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## Social media

# Social studies

How make-up brands can better harness the power of social media and avoid its pitfalls by Alissa Demorest

Of all beauty players, make-up brands are perhaps the best at doing social media. Many color brands have managed to attract a staggering number of followers on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. US-based product development company Hatch Beauty managing partner Tracy Holland even implies that color brands' social media strategies can define whether a company is fashionable or not. "What ranks a make-up brand as hot today is how much social media value is being placed on that brand. Brands considered as niche—Becca, Hourglass and Too Faced for example—have succeeded in garnering an incredible following," Holland tells *BW Confidential*. Smaller players' expertise in this area is attracting the attention of the industry's heavyweights. For example, US-based NYX Cosmetics' prowess in social media was one reason that L'Oréal opted to buy the brand last year.

### Linking social to sales

Social media may be powerful, but measuring its impact on sales remains a gray area. "Everyone would like to tie social to sales, but today this correlation is anecdotal at best. We get

a certain amount of referral traffic from these channels; nine out of 10 consumers discover our products through our digital PR or social media efforts and they come to our site, but who knows where they go after? There is no clear line of [sales] back to social," says Heather

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Yves Saint Laurent Beauté digital marketing manager Virginie Brossard

Park, global executive director of digital and consumer strategy at Nars Cosmetics. Smashbox executive director of global consumer marketing Ginny Chien agrees: "Smashbox does not run traditional media like TV or print; social is one of the few levers we activate to grow the business,

so we know it's having an impact. But it's impossible to measure social ROI because we have other levers, such as merchandising and sampling. [...] Most likely it's a blend of all these things that makes a consumer convert, with social playing a major role."

Yves Saint Laurent Beauté digital marketing manager Virginie Brossard agrees. "Today we can measure e-commerce traffic that comes from social media and how and if these consumers convert. However, it's more difficult to measure the impact of social media as a whole on business trends," she comments. On the flip side, the damage done to a brand's sales by a delayed or inappropriate reaction to a social media crisis is much easier to measure, she says.

Industry watchers say that new technologies that will allow brands to better chart the link between social and sales are still a long way off. Yet, market researchers are tracking brands' presence on social networks more closely, giving companies a clearer picture of the impact of their strategies.

Tribe Dynamics, a US-based research company, ranks beauty brands according to their "earned media value"—in other words, the number of

posts (blogs, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest as well as YouTube videos and tweets) and “engagement rate” based on consumers’ views, likes, comments and shares on social channels.

The company’s report published in October 2014 ranks MAC, Nars Cosmetics, NYX, L’Oréal Paris and Too Faced as topping the charts. Prestige color brands are said to be stronger than mass players in the social space; of Tribe Dynamics’ top-10 make-up brands, seven were prestige brands. This is largely down to prestige’s aspirational value; if a consumer can’t afford to buy a prestige product, it can still aspire to do so by following the brand, being a fan and getting tips and advice on the latest products and looks.

### Brand advocate & content creator

Make-up is the beauty category that is the easiest to express in social channels. This has created a more product-based approach to social media, rather than one that focuses on the brand.

“A social media strategy for a brand alone isn’t sufficient—a successful approach is when the product meets its promise,” comments French social network research agency Dynvibe co-founder Anne Cécile Guillemot. She adds that a focus on products that deliver means that brand ambassadors, (preferably not those paid by the brand, but influencers who will give an objective view of the product, such as vloggers or YouTubers), have become indispensable. “An initiative that produces powerful advocates in the form of social media followers has no price,” says YSL Beauté’s Brossard.

However, brands need to be wary of a backlash when buying (or perceived to be buying) the influence of spokespersons. Hatch Beauty’s Holland says that the popular blogger phenomenon has given rise to a “people grab” for social media influencers. “The huge [multi-million dollar] pay packages that US football players are earning that so shocked American consumers are now being offered by brands to social media heavyweights. Large beauty groups can afford to bring influential bloggers like Michelle Phan onboard to say great things about their brand,” she says.

Social media mavens do more than just tout a product or a brand, they also give an insight into consumer habits. “The consumer’s input can sometimes be more impactful than the

results of a marketing campaign; however, it’s surprising to see how little brands know their own consumers. Brands are still accustomed to doing traditional consumer testing, where they have preconceived notions of product usage, but [social] provides them with information that they never had access to before,” explains Dynvibe’s Guillemot. The idea behind YSL Beauté’s social media operations, says the brand, is to “showcase its products creatively in the context in which they are used daily”.

Brands are increasingly tapping into content generated by social media followers. YSL Beauté’s goal, says Brossard, is to get its most faithful and engaged fans involved in creating content for the brand. L’Oréal Paris, meanwhile, has launched The Brush Contest, a worldwide search for the brand’s next make-up artist through dedicated YouTube channels in major markets worldwide (see case studies). The bulk of the content, namely videos of contestants creating make-up looks based on the “color clash” theme, will be generated by consumers. Another make-up brand, e.l.f. Cosmetics, is to launch a skincare line that will be co-created with its social media followers—the first items to launch will be selected by the brand’s fans.

