Retail Innovation Shout Out: Building a Brand with Loyalty in a Crowded Marketplace

by Brittany Hamm

Beauty product subscriptions are popping up all over. Marketed at slightly different price points to overlapping customer segments, there is not much break out yet. Julep is on its way to changing that.

Outwardly, Julep is the beauty subscription for nail polish addicts. Julep is unique in that it actively listens to its fan base, called “Mavens,” as it develops, tests and launches new products. Jane Park, former Starbucks executive, started Julep as a few beauty parlors that she designed to encourage interactions between patrons and her staff. She asked her staff to listen for feedback on both the products and the experience. With feedback in hand, Julep’s Idea Lab quickly responds with new products and improvements. Not all new launches are successful, but Julep welcomes fast failures and continuous learning as part of the process.

Julep’s latest merchandise innovation comes from a pain point felt by all who dare to paint their own nails: it is hard to do yourself! Julep set out to create a nail polish wand to overcome this challenge. After developing prototypes, Julep invited its Mavens to test the wands. As a small company that lacks significant cash to invest in a markedly new idea, Julep again reached out to its fan base and launched a crowd funding campaign to bring the idea to life. Customer loyalty paid off: crowd funding doubled the goal.

Jane Park has taken her business into the e-commerce marketplace and continues to grow her Maven base with subscription beauty boxes. Julep’s boxes leverage recommendations from style surveys and are revealed online before they show up on doorsteps. Mavens have the option to swap out products or even gift their boxes to friends. Julep continues to listen to feedback and meet customers with responsive flexibility, all while growing a loyal customer base - something we have yet to see from other beauty box subscriptions.

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Originally published on March 19th, 2014

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