The cost of technology has risen substantially in the last few years. Making smart decisions about adding technology to your practice is critical. Many dermatologists find this decision stressful as a wrong choice can be a burden to your practice for years to come. As dermatologists, we are bombarded with claims, some legitimate and some less so, of fabulous results and “returns on investment”. Technology companies are adept at selling and it is up to us to have the tools to decide the best choice for our practice.

This month we are curating tips from the WDS Practice Advisory Committee (PAC) on how to evaluate the best possible technology option for your practice and when to walk away. Once you have decided upon the “perfect” device, have an honest assessment of your practice and never be in a rush to purchase!

Understand your Clientele

No matter what the newest hottest device may be, do your own homework before starting to negotiate. Find out what your patients are looking for and what needs you cannot fulfill with your current offerings. Look at the competition in your area and the general pricing for that service. Do a proforma to make sure the demand is there to ensure you can pay off the device.

Also, new technology may make some of your current offerings obsolete. We often forget to factor in the loss of patients from currently performed procedures when considering adding new device.

**Clientele Questions to Consider**

- What are common aesthetic concerns in your practice? Will the new device address them?
- What is your clientele's price point for a laser procedure?
- How many treatments do you anticipate a month realistically?
- What kind of downtime can your patients tolerate?
- What impact will this have on current offerings?

Understand your Options

Don't get too excited and buy into a new device as soon as it hits the market. Wait and get feedback from your colleagues about their real life experiences with the device before making a decision on a big purchase and explore many options. Consider how the new technology will be used including the space and time the procedure will require, who will be using the new device, and if you will have staff training or hiring needs.
Try before you buy. See what it is like to actually operate the device, from the ergonomics to the software. Since you will hopefully be using this device for many years, make sure you find it comfortable to use and that it is “user friendly”. Make sure that you can replicate the great results in the sales brochure with your own hands. See how the device is used in the real world.

You can speak with your local laser company managers to see if you can have a treatment yourself with a device of interest, or see how a treatment is done by a colleague. These one-on-one live demonstrations can give a better sense of how a device delivers, and add to the informed decision for a purchase.

**Option Questions to Consider**

- Is the device comfortable to use and “user friendly”?
- Can you receive a one-on-one live demonstration?
- How much space and time will this procedure need? Who will be doing it?
- Can your staff be readily trained to operate the device or assist you? Do you need to hire new staff?
- Do you have the physical space and electrical requirements for the device?

**Understand the Nitty Gritty**

Do your own calculations for return on investment (ROI) to see if the numbers make sense. Don’t rely on the company’s analysis. Check with your colleagues to see what price they got the device for and consider how the device will be included in your long term budget including any hidden costs.

Lasers, like cars, lose much of their value as soon as they are used. Sometimes an older used item can fulfill a need in the practice. Think about your overall budget for technology and what you are looking to build for your practice over the next 5 years. This can help you put each purchase into perspective.

Consider purchasing your device with an AMEX platinum card (NFI), as it may double your warranty. When they were used to fix an 18 month old laser, they were easy and a pleasure to work with. Also, know that if you are in an academic setting, it will likely be about a year for purchase to being able to use. Plan ahead!

**Nitty Gritty Questions to Consider**

- Does the device require consumables? What are the ongoing costs and how are they sold?
- How long is the warranty and what is covered? Are there additional costs to keep the device under warranty or a repair contract?
- How long does it take for repairs? (All devices will need one at some point.)
- When is the next generation due to come out?
- Are there any restrictions in the contract regarding resale of the device should you choose to sell it later? How much is a recertification fee?