



## Top Questions to Ask Before Developing a Beauty Product

Steps for avoiding delays, reformulations and other product development snags.

### IMPACT POINTS

- With the right planning, it is possible to introduce your brand to consumers outside of your normal market without compromising your existing customer base.
- Beauty products, like many personal and luxury products, seem to work better if they cost a bit more.
- Products that will be a long-term part of the brand deserve a bit more development attention than short-term promotional items in most cases.
- The shortest path to a successful new product will be to avoid the legal and regulatory quagmires.

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**A**sking the right questions at the beginning of a project and answering them as honestly as you can, will set you on a course to develop a beauty product that will successfully build your brand. Some of the questions are obvious, but they sometimes lead to other questions that can make the whole process more productive and successful.

#### Who is my target customer?

This is probably the most fundamental question for developing a new beauty product, if not the most obvious. Of course, it's crucial to understand the target customer, a customer you are probably already very familiar with.

Questions that often don't get asked include: Does this new product expand my current customer base? Is the new product an opportunity to reach out to customers beyond our usual customer base?

Adjusting your product profile to answer this question may be a key to making the success of your project even greater, particularly if expanding your customer base seems like a good idea. With the right planning, it might be possible to introduce your brand to consumers outside of your normal market without compromising your existing customer base. Reaching for a higher-priced category is usually difficult, and appealing to a lower price-point audience can hurt your current brand image. If incorporating different product characteristics that will broaden the

appeal for your brand is possible, this is an opportunity to reach sideways into parts of the culture that may not be as aware of your brand as it should be.

### What will the product cost?

Again, an obvious question. After considering Helena Rubenstein's dictum that if a product isn't selling, double the price, will you be charging enough? The constraints that marketers place on themselves for product cost sometimes miss the opportunity to take advantage of a pricing fresh start. Once the product is in the marketplace, raising the price is virtually impossible. Beauty products, like many personal and luxury products, seem to work better if they cost a bit more. Again, this is an opportunity to rethink your usual pricing and cost structures.

### Is the product supposed to be a permanent part of the product line?

Or, will it fall by the wayside with changes in fashion? Makeup shades are creatures of fashion for sure. Fragrances can be a flash in the pan, or they can become a classic and go on for decades. Are you going to sell the next BB cream, CC cream, DD cream, or will it be a product that steps outside of the fashion trends and is intended to be around for the long haul? A clear idea on this dimension of the development project can affect how detailed your project will have to be. Products that will be a long-term part of the brand deserve a bit more attention than short-term promotional items in most cases. The testing behind the product should be more rigorous for a "new classic" in the product line.

### What claims will I make?

Yes, Captain Obvious strikes again, but there are considerations that can make this question a bit more interesting. If the product will be sold in markets outside the U.S., how will those claims play in those markets? Understanding and addressing cultural differences can expand the success of your product in those markets. Performance expectations can vary significantly from country to country, as can usage patterns and economic concerns.

## Questions that aren't often asked include: Does this new product expand your current customer base? Is the new product an opportunity to reach beyond your usual customer base?

### Are there any regulatory or legal issues with the claims you want to make?

"Sun protection," "fights blemishes," "increases blood circulation," "treats wrinkles," "stimulates collagen production," or "diminishes age spots." Wonderful things to say about your product. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) would tell you they are all drug claims in the U.S. Other countries may view the same claims very differently. It doesn't matter if the claims are true, if they aren't allowed by FDA regulations for cosmetic products, your product might fall victim to regulatory problems. Whether you write your marketing copy and then have it reviewed and revised for regulatory compliance, or you pay attention to the regulatory boundaries in the beginning, the shortest path to a successful new product will be to avoid the legal and regulatory quagmires.

### What ingredients should be in the product?

There are a lot of happy answers to this question. Ingredients that the consumer understands to offer transformative benefits can support your promotional efforts significantly. Function and fashion

can combine to make a product almost irresistible.

Looking at the other side of the coin: What ingredients should not be in the product? There are both legal and fashion reasons to avoid some ingredients. Some are so well known at this point that there isn't much point in claiming that the product doesn't contain them. Paraben-free has probably run its course as a claim that gets much attention with the consumer. Others are not as easy to spot. California's Proposition 65 list of chemicals known to the State of California as causing cancer or reproductive toxicity is an example. Here, the product needs to be developed to avoid those ingredients that are on the list, like cocamide DEA. Ingredients that might contain some amount of Prop 65 chemicals as by-products or unavoidable contaminants also have to be factored in. Diethanolamine (DEA) is on the Prop 65 list, but triethanolamine (TEA) is not. The problem is that almost all TEA contains some amount of DEA, so the Prop 65 legal exposure comes in through the back door.

