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Cool Tools



Rexam's Glossy Days lipgloss applicators enhance the consumers experience with new shapes, textures and tactile sensations.

From high-quality brushes to applicators hinging on medical devices, beauty industry suppliers are generating the means for consumers to enhance their appearance, all while keeping both convenience and functionality in mind.

Written by Jamie Matusow, Editor

Ask nearly any makeup artist his or her secret to a great looking face, and chances are they'll give credit to the tools they use. While their expertise stems from their vision and know-how, as well as their choice of formulations and their skillful wrist and hand motion, the right applicators are considered key to success.

Department store makeovers and YouTube how-to demos have boosted focus on the role of the applicator and have made it top of mind for consumers, too, prompting brands to deliver a plethora of inspired makeup tools. From tried-and-true high-quality brushes to rollerball massagers to battery-operated devices, beauty industry suppliers are generating the means for a population to take confidence in enhancing their appearance, all while keeping both convenience and functionality in mind.

An applicator that's easy to use, pops into a purse or yields superior results, for example, builds consumer loyalty and helps to differentiate one brand from another. Thus, in many cases, the applicator has become an integral part of the packaging—or a must-have beauty specialty item in its own right—with brands and packaging suppliers taking what once were basic tools and escalating them to new heights.

According to Mintel Beauty Innovation, the number of beauty and personal care products that claim to have either a "unique," "patented" or "special" applicator nearly quadrupled from 2007 to 2010. The majority of these products are skin care related, designed for face and neck care products, followed by color cosmetic products that use targeted applicators such as those for lipgloss or mascara. General claims often associated with "advanced applicators" are enhanced circulation (rollerball products), even application (flow-through brushes) and increased definition (mascara brushes).

Product Partners



Rexam's Gerald Martines

As applicators gain stature, many brands have taken note of their selling power and have aligned them with a product's success.

"The applicator has become an integral part of the product development process," explains Rexam's Gerald Martines, director-new product development & innovation, makeup. "The philosophy at Rexam is to work in close partnership with customers to develop packaging that delights consumers and builds brands. Today, the optimal applicator design is the one that is in-sync with, or designed for, a specific product formulation."

"We are seeing more cosmetic companies include a specialty applicator with their product," says Jason Clerke, president of Garrett Hewitt International. "The same way we realized a while ago so much of the performance of a mascara is due to the brush used, we are also seeing the same results with other makeup. So many powders, bronzers and eye makeup are being sold with a quality, often full-sized brush included with the product. This has been done for a long time with TV sales, but now it is crossing over to brick and mortar."

Walter Dwyer, president of Cosmopak, also notes brands' increasing attention on tools. "There has been a lot of focus recently on applicators as brands are using this as a way to create both interesting new ideas and applications, and also to stand out from competitors," he says.

"There seems to be a renewed interest in high-end applicators, sponges and brushes by the brands, and a shift away from a 'disposable' mentality," says Stacey Calhoun of Taiki USA. She says the brands are realizing a need for added value to the finished product through improved application and superior performance.

At Qosmedix, which specializes in cosmetic applicators for hygienic sampling, Sari Sternschein, director of marketing, says, "We find that most brands are looking for applicator designs that are innovative, something that can help differentiate them from the competition. But of course the functionality of the design takes precedence."

Rollerballs

The advent of rollerballs, which exemplify a perfect combo of convenience and functionality, has proved the effectiveness of an application tool that consumers have favorably responded to.

Launches of rollerball applicators have been at the top of the production list, growing at about 83% since 2007, according to Mintel research. Portability plays a major role in the tool's popularity, especially in fragrance, where launches doubled from 2009 to 2010. But the handy, on-the-go format has successfully been adopted by eye care and lip products as well.

Cosmopak's Dwyer notes rollerballs' dramatic adoption in skin care, saying, "Metal rollerballs are hot. This can be a single roll on—which has been around for years—or recently, the use of multiple balls, such as the Cosmopak tri-rollerball, which we have sold to numerous companies."

A Clinical Look

Cosmopak's tri-rollerball is indicative of the trend toward products/applicators that verge on a medical look, especially popular with those desirous of a clinical treatment, but veering away from the cosmetic surgery route.

"This tri-ball applicator looks totally different than anything else," says Dwyer. "It goes beyond clinical and it looks medical, possibly robotic."

Sternschein is also well aware of the medical-like trend. "We have seen an ongoing trend for more clinical-looking applicators, specifically dial-up applicators such as our new Dial-Up Applicator with Spatula Tip, as well as applicators that look like a syringe and dose out product the same way a syringe would."

