

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

## Este Lauder Cos. pushes accessible beauty at SXSW 2023

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*Chris Aidan spoke about the future of accessible beauty at SXSW 2023 in Austin, TX. Image credit: Este Lauder Companies*

By KAYSORIN

AUSTIN, TX U.S. beauty group Este Lauder Companies is changing the way people think about beauty and accessibility through use of new technology and innovative philanthropy.

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The future of beauty is for everyone, both in the real world and in the virtual world, said Chris Aidan, vice president of innovation and emerging technologies at Este Lauder Companies, in a presentation a few days ago at SXSW 2023.

"We came up with this bold ambition of becoming the most accessible beauty company on the planet," he said.

### Technology for good

Mr. Aidan shared his findings on accessible beauty and the progress that Este Lauder Cos. has made during a discussion at SXSW 2023 titled, "Hacking Beauty for Accessibility." He spoke about his team's efforts to optimize the lives of those with different abilities, making luxury beauty more accessible to all.

According to the World Health Organization, 1.3 billion consumers live with a disability that impacts their daily lives, which is around 16 percent of the world's population.

Despite these numbers, consumers with disabilities have largely been ignored by the beauty industry. This is a missed opportunity for the industry, as consumers with disabilities hold billions in spending power.

Beauty companies have an obligation to think holistically about accessibility and produce products that take different abilities into consideration.

"For us this process really started with thinking about how do people with low vision, [or] no vision, use our products and what is their relationship with them," Mr. Aidan said.

### Empowering independence

During the presentation, Mr. Aidan shared examples of projects and ideas generated during Este Lauder Cos.' annual hackathons. One of the most interesting products that came out of the 2019 hackathon is called VMA, or Voice-enabled Makeup Assistant.

VMA helps guide visually impaired consumers through the journey of applying products. It uses artificial intelligence, machine learning and augmented reality to provide feedback on whether products have been properly applied and if the coverage is good and symmetrical.

While originally designed for those with visual impairments, VMA has been popular with other consumers as well.

Mr. Aidan highlighted how many people struggle with shaky hands as they age, and how they can also benefit from the VMA technology.

VMA is currently available in the United Kingdom and later this year is slated to expand into other markets, including the United States. It will also expand to the Android mobile operating system.

"I hope this is the first of many technologies that we release in this space," Mr. Aidan said.

#### More inclusive future

In addition to the work that Este Lauder Cos. has done during its hackathons, the company also hosts an annual IT day of service that allows its employees to volunteer for various causes. Este Lauder Cos., per its mandate, seeks to infuse social good into its culture at all levels.

Este Lauder Cos. also hosts Tech Day of Pink on the second Thursday of every October that focuses on solutions to breast cancer. Tech Day of Pink has been adopted by other large tech companies that have followed Este Lauder Cos.' lead.

A recent product that was developed at Tech Day of Pink was a squishy ball with a QR code that simulates what a cancerous lump in the breast would feel like. The QR code provides information on how to get checked for breast cancer.

Mr. Aidan emphasized how not all solutions are high tech. What is important is that brands should continue developing new ideas and accessible products.