Canada has its "hot list" of ingredients and ingredient constituents that should be avoided if you are selling in Canada. The European Union has its own collection of ingredients to avoid. Planning to avoid them in the first place saves aggravation down the road.

Answering questions like these at the very beginning will save a lot of time and aggravation as your development project unfolds. If you ignore them at the start, they will likely crop up later, causing you to either miss opportunities for your new product to build your brand more effectively, or you may have to take a few steps backward to make the adjustment. Since virtually everything in our cosmetics and personal care industry was already late and behind schedule when we thought of it, delays and steps backward aren't the fun part. ■ GCI



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## 1. Don't obsess about being popular

When it comes to social media, 80% of U.S. marketers measure the effectiveness of their content with metrics, such as likes and retweets. But being popular isn't all it's cracked up to be—remember those teen horror movies where the most popular character always gets killed off first? In social media, it's easy to get likes and retweets—just ask an open-ended question, such as “How are you getting ready for summer?,” and the likes and shares will flood in. But posts from beauty brands, like “RT if shaving your armpits is a part of your daily shower routine” or “It's Adopt a Shelter Dog Month! Post a picture below. We'd love to see your adopted animal,” do little to support marketing strategy or further a brand's story.

## 2. It's about more than product

StoryScore recently analyzed the social media posts of 10 beauty brands for one month and found that content promoting individual products accounted for one in four of all posts. The majority of these posts followed the same formula of product packaging photo + caption, and quickly got lost in a sea of similar-looking content. But with a bit of effort and imagination, product posts can be made eye-catching and memorable. For example, Olay Fresh Effects promoted its Acne Control Scrub with a colorful, fall-inspired back-to-school outfit on Instagram, while Clinique showcased its Grandest Grape Chubby Stick by showing it beautifully photographed in a bowl of grapes (also on Instagram).

Product innovation is the lifeblood of the beauty category, so it's not surprising that posts promoting these are the single most dominant theme across the 10 brands in the StoryScore study. But it is surprising that so many other themes that are important to building strong brands—people/employees, ingredient stories, brand history/heritage stories—are broadly neglected by the beauty category. None of the above themes accounted for more than 1% of social

media posts in October 2014, while posts about celebrities accounted for 6%.

## 3. Understand your audiences

For seven out of 10 brands in the StoryScore study, Twitter was the dominant social platform, accounting for up to 78% of all the social content they posted. Twitter's dominance is surprising given that more online women prefer Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn or Instagram to Twitter.

Facebook is, of course, still the most popular social platform, attracting 71% of all female Internet users, according to the Pew Research Center. The only brand to use Facebook as its dominant platform in the StoryScore study was Urban Decay.

Instagram is the place to be to catch the attention of online women ages 18–29, 53% of whom are regular users. This explains why Instagram is the dominant platform for both MAC and Too-Faced. Pinterest is also popular with younger audiences (34% of online women), as well as older audiences (27% of online women ages 50–64).

Beauty brands should use visual platforms, like Instagram and Pinterest, to post more than just product shots. MAC posts great content from behind the runway at fashion shows on Instagram, while Fresh Beauty uses Pinterest to showcase beautiful mood boards and lifestyle imagery.

## 4. Give your audience a reason to care

Social media is a great forum for brands to tell powerful stories that promote their cause-related activities. Supporting a meaningful cause is also a great way of building relationships with millennial consumers, who typically spend 25% more on beauty products than the U.S. average. In the StoryScore study, cause-related posts accounted for less than 10% of social content across all brands. Dove is the leader in cause-related content, with 42% of all posts relating to its self-esteem/Real Beauty campaign. The brands posting the least amount of cause-related social content included Maybelline, Kiehl's, MAC Cosmetics and Urban Decay.

## 5. Color comes from context and authenticity

On its Pinterest page, Benefit Cosmetics has a “Beauty Throwbacks” gallery showcasing old products, advertising and other memorabilia from the brand's history. This is a fun way of engaging consumers, especially those from the boomer generation, while also reassuring them of the brand's heritage and longevity.

In the StoryScore study, only three out of 10 brands posted content related to brand heritage—Kiehls, Maybelline and Too Faced. This represents a huge missed opportunity for other brands in the study, and for any other brand that is not digging into the corporate archives to find inspiration for social content.

Younger brands that don't yet have corporate archives are also able to weave their (shorter) history into social content. For example, Espionage Cosmetics, an “all nerd” makeup company founded in 2011 and funded by Kickstarter, posts photos and unboxing videos from backers as well as a gallery of photos from all conventions that the brand has exhibited at since it was founded.

As brands look to develop more robust social content strategies, storytelling will only become more important across social media. For many beauty brands there is still a steep learning curve before they master social media in the same way that they have mastered other forms of expression like advertising, packaging and promotions. ■ GCI



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