

Harnessing the benefits of

As recently as 2009 many beauty companies had no idea what the term “social media” really meant. In such a short space of time, social media has become hugely influential—so much so, that any brand without a social media strategy is now at a distinct disadvantage. On behalf of esprit, Imogen Matthews explores the world of social media to help explain what it means, how to find the most influential bloggers and give advice on how it can work for beauty brands.

Social media: what's that?

Broadly speaking, social media is used to describe how individuals, brands and organisations communicate with consumers online, but it's not just about having a Facebook or Twitter page. Some brands set up these accounts and expect consumers to find them, then are surprised when no-one 'follows' or 'likes' them. Having a social media strategy requires time and effort to build up and maintain a meaningful relationship with consumers.

At last month's Beauty Focus conference, Richard Stacy, founder of social media agency Stacy Consulting, described how he is frequently asked by clients whether they should have a Facebook page. "People need to understand that Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc are not websites, channels of even forms of media. They are simply tools. In a world of connection and action, you can use tools to do things you couldn't do before." He described how social media is about everything that happens that is not on your website and stressed the importance of creating digital spaces to help manage what is out there. "Social

media requires a separate and distinct function, using different processes, structure, skills, people and internal relationships," he affirmed.

Jenni Retourné, Director of Style with Substance, which specialises in social media for beauty brands, started working in the area at the end of 2009. "The difference between how the sector operates in social media now, compared to back then, is very distinct," she comments. "Before, it wasn't a huge area for beauty. I think people didn't know what to do with it {or even what the term 'social media' really meant} or how influential social media could be for their brands."

Mark Ramseyer, CEO of mymarketmonitor.com, maintains that social media monitoring is like eavesdropping in on the coffee house chatter around the globe on just about any subject from "Does my anti-ageing cream work?" to discussions on the latest beauty EU directive.

Mike observes how attitudes have changed. "It was the media that used to influence the consumer. Now, it's the consumer influencing the consumer."

However, setting up a social media strategy is far from plain sailing.

Many of mymarketmonitor.com's beauty clients have said that they feel over-faced with the sheer size of the internet. According to Mike, the important question to ask is: "How do you eat an elephant?" His answer is "with just one bite at a time", which he believes is the best approach to this exciting marketing platform.

The power of blogs

In addition to Facebook and Twitter, following influential bloggers should be a key part of any social media strategy. "Product reviews on beauty blogs are very powerful as the bloggers give very real opinions on their experiences with a product, which is trusted by their readers," affirms Jenni. A great review by an influential beauty blogger can send sales soaring. Furthermore, Google ranks these 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. Jenni has recently set up her own blog **yourbeautyindustry.blogspot.com**, which aims to give an inside view of the industry and inspire people in their careers. "To my knowledge, there is no other

blog dedicated to people working in beauty, so I think it fills a real niche," she says.

"Bloggers have the ability to create a huge buzz about any given product that performs well," says Claire Lynch, whose blog name is The Beauty Scoop. "This is something that brands should want to tap into." She reckons that in some cases, it can make or break a decision to purchase. "I know my beauty purchasing has changed greatly due to being able to see how a product looks on the skin when swatched, or how it looks when applied on the face or nails." For example, a nail polish that looks amazing in the bottle may not be so amazing when on the nails, needing perhaps five coats to get anywhere near the colour in the bottle. Similarly, consumers can find out if a new anti-ageing treatment really does

found Handpicked Media, a service that helps beauty, fashion and lifestyle brands select which blogs to target. On its website, Handpicked states that it champions blogs that are creative and unique with high quality content. "We have found many brands look for the HP logo before they work with them," explains Krista. "They know we are looking for the best to join us and also that we maintain the standard when they join by checking the blogs and reading them, so it gives them confidence to know they are not wasting their time."

Handpicked looks for the following when selecting blogs: good traffic, quality writing, regular updates and tweets. "We definitely encourage a good engagement with a Twitter audience," advises Krista. "Overall tone and layout must also meet our standard."

and meeting the brands can be intimidating. So Handpicked helps by running blogger events on behalf of brands where they get to meet the bloggers and understand how passionate they are about their products. "This is so valuable to them...as the enthusiasm coming from the bloggers is something they haven't had from journalists for a while," reveals Krista.

The reason that some brands have held back from doing too much with bloggers is a fear that they might get negative feedback. Karen Hu, Group Product Manager, Lancôme Make-up, Fragrance & Internet, brushes off this contention. "Nobody likes negative feedback, but in today's digital world you simply cannot hide and attempting to would speak volumes." She is aware that social network sites, blogs, twitter etc are

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live up to its claims, by seeing the results achieved with before or after photographs.

Engaging with bloggers

Over the past couple of years, more brands have started to increase contact with bloggers, including them in press launches, mailing lists and even creating blogger specific events. An early blogger, Beauty and the Dirt, aka Krista Madden, started up 11 years ago, when most brands were only vaguely aware of blogs. In 2009, she used her experience to

Beauty brands are learning fast how to engage with bloggers. For example, Bourjois has a core unit of bloggers

it targets and a handful of YouTubers as well. They are approached daily by more bloggers, but unless they have a large following or have a large number of comments under each posts, Bourjois tends not to send them products. "It's hard to decide where to draw the line, but often it's people just wanting free product from us," comments Wendy Butler, PR Executive for Bourjois.

