

## Sephora's Diversity & Inclusion

### Organizational Background

Originally founded in France and owned by luxury goods group LVMH, Sephora is a leading beauty retailer across the globe. Sephora currently operates over 2,600 stores in 34 countries, with an expanding base of over 460 stores across the Americas. The premium beauty brand employs over 20,000 people and generates over \$4 billion in revenue a year. Featuring nearly 300 brands along with its own private label, Sephora offers beauty products including cosmetics, skincare, body, fragrance and haircare. Sephora's mission statement reads, "we believe beauty is for each person to define and ours to celebrate. Together, we support and encourage bold choices in beauty – and in life. Our purpose is to inspire fearlessness." Sephora emphasizes the importance to create an inviting shopping experience and inspire fearlessness within the beauty community.

### Key Programming

In April of 2019, an in-store incident challenged the core values of Sephora. The beauty brand faced the scrutiny of R&B singer SZA who claimed to have been racially profiled in a Calabasas, California store location. SZA herself was a Sephora employee before her career in music took off. She took to Twitter regarding the in-store experience and wrote two tweets addressing the Sephora employee who called security to check if she was stealing products.



The incident with SZA was timely for Sephora's introduction of its campaign "We Belong to Something Beautiful," outlining the brand's commitment to championing diversity and self-expression. In June of 2019, Sephora announced a closure of all stores across the United States for a one-hour "inclusivity workshop" for employees at retail locations, distribution centers and corporate offices. This mandatory diversity training had been in the works for over six months and was not a direct response to SZA's in-store experience but was relevant to include for reference in the training. The employee training was the first step in launching Sephora's new campaign and preventing similar racial implications in the future.

## **Key Stakeholders and Objectives**

Key stakeholders of the situation include SZA as well as Sephora's diverse set of consumers and employees. Although the company had been planning the diversity workshop for over six months, it was important for the brand to address the incident directly with SZA since her situation was relevant to the launch of an inclusivity campaign. An apology to SZA showed reputability to existing Sephora consumers as well as SZA's audience, which includes other public figures. To take corrective action for this situation, Sephora should prove they value the relationship between its brand and celebrities to ensure those public figures will be willing to work with Sephora in the future. Sephora should also take action to ensure all internal team members feel welcome within the company and clarify to all employees that discrimination is not tolerated within company values.

Additionally, the event sparked an entire Twitter conversation about the history of African Americans being racially profiled in stores; Sephora's consumers were disappointed by the internal actions of an employee that did not uphold overarching company values. It is important for Sephora to reassure its publics, especially African American consumers, that the company is committed to building an environment focused on equality.

## **Response and Outcome**

Sephora issued a quick response the next day on the company's official Twitter account. In an effort to remain consistent with messaging strategy, the company sent an apology tweet responding directly to SZA's initial complaint tweet. In addition, they released a statement saying "We take complaints like this very seriously, profiling on the basis of race is not tolerated at Sephora. Our purpose has always been rooted in our people and ensuring that Sephora is an inclusive and welcoming space for all our clients."

Sephora also readdressed the SZA situation from April during the June campaign launch. In a statement surrounding the launch, Sephora said, "While it is true that SZA's experience occurred prior to the launch of the 'We Belong to Something Beautiful' campaign, the campaign was not the result of this Tweet." The statement continued with, "However it does reinforce why belonging is now more important than ever." Sephora's reformative actions speak to the company's overall objective to promote diversity from within and foster an inclusive community.

## **Have your internal ducks in a row.**

In a strategic planning phase, it is crucial to verify that all of your internal publics are on the same page. If your internal publics are not aligned during a crisis, that internal dissent could ruin your external frame. Finally, ensure that every member of your company is on the same page to avoid further internal dissent.

Sephora's internal publics were in the works of forming a campaign to celebrate the brand's commitment to diversity before the SZA incident. While Sephora was making great proactive efforts to ensure all employees fostered an inclusive mindset, the company failed to convey its plans internally to team members. Knowing that planning was underway for this large project, Sephora should have informed all employees of the upcoming campaign and importance of inclusivity. An inclusive mindset across Sephora's team could have prevented the employee's discriminatory actions and ensured team members acted accordingly to the company's plans. Since Sephora's internal publics were not on the same page, it resulted in untimely employee misconduct interfering with the launch of an important upcoming company project.

Due to the actions of just one internal team member, Sephora's launch of the "We Belong to Something Beautiful" campaign was tainted by the company having to address the in-store incident of SZA being racially profiled. Therefore, external publics were commenting on the brand's lack of inclusion prior to the start of the campaign. The actions of one employee undermined the company's overarching values and hindered Sephora's mission to champion diversity.

Perhaps keeping all Sephora team members informed could have ensured appropriate actions across the internal board of their employees. Sephora avoided further internal dissent by announcing the one-hour diversity and inclusion training for all employees. As the company had been planning the training for six months, they were able to address the incident with SZA in a way that was more impactful than just an apology. The brand took action to further educate its employees on fostering a diverse and inclusive mindset, giving all team members the knowledge to be on the same page and ensure something like this never happens again.

