medical branding • Dermatology branding • Professional development • Networking

## KEY POINTS

- The visual nature of dermatology provides an avenue for professional brand development and patient engagement.
- Board-certified dermatologists have the unique opportunity to enhance the safety standards and quality of commercial skincare.
- Branding in dermatology can advance career opportunities, expand your professional network, increase access to resources, and establish you as a thought leader in your field.
- A dermatology brand should be grounded in personal interest, expertise, and values, and all brand promotion should follow the ethical principles of medical practice.

## INTRODUCTION

Dermatology occupies a unique position in medicine, with a range of therapeutic interventions that address both systemic and localized disease, enhance esthetics, and, by extension, mental well-being. This wide scope of practice and the visual nature of dermatology provide an avenue for meaningful patient and public engagement. As a result, dermatologists have the opportunity to engage in product development, cosmetic innovation, media education, and industry collaboration. However, given advancements in technology, the evolving digital landscape in medicine, and direct-to-consumer health care models, there is now an information paradox. Patients have unprecedented access to medical information at their fingertips but are simultaneously inundated with a surge in unregulated medical misinformation. Most skin care information shared online through forums and social media posts is shared by nonphysician “skinfluencers” who promote idealized skin, are motivated by brand deals and

clout, and do not have the formal education to understand the active ingredients that make up the products they are promoting.<sup>1</sup> This creates the demand for an ethically guided and medically sound dermatology digital influence. Unlike “skinfluencers,” estheticians, and other non-board-certified providers, board-certified dermatologists receive extensive formal education and training with an emphasis on evidence-based care and a commitment to patient safety. This further reinforces the unique value dermatologists bring to an increasingly crowded and commercially driven marketplace.

In this environment, professional success in dermatology depends not only on formal education and clinical excellence but also on the development of a strategic and visual identity.<sup>2</sup> Branding in dermatology is the creation of an intentional, professional identity grounded in values and evidence-based expertise. Creating a dermatology brand can set you apart from competitors and can serve as a public health service to combat misinformation, the promotion of

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Abbreviation

AMA American Medical Association

idealized skin, and harmful “*social media dysmorphia*” that can lead to unrealistic patient expectations and increased risk to skin health.<sup>3</sup> With an emphasis on clinical excellence and differentiation from competitors, creating a dermatology brand can establish your authority in both the online skin space, by helping to guide patients to safe and effective care, and in your professional community by establishing you as a thought leader among your colleagues. This article evaluates the benefits and ethical considerations of branding in dermatology and provides a strategic framework for dermatologists seeking to define their niche, expand their influence, build professional networks, and make an impact.

DISCUSSION

Defining Branding in Dermatology

Branding is the intentional effort to develop a unique personality that distinguishes your products or services from competitors. The *what* and the *why* of the brand should be based on your values as a clinician and should fall within your area of expertise. Branding allows patients to connect with you through shared values and personal experiences and is critical to the brand’s success and credibility.<sup>4</sup> It tells the patient why you care and why you are a credible source, lets the patient in on the mission, and establishes rapport. In the modern medical landscape, a successful brand must have an online presence. Online visibility increases patients’ and colleagues’ access to and understanding of the brand, which translates into brand engagement and growth.

When defining a dermatology brand, consider how you want the brand to be interpreted and intentionally translate this into every aspect of the brand experience. Branding in dermatology is much more than a name or logo; it is the intentional curation of every aspect of the brand, from name, logo, and content to how patients and colleagues can interact with the brand. This concept is known as the “digital front door” and encompasses the different channels through which people view and interact with the brand, such as Web site user experience, social media engagement, and educational content.<sup>5</sup> Each aspect of your brand should reinforce its identity and provide an opportunity for meaningful engagement. When the identity of your brand is clearly and consistently communicated, it allows for the opportunity to

connect with others and can provide several benefits, both personally and professionally. The advantages of branding include differentiation, professional reputation, career advancement, networking, thought leadership, personal development, and business opportunities.

