

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

## Sephora odes achievement against all odds for Black History Month

February 13, 2023



*A new series spotlights entrepreneurial efforts in the beauty space, starting with a profile of the powerhouse talent behind the skincare line Topicals. Image credit: Sephora*

By AMIRAH KEATON

LVMH-owned beauty retailer Sephora is uplifting one of the fastest-growing demographic groups of entrepreneurs nationwide.

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According to the Harvard Business Review, nearly one in every five Black women based in the U.S. are in the process of starting or running a new business. The cosmetics authority is unveiling "Why I Made This," a digital series that highlights just a few who have chosen to embark upon this path, having landed their creations on the shelves of Sephora in the process.

Tapping beauty talent

In light of Black History Month, new content from Sephora captures the stories of a group of go-getters.

Up first, beauty business owner Olamide Olowe stars in episode one of the series, bringing audiences behind the scenes for a glimpse at how her masterpiece was born.

*Sephora's first "Why I Made This" episode stars Topicals founder and CEO Olamide Olowe*

Kicking off the excerpt, Ms. Olowe explains that a lifetime of flare-ups caused by sensitive skin, and a lack of proper treatment options, led to the modern-day skincare solutions brand Topicals.

"My journey starts growing up with a ton of chronic skin conditions, things like ingrown hairs and [excess] oils really made me feel like an outsider," says Ms. Olowe, for Sephora's "Why I Made This."

"I was using a lot of things that were prescribed by a doctor or things that were super harsh and abrasive on the skin," she says. "[I was using] a lot of ingredients and products that were tried and true in terms of their efficacy but maybe not as gentle on a skin tone like my own or even skin types."

"I often was solving one issue and then causing another one with a lot of the products I was using growing up."

Deeply personal in nature, Ms. Olowe describes identifying whitespace within skincare non-fragrant products for

people with chronic skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis did not seem to exist before making moves to fill the gap by founding Topicals.

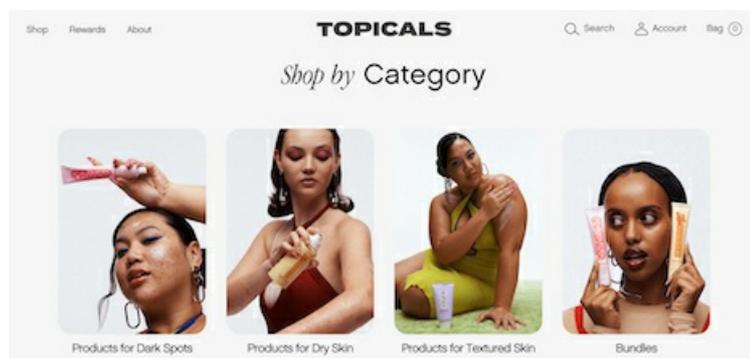
"The name 'Topicals' has both an emotional definition and a functional definition,"

"The functional definition of topicals is literally products that are applied to your skin," she says. "The emotional definition is about being topical' being top of mind, being urgent we really wanted to make our brand something that people really wanted to know about."

Mid-video, viewers watch as Ms. Olowe visits a skincare lab in New Jersey to test out new formulations for her line. Sephora's selection showcases how closely the founder works with those behind the scenes to achieve her desired impact.

"When I was first starting my brand I knew that I wanted to make products that were targeted Solutions, so I wanted them to be jam-packed with ingredients that were efficacious but also great for sensitive skin types and for all skin tones," Ms. Olowe says.

"I wanted them to understand that we care deeply about science but I also wanted it to be about fun."



*Topicals' "Faded," "Like Butter" and "Slather" lotions and sprays are seen here. Image credit: Topicals*

Topicals launched with two mainstays "Faded" tackles hyperpigmentation and dark spots, while the second, "Like Butter," acts as a fast-absorbing hydrating mask. Three years and a number of products later, Topicals continues to address chronic skin conditions with science-backed formulas that stake their claim in a gentle-yet-effective approach.

The female force behind Topicals credits prior experience in the premed track as the source of her familiarity with the acids and actives at play.

Ms. Olowe wears many hats, per Sephora's hit in its final frames, the video progresses to a brand design meeting set in New York City.

She speaks to the importance of Topicals' cool, contemporary branding as a direct challenge to packaging typical of ointment products.

"People loved that it was bright, they loved that we chose logos that were fun," Ms. Olowe says.

"It felt like I was providing a product, a solution and an experience for a community that had felt left out of the beauty industry for so long."

Sephora supports

Between helping one of Sephora's most lucrative skincare brands to date, and accepting admittance into America's fast-growing entrepreneurial sector, Sephora's starter appears destined for greatness. In telling her story, however, the retailer uses its platform to call attention to an alarming disparity.

Prior to Topicals' 2020 founding, Ms. Olowe's vision would be slow to attract the attention of various funding forces.

"It took me two years to raise capital," Ms. Olowe says.

"I think that there is this disparity in the venture capital community where Black women specifically are raising less than one percent," she says. "It was a very difficult journey because a lot of the investors didn't understand my own background."

"We need more stories like mine [and] women with my background, from my community because there is a world of problems waiting for solutions and the people who are going to build the solutions are the people who have been

through those problems."



*Shown on shelves at Sephora, one Topicals product sold every minute in 2022. Image credit: Sephora*

New York City-based early-stage venture capital firm Lerer Hippeau was one of the first to take the leap. Notable figures, from American actress and producer Issa Rae and marketing executive Bozoma Saint John to Silicon Valley CEOs in charge of direct-to-consumer disrupters like Allbirds, Bombas, Casper and Warby Parker, would soon follow.

Initial investments would go on to see vast payoffs. In the few short years since its establishment, the brand inked a deal with Sephora, quickly climbing the retailer's ranks.

What began as a digital deal in October 2020 would transition into a shift in-store in March 2021. Products subsequently sold out in 48 hours.

Today, the Los Angeles-based operation is now Sephora's fastest-growing skincare brand. One Topicals product sold every single **minute** in 2022.

The retailer's latest campaign and existing programming are evidence of the power to be found in fostering leaders atypical within the beauty industry.

Years before this campaign would surface, Ms. Olowe found her footing as a member of Sephora Accelerate ([see story](#)).

*Ms. Olowe found her footing as a member of Sephora Accelerate's class of 2021*

The program offers a curriculum centered on mentorship and merchandising support to help participants make connections with investors and potential funders.

In addition, representation of Black creators and contributors to the beauty industry is heralded across the board, on display per previous initiatives such as Sephora's "Black Beauty Is Beauty" campaign ([see story](#)).

As Sephora spotlights the beauty behind one of the company's most successful starters in honor of the February observance, its programs appear to pave the way for other Black women entrepreneurs to shine.

"I made it my mission to serve people who look like me and to serve all communities who had skin conditions that were left out of the general conversation," Ms. Olowe says.

"Now, we are now available in over 500 Sephora stores in the United States and Canada."