Rexam's Martines attributes the favored clinical look to the rise of hybrid products. "The worlds of skin care and makeup are merging," he says. "Now, there are products that are positioned as virtually 'medical.' This drives the trend for applicators and packaging to communicate a 'scientific' aesthetic. We see it with the applicators, and with the pack colors, typeface, etc. We even see, for serums, some applicators shaped like little eyedroppers. The packaging helps communicate the product attributes, as well as facilitates application."

Clerke, of Garrett Hewitt, says, while brushes are not following a clinical trend, "sponge applicators are definitely heading in that direction, especially in the head shapes."

Many applicators of late feature pinpoint precision, with an almost needle-like tip, such as Yves Rocher's felt-tip eyeliner with a soft, ultra-fine tip for high-precision lining.

Broad Gestures

As brands and suppliers continue to develop applicators that will make consumers look and feel good, gestures—the way in which the hands move, or the way in which the applicator works to apply the product, such as with the rollerball—have taken on importance. Materials and shapes, too, have been created to enhance the makeup application and

specifically determine the results of the formula.

Martines cites Rexam's introduction of Glossy Days lipgloss applicators as an example of the firm's approach to current makeup packaging. "For years," he says, "there were only a few staple styles. Rather than a simple brush, or flocked tip, each Glossy Days applicator's design geometry and material is soft, transparent and flexible—and designed for clean, comfortable, elegant and fun usage." He says, in this way, "the consumer experience is enhanced, as new shapes and textures combine to provide unique tactile sensations and perfect makeup results."

Three flexible, silicone-head disposable mascara wands, each with a unique effect on lashes, were recently introduced by Qosmedix. Sternshein explains the differences: "A large tapered head provides a natural look, while a spiral-shaped head creates dramatic flair. A sphere-shaped head applies mascara on individual lashes creating a fuller, fanned out look."

A twisting motion is key to Cosmopak's new airtight twist pen, launched early this year, which Dwyer says is the biggest breakthrough in the category since they introduced the first twist pen into the U.S. market in 1999. He says due to its design, previously a shut-off valve in the applicator was not available and therefore meant all pens were not airtight when the cap was off. This limited the use of the pen to non-airtight formulas—such as concealer or lipstick and gloss—in order to avoid drying out. "Now," Dwyer says, "we have a new system that opens up this already proven dispensing system to new categories such as eyes and also for treatment or medical use."

Cosmopak also offers the airtight twist pen technology in tubes.

Brush Off



Anisa's Wave Brushes are created through a patented extrusion process that shoots a wave of color through the core of a clear handle, giving a fun and chic look.

Innovations in cosmetic brush development, with features from gestures to materials, have skyrocketed in the last few years, offering brands—and consumers—a seemingly infinite number of choices, whether in packs or as standalones.

Rexam's Martines comments on the increased demand for applicators that are integrated into the pack, saying, "Rather than two separate items, you see multi-function pieces." Part of what's driving this is the on-the-go megatrend, which Rexam calls nomadism. "With consumers applying makeup wherever they go, speed, efficiency and convenience gain importance," he says.

On the other hand, many brands, including a number of makeup artist labels, do not include brushes in the pack with their products, instead, recommending that their products are best applied with the precise strokes of a specific tool.

have been calling us a lot lately, saying 'I want to improve my brush quality so it is just like XYZ's brush.'

Clerke, of Garrett Hewitt, says there seems to be a renewed demand for high-quality brushes. "Maybe this is due to the uptick in the economy," he ventures, "but our customers who have been buying mass- to middle-market brushes

Anisa Telwar, president Anisa International, Inc., says, "We make it a point to follow fashion and accessory trends and learn through various channels, including working with industry makeup artists and testing brushes with key customers to ensure the proper brush is paired with the right products."

At FM Brush, a domestic brush manufacturer based in New York, Jacqueline Mink Cooper, director of retail sales, says customers are looking for brushes unique to the market. She notes a trend in expanded applications for brushes. "There is more emphasis on details of the face, for example the brow and lash. We have taken patented designs and applied them to several different applications such as brow, eye and cheek."

Materials



"Eco-brushes" from Garrett-Hewitt use bamboo handles from sustainable bamboo farms, recycled aluminum ferrules and synthetic hair so they are completely vegan. The glues also do not contain any animal

As the conversation continues surrounding natural and synthetic fibers—as well as where brushes are produced—advances in design and technology allow for plenty of "different strokes for different folks."