Devising a strategy tailored to each social platform should be a given by now. “The first question a company has to answer is which role should a make-up brand play in their customer’s lives? To define that, brands need to know their clients well and to know how they use digital every day. Then, they need to define a proper role for each social network,” explains YSL Beauté’s Brossard.

Indeed, perhaps the biggest pitfall in the social arena, say analysts, is when brands replicate the same message across different social channels. Applying the same strategy for Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest, for example, is doomed to failure as each platform is very different. “Social channels are not equal. Every channel that is successful and sustainable is sustainable for a specific reason that is indigenous to that platform. Brands need to hone in on what that is and what it means for their brand,” says Park. It is also inaccurate to identify certain platforms as hot and others as passé. Brands have to analyze each platform for what it currently offers and decide where that goes in their marketing strategy. “Many established brands try to over-structure social, but we have to recognize that social is constantly evolving and we need ■■■

### To app or not to app?

Although much talked about, make-up apps have not exactly taken off. One major hurdle is getting consumers to use the app on a regular basis. They may download it and try it a few times, but an app’s fun factor is not reason enough to encourage repeated use.

Nars Cosmetics’ global executive director of digital and consumer strategy Heather Park says that consumers take to an app because it provides them with practical value. But are the apps on today’s market really giving value? “A lot of apps are well done, but I have yet to see an amazing, valuable app,” Park says. “If we look closer at the apps customers use, we notice that there are few brand apps. We need to start with understanding what can help consumers in real life [and] what their habits are, and be able to answer with the most relevant innovative service.” “Apps are not a media, but a proper tool for brand and customer interactions,” says Yves Saint Laurent Beauté digital marketing manager Virginie Brossard.

L’Oréal Paris’ Makeup Genius, which launched in 2014, is one of the few major apps launched in the color space. While it was applauded for its technology and ease of use, other brands have been shy to follow. Analysts say that the investment is simply not worth the result, at least for now. “There aren’t many companies that can afford to do what L’Oréal Paris did with Makeup Genius, but I see costs for this kind of initiative coming down little by little,” says France-based digital agency Equinoa founder Timothée Raymond.

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■■■ to be flexible to stay on top of trends, explains Smashbox's Chien.

In its early days, Facebook, for example, was a social network with organic reach, but it has since evolved to become an advertising channel for brands. "If you are still thinking about it the way it was yesterday, then it's irrelevant as Facebook no longer has organic reach. If you think about the channel as being a different lever in your marketing mix then it is very powerful and efficient. A brand needs to understand these channels for where they are right now," Park adds.

Instagram, for example, is cited as one of the hottest platforms for color brands today. "At Smashbox, we are putting quite a bit of emphasis on Instagram. Not only because it's the social platform that is bucking the trend with high organic engagement, but also because [...] Instagram is known for showcasing amazing photography, so it helps convey our brand story," comments

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Smashbox's Chien. However, industry watchers are monitoring the medium to see how it evolves in terms of advertising.

(Instagram was acquired by Facebook four years ago). YouTube, meanwhile, remains an essential platform for make-up brands.

Through social channels, consumers can help brands conceive products that meet specific needs, and act as sensors, alerting them when they have gone wrong. With this in mind, the more upstream in the development process a brand takes this into account, the more successful it will be.

But brands also need to give the consumer something in return. This, say industry watchers, could be by showing a new collection, sharing a tip or answering customer service inquiries. "What drew people to these channels in the first place was the 'social' part of social media. A lot of brands have forgotten what it means to understand what the consumer wants and emotionally resonates with. The customer is inundated with content and nobody wants more noise; they want value," concludes Nars Cosmetics' Park. ■

## Social media case studies

### Benefit ties social to prizes

LVMH-owned Benefit launched National Wing Women Weekend in September 2014, a campaign to promote the brand's mascara and eyeliner duo, They're Real Mascara and They're Real Push-Up Liner.

Billed as the "first annual weekend dedicated to celebrating the one-of-a-kind bond between a gal and her besties", the event began with the VIP launch of Benefit's pop-up Tattoo Parlor in Los Angeles. Social media personality Jenna Marbles welcomed celebrity tattoo artists to the store and consumers could either get temporary or permanent tattoos as well as makeovers. Fans who opted for a Benefit-branded permanent tattoo received a year's worth of They're Real mascara and liner as well as a bag filled with all of Benefit's products.

Although a retail-based event, the brand tied it in heavily with social media. Benefit offered #WingWomen social media badges that allowed fans to tag their friends for chances to win beauty products. For a one-month period prior to the weekend, the brand posted badges on Instagram several times a week. When followers spotted a badge and tagged a friend who embodied that persona (Selfie Star, Gymfluencer and Belle of the Brunch), they were automatically entered to win \$125 of free product for themselves and their friend. A similar initiative was run on the brand's Pinterest Wing Women board. Visitors scanned the pins on the board and tagged their friends who reminded them of the different types of "wing women". At the end of the month, three winners were awarded \$250 of products for them and their friend.

