

Sephora

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“Sephora has revolutionized the cosmetics industry and the way people shop for beauty products,” says Deborah Yeh, Vice President of Marketing. “When Sephora came to the United States, the prestige beauty business was dominated by department stores, and we were told we would never be able to compete. That was not the case! We offer an environment where our clients can discover, learn and play on their own or with the help of our unbiased beauty experts – and they love it.”

As part of its anniversary celebration, the company is featuring new skin care, hair care and make-up products throughout its stores and hosting exclusive in-store events through the “Sephora’s Sweet 15” celebration.

“Exclusive products from our brand partners are a very important part of our business, since our earliest days in the U.S.,” Yeh says. “The Sweet 15 selection was a collaboration between our merchants and our brands, and we are delighted so many of our brand partners [took part] with us during our celebration. And our clients have responded to the products with great enthusiasm.”

A paradigm shift

Sephora Americas is based in San Francisco, with satellite offices in New York and Montréal. It also has distribution facilities in Maryland and Utah. In addition to its 330 standalone stores across North America today, the company has mastered its ‘store within a store’ concept in its nearly 400 J.C. Penney locations, and in 2010, Sephora expanded to the Brazilian and Mexican markets.

Since entering the North American market, Sephora has helped to transform the beauty retail sector, pioneering an open-sell store design and relying on the service and expertise provided by its sales consultants and company-wide focus on the client experience. The company also has one of the world’s top beauty websites in www.sephora.com and established itself as a digital leader in the retail industry.

“The entire Sephora experience is about play, exploration and interactivity,” Yeh says. “We also pursue ways to augment that dynamic when we feel we are helping our clients discover new products, tips and trends.”

Technology that enhances the client experience

Sephora recognized early on that its clients are deeply tech-savvy and by leveraging state-of-the-art technologies, the company could meet its clients’ needs and desires in a very exciting and differentiated way. Reflecting this most recently, in early August 2013, Sephora acquired Scentsa, the unique technology platform that had powered its state-of-the-art Fragrance Finder since 2008. The Fragrance Finder enables clients, with the tap of a finger, to easily find detailed information on the latest fragrances, discover new fragrances, view images, run videos or find thousands of reviews on time-honored favorite scents from around the world. An immediate hit, it is now in all of Sephora’s 330 freestanding U.S. stores today. Acquiring Scentsa enabled Sephora to ensure the technology would remain exclusive to them and to roll it out to support other cutting-edge technology solutions.

Building on the strides made with Fragrance Finder and the Scentsa technology, last year, the company unveiled SEPHORA + PANTONE COLOR IQ, offering a cutting-edge color matching solution that works by scanning the surface of the skin and assigning an official PANTONE SkinTone number. Users then receive a precise foundation match across the entire Sephora assortment, which includes more than 1,500 different formulations.

To make such exact measurements, the technology leverages powerful tri-directional imaging, recording 27 different color-accurate images in less than two seconds. While ethnicity is one factor used by the color matching system, it also considers the physiology behind different skin colors in tones. This includes hemoglobin, freckles, sun exposure, skin conditions, sunburn and the absence or excess of melanin.

Sephora also recently launched SEPHORA SKINCARE iQ, which leverages the Scentsa technology to provide a revolutionary way for consumers to match their personal skincare needs to the thousands of skincare products Sephora offers. Using the technology, clients answer a series of questions, often finding a solution in less than one minute. Sephora does this by cross-referencing its entire skin care assortment, made up of more than 60 brands. SEPHORA SKINCARE iQ is also available in all freestanding stores across the United States.

“Providing expert advice and an innovative shopping experience to our clients is a critical part of our brand, and we’re very proud of how we’re using digital experiences and technology to bring this to life for our clients, wherever they are,” Yeh says. “We have created interfaces that help our clients navigate through a complicated set of beauty choices.

Engaging modern consumers

In addition to these advances, Sephora was a very early-mover among retailers in using mobile technology to help clients find the skin care products they need.

“Our client base is savvy, technologically capable and increasingly wants their smartphone to be a tool of information and convenience on all fronts,” Yeh says. “We’ve designed our digital capabilities to both stand on their own and to complement the experience we offer in our stores.”

Beauty Insiders—clients who take part in Sephora’s free loyalty rewards program—can use their mobile devices to access previous purchases, read product reviews and watch video demonstrations.

“They can truly be an educated client and avoid purchasing products they ultimately do not like or use,” Yeh says.

The company also actively engages its existing and potential clients through social media and other online platforms.

“We are proud that Sephora Americas has more than one million followers on Twitter and more than five million people who like us on Facebook,” Yeh says. “We’ve won awards for how we’ve leveraged social media, as well as how we’ve refined our [mobile] apps to enhance both the online and in-store client experience. We continue to strive for excellence and leadership online, in social media and on mobile platforms.”

The challenge ahead

According to Yeh, Sephora’s biggest challenge is also its biggest opportunity. It must continue to provide clients with a constant stream of new and exciting skin care and beauty products.

“Our exceptional brand partners help us rise to this challenge by creating a fantastic flow of new products,” she says. “We are focused on matching that innovation by continually ensuring that Sephora is a fun and convenient place to shop.”

As it moves forward, Sephora will keep giving its clients easy access to the world’s top beauty brands, with the aforementioned strategies paramount to achieving that goal. Above all, the company will continue to fulfill its mission to serve as ‘the’ trusted source for these products to clients in North America and around the world.

“Sephora is the only comprehensive global prestige beauty retailer,” Yeh says. “We are firmly positioned in the prestige sector, with a heavy emphasis on service.”

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