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Personalisation Reigns In Singapore's Beauty Retail Landscape

By Guan Tan



Credit: essentials
The fragrances corner at Luxasia Group's brick-and-mortar store, essentials.

The Asian beauty consumer has been a fussy bunch this year.

They seem to be increasingly turning a blind eye to the splashy advertisements of high-profile celebrities endorsing beauty products. Instead, they are looking for hands-on multi-sensory experiences and authentic word-of-mouth reviews.

Karen Ong, the managing director of [Luxasia Group](#), attributes the advertising immunity to a retail paradigm shift amongst the Asian beauty consumer. "It is no longer about aggressive product-centric marketing and promotions," she continues. Luxasia Group is a Singapore-based beauty distributor overseeing a plethora of noteworthy beauty brands in the likes of [diptyque](#) and [Eve Lom](#) in the Asia Pacific region.



Karen Ong is the managing director at Luxasia Group, overseeing the company's fragrance, skincare, cosmetics, and hair products' retail activities in Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Instead, the beauty retail landscape has turned on itself and is now consumer-centric.

In other words, the beauty consumer now wants specialised products that meet the needs of their specific skin types, concerns, and lifestyle needs. A plain old lip saver no longer fits the bill. There has got to be a [pink-tinted balm](#), a [plumping and hydrating gloss](#), an [overnight lip mask](#), and an [exfoliating sleep lip mask](#) — for the myriad of needs that the myriad of women may possess.

The increasingly specific beauty demands stem from an informed beauty consumer. Consumers now know that one size does not fit all. Every ethnicity has its specific skin and hair type. Likewise, lifestyle choices play a part in their choice of beauty products.

"For Singapore in particular, we are a cosmopolitan society with a well-informed and discerning consumer base. Naturally, the beauty market here is more mature and more demanding [in] its consumption, leading to an increase [in] demand for high-quality products," says Ong. She, too, notes that the local beauty consumer is inclined to brands affiliated with social causes "such as environmental consciousness and sustainability".



At [escentials](#), Luxasia's brick-and-mortar multi-label beauty store in Singapore, the trend for personalised products and marketing efforts run strong. Now that the consumer has turned away from generic celebrity endorsements, their brand discovery trajectory has taken on a new form.

Ong sums it up in one word, "experiences". Consumers first step in-store to experience and discover new or existing brands and products. Later, their retail experience continues at home where they follow up with "post-visit personal research". This research comes in the form of online reviews and offline recommendations from their social circle.



It's a phenomenon that fellow Asian beauty retailers have realised and have adapted their store designs to. In 2018, Ong notes that the strongest beauty retail trends were, in fact, newfangled retail concepts. "Retail concepts that marry product experience with personalisation and customisation — particularly those that leverage on interactive digital technology," says Ong.

They include virtual mirrors such as [ModiFace](#), an augmented reality app where consumers can try on cosmetic products such as lipsticks. Then there's the [online fragrance profiling microsite](#) by [Penhaligon's](#) where consumers are quizzed on their lifestyle preferences and six fragrances will be recommended at the end — a feature which has been made available at the local departmental store, [Robinsons Heeren](#). At [Sephora ION](#), an online [Skin Inc diagnostic test](#) helps consumers find out their exact skin type and concerns.

Apart from the help of digital technology, Ong notes that [escentials](#) throw "by-invitation-only events" which nurtures communities of consumers with similar interests and lifestyles. "They, too, form their own appreciation groups that turn up regularly at our events and enjoy the brands we carry together as a community," Ong continues.



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When it comes to strong retail trends in the skincare category, products with high efficacy and brands with interesting stories reigned in 2018. Here, one of essentials' best-sellers in Singapore include By Terry's hyaluronic powder (S\$89), used for setting makeup and skincare.



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Other skincare bestsellers include the cult-loved brand, Eve Lom's evergreen cleansing balm (S\$135 for 100ml).

In 2019, Ong predicts that the beauty consumer's retail experience will continue to evolve. "An interesting retail concept that is gaining traction is spaces that allow consumers to experience the fullness of the product and all its features without allowing purchases on the spot," says Ong.

Not only will this move throw the brands' concepts and stories into the spotlight, but it might also force brands to introduce a more sensorial dimension to their products, such as pairing beverages or food with beauty products. Ong calls such experiences "rituals".

"For example, Floraiku, a fragrance brand that Luxasia currently distributes in Taiwan, pairs fragrance discovery with tea appreciation," says Ong. "The idea here is to expand the ambit of product consumption cognitively, extending beyond the usual or expected set of senses."

No matter which direction beauty in 2019 might take, it all boils down to one thing: the consumer. To Ong, it means that retailers have to open their eyes and observe the fluctuations of the beauty consumer vividly in 2019. "To me, how good and 'future-proof' a company or brand is lies in its ability to predict, and its speed in responding to consumers' tastes and preferences."