Personal Branding and Professional Advancement

Developing your personal brand involves self-reflection, identification of your strengths and values, and aligning them with your professional goals and aspirations. When done effectively, branding highlights your interests, knowledge base, and achievements, ultimately establishing your credibility and building trust in your brand. Beyond the clinic, a brand can diversify your career portfolio, reach of influence, and your streams of income. By positioning yourself through the creation and promotion of your brand as a niche expert, you open the doors for nonclinical opportunities such as consulting, serving on industry advisory boards, editorial positions for journals, or providing specialized expertise as a medical-legal witness, to name a few. These opportunities can help to enhance fulfillment in your career by diversifying your influence and keeping you engaged and up to date in the industry and can bring in additional streams of revenue to buffer against decreasing insurance reimbursement rates.

Brand development provides opportunities to connect and collaborate with colleagues, mentors, and industry leaders, fostering organic, meaningful connections that lead to the pooling of ideas and resources.<sup>6</sup> Think of brand networking and the sharing of resources as analogous to asking to borrow a cup of sugar from a neighbor. Of course, you could run to the store, but borrowing sugar from your neighbor saves time and builds community. This is referred to as “Social Capital theory.” The idea behind Social Capital theory is that our lives, and therefore our professional ventures, are made more productive and, therefore, more fulfilling when we build an interconnected social network. According to Social Capital theory, the value this network holds is based on trust and reciprocity.<sup>7</sup> When borrowing a cup of sugar from your neighbor, you are setting the precedent for collaboration, and similarly, when building a community around your brand, you are creating a support system to help protect against burnout and open the door for pooling of ideas, sharing of resources, and exploration of insights and perspectives that can keep your brand relevant and add value. By challenging yourself to network, staying up to

date within your area of expertise, and engaging with people through content creation, public speaking, or social media, you position yourself as a thought leader, gain visibility within your field, and expand your professional influence. People are more likely to engage with individuals they know, trust, and perceive as experts.

### **Practical Framework for Building a Dermatology Brand**

When starting, your focus should be on defining your niche and figuring out what sets you apart from others in the field. Here, we provide a structured step-by-step framework to build your own brand. These steps are intentionally identified to guide you through a successful brand creation. (1) Perform a self-assessment of core strengths and professional interests. (2) Define the patient population or professional community you want to serve. (3) Determine short-term and long-term goals. (4) Articulate what unique expertise you can provide. (5) Market your brand and raise brand awareness. (6) Audit brand health to ensure that brand messaging aligns with patient perception (**Fig. 1**). By first performing a self-assessment, you are able to identify potential gaps in dermatologic care that matter to you and outline how your expertise and knowledge can help to bridge the gap and provide meaningful care to patients. Defining your patient population early on will help guide the creation of your brand and the establishment of short-term and long-term goals, which will act as a roadmap and keep you centered. Long-term goals are important as they provide vision, direction, and purpose, while short-term goals allow for more immediate actions and accomplishments. There should be a re-evaluation of your brand over time, and therefore, long-term goals can change in response to the accumulation of completed short-term goals, or in response to changing needs of the professional community and/or patient population. Brand marketing, the fifth step in our proposed framework, is only possible after determining your niche and the specific expertise and services that you will provide. While marketing strategies often overlap to include social media, advertisements, public speaking, educational initiatives, and professional affiliations, regardless of the specific area of focus, the details on how you promote your brand matter and can be crucial in its perception and credibility. Here, we provide a few marketing strategy examples to consider when choosing how best to market your brand (**Table 1**). Finally, you must focus on brand health by remaining curious, involved, and willing to reassess brand positioning in light

