

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Technology, social data can pave forward path for luxury beauty

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Optune is a subscription-based brand that uses IoT. Image courtesy of Shiseido

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As the beauty sector has become increasingly fragmented and consumers grow more adept at making quick decisions, brands and marketers should harness technology to better connect with shoppers.

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During Ipsos' webinar "The Future of Beauty: Thriving Across the Consumer Decision Journey" on Sept. 9, experts reiterated that today's shopping rituals have rapidly evolved. Consumer opinions can also change drastically on shorter timeframes, so it is important that brands keep a pulse on what resonates with shoppers.

"You need to use social data and business intelligence to stay ahead," said Emily Sobol, vice president of social intelligence at Ipsos. "Social data can map the landscape."

Tech touch

It is essential that personal care and cosmetics labels, particularly those in the prestige and luxury space, stay informed on what consumers are saying and sharing on social media about their brand.

Often, a brand's own messaging will shape consumers' perspectives, according to Ms. Sobol. Opinions can catch on quickly on social media, so clarity in branding is important.

More than 90 percent of consumers trust their peers online more than companies or institutions. Shoppers can discover new-to-them brands on social media or research trending ingredients such as argan oil and acai berries.

"Shopping has become a social but private engagement," said Allison Chaltas, global president of shopper and retail at Ipsos.

Ms. Chaltas noted that while more consumers are asking peers for feedback, online beauty purchases continue to grow.

With more direct-to-consumer brands, such as Kylie Cosmetics and Colourpop, competition for space in shoppers' bathroom cabinets, social awareness and innovative technology can help more established brands stand out.

For instance, a growing number of beauty brands are promoting environmental consciousness by encouraging in-

store recycling or incorporating more sustainable packaging, including reusable glass containers.

Increased variety also means consumers can find more brands that cater to their needs, such as Fenty Beauty that has a wider selection of skin tone options than most luxury beauty collections. As a result of this variety, personalization options enhanced by technology are also gaining steam.

New York-based startup Mink is now selling a portable 3D printer to consumers, enabling them to take any photo and turn it into wearable cosmetics, positioning itself as an "endless beauty aisle." With the proliferation of beauty imagery thanks to social media, Mink is putting cosmetic creation at consumers' fingertips, potentially disrupting the traditional path to purchase in the category ([see story](#)).

Japanese beauty group Shiseido is using technology to deliver tailored skincare to consumers through a brand that is solely available via subscription.

Dubbed Optune, the brand's skincare system is powered by a mobile application, which analyzes a consumer's skin and the conditions in his or her area to blend customized products. Playing into the growing subscription beauty business, Optune will be sold on a monthly basis ([see story](#)).

Shopping channels

Cosmetics companies also need to be cognizant of omnichannel consumers, as more shopping journeys are completed through both on- and offline channels.

Brands should test both virtual and in-store environments together, according to Ms. Chaltas.

There is ample opportunity in this regard since major ecommerce players, including Amazon, have yet to create meaningful and seamless user experiences in the beauty space.

As in fashion retail, beauty brands should also incorporate more experiential offerings into their bricks-and-mortar footprint keeping in mind their more limited real estate.

Department stores are also changing their approach to beauty retail, choosing to incorporate more experiential tactics.

For instance, Bloomingdale's is capitalizing on the growing popularity of high-end cosmetics by unveiling a remodeled beauty floor at its New York flagship. The refreshed beauty department has spa rooms, a fragrance hall, interactive displays and other services meant to entice in-store shoppers ([see story](#)).