

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Beauty facing omnichannel opportunity as shoppers blend in-store, online

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Consumers are able to discover beauty products more easily online. Image credit: Lancme

By SARAH JONES

While a significant portion of the customer journey in the beauty category has migrated to digital channels, the bricks-and-mortar environment remains key for both exploration and conversion, with 65 percent of discovery happening in store.

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According to a survey conducted by Accenture for Facebook, younger shoppers between the ages of 18 and 34 are the most apt to have found a new beauty product online, with almost half of these respondents saying they have discovered makeup via mobile. As beauty brands seek to make it easier for consumers to try out and find cosmetics and skincare virtually, an approach that blends channels allows marketers to reach shoppers across their purchase path.

"Although online and mobile platforms are helping beauty shoppers discover and evaluate new brands and products, people are still purchasing in-person," said Ann Mack, director of insights marketing at Facebook. "This new research found that 79 percent of makeup and facial skincare consumers have made in-store purchases in the previous three months.

"The main reasons consumers continue purchasing offline is that they don't want to pay for shipping, they don't want to wait for delivery and they want to touch before buying," she said. "Brands and marketers must understand how to remove some of these barriers through to point of purchase, and one of the solutions is to bring the in-store experience online."

For the Facebook-commissioned research, Accenture surveyed 1,682 U.S. consumers 18 and older who had purchased makeup and skincare in the three months prior to July.

Purchase path

Across respondents from all age groups, finding new beauty products online is fairly common, with 46 percent saying they have uncovered new cosmetics on desktop. Mobile is less commonly used, with a third of respondents having used their phones or tablets to find makeup.

Cosmetics are also more commonly discovered digitally compared to skincare.

About four in 10 shoppers use a Facebook-owned platform to find new makeup products and skincare. This rises to about half for those aged 18 to 34.

These shoppers use Instagram to follow beauty brands and save ideas. They also engage with their friends' content on Facebook and watch tutorials.

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A post shared by CHANEL BEAUTY (@chanel.beauty) on Oct 7, 2018 at 9:17am PDT

Instagram post from Chanel Beauty

Fifty-three percent of younger makeup consumers are apt to purchase based on what they see on social media, opening the door for labels to connect inspiration and commerce.

Beyond serving as a tool for discovery, digital channels are seen as tools for research. Whereas shoppers used to need to visit stores to find out more about a particular formula or receive a product demonstration, today they can glean information from brand videos and Web sites.

Technology such as augmented reality also allows shoppers to get an idea for how cosmetics will look on them

from the comfort of their own homes ([see story](#)).

Mobile in particular plays a role in the customer journey, with about a quarter of makeup shoppers saying that the channel plays a part in their decision to buy. This is even greater for those who actually buy beauty via mobile devices, with 38 percent of these shoppers saying it is the most important channel for assessing products.

However, the majority of shoppers still say they turn to stores to evaluate new products, with 61 percent of makeup buyers and 55 percent of skincare shoppers seeking out bricks-and-mortar guidance.

Younger shoppers tend to favor a more digitally-driven purchase path. About half have bought makeup online, compared to 41 percent of all makeup shoppers.



Younger consumers are more apt to buy beauty online. Image credit: Este Lauder

Barriers such as shipping costs and the wait time for delivery turn consumers away from online beauty buying. Some also report wanting to be able to touch a product before purchasing.

"Even before heading to stores, people browse, discover and research what to buy using their mobile devices," Ms. Mack said. "That's why it is critical today that beauty brands build a mobile-first experience.

"In fact, according to a study we conducted last year, 'mobile-first researchers' people who say they do the majority of their research on mobile devices grew by 14 percent, and 'mobile-first shoppers' people who say they do the majority of their shopping on mobile devices grew by 20 percent from 2016 to 2017," she said. "Especially among those consumers ages 18 to 34, many are condensing the entire path to purchase into an online experience on their mobile and tablet devices.

"To reach consumers, brands should invest in mobile-first beauty experiences. We've seen brands have great success in creating immersive experiences in which shoppers can try on, shop for and share products. Many businesses are also experimenting with virtual reality where people can apply makeup from home to see how it looks before purchasing."

Digital discovery

Social media is creating communities around beauty brands. Beauty marketers are known as some of the most innovative content creators in the field, but brands such as Chanel, Dior and Shiseido are exhibiting how to instead pull content from the users that love them so much.

User-generated content can establish significant trust with consumers, creating a more personal touch and a strong connection from peer-to-peer recommendations. Beauty brands have a well of endless UGC on Instagram, more so than most other sectors, as these fans are highly interactive, especially on the photo-centric application ([see story](#)).

While it has to a degree been easier to portray the attributes or formula of color cosmetics via digital channels, skincare labels are finding ways to use storytelling to their advantage.

For instance, Este Lauder Cos.' Crme de la Mer is playfully presenting the hydrating benefits of its new mask through a series that takes the typically private skincare treatment out in public.

"The La Mer Dare" series shows actress sisters Sara and Erin Foster challenge each other to wear the brand's Treatment Lotion Hydrating Mask while partaking in everyday tasks, to humorous effect. Streaming on Instagram's IGTV, the videos explain the promised rejuvenating benefits of the mask in an entertaining format ([see story](#)).

"To better connect with shoppers, beauty brands should experiment with mobile-friendly and visual ads formats like

video and stories to help them bring their products to life," Ms. Mack said.

"In addition, its critical for brands to create a one-on-one dialogue with their consumer," she said. "People's expectations for communicating with each other are fundamentally transforming the way they expect to communicate with businesses.

"People are turning to messaging when they want a brand's guidance, when they seek a more streamlined shopping experience, and of course when they want to signal that they are open to important updates. Beauty brands should take note and embrace messaging as a way to connect with consumers online, before they reach stores."

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