

DSCs are key to distributor website launch By Dave Anttila

Picture yourself in a crowd on the opening day of baseball season. Excitement's at a fever pitch. Three rows away, you see a super-fan decked head to toe in the home-team colors and logo stand and start moving his hands up and down, trying to start the wave. However, he's having a hard time getting others to join him. Then, another person stands up and moves to the front of the bleachers to direct the section, ultimately involving the entire ball park.

When you launch an e-commerce website without a complementary plan to create buy-in and enthusiasm, you can often fall into the trap that the first fan did. Sure, the enthusiasm was there, but the lack of coordinated effort meant they were just another fan, waving up and down. Too easily, distributors can fall into the trap of launching "just another e-commerce site."

We want you to engage your audience to ensure a successful new "wave" of selling potential. To engage your audience, your salespeople will be the second fan in the example, getting customers excited about the new buying process. The hope is that this will lead to a chain reaction of customers buying more frequently on the site, therefore ensuring the success of the e-commerce website launch.

You're playing ball with a new e-commerce site—now what?

If you're a beauty distributorship, along with the process of setting up products, developing advertising strategies and acquiring customers, the most important step in ensuring a successful launch of an e-commerce site is activating your sales team. That's because your DSCs are the ones who are talking to salons and stylists every day. If you don't make it easy for them, or explain how the e-commerce launch will work, it could take months, even years, to get their accounts—your customers—sold on the idea of using it regularly, meaning it will take longer for your company to profit off your investment.

Get a good adoption rate right off the bat

We've found that when your sales team is engaged right away, the adoption rate of the website is faster. Earlier and deeper customer involvement will lead to higher sales.

So how do you get the sales team engaged? The entire company must treat the website as a new sales channel to enhance and complement sales activity. Leadership must communicate those expectations to the sales team and develop new marketing initiatives and assets to help salespeople facilitate the transition. Your website is not just a pretty site that you design and forget about, but a living, breathing sales channel that, once launched and running, becomes a powerful vehicle for revenue, depending on how much your team embraces it.

how to shop by brands and how to book education will encourage customers to explore the site on their own.

Last but not least, it is critical for DSCs to show their salons how to use key shopping functionalities. For example, with our iBeAuthentic platforms, we spend time on:

- **Shopping lists**, which save products into a "favorites" folder of sorts to streamline the reordering of their favorite products.
- **Quick order**, which allows customers to add products to their carts by entering the SKU and quantity, cutting down their ordering process to minutes.

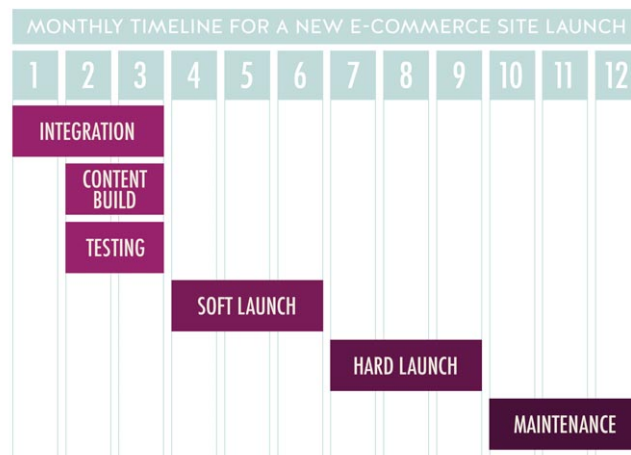
Within that introductory conversation, the DSC will need to determine with their accounts how their relationship will evolve going forward. Ideally, they will transition to

leading more strategic discussions about how to help the salons achieve their goals and grow their businesses. When the relationship becomes more strategic between the salon and DSC, the salon receives an added layer of professionalism and support that trickles down all the way to their clients. It impacts how stylists communicate with clients, what products they offer and breaks them out of the mindset of seeing the distributor just as a "place they get their products." This process will also allow distributors to transition their DSCs to thought leaders who recommend programs

and implement their ideas into salons to help them work smarter.