Not all bloggers are trained journalists

making it easy for people to share their opinions and in real time. "All feedback – even negative feedback – builds authenticity. If a negative review were to appear we would assess it on a case by case basis."

When Revlon receive a bad review, it is firstly fed back to Revlon HQ, so they can take note of the problem, rectify it and when creating new products take the comment into account as a way to improve. They would also contact the blogger and suggest a different product for them if the product reviewed was not right for them.

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Magazines versus online

The explosion in influential blogs is putting print media under pressure. Claire Lynch has seen a few people commenting on blogs to say they have stopped buying magazines. Meanwhile, mymarketmonitor confirms through its online service that younger women are no longer reading magazines. "Beauty blogs are one of the strongest areas because this is where opinion really matters rather than what a journalist tells them," points out Sean Singleton, Director, mymarketmonitor.com.

Magazines have had to sharpen up and many are now adding a blog section to their websites. "I assume this is because they still want to have the exclusive 'you saw it here first'," maintains Claire. "I think they'd possibly find it difficult to get product information out before bloggers do when they're having to wait until the next week or month for the magazine to be printed and on sale."

Magazines are continuing to learn the tricks of the online trade. "What magazines do is to incorporate buttons into each web page to allow consumers to share comments on Facebook and Twitter," says Sean.

The future of social media

It seems that the whole industry is in the grip of social media, but for some brands, there is still a long way to go. Claire observes that there are still many beauty brands, which have yet to realise the power that a good blogger can hold. "I feel it's inevitable that someday they will have to sit up and take notice as more and more people turn to bloggers for their opinions on any given product, and also to see product swatches and face of the days etc."

Brand social media strategies

**Karen Hu, Group Product Manager,
Lancôme Make-up, Fragrance &
Internet:**

"Social media is incredibly important to Lancôme's media mix going forward. As we are continually looking for ways to grow our customer base, it's important that we reach our customers where they are spending increasing amounts of time – in this case with digital and social media.

"We are placing more focus on Twitter. The Lancôme UK account was launched in 2010 and currently has over 3,000 followers. We launched our UK & Ireland Facebook page, Lancôme Expert Services, in August 2010. We are hoping to host bigger blogging events later in 2011.

"We work with our media agency to evaluate a campaign's impact on engagement, connections, conversion and opinions. The increase to our Facebook fan base is incredibly important and the exposure to our customers is invaluable."

Revlon UK:

"Social media is still very new to us at Revlon and we have only been on Facebook and Twitter for two years now, along with engaging with bloggers. For 2011, we are building a new strategy which we hope will bring in a new consumer and give us more presence within the social media community.

"Being a blogger is not a full-time job, so we take this into account. We keep them updated with press releases/tweets and invite them to any blogger events we may be holding."

**Wendy Butler, PR Executive for
Bourjois:**

"The Facebook page has only launched in the last few weeks, but our Bourjois tweets have been going since April 2009. We want to increase brand awareness and try and make people interact with the brand as much as possible. We want to make people aware that Bourjois is a fashion forward, innovative brand, which follows trends. {Social media} is also a good platform to highlight award wins, show advertorial pieces and keep

people up to date with events and activity.

"We hold blogging events on Saturdays {most have full-time jobs out of the beauty industry so mid week is difficult} and talk them through the new launches. We feel this is beneficial as they get to play with the products and have them explained to them by our Celebrity Make-up Artist, Cassie Lomas."

British Beauty Blogger's view:

One of the UK's best known beauty bloggers is britishbeautyblogger, run by journalist Jane Cunningham. Speaking at this year's Beauty Focus conference, she pointed out that the difference between blogs and magazines is that the former will say things a magazine never would. "Blogs are honest and truthful and are all about intimacy and immediacy," she said, explaining that her job is 'to tell, not sell' and she's under no obligation to feature any brand. "So when brands talk about 'getting bloggers to work for us', it simply won't work," she added.

Jane read out emails she has received from beauty companies wanting her to write reviews {"I don't do this"}, inviting her to join in a partnership and even write content for her readers {"No you haven't!"}.

Following up her presentation with a blog later that day, Jane made the point that everyone talks about engaging with bloggers and how to target them, but very rarely is there any consideration for the bloggers themselves. "Blogs are run on a very personal level that is completely alien to the majority of marketers, social media agencies and brands," she said. Many have no clue about the people running the blogs, often new mums who can only blog when their baby sleeps, or are busy executives fitting their blog into what little spare time they have, for fun. "It needs to be clearly understood that bloggers are highly individual... understand that, and you are part way to being heard." Judging from the huge response she received from this post, it is clear that Jane hit a nerve with like-minded bloggers. Is it time for beauty brands to reassess their relationship with the blogging community?