The nonprofit foundation "Susan G. Komen for the Cure" failed to apply this principle throughout a policy change that impacted the organization's donations to Planned Parenthood. The information was leaked from an internal Komen member to Planned Parenthood weeks before it became public, Komen's internal publics clearly were not on the same page. As a result, the organization failed to plan consistent messaging explaining the decision prior to the release of the information.

This lack of internal communication led to inconsistent messaging presented to publics. Many of the organization's lead members were defensive of the decision, saying it was a way to strengthen the granting process. Meanwhile, the Connecticut affiliate of Komen wrote in a Facebook statement: "We understand, and share in, the frustration around this situation," as they would continue to fund Planned Parenthood of New England." Komen faced severe repercussions of its failure to implement internal cohesion. Without an internally united front, the company had to fall back on its original decision and change funding criteria so Planned Parenthood became eligible to receive grants. In addition, the company issued a public apology which made it seem as if the organization had been in the wrong from the start.

The obvious lack of internal clarification gave audiences easy access to attack Komen's actions. The organization received a flood of statements from politicians and organizations revoking their support from Komen. Social media platforms were filled with negative public reaction directed toward Komen. Since Komen did not present a clear message to their publics regarding the situation, the lack of internal communication caused many to view the company's decision to revoke funding as political in nature.

Had Komen explained the situation to all affiliates from the beginning and crafted a clear strategic response, they could have avoided internal dissent. In response to backlash, Komen President Nancy Brinker issued a video statement attempting to clarify the policy and denying accusations that the decision had any political affiliation. The Komen news release issued the same day did not provide the same policy clarification or address accusations of political pressure; the incohesive messaging was detrimental to the company's brand. Unlike Sephora, Komen was never able to align strategies between all team members, contributing to the company's further internal dissent. The lack of policy clarification left the organization's own team members confused and upset regarding the decision. Komen should have given a clear explanation to internal publics prior to making the policy change public to ensure that all messaging addressing the decision was cohesive.

## **Use a social issue as a time to change brand identity.**

If a company aligns their brand around a social issue, it can stem progressive conversation that increases brand awareness and sparks change. In addition, focusing on an issue that is important to society can strengthen your internal brand identity. Launching a campaign around these key topics will project to publics that your brand's values embody a greater change for society that goes beyond your company.

With the launch of Sephora's 'We Belong to Something Beautiful' campaign, the beauty brand pledged their commitment to inclusivity. The campaign created a new motto that serves as a plan of action for the brand as a promise to continue working to make the beauty space a more inclusive environment for everyone. Sephora received media coverage for their actions, and it sparked progressive conversation that could lead to a positive change for the beauty community. The new manifesto adopted reads, "Sephora believes in championing all beauty, living with courage, and standing fearlessly together to celebrate our differences. We will never stop building a community where diversity is expected, self-expression is honored, all are welcomed, and you are included."

This entire movement began with the one-hour training held on June 5, 2019. This training proved the brand's commitment to inclusivity beyond just that day. A diversity training for all employees strengthens internal unity so that each team member can champion diversity in their work for Sephora.

Taking a stand this large to promote an inclusive community demonstrates that Sephora is dedicated toward not only promoting equality but creating a safe space of acceptance. Taking a step to educate employees was an important response by Sephora and resonated with consumers who are becoming increasingly less tolerant of discrimination.

Razor company Gillette channeled the #MeTooMovement, a movement against sexual harassment and assault of women, in their 2019 advertising campaign "We Believe." The advertisement challenges toxic masculinity and emphasizes the importance of changing ingrained, bad behavior. Gillette's powerful stance on the social issue gained significant media attention and sparked controversy amongst consumers. Despite negative responses from key audiences, Gillette team members stuck with their original messaging and did not defend the campaign. Internal responses simply stated the campaign fulfilled its purpose: to spark progressive conversation that can lead to a change in toxic behavior.

In addition, the campaign announced a change in the company's 30-year-old slogan from "The Best a Man Can Get" to "The Best Men Can Be." This change strengthened Gillette's internal identity as it proved the brand's long-term dedication to taking part in something bigger than itself like the #MeTooMovement. A shift in tagline messaging is impactful as Gillette's internal team is now aligned in its strategy of enforcing positive behavior amongst men. Switching the slogan reinforced Gillette's internal commitment to changing norms surrounding toxic masculinity beyond just one campaign.

Similar to Sephora, Gillette issued a new slogan, displaying the company's commitment to embracing an internal shift in brand identity. Although toxic masculinity does not relate firsthand to Gillette, the brand serves men around the world, creating a platform for messaging that can reach a wide audience. Gillette acknowledged the role they play in influencing culture and used its reach to reinforce positive behavior within society. This action demonstrates to key publics that Gillette is focused on more than just razors; the company's progressive mindset proves its dedication to promoting nontoxic behavior in men throughout society.

## Consider the power of a celebrity.

Celebrity influence has the power to give your brand a higher profile. In addition, celebrity affiliation can expand your brand's audience. If a company fails to satisfy a particular celebrity, it should take action to correct the issue in order to maintain its reputation with the celebrity and his or her respective publics.

