

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

## Sephora wields AI for new wave shopping experiences, innovating in personalization

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*Image courtesy of LVMH's Sephora*

By [Rakin Azfar for Mobile Commerce Daily](#)

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LVMH-owned beauty retailer Sephora is taking a huge step in ecommerce innovation by rolling out an artificial-intelligence-based application that helps consumers find specific shades by simply uploading a photo.

The platform, the product of a partnership with facial analysis and visualization technology firm ModiFace, will likely have far reaching consequences outside of the beauty industry. The technology will be an organic ancillary to Sephora's online buying process and will encourage transactions by allowing the consumer to visualize product benefits post-transaction.

"We have been working with Sephora and other beauty brands for almost a decade now," said Parham Aarabi, CEO of [ModiFace](#). "The problem of product discovery has been a substantial problem, which can be addressed partially with augmented reality based try-on.

"However, using AI to actually match shades and recommend products before trying is a key step. We have been working on this for almost 5 years now, but we felt that the technology was finally accurate enough for large-scale deployment."

### Augmented reality

The application uses ModiFace's facial recognition and visualization technology to allow Sephora's customers to upload a photo in Facebook Messenger while in conversation with the Sephora Visual Artist. The technology then automatically recognizes the most compatible shade and recommends actual products in Sephora's inventory through the use of an AI engine.

The platform provides a visualization of the user's photo wearing the Sephora product, giving them an idea of how the product will look without having to rely on the arbitrariness of the consumer's imagination. The development will help Sephora and could help other retailers mitigate some of the precariousness in driving online shopping transactions.

"What we are finding is that people are using this technology for exploration," Mr. Aarabi said. "For example, they have a dress to which they want to find the exact same lipstick shade, or they find a product in store which they would like to match to see similar shades from other brands.

"It is quite universal in utility, and the amount of usage and the level of engagement is definitely indicating this."

sephora-chatbot-01



*An overview of the ModiFace technology*

For those interested in trying out Sephora's new platform, send a message with the words "Color Match" to the [Sephora Visual Artist](#).

Driving transactions

The implementation of the Sephora Visual Artist platform signifies two elements of brand strategy: an adroit psychological maneuver to replicate an aspect of the bricks-and-mortar experience, one which is sorely missed by consumers who shop online, and a recognition by Sephora of the environs where its target demographic is located.

The decision to host the technology on Facebook Messenger, which has an overwhelming mobile quotient, is also telling. Interactive platforms leveraging AI mimic the kinds of online behavior that Sephora's market engages in, such as mobile messaging and social media.

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*The AI platform is an attempt to recreate the in-store experience online*

The partnership with ModiFace is the latest chapter in a period of innovation for Sephora. Earlier this month, it natively blended its ads into the flow of magazine and blog content ahead of its holiday sales event within the application Flipboard, which is known to keep in line with the beauty retailer's audience ([see story](#)).

And the beauty retailer will soon expand its complimentary Classes for Confidence program to more than 85 Sephora stores nationwide, partnering with various non-profit organizations to help spread a message of attainable workplace beauty and confidence ([see story](#)).

"As long as you have and constantly use the Messenger app which has almost one billion daily users there is no friction to use our technology, Mr. Aarabi said. "You simply send a photo to Sephora Virtual Artist and magically, it

tells you the shade matching to the object in the photo, which you can try on and purchase right there.

"It is a very low-friction and straightforward process."

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