

Guest column

Devices of the future

In our guest column, Peter Luebcke, a personal-care specialist at US-based product development company Sagentia shares his view on the growth of devices in the beauty industry



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Brand bundles

Cosmetic brands can reinforce their message and strengthen their offer by not only providing topical products, but by adding devices as part of an overall brand 'bundle'. The device could be a diagnostic one that demonstrates the before-and-after effects of the products and guides the consumer on a particular product or regime. Such a branded diagnostic tool could be used by beauticians in-store to guide customers or, in the case of direct sales, by sales reps to trigger 'service-enabled' recommendations and sales.

It could also be a therapeutic device that works with topicals to promote deeper skin penetration or hair conditioning—the efficacy of the product is promoted and so sales are increased. The perception of the brand is also elevated technologically, especially as chemistry-only innovations that result in truly visible improvements have become fewer and further between.

Prioritizing personalization

Low-cost sensors and intelligence within the device also allow a degree of personalization for the individual consumer. A diagnostic device, for example, could measure skin type or level of hair damage that leads to the recommendation of a product or personal-care regime suited to that individual. In terms of a therapeutic device, sensors and intelligence can provide real-time measurement of the skin, nail or hair and alter the treatment mode accordingly, for example, skin type and hair color to adjust light intensity for hair removal. In an already crowded market, this 'tailored' approach to the individual not only makes the brand credible and distinctive but it helps to secure the loyalty of those consumers.

Exploiting devices' growth

Unlike a purely formulation-based product, a device could connect (wirelessly or via USB, for example) to the internet allowing treatment



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Sagentia personal care & beauty sector specialist Peter Luebcke

or measurement data to be uploaded to the brand's website to build a database of users and meta data for their skin or hair types. This information helps beauty companies target launches and advertising campaigns and can also create an online 'community'. This community could benefit from loyalty rewards and receive offers and alerts via text or email on their smartphones.

Convergence of beauty & medical

In the case of therapy, a purely cosmetic device is limited by the efficacy claims it can make. However, a device that has received medical device approval, for example, can make claims that relate to actual physiological changes (affecting structure and function of the human body), which then have an impact on the appearance, such as a structural change like restoring the skin's youthful elasticity. If backed up by clinical evidence, this type of claim will elevate it above purely cosmetic lower-tech products.

Learning from other industries

From a purely commercial business model perspective, a device that works with a consumable element is a compelling one: low purchase price devices attract the consumer and then the continuing purchase of consumables provides an ongoing revenue stream in much the same way as the razor/razor-head and the ink jet printer/cartridge models. Initially low-margin devices can be sold relying on the revenues from higher margin consumables to make a profit. This approach is also a valuable opportunity to develop protected features that prevent copy-cat consumables being used with the device. However, the company must approach this from a consumer or safety benefit angle rather than purely from a 'lock & key' one, which could be seen to be anti-competitive. Such examples include how a device communicates with the consumable to alter its setting to provide maximum efficacy and safety. The know-how of the company developing that system provides a certain degree of protection, as does first-mover advantage and trademarks and other forms of intellectual property. ■

Peter Luebcke is a personal care & beauty sector specialist at Sagentia, a global product development and outsourced R&D company. His focus at Sagentia is on helping clients develop consumer products that are both commercially viable and efficacious. He has a chemistry and physics background and has a particular interest in dermal and transdermal technologies.