

# GLOBAL COSMETIC INDUSTRY®

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The Beauty Innovator's Resource

Post-pandemic  
PR Playbook

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## WASTE-FREE BEAUTY

*Packaging, ingredients, brands & retail*

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# MARKETS & TRENDS

## Beauty's Post-Pandemic PR Playbook

| BY ADA POLLA, Alchimie Forever

**T**o say that the world changed in the last 18 months is an understatement, and nowhere is that more true than in the beauty PR universe.

Of course, the COVID-19 global pandemic affected beauty businesses in numerous ways. From changing consumer preferences (moving away from color cosmetics, toward skin care and wellness) to shifts in distribution channels (long brick and mortar closures, an increase in online sales), beauty brands have had to rethink how to reach their audience, and specifically, how to reach new consumers.

A consumer typically finds new beauty brands through:

1. Word of mouth
2. Social media and influencers
3. Press
4. Recommendations during professional services and treatments
5. Samples given at checkout in store or online
6. Product demonstrations by brand ambassadors in stores

Each of these discovery methods have been impacted one way or another by the pandemic—and many articles have covered these changes, such as the end of conventional testers, the slow return to facials and more. Here, however, I will focus on the way that press/public relations have changed.

### Office Closures and Relocations

All the large press conglomerates, from Hearst to Meredith to Conde Nast, closed their Manhattan HQs during the early phases of the pandemic. Eighteen months later, these are slow to reopen. What does this mean for editors and writers? Many employees moved out of New York or Los Angeles, returning to their home states, often to bigger homes. A return



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to the office will not only imply no longer working from home—for many, but it will also imply a relocation.

### Events at a Halt

Glamorous launch events, swanky press parties and international press trips came to a screeching halt when the pandemic hit, and to date have not been effectively replaced by Zooms. Meetings in stores with brand founders are still few and far between. Making an impression is therefore harder today than ever.

To understand what all of this means for brands, I spoke with Jaime Maser Berman, founder of Maser Communications, who manages all things public relations for my brand, Alchimie Forever.

### Sending Product

Leaving the office has meant that the omnipresent “beauty closet” filled with free samples and new launches has gone away. Without the space to store all these products, sendouts are no longer a given.

PR professionals are asking their contacts if a sendout is welcome—not only because “home office” addresses must be confirmed, but because with space at a premium, sendouts are no longer always welcome.

This can be particularly challenging for new product launches. Whereas a new product launch always warranted a few dozen packages being sent to top publications, helping to generate attention if not always press, this is no longer the standard.

“Asking an editor if they’d like to opt-in for products (where they submit their details quickly and easily via Google form) is standard practice, at least in my book,” says Maser. “Even if I have their current mailing address, even if I know they typically do want to try new items, I always ask and never assume.”

### Avoid Wastefulness

In this post-COVID world, checking in is even more important. Space is at a premium; most apartments (and/or homes shared with roommates,



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partners, pets, families) were not meant for the sheer volume of beauty mailings work-from-home life has brought. Not to mention that some editors live in walk-up apartments or non-doorman buildings, so even receiving the package can be a challenge, let alone transporting the seemingly endless number of boxes into the apartment, finding space to store samples, breaking down and discarding or properly recycling the garbage after, etc.

Editors are also very cognizant of and vocal about wastefulness that accompanies the product when it comes to the mailer. This includes boxes, bubble wrap, tissue paper, crinkle paper, a gift or merch, or something extra that often accompanies the product. As one editor said on a Clubhouse chat I attended about press mailers, a person can only have so many branded water bottles, yoga mats and journals before it becomes too much.

Therefore, it's important to be deliberate and thoughtful about how you're sending something. If you're planning on sending more than just the new product, alert the recipient. The last thing someone needs is to be shell-shocked that the small jar of moisturizer they were expecting also

came with a giant cooler filled with perishables.

### Addressing Product Overload

Lastly, editors only have so much skin and hair—they can't test every single item that arrives. Before the pandemic, offices housed a whole staff (across beauty, fashion, accessories, lifestyle, health, booking and art departments) that could try new products. That's not the case when you're sending products to an individual's home. Therefore, you only want to send an item that they've expressed interest in seeing or trying.

