

Beauty Bloggers Gain Credibility in Industry

By Rachel Brown

MANHATTAN BEACH, Calif. — Beauty bloggers, once snubbed and now coveted by many of the beauty companies they adore, are on a bumpy evolutionary trek from detached commentators to industry insiders.

"They are like the QVC of this time," said Don Ressler, co-chief executive officer of Intelligent Beauty, owner of Redpoint Cosmetics and iQ Derma. "They have been really involved in the [beauty] space. They have really shown they have a voice."

At the Total Beauty Blogging Summit held partially at Intelligent Beauty's headquarters here from May 16 to 18, the advantages and disadvantages of bloggers' rising power were etched out. On the plus side for bloggers, much of the beauty apparatus is taking them seriously as formidable links to consumers, and a support system of bloggers and online networks has blossomed to foster their success.

On the downside, increasing competition has made it difficult for individual beauty bloggers to stand out. Bloggers complain about pesky publicists expecting coverage, and burgeoning media awareness has led to a perception that they're swag addicts with trigger fingers for positive reviews.

Dangling on the precipice between fringe and mainstream is certainly a tricky place to be. Many beauty bloggers are making an effort to keep beauty companies at a distance since traditional media, they said, often gets too chummy with beauty firms.

The 45 bloggers at the summit were keenly aware that their currency is the authentic connections they have with readers. "We are liberated from the pressure of advertising. One of the great strengths that we all have is our editorial voice and the honesty we give readers," said Annie Tomlin, editor of Bella Sugar, speaking on a panel at the summit, which was arranged by Total Beauty, a Beverly Hills-based online resource for beauty product information with a network of some 125 bloggers.

Still, bloggers walk a tightrope trying to preserve their integrity and acquire information as beauty companies banking on the bonds they have with consumers court them. Christina Jones, who writes eBeautyDaily for b5media, has responded to the dilemma by cutting back on communicating with public relations representatives. "I hate that pressure," she said. "I don't want to deal with them."

Julia Coney, founder of the All About the Pretty blog, suggested readers can tell the difference between a blogger with true affection for a brand and one that has succumbed to marketing, and will ultimately vote with their eyes. "I am not on Bobbi Brown's p.r. list, and I don't care if I ever get on it because I love her that much," she said. "Readers really know."

As the blogosphere matures, bloggers are sharpening their content and are sometimes shying away from covering products being sent to other bloggers to ensure variety. "Just because it is the hottest product, it doesn't mean we are going to write about it," said Ellen Mirza, editor in chief of Lipstick Powder 'n Paint. "We have to be passionate about it."

Readers and brands can better judge bloggers for themselves if there exists established codes of conduct. Kristen Giordani, senior editor of Total Beauty, advised summit attendees on product review guidelines. For example, she handed them an instruction sheet that outlined how skin care items should be tested for at least four weeks, makeup for five days, hair care for two weeks and body care for four weeks before a review.

"The sites and bloggers that do have ethical standards and communicate those are going to be looked at [more favorably] from readers and brands," said Emrah Kovacoglu, ceo of Total Beauty.

Review protocols make sense to Paul Baranda, who puts out Beyond Beauty Basics with his girlfriend. "Really what we want is for readers to come back and

stay loyal....We want to be that person that teaches you what is hot out there and what is new, and give it an unbiased review," he said. However, he conceded, "There still seems to be somewhat of a lack of accountability in blogging. You don't have to get two sources and all that stuff."

The questions confronting beauty bloggers are only due to mount as their numbers continue to climb, making it a complicated task for beauty brands to navigate the blogosphere that is home to hundreds if not thousands of blogs touching on beauty. "The brands have definitely understood by now the importance of bloggers in the success of their businesses, but it is difficult for them to figure out what to do," said Kovacoglu. "User-generated content is something that is scary to brands. They don't know what is going to be said."

Fragmentation and diversity in the blogger universe makes it that much harder for brands to gauge what bloggers will write. At the summit, the bloggers spanned the racial spectrum; live in big cities, suburban enclaves and small towns; were members of the YouTube to Baby Boomer generations, and ranged from stay-at-home moms to successful professionals to former beauty editors.

Brands have coped with that diversity by basing their interaction with blogs on a blog's traffic totals and reaching out to the most recognizable blogger personalities. Kovacoglu said that brands are paying serious attention to blogs that have 25,000 to 35,000 unique visitors monthly, but Baranda estimated p.r. agencies start contacting blogs once they've reached the roughly 3,000 monthly visitor mark.

