

Case Study - Ulta

Streamlining Processes to Meet Consumers Where They Are

Introduction:

In the beauty industry, and retail in general, consumer behaviors and insights are a swinging pendulum. Whether it's a new skincare trend inspired by a viral TikTok, or say, an international pandemic that causes a decrease in makeup-wearing, many factors contribute to constant changes in consumer wants and needs for Ulta Beauty. The question is, how can Ulta keep up with these constant changes to meet their customers where they are?

The Problem

Before Ulta Beauty's partnership with Fuel Cycle, their method for gathering consumer insights consisted of one survey tool that only supported long, drawn-out, and complicated processes for gathering data. The survey tool required the work and collaboration of about 10 different internal Ulta Beauty teams just to get the surveys into the hands of potential participants. Once the survey had collected enough data, the Ulta Beauty team also faced some major challenges in conducting analysis and insights and report development in a timely and efficient manner.

Because of the fast-changing desires of beauty consumers, there were many situations where Ulta Beauty needed to collect data and information about a certain topic quickly, but were unable to do so with their current survey tool. Often, executives would request immediate answers to a specific question about consumers, yet it would take weeks, or even months, for the insights team to get the answers.

The old ways of market research simply could not support such a broad and fast-changing consumer base, and Ulta Beauty needed a new and improved process for collecting insights to improve customer satisfaction and achieve better brand health.

The Solution

While looking for new customer insights tools to improve their processes, Ulta Beauty realized that a partnership with Fuel Cycle is just what they needed.

Through Fuel Cycle, Ulta Beauty set up an online community called the Beauty Board. The Beauty Board consists of:

7,000+
members

10,000+
completed surveys every month

3,000+
user comments

82%
participation rate

The successful engagement rate of the Beauty Board comes down to the incentivization strategy that Ulta Beauty crafted alongside Fuel Cycle. They implemented a strong member value proposition to reward engagement and make participating users feel heard and valued.

Here are some aspects of the incentivization strategy in the Beauty Board:

- Newsletters sent to community members to show them survey results and the associated changes that Ulta Beauty is making because of the feedback collected in the community.
- A fun, appealing community landscape to keep users interested and engaged.
- Monthly recruitment refreshes to ensure that new voices are entering the community.
- A “welcome committee” of hand-selected community members that act as brand ambassadors to welcome new members and encourage participation among the community.
- Mobile access and promotion to appeal to younger generations (specifically Gen Z and millennials), allowing Ulta Beauty to get the word out about incentivized opportunities via text rather than in the crowded email space.

The Results:

The flexibility of the Fuel Cycle platform, and the high engagement rate of their community members, allowed Ulta to streamline the inefficient, drawn-out process they once knew. What once took weeks could now be done in a matter of hours. What once was a bandwidth of 1-2 surveys per month turned to 6-8 activities a week.

The Beauty Board saved time, resources, and money for Ulta Beauty. On top of this, the online community did not burden other internal teams like the outdated survey tool did. The Consumer Insights team at Ulta Beauty could work more independently and effectively using Fuel Cycle’s tools. Speaking of tools, Ulta Beauty got to experience many new methods of research, besides surveys, including discussions, missions, and virtual focus groups.

A direct result of Ulta Beauty’s partnership with Fuel Cycle was improved brand health during the COVID-19 pandemic. They created a “COVID tracker” to get updated insights as consumers changed their beauty habits during the pandemic. This helped Ulta Beauty shift their messaging and recommendations to appeal to today’s consumers. Ulta Beauty was able to publish the findings from the COVID tracker to stakeholders and executive teams on a monthly basis.

Overall, Fuel Cycle allowed Ulta Beauty’s Consumer Insights to streamline their methods, ultimately achieving higher customer satisfaction and better business results. They expanded their data and insights methods, allowing them to gather more data to take to Ulta Beauty’s decision-makers, leading to decisions that please consumers, even in an ever-changing industry.

The Fuel Cycle Difference

Fuel Cycle's award-winning Market Research Cloud is the most comprehensive intelligence gathering ecosystem that exists today. Our platform enables decision makers to maintain constant connections with their customers, prospects, and users to uncover real-world actionable intelligence. By integrating human insight with critical business data, and through automated quantitative and qualitative research solutions, Fuel Cycle's Market Research Cloud powers product innovation, brand intelligence, and enhanced user experience. Breakthroughs require action. We built Fuel Cycle to ignite it.

“A huge part of the beauty community, and really tapping in and understanding (our) consumers, is our partnership with Fuel Cycle.”

Mary Wallen, Senior Analyst of
Consumer Insights at Ulta Beauty

Ignite your
market research
breakthrough!

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