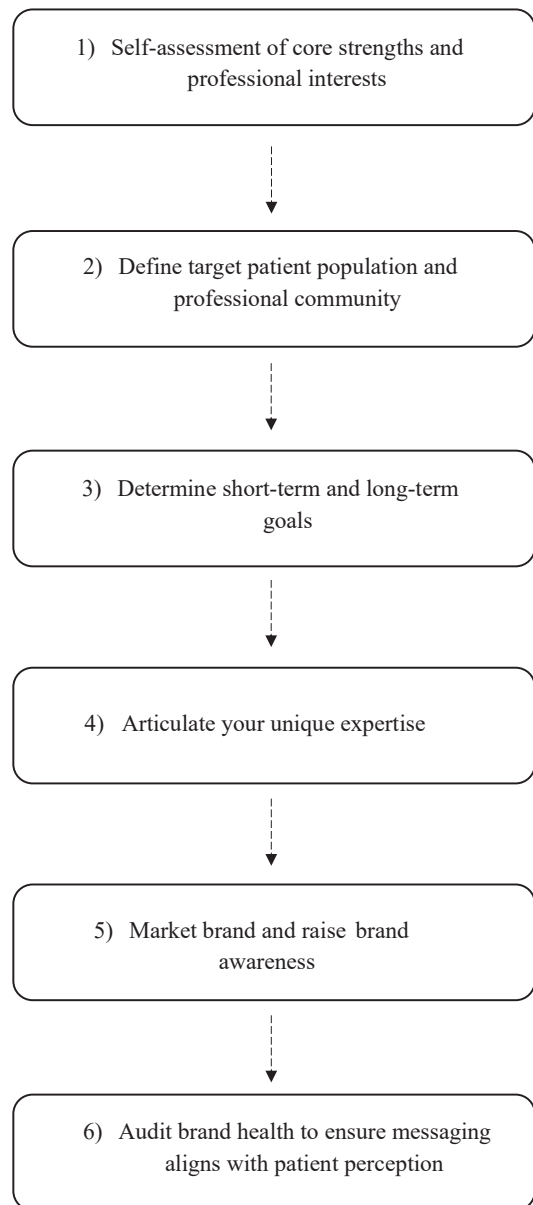


**Fig. 1.** Framework for brand development. The image depicts a simple 6 step framework to guide the successful development of a personal and professional brand in dermatology.

of evolving career goals, the changing business landscape, and patient needs.

### **Inclusive Branding and Product Innovation**

Diversity is inherent in the practice of dermatology. Given that dermatology centers on the diagnosis and treatment of the skin, hair, and nails, dermatologists must incorporate diversity into their education and training so that they can recognize and

Table 1  
Niche-based marketing strategies

| Brand Focus                                                       | Marketing Strategy                                                                                                                                   | Strategic Objective                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Medical dermatology                                               | Attend academic conferences. Bring awareness to diseases through public speaking. Network with pharmaceutical companies for research development     | Clinical authority: To stay at the forefront of emerging systemic treatments. To educate colleagues and patients                                                                |
| Esthetic dermatology                                              | Attend esthetic-focused symposia. Teach courses on emerging techniques. Provide social media demos of services. Share consented patient testimonials | Visual credibility: To demonstrate technical proficiency and realistic patient outcomes. To educate colleagues on emerging techniques, products, and patient outcomes           |
| Surgical dermatology                                              | Publish research articles. Demonstrate surgical techniques to colleagues. Collaborate with device manufactures                                       | Technical expertise: To highlight precision and safety in procedural outcomes. To build referring physician trust                                                               |
| Pediatric dermatology, rural dermatology, or niche subspecialties | Lead patient education workshops. Engage in advocacy through nonprofits, and multilingual patient resources                                          | Community trust: To establish a brand as a safe and accessible resource for specific vulnerable populations. Educate patients on skin health                                    |
| Business of cosmeceuticals                                        | Private label formulations with science-based ingredients that are more efficacious than recommending over-the-counter products                      | Quality and convenience: Rather than directing patients to a drugstore, this approach allows them to purchase curated, physician-dispensed products directly from your practice |

The table provides illustrative examples of brand marketing in dermatology.

manage conditions in different skin tones and hair types. Historically, representation of skin of color has been lacking in formal medical education and in dermatology literature. This has led to lower diagnostic accuracy, decreased quality of care, poorer treatment outcomes, and negative patient experiences in patients with skin of color.<sup>8</sup> More recently, there have been efforts to bridge the gap not only through reformation of formal medical education but also by increasing cultural competency and humility. This same commitment to inclusivity should be reflected in the development of a dermatology brand. An inclusive brand offers a range of products or services suitable for patients of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and abilities. Brand content creation should depict this inclusivity and should be sensitive to different cultures. One way to promote inclusivity is to offer brand materials in multiple languages (eg, product packaging, social media with multilingual closed captions, and so forth).<sup>9</sup> Inclusive product innovation can also be driven by actively engaging with patients and listening to their feedback. Inclusivity means putting the

patient’s needs at the forefront of the brand and incorporating their feedback.

