

## Selling techniques

## The consumer connection

Retailers need to improve their selling methods to entice customers in-store

by **Imogen Matthews**

**T**he days of putting product out on shelf and expecting it to sell are long gone. In-store, make-up brands now need to work hard to interact with the customer, who is faced with more brand and retail choices than ever before. “Customer engagement” is a term used more and more frequently by make-up brands. The trick is to draw the customer towards the counter on her terms, rather than ambush her with hard-sell techniques. Niche brand Urban Decay calls it “aisle style.” Beauty consultants in its UK stores have bar codes drawn onto the back of their hands in different shades, which are designed to stop consumers in their tracks and ask what it’s all about. “It’s a way of drawing them in, using visuals instead of speech,” explains UK Urban Decay distributor Shafii & Schmid managing director Alex Shafii. The beauty consultants are also encouraged to paint flower patterns with crystals on their faces for a similar effect.

French department store Printemps beauty buyer Fabien Petitcolin believes that the trend is increasing in make-up for an “American way” to sell products. “This means being interactive with customers, being customer oriented and having a professional or backstage approach,” he affirms. “In Printemps we have developed many services that enable us to sell make-up in a stronger way.” The department store has introduced Lancôme’s Eye Design Studio, the Chanel VIP Room, Make Up For Ever’s eyebrow studio, the Shu Uemura Tokyo Lash Bar and the Bourjois Mascara Bar.

### Increasing the theater

The challenge facing retailers is to bring more theater into the shopping experience. Printemps is probably one of the few department stores to embrace this challenge by



◀ Stores are including more professional selling environments, like Shu Uemura’s Tokyo Lash Bar at Printemps

introducing so many branded service-driven add-ons. Generally, retailers are more concerned about the returns per square meter, resulting in brands cramming as many products into a point-of-sale as possible.

### “Brands should look at creating interest at the counter during quieter times, [like] selling evening make-up at [dinner] time”

*Sheridan & Co managing director Michael Sheridan*

“There has to be a compromise,” maintains UK creative consultancy Liquid Rock managing director Fiona Rauh. “There needs to be more space for testers, although this is expensive [for] the brand as they are supplied free to the

retailer.” She suggests that retailers should make shopping a fun experience, have informed, trained staff and a “demo” area that can be taken over by brands to educate and make over customers.

Another approach is to think about how make-up is sold during the course of the day. “There is a tendency for brands to offer the same thing throughout the day and the whole weekly program,” points out UK retail design consultancy Sheridan & Co managing director Michael Sheridan. “Brands should look at ways of creating interest at the counter during quieter times or at certain times of the day. For example, selling evening make-up at [dinner] time.” Sheridan is a firm believer in providing enough testers to allow customers to sit down and try the products. “We’ve put islands with four make-up stations into Laura Mercier sites. It’s about getting bums on seats and getting them to stay as long as possible.” ▶▶▶

▷▷▷ But testers are not always the answer, especially for self-selection brands. They need to be serviced regularly as they have a tendency to get messy and can be unhygienic. German make-up brand Art Deco prefers to use different tools, such as starter kits, sometimes with a DVD demo, for new launches. “The key point is not what we do; the important thing is how we do it,” explains Art Deco vice president marketing Anna Blasco-Salvat. “The industry and retailers need to build up this ‘brand experience.’”

### Sampling to save time

Sampling technology has improved enormously in recent years and can be an effective low-cost tool if used correctly. Samples can also be used as a time-saving device in comparison to a consultant-led experience involving a makeover. The problem is that if the consumer doesn’t know how to apply the sample, she won’t trade onto a full-size retail product.

UK sampling specialists Sampling Innovations sales director Mark Lockyer recognizes that handing out free make-up samples is open to abuse. “Samples can be paid for within the context of tester kits, which feature

products targeted for a look or a type of consumer.” He also suggests that brands tap into loyalty card schemes by providing coupons and samples dispensed from vending machines in-store. Rauh agrees, “Conversion rates are so much higher when the customer has a physical sample to use rather than a money-off coupon to redeem,” she says.

“She’ll wear the sample, tell her friends, so the potential of getting more consumers interested in the brand is multiplied.”

However, sampling make-up isn’t necessarily straightforward. How can a brand decide which shades to offer when there are so many to choose from? “It’s one of the reasons brands have not sampled as much as they could do,” agrees Lockyer, who suggests that brands put together a sample collection that represents a complete look. “This is about educating the consumer to discover the right shade for them and about adding value.” Swedish brand EasyLooks sells one-shot color capsules for a complete look, including The Collection, containing four different make-up looks on separate strips.

Bourjois has taken the sampling idea a stage further with its mini Bourjois range of low-cost eye shadow, nail polish and lip gloss, which encourage consumers to buy several products from the range without paying too much.

With the development of new products that need explanation, there is a growing recognition of the importance of consultant training. “Training has always been a huge focus for us, but we refuse to make it more complicated than it has to be,” states Benefit Europe managing director Ian Marshall. “We try and keep the message simple and ensure that our teams realize that the quickest way to make a customer happy is to show her something that will make an instant difference.” Art Deco’s Blasco-Salvat believes that consistency in the timing of training programs is even more important. “We need to repeat and to reinvent permanently the messages and the ‘magic’ of the brand,” she affirms.

### Technology benefits for retail

The changing online environment is also benefiting retail, through consumers’ use of social networking sites such as You Tube, Face Book, blogs and customer feedback pages. They are helping to build a relationship between the brand and the consumer so they almost feel part of the brand themselves. “We

live in an instant society where a consumer is online practically 24/7 and can surf the web, read emails at home, at work and on the move, and importantly, forward these to her friends,” affirms Rauh. The internet also impacts on in-store staff who are becoming more knowledgeable about new launches and brands.

Urban Decay is putting new interactive counters into House of Fraser department stores. Customers can see the latest looks by touching a screen, which lists out each product and color used. “The internet is part of every young person’s life, so they are extremely computer savvy,” asserts Shafii, who believes that the way most make-up is sold in department stores is boring. “You have to be different by having unique products and by giving the customers the tools to play with them.” Urban Decay’s beauty advisors also use on-counter technology to take customer details so that they can e-mail them about new launches and gift-with-purchase promotions. Art Deco’s “Market Observer” is a tool used by its advisors to summarize their experience at the point-of-sale. The information is then used

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in product development meetings, enabling management to correct product features or pricing for the following season.

What happens outside the store can help to sell make-up. Brands are sponsoring music tours and investing in product placement in movies and sitcoms. Clever use of PR can also draw customers into the store. For example, UK brand Taxi London recently launched its men’s make-up line with a PR campaign that targeted mainstream news media rather than the consumer press. As a result the brand got prime-time coverage, which was picked up by the consumer press, radio and online blogs.

Retailers need to focus on two key areas if they are to improve the way they sell make-up. Firstly, creating a brand experience that draws in and engages the customer. And secondly, they need to invest in the training of sales staff to ensure that this brand experience is delivered. ■



▲ Technology is playing a greater role in-store. For example, Urban Decay’s interactive make-up screens at House of Fraser