Popular R&B singer SZA became affiliated with Sephora's brand after she addressed her public audience on Twitter. Although Sephora did not choose to be associated with SZA, her heightened status as a celebrity put Sephora on the map for acting out of character. The same way a celebrity can give your brand a higher profile, their dissatisfaction can tear it down.

By tweeting her experience, SZA's key publics became the key publics of Sephora and the brand had to deal with the resulting backlash from her followers. Sephora had to address SZA's key publics as well as its own at the time of the incident and while launching the diversity campaign. In addition, this incident could lead to future instances of celebrities not wanting to work with Sephora because of the way SZA was treated.

Sephora took action to mend this situation and responded with their own tweets directly to SZA.



The tweets were one of two public apologies regarding the situation, in news statements Sephora reinforced its purpose to be an inclusive space for all and assured the public the company would take proper steps to amend the incident with SZA. This is crucial as SZA's Twitter audience is now made aware of Sephora's attempt to mend the situation. Since SZA's key publics have aligned with Sephora's, it is important the brand demonstrate to both audiences its commitment to preserving celebrity relationships. Sephora's corrective actions within the campaign also show both its own and SZA's publics how the company plans to prevent similar incidents in the future. In addition, this will ensure high profile figures still consider future work relationships with Sephora.

Pepsi also followed this public relations principle with its "Live for Now," advertisement. Featuring reality TV star Kendall Jenner, Pepsi felt the negative impact of starring a celebrity. The advertisement intended to promote unity and peace but was instead viewed as trivializing the Black Lives Matter movement, with Jenner at the center of it. The ad already received a significant amount of criticism; however, the main uproar was rooted toward Jenner's role in what seemed to be an appropriation of a protest movement. Jenner's status raised Pepsi's profile of this ad as critics slammed Pepsi for having a Caucasian superstar at the center of such a sensitive racial issue.

In addition to responding to its own key audiences, Pepsi's casting of Jenner meant the brand affiliated her directly to the incident. In a season premiere of her family's reality TV show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, Jenner broke down in tears and expressed her regret for the advertisement. As a result, her audiences and celebrity network became part of Pepsi's key publics.

While many publics viewed Pepsi's apology to Jenner as controversial, it was in the brand's best interest to preserve its reputation with Jenner and her following. Her key audiences may include public figures that Pepsi could potentially work with in the future. Within the apology, Pepsi stated, "Clearly, we missed the mark and apologize. We are pulling the content and halting any further rollout. We also apologize for putting Kendall Jenner in this position." It is crucial for brands to maintain a positive relationship with celebrity audiences during any crisis so these high-profile figures and their followers will continue to see the brand as a reputable partner.

### **Engage your employees in your own campaign.**

Employees can often be the best example of your company and its culture. Especially when it comes to making a change in your brand, the most important change comes from within your internal publics – employees. The use of employees within your campaign demonstrates authenticity to your audience and can lead to long-term benefits related to organizational culture and productivity.

Sephora's first step of the "We Belong to Something Beautiful" campaign included closing stores to offer diversity and inclusion training to employees. Putting employees at the forefront of this campaign demonstrates to key publics the effort made by Sephora to promote an inclusive company culture.

By training all employees on the importance of values such as inclusion, the company is strengthening internal unity. A cohesive mindset amongst all internal team members will help ensure they follow a progressive plan of action to make the beauty space an inclusive environment. The company's decision to launch the campaign with an initiative to further educate their employees shows its dedication to shifting the brand's internal focus.

Not only does the training demonstrate authenticity to Sephora's publics, it also creates a sense of belonging for diverse employees. By training toward a cohesive understanding of inclusion, Sephora promotes an accepting company culture and guarantees all employees act accordingly to the brand's values. In addition, this training could strengthen Sephora's future organizational culture by ensuring that all employees feel recognized and accepted for their differences. A company that fosters a positive company culture encourages employees' motivation to contribute quality effort, improving overall organizational productivity.

Hallmark also applied this important public relations principle in "Hallmark Writers on Tour," an employee-centered campaign. Hallmark formed a campaign strategy that allowed writers to interact directly with consumers, reminding both parties of the emotional benefit and importance of greeting cards. The campaign's use of employees effectively reminded the media and consumers of Hallmark's core company culture, which is creating impactful greeting cards.

The tour included Hallmark employees and card writers going out on tour across the country to share their work and hear consumer stories. As a result, the tour became an effective employee relations program that helped renew employees' sense of purpose.

Hallmark's strategy to put employees at the forefront of this campaign demonstrated true authenticity to its audiences. Since card writers were able to hear directly from consumers their

personable memories associated with greeting, the employees were motivated and inspired with new insight for future work. This fresh mindset contributes to long-term benefits of organizational productivity. A strong internal brand leads to a positive company culture where employees are excited to contribute. Both Sephora and Hallmark effectively leveraged internal team members to promote important campaign strategies and convey authenticity to their audiences.

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