



Premium Beauty - Navigating the impact of Covid-19

The Premium Beauty industry in Ireland has faced some very difficult challenges over the past 18 months.

The first major change was the permanent closure of Debenhams doors, a department store that played an integral part in the Irish market as a destination for luxury cosmetics and fragrance brands.

It saw the impact of travel restrictions removing accessibility to airports where premium beauty brands are a major segment of Duty-Free shopping.

The temporary closure of all non-essential retail shops resulted in pharmacies being the only outlet where a customer could physically purchase their much-desired luxury beauty product.

The Premium Experience

The entire premium beauty industry is constructed around customer experience and excellent service.

The customer is paying a premium, so they experience the one-to-one consultation from a Beauty Advisor before they purchase.

Whether the customer is looking to purchase a new makeup, skincare or perfume, and whether it is for gifting purposes or a self-treat, the customer wants assistance and reassurance from the Beauty advisor that the product they are purchasing is right for them.

This level of service involves the beauty advisor building a good relationship with the customer so they can expertly guide them on shopping the brand.

This personalised shopping experience is part of the essence of premium beauty, and this is what Covid 19 pandemic completely removed from the entire industry.

The importance of brand loyalty

The customer was left with minimal options; to either rely on their previous brand experiences or to look at social media and browse various websites educating themselves on what they wanted to purchase.

Well established premium brands really showed why they earned their place in the industry as their loyal shoppers knew exactly what they wanted and made sure they got it by whatever means necessary.

Whether it was to purchase via a website or in a pharmacy, they

knew what they wanted and sought it out.

Adapting to Change

The pharmacy beauty halls however were operating in a very different non-personalised and uninviting environment due to strict Covid regulations.

The premium counters & fragrance walls in pharmacies had all their testers removed, signage and point of sale showcasing latest launches and special offers all removed.

The Counters were being serviced by generic and OTC staff only by request of a specific product from a customer as premium beauty products were deemed 'non-essential'.

The level of 'essential' would be contested however, by tremendously brand loyal customers who couldn't live without their favourite Advanced Night Repair Eye Cream, Genefique Serum, Clarins Hand Cream or Coco Mademoiselle.

Maintaining routines and self-care were some important elements to surviving lockdowns and even though there was no place to go socially, that did not deter our customers who regularly purchased more luxurious products as they continued to shop.

Customers want premium products to give themselves some comfort or to gift a loved one who they believed needed some comfort.

The premium beauty categories in turn became pillar categories for pharmacy as sales remained positive and consistent whilst keeping existing customers and recruiting new customers with a preference to shop in-store rather than online.

Phased return to personalised services

As we emerge from this lockdown our pharmacies are building on this positive performance by investing in our Beauty Advisors and fully equipping them to operate safely in the new phase of the pandemic.

We have been empowering them with extensive education and training on new processes and brand plans to ensure we are confidently trading into the future and setting genuine targets.

Written by Roisin Murray, Premium Beauty Buyer, McCauley Health & Beauty Pharmacy

Testers and full counter displays are being re-introduced in phases, and we have yet to return to full services on counter concerning sit down consultations and full face make overs.

Foundation colour matching and skin consultations are being carried out by providing customers with personalised samples to take home and try the product before purchasing the full-size version.

Beauty advisors are working carefully maintaining relationships with their customers by engaging virtually through texts and emails informing them of any promotions and new product launches.

This will continue to be the way of working for the next phase before the return to full services in the coming months all going to plan.

It should be recognised that the past 18 months have been very challenging for Beauty Advisors, as makeovers and the customer interaction is their passion and motivation and this element was completely removed from their role.

E-Retailing standards & the future

Whilst the in-store experience remains to be the primary focus for our premium customers, E-commerce continues to be a very important part of the business with some customers fully converted to the convenience of online shopping.

We have implemented click and collect hubs in some of our satellite pharmacies to offer more premium products to our more rural customers.

E-Retailing premium brands also comes with the expectation of a more premium experience.

Customers are expecting an extra special online shopping experience, from the moment they receive a personalised email enticing them to shop, to the moment they open their package when it arrives at their door.



This flawless delivery process is a lot easier said than done and every business is striving to continue to streamline and improve their customers online shopping journey.

Substantial investment has been put in place to provide easy navigation of the website, creating brand boutiques for luxury brands, featuring new launches and promotions on web banners and building a simple checkout processes with options to use loyalty or discount codes.

Their delivery should arrive within the expected timeframe, containing all items ordered and with very smart packaging that is ticking all the boxes - functional, sustainable, and exceptional presentation.

The premium beauty customer expects no less than prestige. This is the motivation for all our operations as we continue to navigate the current climate.

It is vital that pharmacies are maximising all available opportunities for growth by ensuring these premium standards are executed both in-store and online.

We are doing so by strengthening our service strategies, empowering our beauty advisors, and harnessing all that the latest digital technology has to offer.