

## **SPECIAL REPORT:** **Aesthetic Clinics,** **1 Year After Coronavirus**



**15 leading clinic owners reveal  
how they're growing their practices  
a year into the pandemic**

It's been one year since the COVID pandemic erupted, forcing businesses to shut.

What has been the long-term impact on aesthetic clinics and medspas?

We interviewed 15 clinic owners on three continents to form a global impression.

The regional variation was enormous. At time of interview, the European clinics were still shut completely or operating only on a limited basis. Meanwhile, in some American states, clinics had been open for many months.

Still, some clear trends and commonalities emerged.

On the following pages you'll discover:

- ✓ **The financial impact of the pandemic.** How deep were clinics' losses over 2020 / Q1 2021 - and what are the long-term financial implications?
- ✓ **Future plans.** What permanent changes are clinics making to their operations following the pandemic to secure their growth?
- ✓ **The silver lining.** Some clinics experienced unexpected benefits as a result of the closures - we reveal what they are.
- ✓ **How your peers changed their marketing.** Learn how other clinic owners have adjusted their marketing to the new market conditions, to gain a competitive advantage.
- ✓ **Changing patient demand.** Find out what treatments patients are requesting right now in other clinics - and how this has changed as a result of COVID.

...and more.

I hope you find the report useful - and if you enjoyed it, please let your peers know about it.

You can find the original page for the report here:  
<http://bit.ly/AestheticsAfterCOVID>

Warmly,



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# 1. The Financial Impact of COVID

We asked aesthetic clinic owners how badly their businesses were hit by the pandemic.

These were by definition the survivors - the clinics that were still in business a year into the pandemic, unlike many others. So it's likely that they entered the crisis relatively strong.

Still, a remarkably optimistic picture emerged.



"We're still down because we're only able to be open at 50% capacity right now, but we'll make it up quickly when we can open fully. It's just a holding pattern right now."

Allison Tray  
Founder, Tres Belle Petite  
Medi-Spa, New York

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**Of the 15 clinics, 6 said they were down year-on-year in 2020** - but all by less than 20%, and most by just a few percentage points.

The remainder said that any **losses made during closure were recouped** thanks to a surge in demand once they re-opened.

**Three grew year-on-year** and almost every clinic expected to grow significantly during 2021.

"During quarantine, my clients swooped in to support me. I'd see regular clients going to my website every month to buy a \$300 gift certificate. I called them and ask whether they were planning to give it to anyone because we were closed. They said they were buying it to tide me over. It was a beautiful gesture. The relationships I'd spent 17 years cultivating really paid off.

"We're still down because we're only able to be open at 50% capacity right now, but we'll make it up quickly when we can open fully. It's just a holding pattern right now."

-- Allison Tray, founder, [Tres Belle Petite Medi-Spa](#), New York

“Right before COVID happened we bought a brand new facility in Central Valley, and so we had to make a decision whether or not to build. We’d already hired people, so we decided to go ahead. We lost a lot of money on this and it was an enormous shock, but we wanted to provide dermatology care to an underserved area.

“But overall, we’re better off than last year because after the initial lockdown was lifted, we were able to perform both medical and cosmetic procedures which allowed us to get back to normal quickly.”

--Dr Hayes Gladstone, Owner, [The Gladstone Clinic](#), California

## 2. Non-Financial Impact of COVID

We asked clinic owners about the biggest impact COVID had on their business, other than financial.

A third of interviewees felt their **clinics had emerged from the pandemic stronger**, because the enforced closure gave them time to upskill, develop their marketing or improve their Standard Operating Procedures.

“I looked at it as the executive retreat no one wants but that you’re forced into. The closure gave me 2.5 months to re-assess my business, so we emerge from the crisis stronger. We developed a business plan and I also looked at my surgical skillset.



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“After years of growing word-of-mouth, we also used that time to launch our digital marketing program. Because we went from zero to a strong online presence, we saw tremendous growth when we re-opened.”

