

Social media trends

in the beauty markets



In the space of just a couple of years social media have changed the way that many companies are doing business. Cosmetics and toiletries companies were initially slow to recognise the importance of social media, but many are realising now how influential they can be for their brands. Imogen Matthews, consultant to In-Cosmetics, looks at what has changed and how social media can be used to create brand awareness and grow sales.

After having been slow to recognise the importance of social media, cosmetics companies are now realising how influential they can be for their brands

Before social media, brands would rely on traditional methods to engage with customers – methods which could be costly and often not particularly effective. Although above-the-line media, including TV and print advertising, are still widely used, smart brands are spreading their budgets online to ensure that they reach those likely to buy their products. An increasingly large part of their marketing budgets is dedicated to growing an online presence through social networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, which play an important part in a consumer's journey in discovering products.

According to Sean Singleton, group managing director of **Skive Group**, who spoke on the subject of social media at this year's In-Cosmetics show in Milan, recent statistics show there are some 200 m blogs and 95,000 beauty blogs, with 35-49 year old women proving to be the fastest growing group in the blogosphere.

Estée Lauder Companies employ social media across their portfolio of brands, such as **Bobbi Brown**, which uses **Twitter** to provide tips and advice to its followers in real time. Twitter is also used for two-way communication and can give valuable feedback that is able to be implemented in product development and product improvements. According to Estée Lauder, social media are delivering in the top five traffic sources for every one of its brands and social media consistently over-index in terms of sales conversions.

Alex Moscow*, managing director, **9mm Public Relations**, believes that like any marketing strategy, companies must know who they want to target, where they hang out and what they want from the company. "The key to the success of any social media campaign is the distribution of valuable content," he explains. "These are not sales channels. You want to build relationships. Before starting any activity, monitor your target audience and identify what is important to them and how you can

join in their conversations. See how you can add value to them as this is an opportunity to immerse your customer in your brand. Help them to experience it in a way that traditional marketing could never do."

Moscow warns that building a network of fans is worthless unless those fans are active. "The goal may be to sign them up to a newsletter, gain feedback for current products or to test new ones. Whatever it is, the goal should be defined first and foremost."

This means that brands need to concentrate on the social media channels that offer the best route to their customers. Moscow points out that the way people use Twitter is very different from Facebook and that Facebook usage is very different from LinkedIn. "Brands should have a strategy for each," he advises.

Importance of bloggers

Beauty blogs feature very highly in **Google** searches, meaning that in product searches consumers are likely to find



Using social media for two-way communication to obtain valuable feedback

photo: Apple

blog reviews on the first couple of pages of results. This can have a significant impact on their purchasing decision, particularly if a product is rated by influential beauty bloggers with a good review to send sales soaring. According to research analysts **Mymarket-monitor**, there are over 8,000 English language blogs dedicated to beauty globally. Their research shows that blogs globally account for over 45 % of all online beauty conversations.

Google ranks blogger reviews highly, so if someone is searching for product information online, they can read reviews of people's real opinions, rather than a generic write up in a magazine. A good blogger is not afraid to offer honest opinions based on having tried the product with pictures of how it looks on the skin or hair.

Moscow believes that the blog should be the focal point of any social media strategy and that channels such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn should be used to motivate people towards it. "Like the other channels, the blog should not be used as a hard sales tool. It should make people feel valued by the brand and offer content that benefits their lives in some way." He points out that if Facebook were to close down tomorrow all the hard work would disappear with it. "You own your blog. You can therefore set it up to do whatever you want and own all of the data that you generate from it."

Magazines and social media

The growth in influential blogs is putting print media under pressure. According to Mymarketmonitor, younger women are no longer reading magazines but are picking up information on beauty products through blogs. Magazines have had to sharpen up and many are now adding a blog section to their websites as well as incorporating buttons into each web page to allow consumers to share comments on Facebook and Twitter.

One of the questions frequently asked by newcomers to social media is how can they find quality connections. Moscow suggests the following:

- Contact your best customers, find out what they want from a social media relationship and build it for them. Invite them to be the first members and incentivise them to bring their friends.
- Get onto the shop floor and do the same as above. The first stages of any social media planning should be a research phase. You want to find out what customers want from you and what will keep them coming back for more.
- Look at what other brands are doing, not necessarily your competitors, but any brand that attracts a similar type of customer. Build an understanding of what makes their social media presence a success.

* Alex Moscow will participate at next year's In-Cosmetics marketing trends presentations, taking place in Barcelona on 17-19 April. For more details go to www.in-cosmetics.com



Imogen Matthews
In-Cosmetics consultant, Oxford, UK

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