How to boost traffic was a topic of great interest during the summit. Search engine optimization specialist Russ Smith told the group that celebrities remained leading attractions. Individual bloggers noted that their largest readerships were frequently for "how-to" posts. "Women want to learn how to do things properly," explained Tammy Gibson, the blogger behind A Mom in Red High Heels.

Regardless of traffic, Kovacoglu indicated brands are most comfortable with bloggers the likes of Shake Your Beauty's Tia Williams, Jolie Nadine's Nadine Haobsh and Jet Set Girls' Anne Fritz, all of whom previously were found on magazine mastheads. Williams has been featured in Olay advertising, and Haobsh said she's worked with Guthy-Renker on

the infomercial company's In An Instant skin care line.

Depending upon known blogging entities, though, can shut out brands to key niche consumers. As brands and bloggers become more sophisticated, they have a better grasp on audiences for blogs and what products appeal to them. Gibson said that there are currently a few brands "savvy enough" to approach her specifically for her audience, which largely consists of middle-class mothers 23- to 35-years-old.

Ressler said Intelligent Beauty would attempt to learn more from bloggers by soliciting their opinions and treating them akin to an "informal advisory board." "You get instant information in real time. You don't have to wait for a magazine," he said. In addition, Total Beauty is launching a program called Sneak Peek later this year get products in the hands of beauty bloggers for them to review. "This is the first time we have had significant brand partnerships getting brands in front of bloggers," said Kovacoglu.

If the summit, where brands such as Kate Somerville, L'Oréal Paris, Anastasia Beverly Hills and Murad wooed bloggers with products and tours, is any hint, the assimilation of bloggers into the industry isn't slowing. "We see that the Internet is very quickly changing the entire landscape of the beauty industry," said Adam Goldenberg, co-ceo of Intelligent Beauty Inc. "The beauty companies that get this and that embrace the Internet are going to be successful and the ones that don't are going to be left behind."

Frédéric Fekkar is game. In a video clip shown at the summit, he confessed, "Actually, I wanted to be a blogger myself. Maybe I should start."



Kirsten Lambertson of Beauty Riot, Nadine Haobsh of Jolie Nadine, Anne Fritz of Jet Set Girls, Tia Williams of Shake Your Beauty and Annie Tomlin of Bella Sugar.

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SNIPPETS

ONLINE BUY: Intelligent Beauty has purchased skin care Web site DermStore from its dermatologist founder Craig Kraffert for an undisclosed amount. DermStore, which was started in 1999, carries brands such as La Roche-Posay, Nia 24, Jan Marini Skin Research, Colorescience, SkinCeuticals, Laura Geller, B. Kamins and Kinerase.

LATEST DELIVERY: Intelligent Beauty is introducing a proprietary delivery system called t-sphere in two product lines set for a fall launch. "This is a second- or third-generation process in that it is a completely new structure of

a liposome," said chief scientific officer Scott Whittier, who joined Intelligent Beauty a year ago from Milbar Laboratories. T-sphere will be used in iQ Advanced, which builds upon key ingredients in existing skin care line iQ Derma in five debut products, and Kronos, a new age-correcting hair care line.

KATE EXPANDS: Kate Somerville products have recently landed in roughly 25 doors including Henri Bendel, Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom. The skin care brand was previously confined to some 35 spas, independent shops, resorts and clinics, including the Kate Somerville location in West Hollywood, Calif. "We expect Kate to be one of our biggest skin care performers this year," said Claudia Lucas, senior vice president and general merchandise manager at Henri Bendel.

RAW SKIN: Mineral makeup specialist Raw Natural Beauty is adding skin care to its product assortment this month. Items

include Ambiaty Concentrated Serum to combat fine lines and wrinkles for \$79 and Ambiaty Daily Revitalizing Cream to promote elasticity for \$59.

FROM BROWS TO FACE: Anastasia Beverly Hills is unveiling a full color line next year. Reed Cromwell 4th, director of global product development and innovation, was hired from Stila to lead the effort, which will draw from eyebrow guru Anastasia Soare's Romanian heritage. "We are looking at the whole face and becoming a face authority," said Cromwell.

DYE CHANGE: L'Oréal Paris' Féria is getting an ingredient tune-up. Reformulated Féria hair color products will hit the shelves late summer, according to Jennifer Hessel, assistant vice president of retail and public relations for L'Oréal Paris. Hessel led beauty bloggers on a tour of the company's Los Angeles store in the Beverly Center mall.