Cosmetics Retailer Ulta Beauty on How It’s Adapted to the Pandemic



|
24 hours ago
Key insight:

- Creating seamless experiences between stores and online is key for brands to succeed going forward.

Karla Davis, Ulta Beauty’s senior director, integrated marketing and media, doesn’t want things to go back to normal—she wants them to be better.

That’s what Davis told Adweek’s director, Inside the Brand, Heide Palermo, today during Adweek’s virtual event The Future of Shopping. During the conversation, Davis talked about how Ulta has navigated the past few months, both in regard to the effects of the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic and the movement to fight systemic racism.

“Instead of the new normal, [it’s] the new better,” said Davis. “The idea [is] that getting on the other side of this,

we should be so much smarter. We should not be excited about going back to what we used to do [but should instead] use that opportunity to really move forward and supercharge the future."

Davis said that the pandemic has been a lesson in "how do we tap into the silver linings and the learnings that will make us smarter and better on the other side of this."

There's reason to be hopeful, Davis said: 90% of Ulta's stores are open in some form, whether it's with measures in place, like asking customers to wear masks, or with the help of innovation, like curbside pickup. Open locations also no longer have products available to test.

With stores shut, operations and marketing needed to be more in sync than ever. During the pandemic, Ulta ramped up its digital capabilities, particularly its GlamLab tool, which allows users to virtually try on makeup products. More deeply integrating parts of the in-store experience to Ulta's digital platforms has been a major innovation in 2020, she said. And as ecommerce became their sole channel of business, it emphasized that Ulta's digital platforms needed to be as well-rounded as the stores.

"The shift to content is a key element of how we show up and really making sure that people aren't seeing us just as commerce and as a last place to go to purchase, but how do they engage with us across their journey in a much more tangible and real and engaging way," she said.

Ulta's also continued its focus on diversity and inclusion, in particular through initiatives that bring young women into the Ulta offices teach them about the business of beauty and have them create a product, which will continue next year. Ulta has also worked with NBCUniversal to highlight Latina beauty stories on its platforms.

"This isn't something we turned on a month ago," she said.

“This is a moment to double down on that value as a business and as a brand.”

Brands, she said, need to make it a fundamental part of their business to create real change rather than simply a box to check.

“[You need to] really challenge how we think about infrastructure,” she said. “It’s really seeing it as a business initiative and not just an HR initiative.”

Davis said she’s hopeful that the conversations will continue and said she feels that more people are speaking up than ever about the need to take action on systemic racism and be an ally.

“The continued and sustained conversation around systematic change is encouraging,” she said. “There have been many moments along my lifetime and throughout my career where there have been bubble-ups of some of these same conversations. But if I want to be very honest, they’ve bubbled, and then they have dissipated.”

She continued, “But I will say that something feels different about the conversations now.”

https://www.adweek.com/digital/ulta-beauty-shared-how-the-cosmetics-brand-adapted-to-the-pandemic/