- Dr Philip Schoenfeld, Owner, [Renu by Dr Schoenfeld](#), Maryland

Another group felt that they **improved their relationship with patients** during the crisis.

“I communicated a lot during the shut-down through emails, video, social media, personal calls and even rescheduled people personally. That gained us a lot of confidence from patients. It made our relationship more intimate.

“Most people were only seeing a small collection of other people during the shut-down, and in lots of cases we were one of them. When they came in, they’d open up to us. It was emotional.”



- Dr Kate Dee, Founder, [Glow Medispa](#), Seattle

“We’ve always been very serious about health and safety, but during the pandemic we put even more protocols in place. It meant people trusted us.”

- Nuala Woulfe, Owner, [Nu Aesthetics Skin Clinic](#), Dublin

However, there were many negative consequences as well, most notably:

✓ **Increased administrative burden.**

Teams have been difficult to schedule during the pandemic, with staff members home-schooling their kids, testing positive for COVID or being forced to self-isolate. For similar reasons, some clinics experienced higher-than-usual patient cancellations.



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**Dr Kate Dee**  
Founder, Glow Medispa,  
Seattle

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✓ **Ongoing patient fear.** A sub-set of mainly older patients have been afraid to come into clinic even when legally possible, and some clinic owners fear that they may be lost forever.

✓ **Parts of the business remain weak.** Not all service lines have recovered equally or at the same pace. Several larger clinics lamented the fact that their aestheticians’ or medispa treatments remain slow compared to surgical or more invasive treatments. This may be because patients are avoiding repetitive treatments or are more cautious about face-to-face treatments.

Others noted that the balance of their business shifted during the pandemic towards more medical procedures, although they did not perceive this negatively.

Some clinic owners noted a significant **impact on their work/life balance** - in both directions:

“Once we re-opened, we slowly ramped up our patient volume, but not to the pre-pandemic levels. That was partially for safety reasons and partially by choice. I discovered that a calmer schedule suited me. I’m not going back to an overbooked schedule.”

- *Dr Jerome Potozkin, CEO, [Potozkin MD Skincare & Laser Center](#), California*

“I was fully booked, but since my aestheticians couldn’t offer all their services and some staff were furloughed, I had to take on more additional tasks. I would normally like more of a balance. During all that time I was forever grateful I could work, interact with other people face-to-face (even if virtual at times) and bring in more revenue while other businesses couldn’t, so I’m not complaining. But there was a lot of extra pressure on me.”

- *Dr Dev Patel, Medical Director, [Perfect Skin Solutions](#), UK*

The ‘**How I Scaled My Aesthetic Clinic**’ podcast features the world’s leading practice owners, talking about their path to success and revealing the tactics they used to grow their businesses.

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Host:  
MIRIAM  
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### 3. Ongoing Challenges for 2021

Even once clinics fully re-open, clinic owners expect to continue grappling with COVID-related issues throughout 2021.

#### Implementing safety measures is a given.

- ✓ Around a third of interviewees were actively planning for **the possibility of further shut-downs** and COVID outbreaks:

“We’re now seeing rebound spikes in Europe - will people let their guard down or refuse to get vaccinated? If more virulent strains emerge, will the economy shut down?”

“We’re keeping a large amount of cash reserves to cover expenses in case that happens, instead of taking it out as income. In the past, we’d also be looking at buying new devices, but right now we’re avoiding big capital expenditure because of the uncertain conditions.”

- Dr Jerome Potozkin, CEO, [Potozkin MD Skincare & Laser Center](#), California

- ✓ In some American states, clinic owners expect to continue to be **challenged by patients who refuse to wear masks** on premises, even when required.

This has become a contentious political issue which is straining relations between staff and patients and causing disruption in-clinic.



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- ✓ A handful of clinicians noted that patients were **concerned about adverse reactions to the COVID vaccine if they had dermal filler**, and expected that education around this subject would be a focus over the coming months.