One of Anisa International's latest developments, Dual-Sided Brushes, incorporates the benefits of both natural and synthetic brush application into one tool. "This is totally new in the marketplace," says Telwar, "and is the epitome of a partnership between functionality and aesthetics." She explains, "Each brush in this collection has both a synthetic hair and natural hair side for more precise and quick application. The synthetic side is best used to apply emollient or liquid-based products, then the brush can be flipped over, and the natural hair side is used to apply powder-based formulas. To complete the look, the tip of the brush can be used to finish and blend out the entire face, using portions from both styles of hair. Each of these brushes is crafted with special heads, to give an overall, professional quality application."

products.

FM Brush also combines various materials to find the perfect brush. “Once only good for cream-based products, some of our unique synthetics work better than their natural counterparts. Our synthetics will last longer and in many cases are anti-bacterial and anti-microbial,” says Cooper.

Antibacterial treatment brushes have also been in increasing demand at BaoSheng, Inc., a second-generation Chinese manufacturer that provides high-end brushes, which are assembled by hand for major global beauty brands. Marco Golding, vice president of sales, says the company, which uses both real and synthetic fibers, regards its brushes as works of art. The company also produces brushes for inclusion in compacts and sets.

Which type of brush is most in demand?

Clerke, of Garrett Hewitt, says it’s a high-quality brush made from high-quality synthetic hair. “They perform so closely to the top animal hair brushes,” he says, “and people are demanding more products that are not from animals.” He adds: “We are now able to produce a synthetic fiber that can mimic any type of animal hair of high quality to the degree that it is hard to tell the difference.”

According to Taiki’s Calhoun, makeup brush development continues to evolve to synthetics from goat and other animal hair. She says, “Cosmetic companies are increasingly interested in ‘animal-free’ eco-friendly alternatives.” Taiki has patented a new synthetic PTT fiber that Calhoun says “is geared to mimic the superior softness and performance of squirrel.”

A Handle on Eco-friendly

Eco-friendly brush options are expanding not only as far as the hair, but the handles, too.

Anisa offers several options that include bamboo handles, now available with a colored, non-toxic stain and a special handled brush that is actually created with a biodegradable corn resin.

FM Brush provides composite handles, bamboo handles, recycled aluminum ferrules and PET packaging.

One recent launch from BaoSheng features a brush without a ferrule, in which the brush handle holds the hairs.

The demand for eco-friendly and also vegan brushes has increased substantially, according to Clerke. “A great example of this,” he says, “is our line of Eco-brushes.” These brushes use bamboo handles from sustainable bamboo farms, recycled aluminum ferrules and synthetic hair so they are completely vegan. The glues also do not contain any animal products.

The Spin on Vibration

Controversy also spins over the trend toward electronic applicators. While it helps some brands stand out, others wonder about its true value.

Cosmopak’s Dwyer, has seen a marked movement toward demand for motorized applicators, and says, “The use of the applicator to do more than just apply, but to offer massaging is a new concept we introduced in 2011 and it is performing very well.” He says they also are launching a new vibrating massage tube ideal for cellulite or body creams.

Meanwhile, Rexam’s Martines says the feedback they get from top-tier makeup stylists is: “What is the value? Some technologies are novel but antithetical to the true spirit of the makeup world. Don’t cut corners on innovation, but be smart and strategic about the use of technology, as it relates to the world of makeup.”

The Right Tool

Battery operated or otherwise, Martines believes the “perfect” applicator is the one that—within the framework of what is worthwhile, from a cost consideration—helps the consumer translate the tricks of the makeup professional into daily, easy, application routines, no matter how sophisticated the formula. “That’s our grail,” he says. “How do we get there? The key is to work proactively, in close partnership with brand owners, consumers and makeup stylists. As a supplier, we strive to understand the pressures of our customers. In addition, we must examine consumer gestures, their ‘routine’—and really listen to their expectations about the product. And then, finally, we observe the magic of the makeup professionals at work. As product qualities evolve, as formulations change—and with the economic pressure we all face—the nature of ‘the best’ applicator changes as well.”

Applicators Don’t Necessarily Apply

Written by Alan Goolman

It’s at times like this I wish my memory were better, but deficient memory and the cold hard fact that Cleopatra might have actually been my first customer at the “Gilded Cage” in Henri Bendel aside, there is one thing I do remember and am absolutely sure of—I was never a fan of applicators.

Applicators—those brush-like, sponge-tip, “mini-do-or-don’t-hickeys” that have been and sometimes still are included in many cosmetic compacts for the convenience of the customer, which regardless of distribution, may or may not add to the perceived value of the product, but almost always detract from the performance and application of what might be a great formula. How’s that for a run-on sentence?

I’m going to go out on a limb here and state something that many of us who are (or were) makeup artists probably would agree with: Applicators, for the most part, are a waste of time and money, and best serve the customer when thrown away.

