

MULTICHANNEL

Sephora strives for personalization via multichannel mcommerce push

April 12, 2012

□

By TRICIA CARR

Sephora is strengthening its position in the mobile space by not only revamping the company's mobile site and iPhone application for a better consumer experience, but also deploying more in-store iPad kiosks to drive sales.



Sephora unveiled its new personalized Web site, mobile site and iPhone app yesterday as it continues to prove that it is staying on trend with numerous technology enhancements. The company is also integrating Pinterest into its overall efforts to drive consumer engagement.

"Our goal is to make beauty fun and exciting for our customers," said Julie Bornstein, senior vice president of Sephora Digital, Pittsburgh. "We're constantly looking at new technologies and ways to improve the shopping experience – it's all about making shopping easier, better, and more enjoyable.

"Our new online and mobile strategy lets us connect customers with products they want, and helps them to discover new one, too," she said.

"We were one of the very first retail brands to have a Web presence, and these new digital and social tools are allowing us to make the customer experience even better, whether shopping from one of our thousands of stores or from the couch using an iPhone or iPad."

Sephora operates more than 300 stores in the United States and Canada.

Branding Brand powers Sephora's mobile offerings.

Mobile makeover

The Sephora enhancements include a new personalized Web experience, a new mobile

site and iPhone app.

Sephora's new Web site and mobile offerings now offer a targeted product search in the beauty category.

For example, each product on Sephora.com has been tagged and indexed with 25 different characteristics – from relevant data such as target age group, to specific ingredients, formulations, fragrance and price.

The new functionality lets consumers find the right product quicker.

Additionally, the makeover includes 80,000 additional images, product quick-views, more color views and time-saving checkout.

Sephora is also testing iPad devices in its store locations.

Currently, 20 stores in the U.S. have been outfitted with iPads to give consumers another way to navigate the company's mass selection of products.

Via the iPad devices, users can also interact with a menu of services offered at the Beauty Studio.

In addition, Sephora is also distributing an iPod Touch to let sales associates help clients find and research products through the Sephora app.

"We're bridging the online and offline worlds, and the iPads are another tool that lets customers get the best of both," Ms. Bornstein said. "The iPad gives our customers another way to search and learn about Sephora's thousands of products, and keep them engaged with new beauty trends while shopping in-store.

"Customers can use the iPad to review Beauty Studio services, discover the exact product that's right for them, and can also scan any product in-store to read reviews, or even look up their own personal shopping history to find the same product that they purchased last," she said.

"We are currently doing a pilot program with the iPad in 20 select stores to determine the best use case for the in-store experience, and will roll this program out broadly later in the year."

Social efforts

In addition to its mobile efforts, Sephora is also branching out in the social media space.

The company has fully-integrated Pinterest. There are now "Pin It" buttons on every product page that let users pin any of the 14,000 products from Sephora's Web site.

"Mobile is a huge part of our business, from a traffic and sales standpoint," Ms. Bornstein said. "More than 70 percent of our mobile traffic comes from iOS devices, and we've found that iPad traffic to Sephora has nearly doubled in the past year.

"Our iPad apps let us connect our customers with the products they want and best beauty content; the apps have been downloaded more than two million times. In addition to our

20-store iPad pilot program, we're outfitting every Sephora store with iPod touches for mobile point-of-sale," she said.

"Our employees will also use the iPod touch to help customers quickly look up purchase history or access Beauty Insider points. Customers' profiles are automatically updated with their favorite products within our Beauty Insider program, so they can always have a record of what they've tried in the past, and of course avoid the lines when paying for any product."

Users can also check Sephora's feed on Instagram. The company is giving consumers a behind-the-scenes look at its staff and upcoming trends.

"The idea is to provide a seamless brand experience that bridges the online/offline gap by using mobile devices. Sephora is an innovator in the mobile space, and this effort helps to secure its position as a leader," said Chris Mason, cofounder/CEO of Branding Brand, New York.

"Sephora provides a clear example of how mobile can enrich shopping experiences across the board," he said. "Rather than sitting around worrying about the death of retail, brands should be asking themselves, 'how can I use these devices to bring my in-store experience to the next level?'" he said.

Final Take

Rimma Kats is associate editor on Mobile Commerce Daily, New York