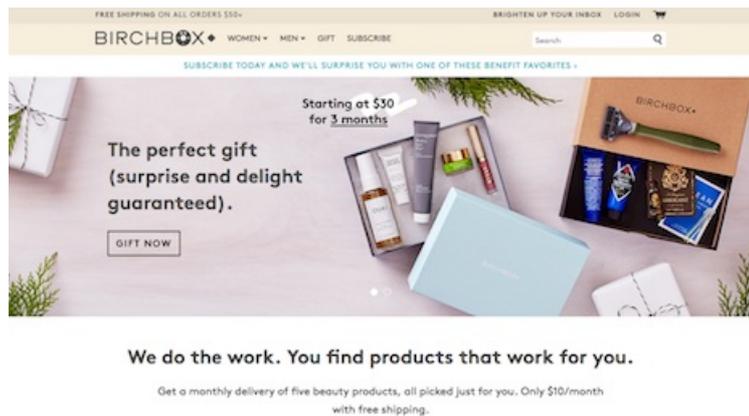


COLUMNS

## Dressing up the ecommerce experience for beauty enthusiasts

November 23, 2016



*Beauty in the hands of the beholder*

By **Garrett Eastham**

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Just a few years ago ecommerce was not a real shopping option for beauty customers who typically used online stores as a tool for price comparisons before visiting a physical store.

Now, ecommerce is becoming a major force in the beauty industry, representing 6 percent to 8 percent of total sales with steady growth projected, according to A.T. Kearney.

The rapid rise in ecommerce for beauty provides new opportunities for consumer engagement beyond the transaction itself.

Beauty enthusiasts are using online channels to discover new brands, uncover price points and read reviews. The key to converting these enthusiasts, however, is creating a seamless experience between the physical store and the online experience.

In other words, retailers must offer ecommerce experiences that help shoppers experiment, learn and find the exact beauty product they want.

What are beauty shoppers looking for?

Beauty buyers are constantly on the hunt for the latest and greatest cosmetics, and they are 100 percent open to trying both luxury and drugstore brands, according to Women's Marketing and Seurat Group.

In fact, many beauty shoppers are not committed to one brand with so many options available to try. They want, and love, to experiment.

Google's report, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Digital Behaviors of Beauty Shoppers," revealed that 27 percent of shoppers are trying completely new products and nine out of 10 are open to trying something totally new.

Additionally, 40 percent of these experimenters are heading to online stores to find new products to try. That means that ecommerce stores need to connect shoppers with the new products that they are itching to try.

By offering curated campaigns throughout the Web site which feature new lines, trending styles and colors for the

season or inspirational ideas, shoppers are more likely to find things they love and want to buy.

Beauty shoppers are also actively seeking to learn more about what they are buying, including where it comes from, how it works and what it feels like.

According to Women's Marketing and Seurat Group, 46 percent of beauty shoppers are totally uninformed and 55 percent are actively seeking product information. Plus, 30 percent of beauty shoppers buy based on specific benefits listed on the site, as found by Google.

To help shoppers learn more, ecommerce sites should offer carefully curated collections with detailed product data that shares a variety of information about each product.

Plus, retailers need to develop on-site search that properly reflects shoppers' language and shows relevant products.

After all, search is the number one source for beauty enthusiasts using ecommerce sites, according to Google.

How retailers can "make up" in-store experiences in the online store

The path-to-purchase is just as much of a priority for shoppers as the products on the digital shelf.

It is simply not enough to have a good experience that inspires a purchase. Retailers need to help shoppers feel confident at every stage of the buying process.

To build that confidence, retailers can find inspiration in knowledgeable store associates, and replicate that same level of service and knowledge online. To do so, retailers can leverage rich product data.

Product data is the backbone of curated campaigns, comprehensive search and detailed product information.

Logistically, product data includes detailed product "tags" that correspond to a retailer's "categories," allowing shoppers to search for a product that fits their needs, such as "daytime pink lipstick" or "anti-aging moisturizer for sensitive skin."

Most retailers have extremely simplified product data already embedded in their site, but it is often limited to standard attribution such as price, brand or color.

To help shoppers find the right products through search and discovery, product data must replicate the depth, breadth and customer-centric vocabulary of the all-knowing in-store sales associate.

By extending the detail of product data, retailers can help shoppers find relevant results in their search, narrow down large catalogs and experiment with new products, feeling confident and excited about every purchase.

IN THE ultra-competitive beauty marketplace, online retailers who successfully educate and delight their shoppers will be rewarded with increased conversion rates and customer loyalty.

After all, the shopper who finds products to accentuate her natural beauty will come back again and again.



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