Building an inclusive dermatology brand extends beyond content creation, products, and services to workforce diversity and advocacy for diagnostic parity. By hiring staff that reflects a diverse range of ethnicities, races, and cultures, a brand moves beyond deploying inclusivity and diversity as a marketing tactic to being a brand that actively practices inclusion. Making inclusivity inherent to the brand can help to build brand trust and loyalty among patients who see people similar to themselves as an integral part of the brand. Dermatology can be an intimate and vulnerable experience for patients, and building a brand where they can feel seen, understood, and safe not only benefits the success of the brand but also the patient–provider relationship and ultimately patient health outcomes.

Rebranding in Dermatology

Rebranding is the updating or creation of a new name, term, symbol, design, or combination

thereof for an established brand, with the intention of developing a differentiated position in the minds of stakeholders and competitors. A company may consider rebranding for several reasons: to keep up with the economic landscape, such as changes in patient needs or technological advancements; to update brand values to reflect the current culture; to maintain relevance and an edge over competitors; or to support brand expansion and growth.<sup>10</sup> Rebranding is not without some risk, so the decision to rebrand should be made only after a careful analysis of the demands placed on the brand, where the brand currently stands, and a detailed plan for future projections. A successful rebrand would include aligning the company's image with updated values and goals while retaining the previous patient base and expanding and gaining new patients. Companies that have successfully rebranded have done so using an inside-out approach, evaluating internal areas of improvement and making changes patiently over time while avoiding radical changes to the brand name or logo. A famous example of this was Apple's late 1990s rebranding, where they simplified their brand and focused on the user experience.<sup>11</sup> For a dermatologist, this translates into focusing on the patient experience. To rebrand, the company must re-evaluate all aspects of the patient experience from the clinic to product and digital communications to ensure that the patient experience is in alignment with the brand's values and purpose.

Preservation of name and logo is not always possible, especially with company mergers or when the original name and logo were too niche, outdated, or no longer accurately representing the direction in which the brand has grown. In instances like this, there should be an effort to maintain brand equity, or the recognizable aspects of the brand that patients have come to know and trust. For example, if the logo must be changed, a brand can use the same color palette for the new logo to enhance patient recognition, or when undergoing a merger, keep the same company staff, especially during the period of transition. This will preserve the human experience of your brand even when new names or logos might not yet be familiar. By honoring these familiar elements, a brand can communicate that there has not been a loss of identity but rather a continued commitment to a more inclusive future for its patients.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations regarding branding in dermatology are an important and popular topic

of discussion. A study published in November 2025 surveyed members of the American Academy of Dermatology and brought to light some recurring ethical dilemmas shared by dermatologists. Dilemmas mentioned in the study include financial influence and related conflicts of interest and their potential effect on quality of care and provider decision-making, overuse of procedures and or products for financial gain, and misrepresentation of provider qualifications/scope of practice.<sup>12</sup> Before diving further into a discussion of medical ethics, it is important to note that, according to the American Medical Association's (AMA) Code of Medical Ethics on Advertising & Publicity, physicians may promote themselves (and, by extension, their brand) through any form of public communication, provided the information is truthful and does not mislead or deceive.<sup>13</sup>

