

How Startup Brand Barefoot Scientist Is Adjusting to the New Normal

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A day after launching in Ulta Beauty stores, foot care brand Barefoot Scientist received unfortunate but inevitable news: Ulta's locations would have to close due to the pandemic. For the relatively new company, it was disheartening that consumers wouldn't be able to test its products in-store. But like other brands coping with the pandemic, Barefoot Scientist has learned to adapt and focus on the present.

We recently spoke with the company's founder and co-president, Dana Ward, about the partnership with Ulta, how the brand has adapted its marketing efforts—and why it's unlikely that you'll see them on TikTok anytime soon.

How have the past few weeks been for Barefoot Scientist? Did you have to pivot your marketing efforts in any way?

It's been busier than ever because we had to pivot from marketing plans we had before this crisis and start over. Earlier on, I started talking with manufacturers about hand sanitizer, wondering how fast I could get it. But then I realized that every brand is probably doing this. So, I wanted to focus on what we can do that not every beauty brand can offer.

We're a premium foot care brand, so we whipped together a new all-in-one kit for at-home pedicures. This doesn't speak to everyone of course, because a lot of people already do their own pedicures. But there's a huge population of people who solely go to salons. We're also focused on the physical and emotional aspects of self-care, especially during this time.

What's worked so far?

The decision early on to create that all-in-one kit was extremely valuable to us; we've been seeing crazy sales. Focusing on Instagram and Facebook marketing for that has been huge. We already had video footage, but we created a fresh video ad showcasing the kit, and it has really resonated with the audience.

Normally, we would've focused on some other products that are bestsellers, but the times have changed. One of our bestsellers is a blister-prevention spray; it blocks friction from shoes that rub your feet. But people aren't wearing shoes as much right now, so it would be so silly for us to continue marketing that in the same way that we were in February.

Social has been one particular channel that more marketers are leveraging during the pandemic. Are you primarily using Instagram or emerging platforms like TikTok?

I know that we probably should jump on the TikTok bandwagon; the number of users and the number of hours spent on it have increased significantly. But content like that takes a good amount of time.

I come from a video background—I helped start this YouTube-based entertainment news network called Clevver, which is now owned by Hearst. So, I used to produce a lot of content, and I understand it takes time. We're not there yet with TikTok, but we have been increasing the content that we're creating during this time and want to continue doing so. That means making videos for YouTube. We're also really focused on Instagram because we do see a lot of our sales coming from there. As a small startup, it's really important to test different strategies. When you see something working, you do more of it.

How are you thinking about the content that you're putting out there?

A lot of it has to do with what consumers are asking for and putting ourselves in their shoes. For example, I don't want to do a live chat just to chit-chat. It's fun, but I want to make sure that there's some valuable takeaway for those who are giving us their time. I know we all have time right now, but there's still so much content to consume out there. If someone's choosing us, we want to make sure the content we're producing either entertains or educates.

Have you experienced an influx of new customers in the past few weeks?

Absolutely, and we're testing different strategies. We launched at Ulta Beauty, and then the next day it was announced that all stores were closing. That was scary. We wondered, "What does that mean for us? Are we going to get sales? Are they going to showcase our brand on the site in a different way?" It's very scary when you don't have that foot traffic that you're relying on the retailer to provide. But things have gone so great because our brand has been featured on Ulta's homepage. We're getting a ton of new customers right now, and as a new brand, that's super exciting.

Have you paused any of your 2020 plans?

We're still planning out our marketing calendar as if the world is going to get back to normal. If we need to shift any messaging, we will. But Mother's Day is coming up, and even with everything going on right now, people still want to buy a present for their mom. So, the messaging might be different, but we're still going to market around that calendar.

We're really looking forward to when stores open so we can officially launch in Ulta Beauty stores. It's exciting for us to get that visibility. We have marketing plans related to our in-store launch there that, hopefully, will still go off without a hitch.