

Upfront



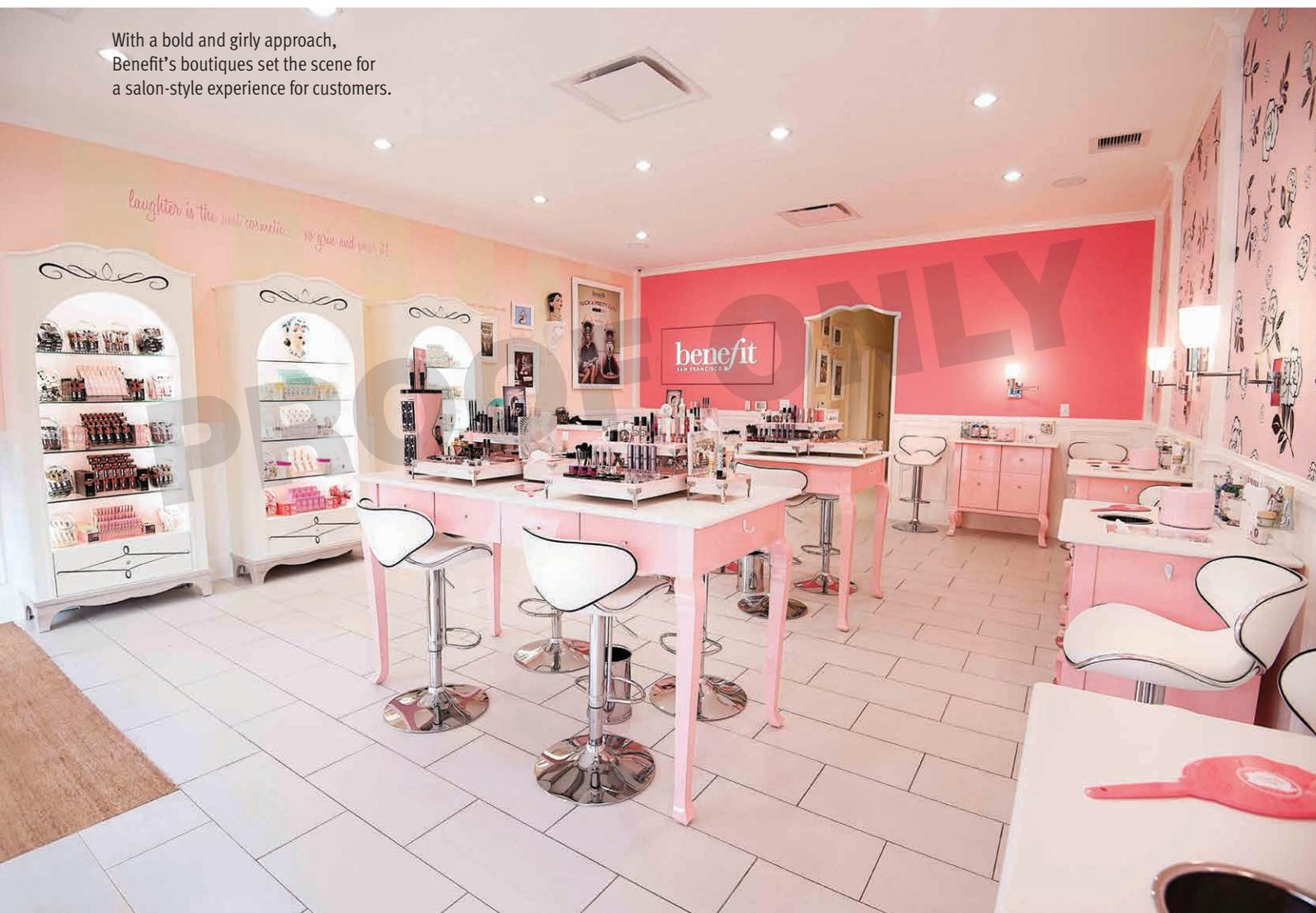
Nicole Frusci, senior vice president of marketing
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San Francisco

BENEFIT COSMETICS

Live Out Loud

Benefit Cosmetics solidifies its place as the leader in brow products and services while it stays true to its customers' beauty needs. **BY STEPHANIE CRETS**

With a bold and girly approach, Benefit's boutiques set the scene for a salon-style experience for customers.



