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MAC, Bumble, Unilever and Body Shop Talk Globalization Trends



Beauty executives from Unilever, MAC, Bumble and bumble and The Body Shop discussed the impact diversity and globalization is having on the beauty industry at a symposium Friday, November 17, sponsored by FIT's School of Graduate Studies, the first event in a new series.

Each executive discussed issues relevant to their companies' dealings with diversity and globalization.

For example, with its acquisition of Alberto-Culver, Unilever took in several ethnic hair care brands and has grappled with what to eliminate, what to integrate and if any voids need filling. As part of the process, the company is eyeing a packaging revamp including new functional descriptions. It seems as minority markets become majority markets, the company wants to offer solutions to those with kinky, curly and wavy hair for the looks they want to achieve.

"You have this hair and you want to have that hair," explained Cheryl Wilson, Unilever's director of global business development, ethnic hair care. "We want to take concentration off ethnic and make it about hair textures. Our products are need-based, not skin color-based."

Nicholas Gavrelis, vice president, global product development for MAC, commented that global trends are now more prevalent, thanks in part to social media. He recalled an unexpected demand for MAC's Snob lipstick, a white-based pink shade, after it was worn by a popular Latin American novella actress and written about by a blogger. More recently, its launch of Natural Radiance, a prep and primer for oily and combination skin that offers brightening, was inspired by Asian whitening products. It is currently exceeding projections.

Alexandra Fritsch-Gil, marketing manager, Bumble and bumble, said she anticipates beauty ideals will change with new influences, and that marketers will respond. "We will evolve and mirror the changing face of our diverse consumer...Marketers used to need a good emotional IQ and business IQ, now they need a cultural IQ."

Mark Davis, director, community and ethnical trade for The Body Shop Intl., a company with a history of partnerships around the world, currently sources 25 ingredients from 21 different markets. He advises others that to do this successfully, there has to be a respect for the land and fair business practices with its indigenous residents. "If you don't pay fairly, it is essentially intellectual (and product) theft," a violation he referred to as "bio-piracy."

Furthermore, as world populations proliferate there will be greater demand for the acreage producing these agricultural ingredients. A cosmetics use is likely to lose out to food, pointed out Body Shop's Mark. "So we need to work responsibly, and not put more pressure on these lands."

Keynote speaker Tonie Leatherberry, a principal of Deloitte Consulting LLP, cited Nielsen data where in 2011 50% of children under the age of one were minorities, and by 2025, 50% of the U.S. population may be multicultural.

Stephan Kanlian, chairman of the school's Cosmetics & Fragrances Marketing and Management program, said its curriculum has forever changed. International studies is no longer treated separately "but integrated in all classes." And its field studies program itinerary has been expanding to include markets like Stockholm and Korea, in addition to London, Paris, Tokyo and Shanghai.