

BEAUTY

Why Beauty Won't Stop Expanding

The high-growth category now includes everything from vibrators to vitamins as consumers look for more holistic solutions rather than just products.



The beauty category is expanding to include everything from vibrators to vitamins. BoF Collage.

By **JOAN KENNEDY**

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Growing up, Carolyn Yachanin tried topical after topical to get rid of her cystic acne. Despite an abundant collection of empty tubes — and promises — nothing worked. In 2018, she turned to a holistic doctor, who introduced her to plant botanicals, herbal supplements and things like grape seed extract, gotu kota and matcha. Finally, her skin began to clear.

Yachanin was so taken by the power of the ingredients, she was inspired to bring them to the masses. In 2020, she launched Copina Co., a plant-based “edible beauty” company, which sells vegan powders loaded with botanicals that jumpstart collagen creation in the body to promote hair and nail growth, as well as help skin plump and youthful.

“Our external vibrance and beauty is really a reflection of our internal health,” said Yachanin. “What the beauty world should really be focusing on is aligning and optimising our internal health.”

The collagen powders Yachanin sells are one of several **non-traditional** beauty products that have been **branded as beauty** in recent years, as the industry has undergone a rapid expansion. Today, thanks to the growing confluence of beauty and wellness, everything from vibrators to vitamins are sold in stores next to moisturiser and makeup. The most recent wave of beauty startups often strives to be more than just beauty, such as Vyrao, a fragrance company that claims their scents offer an energy boost, or Keys Soulcare, a skin care label that supplies consumers with an entire ritual, including packages that come with roller tools, cream and candles.

This shift, according to Audrey Depraeter-Montacel, Accenture’s managing director of beauty and luxury, has been happening for years but underwent a pandemic-induced acceleration. A number of factors are driving the trend, including a greater societal focus on self-care and a desire for a more lifestyle-based approach to wellness. But brands, too, are propelling the change, using storytelling and approachable content to stamp their once-fringe products as part of a consumer’s beauty routine.

“People are approaching how they take care of their skin and their body in this much more holistic view,” said Katie Thomas, a lead at Kearney Consumer Institute. “As we bring self care into it, the overarching thing is wellness, and beauty becomes part of that.”

How Brands Are Selling It

As consumers become interested in more holistic and self-focused beauty, brands are investing in lifestyle and educational content and messaging centred around the consumer to convince people that their products will benefit their well-being.

“In beauty, storytelling is everything,” said Depraeter-Montacel. “If you are good at articulating that initial intention and are telling a story that makes sense ... I think there is no limit — you can go into food, you can go into sport.”

According to Yachanin, there’s been a “great awakening” among consumers to think of beauty beyond what you put on your face, to what you consume and how you feel inside. That trend is driven in part by young people sharing beauty and wellness-centric lifestyle content on platforms like TikTok, like a video that shows what someone is eating for breakfast just after they share their morning moisturiser.

“[We’re] meeting people where they’re looking to start building their skincare routines — which is not necessarily in their night creams, it’s in their morning coffees,” said Yachanin. Before she started the company, Yachanin published a blog and has replicated its community-support feel in the company’s marketing. Copina Co. puts recipes on its site, incorporates its products into viral TikTok trends, posts “how to’s” along with short videos highlighting things like “reasons tremella mushroom is amazing for your skin,” and sends samples to creators who are already making wellness content in line with the brand.

Content has been a major tool for Éva Goicochea, founder of sexual wellness company Maude, which sells sleek vibrators and candles that melt into massage oils. *Beauty Independent* editor Claire McCormack says sexual wellness brands have been able to justify their beauty positioning by building a strong community rapport through both content and solutions-based products for once-taboo problems. Goicochea, who calls sexual wellness “the last frontier of beauty,” uses the brand’s content vertical, called “The Maudern,” to tackle topics like sexual wellness, science and history.

“It’s not only just about the product — it’s also about your sense of self,” she said. “We use beauty as this beacon of how you see product interacting in the rest of your life.”

Fulfilling consumer desire for both purpose and self-prioritisation in products is what drove Yasmin Sewell to launch her fragrance brand, Vyrao, which takes more of a wellness approach to the category with scents that are designed to energise the body.

“Scent was always traditionally marketed to be worn for other people, like to be sexy for somebody else, but I created these with the sole intention that you would use them for yourself,” said Sewell.

Building Routine

As the definition of beauty has grown, brands now have to think about and embed themselves in the routines that surround their product — what the consumer is doing before and after using it, as well as their mindset — to satisfy more informed, solution-oriented consumers, says Thomas. Retailers, too, are increasingly designing the consumer experience to fit into a consumer’s personal habits.

DTC vitamin company Ritual, for example, aims to make its science-based brand approachable with friendly Instagram posts designed to tout vitamins as a desirable habit (that’s easy to make, thanks to the brand’s subscription model), not just an afterthought on the pharmacy shelf.

“The tone of voice is what draws people in,” said Ritual founder Katerina Schneider “We want to be ... your OBGYN that you do yoga with.”

Consumer research showed Ulta Beauty that shoppers wanted to bring services home and create regimens, said Penny Coy, Ulta Beauty’s vice president of merchandising. In response, it beefed up its product mix, opening wellness shops in 450 of its 1300 doors that include supplements, powders, teas, tools like massagers, toning devices and sleep therapy machines as well as what it calls “down there care,” including tampons and hemp-infused period patches, with further expansion to come in Spring 2022. It also offers resources like skin analysis that give buyers personalised recommendations. Coy said the company continuously surveys consumers as it expands its mix, and has so far found its customers want variety and expansive self-care categories to choose from.

“We haven’t drawn the line,” she said. “This is not a fad. Wellness is here to stay.”

As the beauty sector broadens, it could come with changes in how retailers and legacy corporations show up for and talk to consumers. Mainstay beauty labels could see further challenges from what Thomas calls “ankle biter brands.”

“It’s death by 1,000 paper cuts,” she said. “You’re going to see smaller brands continue to chip away at the bigger brands unless they can reconcile what they’re really bringing to consumers.”

A pocket of consumers may still think more traditionally and be harder to convince — for some, a candle will always be home decor, not wellness, said Thomas. But for most brands, the potential that comes from being a part of the growing beauty market means there won’t be a slowdown in expansion any time soon.

“[Beauty and wellness positioning] gives you market share,” said Depraeter-Montacel. “The opportunity around the ecosystem and product category is infinite.”

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