Are your brows behaving badly? Do you want your eyelashes to stand out? Do you need to minimize the dark circles under your eyes? Whatever the beauty dilemma, Benefit Cosmetics has the beauty solution.

“The great thing about Benefit is that it’s a brand for every gal,” Senior Vice President of Marketing Nicole Frusci says. “We are all about instant beauty solutions – looking at customer needs and solving their beauty dilemmas. From in-store to social media, we weave our DNA through everything we do. Bold and girly is one piece, along with laughter and fun, which are elements

of the persona and personality of the brand that we try to live out loud every single day.”

With more than 1,800 locations worldwide in 47 markets, including 30 in the United States, Benefit products are widely accessible. Benefit offers several ways customers can purchase products: Benefit Boutiques, gondolas in beauty retailers such as Sephora, Ulta and Macy’s locations and all retailer websites including Birchbox.com. The boutiques set the pace for a salon-style experience, where the associates will take their time giving a service to the customer and offering tips and tricks. For the gondolas, however, Benefit has to compete with an array of other beauty brands.

“My approach is big, bold, girly and pink,” Senior Director of Visual Merchandising Ralph Johnson explains. “We have kitschy, fun and playful marketing

visuals, funny sayings and irreverent packaging, but we have to deliver on a serious product.

“We go the extra mile to create custom, quality packaging that stands out at retail. The product begs to be glorified in a special way with our creative fixtures. For example, our Roller Lash mascara is merchandised on a giant hair

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roller. We have the opportunity to be fun and crazy with each product.”

Another point of difference for the brand is its Brows-A-Go-Go locations, where Benefit leads with services rather than products. For the customer living in a fast-paced area like New York City, she can come in and get her brows waxed on her lunch break. “In the boutique setting, you come in, take your time and learn,” Johnson explains. “But Brows-A-Go-Go is for the girl on the go. The locations have a smaller footprint, providing just services that are focused on the face. The product selection has been reduced to focus only on products for eyes and brows.”

Currently, Benefit has four New York City-based Brows-A-Go-Go locations, but has plans to open an additional six in the coming year. Solving brow-related dilemmas harkens back to Benefit’s founding more than 40 years ago. Not only has Benefit grown to 47 countries, the company has also launched a full brow product collection with more than 45 new SKUs last June.

“This was just a natural extension to solidify our leadership in the brow category,” Frusci says. “People were already coming to us for brow services and now we can finish the services with products to perfect their brows.

From a marketing and merchandising perspective, it gave us an opportunity to expand our exposure and visibility at retail and double down to put the stake in the ground that we are the go-to brand for instant brow solutions.”

Johnson found the brow launch to be both incredibly challenging and rewarding. He had to coordinate the new product merchandising in every retail location, some of which had different size requirements or methods of installing fixtures. And everything had to be ready on the same day. “I’m still recovering from that,” he says, laughing.

“It’s solidified our position and exceeded sales expectations, which has been phenomenal,” Frusci adds. “It’s not even about the launch but what has happened from sustaining it. The launch was incredible with great buzz and people really fell in love – the word of mouth has been great.”

Staying Connected

Benefit has been around for a long time, yet it manages to stay connected and attuned to its customers’ wants and needs. And with beauty products, omnichannel messaging is more important than ever. With beauty influencers taking selfies of their great beauty look that day on Instagram or countless beauty vloggers on YouTube and Snapchat doing make-up tutorials, how does Benefit stay connected to its key demographic?

