

IN-STORE

## Sephora blends mobile with bricks-and-mortar for first connected boutique

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*The Paris-based Sephora Flash connected boutique*

By [Alex Samuely](#)

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LVMH-owned Sephora's newest retail concept is a bricks-and-mortar connected boutique that creates a disruptive shopping experience via interactive in-store tablets, phone-charging stations and a selfie mirror.

The beauty giant has rolled out its first Sephora Flash boutique in Paris as it ramps up to reach the pinnacle of customer experience via a mobile-connected design. While it still offers its vast array of cosmetic products, the store is also equipped with a digital catalog and discovery tablets to help shoppers explore coveted beauty looks and experiment with new products.

"[Bridging the gap between bricks-and-mortar and digital is] important for all different types of retailers, but most especially for category killers like Sephora," said Steve Rowen, managing partner at [Retail Systems Research](#), Miami. "People might buy/replenish cosmetics from Amazon, but not without trying them first.

"So Sephora's going to get them in the store - at least once," he said. "The goal, of course, is not to make just one sale.

"So the more digital content and inventory you can access right there - all the better. But if you can make the in-store experience good enough to shun online replenishment, well, that's how you keep shoppers coming back."

### Bridging the gap

The Sephora Flash boutique is blending digital with beauty, proving the brand's dedication to improving shopping experiences and blurring the lines between bricks-and-mortar and mobile. The premier Flash store was unveiled at 66, rue de Rivoli in Paris last week, preceding a slew of connected boutiques that are set to launch worldwide in the future.

Consumers who stop in to the Sephora Flash store will be able to shop the usual collection of makeup the retailer offers, in addition to a digital catalog featuring more than 14,000 items from approximately 150 beauty marketers.

If shoppers cannot locate a desired product, they may virtually add it to their digital basket, which is represented by a digital tag. This way, consumers can shop with both physical and digital baskets, enabling them to pick up any cosmetics they need from Sephora, a move that will likely prevent customers from visiting a competitor.

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*Customers may scan NFC tags to learn more about specific perfumes*

Perfume fans may opt to test out the in-store discovery tablets, which allow individuals to explore fragrances from established brands such as Tom Ford and Serge Lutens. The perfume testers have been digitized, meaning that shoppers can pick up a Near Field Communication tag for their desired scent and scan it on a nearby screen to receive more information about the item.

If they are interested in purchasing the fragrance, they may add it to their digital basket.

Customers can pay for both their digital and physical purchases at the counter, eliminating the need to go online and pay extra shipping fees. However, shoppers may choose to have their digitally-bought products delivered to their doorstep, or pick them up in-store.

Additionally, the Sephora Flash boutique offers a large selfie mirror. Consumers can snap photos of themselves while trying on new items, and then disperse them across social media.

A mobile phone charger is also available on-site, suggesting that more retailers should begin equipping their stores with charging stations to provide a valuable service to visitors. This could also prompt other passersby to pop in for a few minutes and charge their devices while browsing inventory they had previously not been seeking out.

"I think they'll love it," Mr. Rowen said. "I can easily see how the fun factor in creating new looks amplifies as a result, and I imagine customer feedback will be very positive."

Pioneering connected experiences

Sephora is cementing its status as a digital pioneer with the Flash boutique rollout, potentially paving the way for other marketers to brainstorm ways of marrying mobile with the bricks-and-mortar experience to best serve customers.

Connected boutiques may also be a smart idea for brands with smaller amounts of in-store inventory. The presence of NFC tags and digital baskets will enable shoppers to still make purchases on premises, but choose from a larger variety of options without needing to worry about shipping charges.

Sephora Flash is not the only innovation the brand has introduced in the past few months.

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*The store is manned with tablets to augment the cosmetics discovery process*

Recently, Sephora has taken to Snapchat to announce the availability of Urban Decay's Gwen Stefani eye shadow palette, leveraging the messaging application's recent introduction of innovative new filters and jumping in on a trending topic on social media ([see story](#)).

The retailer is also betting mobile can help it compete in the subscription services space, with plans to include mobile offers, Spotify playlists and codes for accessing content via smartphones when it starts rolling out beauty boxes this fall ([see story](#)).

"This is what the future looks like - bringing digital excitement into the store," Mr. Rowen said. "It will be table stakes before you know it."

### **Final Take**

*Alex Samuely, staff writer on Mobile Commerce Daily, New York*

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