Harsh, maybe, but I began in this business as a makeup artist in late 1970-something (I told you I have a bad memory) and I took my art very, very seriously. So seriously in fact that the only brushes I could find (at the time) that met my exacting requirements were handcrafted art brushes purchased in art supply stores. Brushes with tapered, hand-turned wooden handles so long I had to be careful not to blind passersby as I painted faces. When asked, I would describe brushes with a reverence generally reserved for a church: “They’re my tools, like natural extensions to my hands.” And while I had not been to France at the time, that’s where my brushes had to be made—France!

Have applicators ever been made in France?

Guess I should have recognized this as a sign. I spent the next 15 years of my life working for French companies, but that’s another story... I also won’t go into the part I believe I played in the history of the demise of the applicator and the rise in awareness of professional makeup artist brushes, but nothing I can think of has made more of an impact on the obsolescence of applicators than makeup artist brands. In fact, to fully understand the fate of the applicator, only one question need be asked and answered: “What is the percent to total sales in brushes of any makeup artist brand? If the answer to that question isn’t enough to prove the point, the answer to this question should do it: How many makeup artist brands include applicators with their single eye shadows or blushes?

After that, what I’m about to say will come as somewhat of a shock. I believe applicators (if handled properly) can serve a useful purpose. There, I said it, and lightning hasn’t come to strike me down! Not the applicators of the past of course, but a new generation of applicators designed to perform more like the professional brushes that made them almost virtually obsolete.

We see the beginnings of this in what has fast become a large growth category—kits. Women are becoming ever more sophisticated, and regardless of where they purchase their beauty products, they now have the knowledge and expertise to judge a product based on the sum of all of its components. With kits, if the applicators and tools included don’t meet their expectations or enhance the product experience, it de-values the total kit. Happy to say, I’ve noticed progress in the quality of applicators and tools offered in kits, and I hope the trend continues.

Clearly, as far as I’m concerned, nothing can, or ever will replace the feel, control and application of a hand-sculpted brush (French or not), created to perform its specific job perfectly, enhancing the user’s total experience. That being said, I am willing to state: There are times and situations when an applicator (next generation of course) could at the very least... do just fine.

About the Author

Alan Goolman began his career with Stagelight Cosmetics, became national makeup artist for the U.S. for Christian Dior, and then worked with Chanel as premier makeup artist for the U.S. Currently, he is a consultant specializing in creative marketing, brand development, product development, color development, color theory and color training... and of course, brushes.

The 1-2-3’s of Applicator Design

Written by Steve Corsi

Cosmetic applicators have traditionally been the unsung heroes of the cosmetics world, although in the last 10 years, these “agents of transfer” have seen considerable change in certain makeup categories and have been opportunities for differentiation in their own right. When working on projects that involve some form of applicator design, I have found it useful to evaluate based on three factors: material, structural and functional (MSF). Examples follow:

Mascara Packages

Within the MSF framework, mascara has probably seen the most change to date regarding material and structural: synthetic and molded brushes (that allow for filament configurations impossible with traditional wire) to functional—such as vibrating action offered by Estée Lauder and Lancôme. All claim to give some form of improved product delivery.

Taking the functional factor further, shape-changing mascara brushes have come onto the radar such as Revlon’s CustomEyes. These seek to provide characteristics of both volumizing and lengthening brushes in step with the recent trend toward multi-attribute mascara formulas. There are various means of accomplishing shape change. Two examples are: basic mechanical (expanding mechanism inside the brush) and esoteric (presently theoretical), employing temperature sensitive shape memory alloys (SMA) such as Nitinol. In one form of implementation, this could lead us back to wire mascara brushes as the “new” technology!

Lipgloss Packages

Material: In the case of lipgloss, we are now quite used to PP and PET applicators feeding directly from a tube—usually PP or Surllyn. A similar surface application idea is implemented by Dior's Capture Totale, which employs a metal spatula with direct feed to product. The palladium coated metal spatula also claims a cooling effect in use (functional).

Foundation Packages

Structural and functional: Flow-through powders and foundations (e.g. YSL's Perfect Touch) promised a new level of convenience in use for these categories. However, there have been question marks surrounding their hygiene.

Traditional Foam Applicators

Over the years, the traditional powder applicator has seen some material evolution (e.g. Yukilon versus polyurethane) and antibacterial treatments; some structural, such as larger ergonomic shapes; and structural and functional (e.g. blending foam eggs), such as those offered by Sonia Kashuk and Beauty Blender. However, due to the sheer number of foam applicators in the market, it's probably this humble area that offers the most potential for innovation under the MSF framework.

About the Author

Steve Corsi is creative director of packaging and merchandising at Steve Corsi Associates, and instructor of packaging development and design at FIDM.

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