While beauty tech has been a category on the rise for some years, it’s finally beginning to play an integral role in consumers’ beauty routines. According to a 2018 survey by GlobalData, 38% of consumers say they are often or always influenced by “how digitally advanced or ‘smart’ a product is when making their beauty and grooming purchases.”

A wave of new releases highlight the way in which major beauty brands are fusing tech advances with human expertise to deliver innovative, user-friendly solutions to capture consumers’ imagination—and loyalty.

In May 2019, French personal care giant L’Oréal debuted a host of beauty tech concepts at the Viva Technology trade show in Paris, adding to the growing roster of innovations available to consumers.

With the theme of “Limitless Beauty” for its presentations, augmented reality (AI) was integral to many of L’Oréal’s innovations. Among them was the debut of its Virtual Hair Advisor, created together with
ModiFace, the augmented reality and artificial intelligence company acquired by L’Oréal. The Virtual Hair Advisor allows users to try on hair colors via a screen, and listen to professional hair advice from L’Oréal experts.

La Roche Posay SpotScan analysis

The company also presented its Effaclar Spotscan by La Roche Posay, an app that uses AI and data to analyze acne-prone skin, then offer advice and product recommendations. And within its make-up offering, L’Oréal showcased Lancôme’s Shade Finder, which uses AI to provide an accurate foundation shade recommendation to the consumer at the point of sale. By the end of 2019, the tech is set to be available at 1000 Lancôme points of sale globally.

This raft of L’Oréal innovations follows on from its major presence—alongside fellow CPG giants Johnson & Johnson and P&G—at the global tech showcase CES in Las Vegas in January 2019. Alongside burnishing these companies’ reputations as innovators in beauty, launching tech-led devices and services allows major brands to develop direct-to-consumer relationships, and build a detailed picture of consumer data and glean insights from that information.

SK-II's Future X Smart Store

Among P&G’s beauty tech launches at CES 2019 was its SK-II brand’s Future X Smart Store, conceptualized around a “phygital” retail environment, that blends physical and digital elements. It employs AI technology to power innovations such as an interactive skincare wall that analyzes the skin remotely and offers personalized product recommendations. And the Opté Precision Skincare system was
developed by P&G Ventures, the startup studio within Procter & Gamble. Using a wand and serum, the system combines “optics, proprietary algorithms, printing technology, and skincare in one device,” the company says. The wand scans and detects hyperpigmentation, and then corrects hyperpigmentation by delivering a precise veil of serum to the skin.

Indeed, the trend for major beauty companies incubating beauty tech startups is ramping up the speed of innovation. Alongside P&G Ventures, Unilever Ventures counts among its portfolio Ioma, a French personalized skincare brand. And L’Oréal’s Research & Innovation Center in San Francisco fostered the development of the company’s My Skin Track pH by La Roche-Posay – which analyzes the skin’s pH to offer product recommendations - working together with Epicore Biosystems, a company that creates microfluidic platforms and soft wearable sensors.

Another new launch that’s stemmed from L’Oréal’s Research & Innovation Division is Color&Co, an at-home hair color brand that debuted in the US in May 2019. The brand allows consumers to determine a personalized hair color formula via an online quiz, and have a live online consultation with an independent, licensed professional colorist. After this virtual consultation process, the customer’s personalized hair color is delivered by post, with prices starting at $19.90.

"Beauty consumers are asking us for increasingly personalized experiences, and we saw a real opportunity to innovate in this cornerstone of our business," said Guive Balooch, vice president of L’Oréal's Technology Incubator, an arm of L’Oréal's Research & Innovation Division. "Hair color results depend on a variety of factors, so it was important to develop highly accurate new technology that could
deliver unprecedented at-home shade precision. For the first time, we are able to offer an almost endless variety of color options for at-home application."

Smart cosmetics

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