One interviewee decided to pause all filler treatments until most patients were vaccinated, for this reason.

- ✓ In the UK, clinics are **planning for their re-opening** in April after several months of full or partial closure. They expected to be working through a significant patient backlog for at least several weeks, requiring careful management and possibly tough decisions about phasing in treatments and staff.

Looking further ahead, some expect the main challenge of 2021 to be **managing growth**:

“This is likely to be a year of fast growth, and it’s really forcing me to think about how to reshape my business without running myself into the ground. I’m rethinking where I want to focus, who I want to hire and who I’m going to train to do certain parts of my job that I no longer need to do, since my business is growing and my attention is required elsewhere. Growth comes with challenges.”

- Jessica Hutcheson, Medical Director, [Sandbanks Clinic](#), UK

## 4. How Clinics' Marketing Has Changed

The pandemic seems to have led to an increase in aesthetic marketing - at least amongst clinics who survived the crisis.

**Over half the clinic owners we interviewed stepped up their marketing** between March 2020 and March 2021.

Reasons include:

- ✓ **Patients needing more contact** during a difficult period
- ✓ Having **more time for marketing** during shut-downs
- ✓ Being **pushed to move online** because traditional offline methods were no longer available



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In some cases, clinics took the opportunity to launch an entirely new digital presence or to significantly grow the social media presence of individual companies in their practice.

This is a permanent change to the direction of their marketing, and makes the digital environment ever more competitive for clinics.

But clinic owners weren't just doing more - they also took the opportunity to experiment with formats they had never previously had time for, including TikTok, Clubhouse, live videos, podcasts and webinars.

A small number took the opposite approach, **winding down their marketing so as not to appear insensitive** during a healthcare and economic crisis:

"In weeks and months after the pandemic, we were more careful and cautious - we didn't want to seem like we were over-marketing while people were dying. We were subtle.

“We’ve gradually increased that and after the holiday season, our marketing is back to pre-pandemic type and quality.”

- Dr Elizabeth Rostan, Owner, [Charlotte Skin & Laser](#), NC

However, even those who increased their marketing presence tended to adjust their tone and content.

More than half of respondents said their **marketing has become much more personal** in the past year:

“I never really put my family on social media before. But during the pandemic, people liked that insight of what I was like when I was at home and had to build a basketball hoop with my five-year-old... People appreciate that you’re one of them and that you’re not in a bubble. There was also a lot of negativity in the media, and they loved hearing something different.



“I did some live sessions on Instagram and TikTok during the pandemic. People appreciated the raw content. You want to make sure you’re showing the reality, which is, ‘Hey, it’s been tough for everyone, but I’m a real person.’”

Dr Sean Paul  
Owner, Austin Face & Body,  
Texas

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“Similarly, I did some live sessions on Instagram and TikTok with different physicians and nurses in aesthetics. People appreciated the raw content. You want to make sure you’re showing the reality, which is, ‘Hey, it’s been tough for everyone, but I’m a real person.’”

- Dr Sean Paul, Owner, [Austin Face & Body](#), Texas

And across the board, there’s a **stronger focus on education, nurture and relationship-building**:

“My messaging changed. I would normally post about skin but I posted videos about the vaccine, Coronavirus, managing a sick child at home, mental health. I tried to keep up the emotional connection with my patients and wrote lots of e-shots personally. I got lots of responses saying that the emails really helped them during lockdown, because I was speaking from the heart.



“This is going to be a permanent change. We’re going to hire a second marketing person to help me process the material and keep the new feel once we re-open.”

- *Dr Dev Patel, Medical Director, [Perfect Skin Solutions](#), UK*

One clinic owner noted that **Coronavirus changed their entire selling process:**

“We used to participate in a lot of local community gatherings, parades, bridal shows and farmer’s markets. None of this exists anymore, so we’ve had to go 100% online. But these face-to-face events were good for moving patients forward - we could meet people, develop immediate trust and candor, and make educated recommendations in person.