Soft launch—first base

During the soft launch stage of deployment, the e-commerce site is turned on to key accounts, where they're given the opportunity to look at the site and use it. This is when distributors and their DSCs will communicate closely with their salons to spot opportunities for improvement related to content and user flow. This is also the time to pick the brains of



iBeAuthentic suggests a three-month period for the soft launch of an e-commerce site to spot opportunities for improvement related to content and user flow.

Pitch the new site to key accounts

Before the website launches, have your DSCs sit down with their key accounts and walk them through the new website. That will communicate the significance of the change and speed up the adoption process.

Have your DSCs demo the account setup, including how to register and how to manage their address and payment information. Walk them through it step-by-step. On top of that, highlighting key navigation features, like how to find promotions, how to use the search bar,

key accounts to learn what is working and not working for them.

We've found that a constructive way to organize feedback is to conduct surveys. Whether that's an online form they fill out or a questionnaire that transfers between the DSC and the account, the surveys will give a broad picture of how the site performs and allow your team to communicate with iBeAuthentic on tackling any issues and improving the layout of the main functionalities.

In addition to the testing and deployment, you will need to create a plan for promoting the new e-commerce site on your existing marketing channels. We suggest using your magazine to announce the new site. Usually, this is the marketing piece that has the highest distribution number out of all your platforms and ensures that most of your customers will see it. We suggest planning one publication to tease the new website and another publication to promote the site once it's launched, then promoting it in every issue going forward. Yes, selecting a publication in which you will announce the launch might feel too hasty when you don't know the full scope of the project, but it's easy to adjust if you need more time and sets a goal for the team to work toward.

Full launch—rounding second heading home

The full website launch occurs after your DSCs and their key customers have worked out enough kinks and tested enough features and you've made the necessary updates to feel confident that the website meets all of your customers' needs. Now, every salon will gain access and you will create a more conventional promotion to encourage customers to register.



The most effective way for a distributor to debut a new website is to plan a consistent launch across its content ecosystem, with complementary graphics for bi-monthly magazines, box stuffers and promotional cards. Images Courtesy of Paramount Beauty.

For the full launch, think about the eblasts, box stuffers, social media campaigns and website banners that will deliver your message. Brainstorm with your DSCs about how they can use these tools to get customers on the website faster and more efficiently. This stage of the process is really about rounding the corner on how you're going to maintain the day-to-day operations of the website and manage the relationships of your DSCs with their accounts.

We've found that the most effective tactic to encourage your customers to try the site is to offer free shipping on the first order they place online. Because you will have a mix of salespeople and salons ordering on your site, we recommend allowing free shipping only on customer-placed orders to encourage customers to try the new website. If you allow salespeople to scoop the deal for their clients, it defeats the purpose of the offer.

As far as incentives for DSCs go, these play a big part, as commission is a critical piece of their pay. Distributors can motivate their DSCs to get their customers onboarded through different initiatives—for example, offer an

incentive for onboarding a specified number of customers who register and place an order during a specific time frame. Consider tweaking the sales compensation structure as required for a few crucial months during setup to motivate customers to sign up.

In addition to all of the benefits your website will provide, the most important might be that customers shopping online tend to place higher-dollar orders than when their salesperson orders for them. Customers spend more when they shop, because they have the ability to browse and find other items they want at their convenience.

For a home-run strategy

when launching a new e-commerce site, what's most important is involving salespeople in the company's vision from start to finish. Get them out of the stands and onto their field. By leveraging the new site, your salespeople will have the opportunity to educate and consult with their customers on new business



strategies, ultimately helping them realize that they are the agents for change.

For more information about how iBeAuthentic can help you build and launch your e-commerce

website to the greatest buy-in, schedule a call with Dave Anttila (danttila@ibeauthentic.com), business development and iBeAuthentic partner, and Erin Noha (enoha@ibeauthentic.com), Digital Media Supervisor, who co-authored this article in partnership with iBeAuthentic and Beauty Industry Report.