

How D2C Darling ThirdLove Went From Zero to a Million Customers

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Dismayed by a shortage of high-quality bras, and limited store inventory, Heidi Zak co-founded the direct-to-consumer (D2C) startup ThirdLove in 2013. The mission was simple: make shopping for a bra a better experience. With a strong focus on personalization, ThirdLove stocked a wide range of sizes and styles and used customer data to create an innovative buyer journey.

The company has been making waves ever since and was named to Forbes' "Next Billion-Dollar Startups" list in 2018. Josh Wolff, ThirdLove's vice president of customer, traced the path behind the brand's success. Hint: It's no secret.

eMarketer: What channels did you focus on at launch?

Wolff: Facebook has been the most potent channel for us and hugely valuable in acquiring our first million customers. It's no secret sauce—we were building a brand that didn't exist, and we had a clear value proposition for an addressable market we could target via Facebook.

eMarketer: You've grown a lot since 2013—is Facebook still a core channel?

Wolff: You can think of Facebook as a storefront on the prime corner in the middle of downtown. You can do a lot with the real estate when you first open, but there's only so much traffic. It's the cream of the potential crop, and ultimately you have to grow beyond it.

eMarketer: Have you shifted focus to other channels?

Wolff: We've reached a point in our development where we see value in moving beyond traditional digital channels to increase brand awareness and reach customers. We launched our first national campaign this year, which included out-of-home [OOH] and TV ads. We're also known as podcast advertisers, even to those who don't buy bras, and it's an area we'll continue to invest in.

eMarketer: We've seen a lot of D2Cs like Casper and Bonobos launching brick-and-mortar stores. Is that something ThirdLove would consider?

Wolff: I don't think any D2C should go the brick-and-mortar route simply for the sake of adding the channel. When brands do, it usually has something to do with creating a better experience or different product.

One of the great things about being a D2C is we know more about our customer than retailers do. Because of our Fit Finder, we know shopping history, what someone's size is, and whether it's changed, or whether they've exchanged something they thought was their size and wasn't. It gives us the luxury of being able to leverage data to give the best possible experience to the customer.

It's something that would be dramatically harder if we were in a normal retail environment where people might come in, try a product, and walk out without us ever knowing who they were or whether they liked the product.