“Without face-to-face events, our selling process has had to change. It means a longer educational process in the initial consultation.”

**Brandon Robinson**  
Owner, Skin Body Soul  
Spa chain, Iowa

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- *Brandon Robinson, Owner, [Skin Body Soul Spa](#) chain, Iowa*



Finally, while everyone increased their online presence, one clinic owner found an advantage by **going against the grain**:

“Our marketing plan has focused more on digital platforms as we always have, but we have used more direct mail such as postcards, which has really helped. This may be contrary to popular belief, but with people home more and with the high level of noise on social media platforms, the impact from a postcard was higher than we thought.”

- Dr Todd Schlesinger, Director, [Dermatology and Laser Center of Charleston](#), SC

## Discover the Aesthetic Immersion Marketing system

Just 4 factors separate aesthetic clinics with wildly successful marketing from the average Joes everywhere online.

These are the pillars of the Aesthetic Immersion Marketing system.

Visit [www.aesthetimmersionmarketing.com](http://www.aesthetimmersionmarketing.com)  
to find out what they are...

...and how they can turn your marketing from ‘okay’  
into an engine of growth for your practice



## 5. Treatments Patients Are Requesting Right Now

The type of treatments patients are requesting has changed during COVID.

Interviewees agreed overwhelmingly that **the “Zoom boom” or “Zoom bloom” is real.**

“People are staring at their faces on screen for hours on end during the work from home era. The mask cannot cover everything all the time - and people are coming out and socializing again. They want to ‘fix’ areas the mask has been covering up. There are also lots of people looking for work right now, and they want to look good. Our patients are tired of “Zoom Gloom” and ready to be taken care of so they look and feel good.”

- *Emily Tryon, Founder, [Esthetic Solutions](#), Scottsdale, Arizona*

More than half the interviewees have seen a big rise in facial rejuvenation treatments like laser resurfacing and injectables during this period. As one clinic owner put it: “Injectables are crushing it for us.”

However, this is a mixed picture. A significant minority noted that their injectable treatments were still flat or significantly slower to recover than other areas of their practice.



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**Emily Tryon**  
Founder, Esthetic  
Solutions, Scottsdale,  
Arizona

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A second notable trend is more **openness to treatments with downtime** - including surgery - because of remote working:



“People seem to be okay with surgery in a way they haven’t been in years. There’s a real boom in surgical practice, which has not been mirrored in our non-surgical practice yet.

“People are much more aggressive in terms of wanting long-lasting, permanent results without repetitive treatments and are willing to go further than before because they’re working from home and have time for it.

“I used to think that the barrier to entry was financial or fear, but this year we’ve discovered it’s recovery. If we can solve the downtime problem, diminish it even by a few days, this will continue to be a massive growth area.”

- *Dr James Marotta, Owner, [Marotta Plastic Surgery Specialists](#), New York*

Cosmetic surgeons have had another advantage during the pandemic:

“There’s still a fear of going into a hospital or surgery center environment. So patients can have a procedure under local anaesthesia in your office with a less surgical feel, and come in and head out on the same day, that’s helpful. With COVID, everyone’s spooked about going into a larger facility.”



“People want long-lasting, permanent results without repetitive treatments and are willing to go further than before because they’re working from home and have time for it”

**Dr James Marotta**  
Owner, Marotta Plastic Surgery Specialists, New York

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- *Dr Sean Paul, Owner, [Austin Face & Body](#), Texas*

Another impact of remote working? Aesthetic treatments have always been very seasonally variable, but now **some treatments have become popular all year round:**

“It used to be that patients would schedule treatments depending

on when they're on vacation. If I'm doing young adult rhinoplasty and my patients are in high school, summer was the hit month because that's when they had time to recover.

"Now we're seeing these all year - there's no difference between June and October. And people aren't waiting for summer vacation to do facelifts. They can do them any time.

