



ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

From online to offline and everywhere in between, WWD's executive editor of beauty, **PETE BORN**, reports on the digital brands that are boldly blurring the last vestiges of traditional channel distinction.

THE FLAGSHIP STORE of NYX Professional Makeup on New York's Union Square illustrates in dazzling light the true point of omni-retailing. Walk through the store under bright lights overhead, past colorful neon displays lining the walls, about 20 digital screens beaming self-help videos, various beauty bars for lashes, mascara and brows, as well as lessons on strobing and contouring. At the end is a giant multiscreen installment to guide customers through creating their own makeup palette, with pop music throbbing through the sound system.

This demonstrates the chameleon-like changeability that has been engineered to keep consumers in the NYX moment (an objective shared by countless other new breed brands). It is a process of transmuting the virtual world of digital into the touchy, feely fleshed-out physical reality of the here and now.

The objective of this alchemy is to be here, there—everywhere—for the customer, whether it's on a city street, inside a Target or in front of a screen. E-commerce companies that may have been born online are not married to it and vice versa. Wendy Liebmann, chief executive officer of WSL Strategic Retail, lays down the creed: "We may have come out of this virtual world, but we are not bound to stay there, if that's not where our customers or the shopper is."

Along the way, these new brands are not shy when it comes to snaring customers. "It's a Glossier world," says brand founder Emily Weiss. Weiss launched online, set up her first full store in Decem-

ber and is considering opening a second. "It's a whole universe," she continues. "And she is interacting with us multiple times a day. She's following Glossier on Instagram, she's getting Glossier's e-mails, she is downloading Glossier photographs to be the wallpaper of her iPhone."

That's why these young brands, which started in e-commerce or elsewhere, show no hesitation in going anywhere—to department stores or national chains, or even into the realm of TV shopping.

John P. Bailey, president and chief financial officer of E.l.f. Beauty, which started online and has since opened 19 branded stores as well as large mass merchandisers, says his "biggest takeaway was that instead of operating in silos, as many companies do, integration can be a powerful tool. We've spent a lot of time focusing on how to leverage our stores into various aspects of the business, such as our innovation program and our overall engagement model," he says.

Pinrose Perfumes was daring in its diversification, opening Nordstrom the year after it launched. Then came Sephora, with expectations of operating in 204 stores at the end of the year. Then came QVC. Cofounder Christine Luby has some advice about

*"WE MAY HAVE COME
OUT OF THIS VIRTUAL
WORLD, BUT WE ARE NOT
BOUND TO STAY THERE."*

Wendy Liebmann, WSL Strategic Retail

embracing retailers. "It's tempting to launch a ton of doors out of the gate," she says, adding that it is better to do a 10-door test.

NYX, which started in beauty supply and at trade shows with a strategy of spreading word of mouth among beauty junkies, did not have an easy time launching its own stores. Scott Friedman, president, recalls that the hardest task "was finding out what the store was all about, what it would look like and how do we make it relevant. We didn't want to just open a store, we wanted to properly express the brand and share this great energy that exists online."

To that end, NYX opened stores loaded with plenty of digital features and a large product assortment, then began collaborating with YouTubers and Instagrammers to create tutorials to show how to replicate the latest looks, be it a glitter lip or full-face contour.

"Part of the purpose of our stores was to go beyond it being just a point of distribution but really this ultimate immersive experience. All of these features are intentionally made to help educate consumers," says Mehdi Mehdi, NYX's vice president of digital.

Nathalie Kristo, senior vice president of marketing at NYX, says "retail is detail," noting how hard it is to actually execute and ticking off details that need attending to like "your looks...the energy of the store...how our artists interact to make it an inviting environment...how the digital tools work and if it's going to be intuitive to have someone come in at different makeup comfort levels....Every single detail is thought through because it's supposed to be the best experience of the brand," she says.

Katia Beauchamp, ceo of Birchbox, is in the process of opening her second store—in Paris—but she has come to realize that, "Our focus will be digital, but we believe brick-and-mortar will be part of the strategy," she says. "The symbiosis between online and offline is where you get real relationships with customers. Online is powerful because there is so much data about the user; it's pretty hard to do that in the physical world. But in the physical world you're able to interact with users. The power of the symbiosis between the two creates a sticky, lasting multigenerational relationship."

Celebrity hairstylist Jen Atkin launched her brand Ouai online, and recently opened a pop-up shop in Henri Bendel. "In the past, we've all felt there's a division—either brick-and-mortar or you're a digital company. I now realize there are enough consumers in both categories," she says. "You have people who like the convenience of shopping online, but you have a lot of people who enjoy going into a store and trying something on and feeling the texture of the product."

Atkin likens it to the music industry: "It's important for Justin Bieber or Beyoncé to make a music video," she says, "but it's also important for them to go out on tour. For a young brand in demand, you need to meet your audience everywhere." ■