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FROM MICRO-FACTORIES TO CUTTING-EDGE INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY HOLDS THE KEY TO PERSONALISING PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Personalisation is playing a big role in the luxury industry these days. “It creates genuine added value for brands by allowing them to cater to increasingly individual needs among consumers, especially younger people”, begins Thierry. The challenge is to make these solutions available on a massive scale. This is a colossal undertaking for a group like L'Oréal, which serves millions of consumers around the world.”

Technology holds the key to addressing this infinite spectrum of requirements. “Tech lets us go further in the responses that we can provide.” With this in mind, the Group's technology incubator, based in San Francisco in America's Silicon Valley, works closely with the brands to design and develop innovative services that

are in synch with customer expectations. “The brands explain their specific requirements and team up with our experts to come up with appropriate solutions.” Thierry cites the example of *Le Teint Particulier*, Lancôme's new foundation, which uses technology that can design and manufacture a custom-made foundation tailored to each individual customer's skin in just 30 minutes. “It is a revolutionary production unit employing an ultra-sophisticated algorithm that can orchestrate a perfect match between skin and foundation. Equipped with a predictive capacity that is even more precise than the chromatic sensitivity of the human eye, it can be used to identify the perfect shade using three measures taken locally with the help of a scanner.” As Thierry explains, “these new services allow us to meet the unique expectations of each and every consumer. The level of personalisation and tailored perfection that we are offering is unparalleled in the beauty sector!”

FROM LAB TO STORE: A STRICT APPROACH TO OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT

To make this unprecedented level of personalisation available to as many people as possible, L'Oréal Luxury is deploying these new services at its sales outlets. “This is a huge operational challenge for the Group”, comments Thierry.

Step one is to check the viability and reliability of these services. “We're talking about setting up micro-factories in public places, where they will be in contact with thousands of consumers. We can't leave anything to chance.” Accordingly, two rounds of testing are conducted, comprising a first set of laboratory tests to verify the machines' accuracy, performance and safety, and a second set at the sales outlets themselves to see whether the systems work properly in real-life conditions and over the long run. “We set up the machines in pilot outlets first before embarking on wider deployment. The experts who designed the machines visit the pilot sites regularly to make sure that everything is working as it should. For the

launch of *Teint Particulier*, we trialled the system at two stores on the US West Coast before rolling it out at nine other US sales locations in the space of a year", Thierry tells us. The Group also stresses training. "In addition to providing staff with handbooks, an expert/trainer teaches beauty advisors how to use the services and trains them in cleaning and maintaining the machines. We want our people to learn quickly how to use the system independently, so they can be comfortable assisting customers."

Once the service is set up, the next step is to integrate it in the customer journey. "The goal is to create a unique and memorable experience. The service has to blend naturally into the relationship between the beauty advisor and her customer. The human aspect has a fundamental role to play in the customer's in-store experience. As Thierry points out, "every one of our customers is unique, and the in-store technology can't be the only thing to recognise this. Beauty advisors also have to build a personalised relationship with each individual client. That has always been the hallmark of luxury." A prime example would be Kiehl's, whose advisors offer a consultation lasting ten or so minutes and recommend personalised solutions based on that individual assessment. "Our clients feel as though they have received something unique or rare."

STORES: PLACES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND HAVE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

Thierry sees growing appetite among clients for these customised products and services, which is translating into the commercial success of these initiatives. "Today, a large proportion of Yves Saint Laurent lipsticks sold on the brand's e-commerce website are personalised with the customer's initials or a special message. In Asia, we've seen several hundreds of people get in line for a personalised Yves Saint Laurent lipstick!" This trend is playing out worldwide.

What's more, these services are enabling the Group to reach new consumer targets. "We've found that 90% of customers who buy Lancôme's *Le Teint Particulier* foundation are new to the brand. Encouraged by our US success, we just launched this new service in France and now have 24 stores selling *Le Teint Particulier* on both sides of the Atlantic."

The next stage will be to roll out these services worldwide while developing new ones to make the customer experience even more special and memorable. Thierry offers these words in conclusion: "You don't need to go to a store to buy a product anymore: you can just buy it online. We want our stores to offer something more, something different, including exclusive products, personalised services and expert advice. Stores need to be places where customers can build relationships and have unique experiences. That is luxury's promise, which we must honour if we want to continue to delight and amaze our customers."