"It's a lot more consistent for our cashflow. And the person who's benefited most is our patient coordinator, who doesn't have to schedule people 4 months out - she can just get people on the schedule."

- Dr Philip Schoenfeld, Owner, [Renu by Dr. Schoenfeld](#), Maryland

Whether these changes will embed long-term depends on the extent to which remote working remains common.

Michele Garber, the [NipTuck coach](#) who helps patients through the plastic surgery process, warns that "some people are feeling pressure to get things done now, because they're worried that their time working from home may be limited. As a result, they may be entering the surgical process without due consideration, proper research or being adequately prepared for the recovery.



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"They're being bombarded with confusing advertising material - the industry needs to slow down."

But meanwhile, the demand has not all been for more aggressive treatments. Clinic owners on opposite sides of the world have seen an opposite trend - **a move towards more low-key, nurturing, non-medical treatments.**

"People's worlds have been turned upside down. They are

stressed and want to come somewhere where they can feel safe and forget the outside world. They've also been cooped up - there are so many lonely people right now who have been separated from loved ones. They miss the human connection.

"They come in for long facials - we've incorporated a lot of massage - and we have a sauna, and they want that too. No one wants a production line - they want nurture, touch and good energy. It's a healing process."

- Yvette Hayes, Owner, [Pellis Medispa and Kallos Therapies](#), Sydney, Australia

"After the last lockdown, everyone wanted massages - anything involving relaxation. People wanted physical touch and nurturing, to feel good about themselves again after a hard time.

"Now wellness is becoming more important. During the current lockdown, people have had more of a chance to walk, exercise and eat more healthily. They're also hearing about the impact of negative health on COVID, and they're working on themselves to improve their health.

"We do nutrition, body therapy and holistic treatments through our day spa and that's something people want right now - in an environment where they feel safe and where they have access to experts."

- Nuala Woulfe, Owner, [Nu Aesthetics Skin Clinic](#), Dublin

Finally, some clinics deliberately pivoted their offerings during the pandemic towards **more medical treatments**, which were easier to offer during the shut-down.

So they are still seeing a rise in procedures like Botox for migraines and hormone treatments, possibly prompted by patients' stress during the pandemic and difficulty accessing general practice.



## 6. The Biggest Business Lessons for Clinic Owners

We asked clinic owners about the most significant business lesson they learned during the year of Coronavirus.

Three answers dominated:

- ✓ **Build financial reserves.** There was widespread agreement that clinics need an emergency fund:



"Our disaster plan includes a comms system, having paper documents at hand and the ability to protect valuable product from power outages. Failure to prepare is preparing to fail."

**Dr Todd Schlesinger**  
Director, Dermatology  
and Laser Center of  
Charleston, SC

"We try to keep 3 months of operating expenses to draw on in case of

disaster. It might be another shut-down but in Texas the power grid recently shut down - you don't know what might happen. We've built a financial cushion and have the ability to obtain funding, other practices need to think of this too."

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- *Dr James Marotta, Owner, [Marotta Plastic Surgery Specialists](#), New York*

"When the pandemic hit it was very stressful in the short-term but I knew that if I had to, I could be shut for a year and re-open because I had an emergency fund - just like in my personal life. A lot of medspas were highly leveraged to pay for expensive devices and when revenue stopped, they were in trouble. My business had no debt and that made all the difference."

- *Dr Jerome Potozkin, CEO, [Potozkin MD Skincare & Laser Center](#), California*

- ✓ **Write a disaster plan.** Preparing for unforeseen events is about more than cash:

"I live in an area prone to natural disasters such as hurricanes and flooding. So we have to be prepared. Our plan includes a communication system, teams of staff designated by critical level, having paper documents at hand if needed and the ability to protect valuable product from power outages. Failure to prepare is preparing to fail."