“We leverage social media to both engage with our girl on a regular basis and evolve and innovate where, when and how she engages with us,” Frusci explains. “Everything from posts on Instagram with visual and aspirational content, but then also using Facebook Live for a weekly show called ‘Tippy Tricks,’ which gives people the opportunity to have a real-time convo with us, as well as watch later. We’re constantly looking for where she is and staying nimble to ensure we’re delivering what she

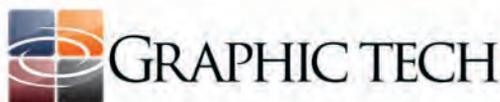
wants where she wants it, while giving her different perspectives of the brand.”

“We’re very excited to take on the opportu-



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nity to ensure our messaging is cohesive and the customer is getting that same experience online and in store as well,” Senior Director of Omnichannel Marketing Jennifer Whipple adds. “We’re even going back to our existing products: Is the messaging on the gondola the same as online? How are we talking about the products in store? What are we talking about on social? We’re bringing things back together to ensure we have one clear message.”

Benefit achieved that through its online “Brow Play Station.” It took the message of solving customers’ brow dilemmas and brought it to its website. Customers can select their brow shade, determine their brow issues (patchy, sparse, etc.) and have products curated to fit their needs, complete with follow-up video tutorials to help them successfully master the look they want.

Additionally, Benefit is constantly talking to its retail partners and looking at reviews from Sephora and Ulta customers. “If there’s a constant message in the reviews, we’ll take that feedback to either explain the product better or maybe it’s an educational experience we can bring in-store,” Whipple notes. “The re-

“The launch was incredible with great buzz and people really fell in love – the word of mouth has been great.”

views are a way to guide us in what she needs from us to better understand the use or to ultimately buy the product.”

“Our biggest point of difference is that we listen,” Frusci adds. “We are constantly engaging with our fan base in social media and through retail partners. We have conversations with our retailers but also with those out in our field. They’re in the trenches every day talking to customers and bringing that back here to our offices, the Pink Palace, to make decisions. Staying true to who we are, it’s all about going back to who she is and what she needs.”

Looking Forward

With the successful brow launch completed, everyone at Benefit is looking forward to what the future will bring. “The entire company put their blood, sweat and tears into every piece of that launch,” Frusci explains. “Everything was truly comprehensive and cohesive across every channel. That showed the power of the brand and it’s just the beginning. Now it’s about sustaining and growing our leadership in brows.

“Brows are what we think about 24/7/365, and it’s only going to become a bigger part of the business,” she continues. “It will drive the DNA of our brand and put more smiles on girls’ faces for years to come. That’s what I love about our brand: It’s fun and all about making women happy. Reaching and acquiring new fans to make them happy gives me more motivation.”

Benefit translates that messaging back to the home office, or the “Pink Palace” as it is affectionately known. The whole

team works together to drive the brand to become a leader in the beauty space, which includes playing dress-up and ensuring every day is unique and exciting. “Everything we do, every launch is something different and fun,” Johnson says. “You get to reinvent yourself every few months for a new launch. We’re coloring outside the lines and being disruptive. The crazier the idea, the higher chance it will be adopted.”

“After the huge undertaking of the brow launch, we’re very proud of the results and how it went,” Whipple says. “Now, I’m focusing on our digital presence, and my team will help drive that. It’s exciting to build the e-commerce business in total.”

As Benefit solidifies partnerships and grows its footprint, it plans to take the world by storm. Thanks to the expertise and knowledge in the brow category, Benefit can solidify its place in the beauty world as the go-to brand for brow products and services.

“Since day one, our founders looked at Benefit as a beauty locker room where girls come in, hang out, have fun and get beauty services,” Frusci says. “We always talk about how our customers start young and stay young with us. Now, for brows, whether a service or product, she needed a solution from both perspectives and we want to be there to answer all dilemmas. We’ve been known for traffic stopping and pulling customers in through fun, playful ways and that still remains true to how we encourage and engage new customers to sit down at our counters and our approach to social media.” 📱