"I work with Odele, 'clean hair care for you + whomever you share your shower with,'" says Maser. "The brand is all about inclusivity and shareability (the name itself is a riff on the Norwegian phrase 'å dele,' which means 'to share'), so when it came time to let the media know about our new launches this past January, we gave them the option to #shareOdele—they could receive the new product samples and opt to #shareOdele with a friend



Editors only have so much skin and hair—they can't test every single item that arrives; photo courtesy of Thirdman on Pexels.

or family member or charity [that accepted personal care products] in need (Odele handled fulfilling all). They could elect to just receive assets/ no product samples and #shareOdele with a charity in need (again, Odele handled fulfillment). It went over like gangbusters. Editors loved the

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idea of sharing product with friends and family who aren't usually on the receiving end of a mailer, and also loved the idea of giving back, and Odele was more than happy to provide the product and have new people experiencing the brand."

### Rethinking Desksides

My brand has a story: a family story, a personal story, a story that is complex and non-corporate, one that is best told in person. I remember the days of desksides, meeting with a handful of editors in one day, sharing my brand story with them. I don't know when desksides will come back, but I do know that Zoom desksides have not replaced in-person desksides. Indeed, Maser early on suggested that, if anything, phone calls might be more effective than Zooms.

"Zoom has absolutely helped keep a connection going in a time when we all so desperately needed one, but Zoom fatigue is real," says Maser. "After the year and a half we've all

had, sometimes you can't quite pull it together to keep your camera on because you've been so stressed or anxiety-ridden, you haven't slept or showered recently, or you're opting to not have your camera on because your backdrop is less than glamorous or stylized, or you're simultaneously homeschooling while also doing your job so you need to have your camera off so you can tend to your child (or children). And no one can fault you for any of this; this has been our reality. We're all just trying to do our best—or really, get by—in what has been the most surreal of times."

Maser notes that editors will partake in Zoom when it makes sense, as with a virtual activation (like a floral arranging class, a cooking lesson led by a celebrity chef, group fitness workout, etc.), celebrity launch, multiple SKU introduction, an expert ambassador speaking on behalf of a brand, or a large advertiser holding a virtual event.

She adds, "And, of course, they'll attend a Zoom to show support to publicists they have longstanding relationships with or brands they're truly fans of."

Maser continues, "But they've also been very clear in communicating there's no need for a Zoom when it's something that could be easily covered in a press release. There's no need for a Zoom when it's about one new SKU or product (unless it's something with a complicated delivery system or technologies).

As a publicist, it's our job to help steer our clients in the right direction and use our expertise and knowledge to advise how to best reach the media with news. Sometimes that means through a 1:1 or small group Zoom with the client, sometimes it means through a Zoom or catch-up call between just the writer and the publicist,

sometimes it means through email, sometimes it means through product mailings. There's no set formula for the right way to do it, in my opinion; each client and each launch dictates a different direction."

### Be a Social Listener

Whichever format you use, it's always crucial to read the room and have your finger on the pulse of editors' likes, dislikes, comments, preferences, etc. This is even more critical since the pandemic hit, as everything shifted virtually. Social listening is clutch here: paying attention to what editors are posting on Instagram Stories and Twitter, talking about on Clubhouse, and sharing via editor quizzes on The Beauty Loop (a media/PR insights and updates subscription newsletter from longtime beauty director Erica Metzger).

### Are We Ready for Events?

Editors are looking forward to returning to events, but brands will have to think not only about how to make events safe and comfortable for editors, but also of the ROI. It seems likely that for the near future, at least, in-person press events will remain smaller, more intimate gatherings.

### Adapt, Learn and Grow

"You have to be fluid and nimble," says Maser, regarding PR in the new normal. "[W]hat was standard practice circa April 2020, in the beginning of lockdown, doesn't necessarily apply now. Adapt, learn, grow—that's the new lather, rinse, repeat." ■



Zoom desksides have not replaced in-person discussions; if anything, phone calls might be more effective than Zooms; photo courtesy of Ivan Samkov at Pexels.



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