*Dr Todd Schlesinger, Director, [Dermatology and Laser Center of Charleston](#), SC*

- ✓ **Diversify your income streams.** When you offer different types of services, you're more likely to be able to keep income flowing in times of trouble:

"After the initial lockdown was lifted, we were able to perform both medical and cosmetic procedures which allowed us to get back to normal quickly. The diversity of the services we offered prevented us from closing the practice."



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**Dr Hayes Gladstone**  
Owner, The Gladstone  
Clinic, California

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- *Dr Hayes Gladstone, Owner, [The Gladstone Clinic](#), California*

Several clinic owners said that navigating the crisis successfully **cemented their identity as entrepreneurs:**

"When you're a doctor you're on salary - you're recession proof. As a business owner you're so vulnerable to everything. It made me realize I have the gumption to do it, to be scrappy..."

- *Dr Kate Dee, Founder, [Glow Medispa](#), Seattle*



Others learned that **every crisis contains opportunities**:

“Before COVID, I never had to pivot. When I was finally forced to, my business grew on an exponential trajectory. So while it’s a cliché, I’ve learned you can always turn lemons into lemonade.”

- *Dr Philip Schoenfeld, Owner, [Renu by Dr Schoenfeld](#), Maryland*

“I took the opportunity to grow our Scottsdale location! This time has allowed me to develop a different side to my business, to expand the company's consulting and training side and help other businesses that are struggling. I'm excited to open our training center coming this fall in Scottsdale.”



“When you’re growing, you need a plan. Make sure every decision is solid before you implement. If you grow too fast and don’t have the right infrastructure in place, it can fall apart really fast. So go slow and don’t wing it.”

Jessica Hutcheson  
Medical Director,  
Sandbanks Clinic, UK

- *Emily Tryon, founder, [Esthetic Solutions](#), Scottsdale, Arizona*

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Another common theme was **the power of relationships** - both with patients and with staff.

“It was our relationship with our clients which got us through the crisis. We’ve worked on building that for 17 years and when we needed it most, they helped pull us up. Nothing is more important than caring for your people - when you do, they’ll care for you back.”

-- *Allison Tray, Founder, [Tres Belle Petite Medi-Spa](#), New York*

“You need to be strong for your staff and clients, not get flustered by change and by disasters. When our staff saw that I didn’t seem to be bothered at the beginning of the crisis, it helped everyone get through it. And as a team, it brought us closer.

“When you’ve gone through that experience together, it makes you stronger. The atmosphere and culture at work is hugely important.”

- *Nuala Woulfe, Owner, [Nu Aesthetics Skin Clinic](#), Dublin*

Finally, a lesson most clinic owners never expected to learn at the beginning of the pandemic...

**Fast growth is good - but it has to be carefully managed:**

“When you’re growing, you need a plan. Take one step at a time, get a good HR person, triple-check all your contracts, make sure every decision is solid before you implement. If you grow too fast and don’t have the right infrastructure and support in place, it can fall apart really fast. So go slow and don’t wing it.”

- *Jessica Hutcheson, Medical Director, [Sandbanks Clinic](#), UK*

# About the authors

Miriam Shaviv and Danny Bermant are directors of Brainstorm Digital, which uses **Aesthetic Immersion Marketing** to keep aesthetic clinics and medspas fully booked with their most profitable treatments.

Since 2014, they have helped dozens of practices in the UK, US and Australia get their patients through their doors again and again, without the headache of costly online advertising.

Their podcast, "How I Scaled My Aesthetic Clinic," features high-performing owners of practices from all over the world, who share the strategies that allowed them to grow their businesses to soaring success.

Are you the founder, owner or medical director of a growing aesthetic practice or chain, who would like to discuss how the Aesthetic Immersion Marketing system can help your clinic?

Please email [miriam@brainstorm-digital.co.uk](mailto:miriam@brainstorm-digital.co.uk) or [danny@brainstorm-digital.co.uk](mailto:danny@brainstorm-digital.co.uk) and tell us a little about your practice.

We'll get right back to you.



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