The provided ethical dos and don'ts chart (**Table 2**) is not all-encompassing but instead is meant to engage you in thought as you create, navigate, and promote an ethical dermatology brand. This chart addresses 6 ethical areas of concern shared among dermatologists regarding the promotion of products and services, with the first being public communication. All forms of communication from a brand, whether that be product packaging, social media posts, or public speaking events, should be truthful and evidence-based, should not be meant to deceive the reasonable patient, and, to the best of its ability, should avoid setting a precedent of unrealistic expectations. This commitment to honesty should extend to financial influence in that the brand should not recommend products or perform services purely in the spirit of increasing procedural volume and therefore financial gain. All products and services should be decided on collaboratively with patients and should be made in the best interest of the patient. Furthermore, any financial conflicts of interest should be disclosed, and physicians should accurately represent their specific credentials and avoid performing services or offering advice outside of their training. Finally, the chart emphasizes that a truly ethical brand should incorporate inclusivity by actively listening to and addressing the specific needs of diverse patient populations as a commitment to diagnostic parity and equitable care. Ultimately, brand promotion and financial gain should not be valued over clinical integrity. When creating and promoting a brand, one should approach every decision in alignment with a commitment to act in the best interest of the patient, to do no harm, and to only offer services, products, and/or procedures that are evidence-based and that are a medically sound option for the patient.

**Table 2**  
**Ethical considerations and best practices for branding in dermatology**

| Feature              | The “Dos” (Ethical Best Practices)                                                                      | The “Don’ts” (Ethical Pitfalls)                                                                       |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Public communication | Ensure all promotional information is truthful and evidence-based <sup>13</sup>                         | Avoid any communication that could mislead or deceive a reasonable patient <sup>13</sup>              |
| Financial influence  | Disclose potential conflicts of interest regarding product development or industry ties <sup>12</sup>   | Never allow financial incentives to dictate provider decision-making or quality of care <sup>12</sup> |
| Inclusivity          | Recommend treatments only when clinically indicated for the patient’s well-being                        | Avoid the overuse of procedures or products driven primarily by financial gain                        |
| Procedure volume     | Clearly and accurately represent your specific qualifications and training <sup>12</sup>                | Do not misrepresent your scope of practice or credentials <sup>12</sup>                               |
| Professional scope   | Act in the best interest of the patient at all times (Beneficence)                                      | Avoid offering services, procedures, or products that are not evidence-based                          |
| Patient interests    | Incorporate inclusive innovation by listening to feedback from diverse patient populations <sup>9</sup> | Do not exclude or ignore specific needs of a diverse patient population <sup>9</sup>                  |

This chart contrasts “Dos” and “Don’ts,” based on the AMA Code of Ethics, to guide clinicians in maintaining professional integrity in brand development and promotion.

SUMMARY

In the current day and age, branding in medicine and providing a visible way for patients and leaders in the field to experience and connect with your brand is more important than ever. With advances in technology and information at patients’ fingertips, it is increasingly important to educate patients and promote evidence-based medicine they can trust. In this article, we provide a practical 6 step framework to guide you in your brand development, define branding and rebranding, highlight the benefits of branding, such as personal and professional advancement, discuss important ethical considerations, and recommend tips for brand success, such as inclusivity, a willingness to re-evaluate the brand often, and consideration of patient feedback for brand improvement.

CLINICS CARE POINTS

- *Pearl:* Successful branding should be an intentional extension of your values and specific areas of expertise. Aligning your professional personality with your clinical strengths establishes rapport.
- *Pearl:* Engagement in networking, education, research, and public communication can enhance brand visibility, strengthen brand credibility, and establish thought leadership.

- *Pearl:* Per the AMA’s ethics of clinical practice, dermatologists may engage in self-promotion and professional branding, provided they are truthful, within their scope of practice, do not cause harm, and align with ethical standards.
- *Pearl:* Ensure that any products or procedures promoted are strictly evidence-based and that the patient’s best interests are prioritized over financial gain.
- *Pitfall:* Neglecting brand inclusivity (eg, packaging, digital content, and products/services) and patient feedback.
- *Pitfall:* Unwillingness to re-evaluate the brand in light of patient feedback and the ever-changing landscape of medicine.

DISCLOSURE

C. Burgess is a cofounder of Black Opal and serves as a consultant for RoC, SkinMedica, and IT Cosmetics. All other authors report no relevant financial conflicts of interest.

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