

Living A LUSH Life With



FRESH HANDMADE COSMETICS

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In the late 1970s, a small group of unknowns in the cosmetic industry banded together to create fresh handmade cosmetics under the name Cosmetics to Go. The Body Shop showed interest, and in 1978, Cosmetics to Go sold peppermint-scented foot cream to the chain store, signing a deal to sell their products through the Body Shop. In 1988, CEO and founder Mark Constantine decided it was time to branch off: Cosmetics to Go opened a store in southern England. The company began as a catalogue-based mail order cosmetic company, but soon began losing money. Constantine sold the company and took a break until the mid-1990s.

Constantine worked to recover his losses and, in 1994, reopened in Dorset, England, under the name LUSH: Fresh Handmade Cosmetics. Using the customer database left over from Cosmetics to Go, Constantine held a contest to find the name for his next adventure. The winning entry came from Mrs. Elizabeth Bennett of Edinburgh, Scotland. Says Constantine: “LUSH is such an evocative word. It can mean green, make you think of the rainforest of a passage of poetry, a piece of music, or someone who has had too much to drink. It has a wonderfully addictive feeling about it.” (Dunn).

The company quickly made a name for itself by inventing products such as bath ballistics, shampoo bars, and bubble bar slices. Demand soon outgrew supply, and Constantine had to expand. The first LUSH storefront in Dorset still exists, as does the second store in London. In the thirteen years since opening under that name, LUSH has grown from being a two-storefront company to having more than 370 shops in forty countries around the world, with mail order operations in twelve countries. They have production facilities in the UK, Canada, Italy, South America and Japan. They “[aim] to have the youngest, freshest products in the history of cosmetics” (LUSH Fresh Handmade Cosmetics).

Their mission statement is as follows:

A LUSH Life

We believe in making effective products out of fresh organic fruit and vegetables, the finest essential oils and safe synthetics, without animal ingredients, and in writing the quantitative list on the outside.*

We also believe in buying only from companies that test for safety without the involvement of animals and in testing our products on humans.

We believe in making our own fresh products by hand, printing our own labels and making our own fragrances.*

We believe in long candlelit baths, massage, filling the house with perfume and in the right to make mistakes, lose everything and start again.

We believe that our products should be good value, that we make a profit, and that the customer is always right.

**We also believe words like “fresh” and “organic” have an honest meaning beyond marketing.*

(LUSH Fresh Handmade Cosmetics)

LUSH works hard to ensure they follow through on their beliefs. The ingredient list of every product is available both in-store and online. Many products have ingredients such as fresh berries and melon. This means that most items have expiration dates within a few months of production, quite rare in the world of cosmetics. Some items – such as face masks – have a shelf life of only a few weeks and, depending on the size of the country, are only available in-store to prevent expiration while in transit. The reason for this is that LUSH refuses to use preservatives they deem unnecessary; most preservatives they use are purely to ensure the product stays fresh long enough to be used.

However, it is the second item in their mission statement that has helped LUSH to make a name for itself. Being against animal testing is a common idea in the cosmetic industry, but Constantine takes it a step further. In 2006, laws were proposed in the European Union stating that more raw materials and dyes used in cosmetics should be tested on animals. The law never passed, but as a European-based company, LUSH got very involved in actively trying to reduce the legislation by launching a worldwide campaign animal testing. Customers received stickers and buttons that stated “Still Against Animal Testing.” LUSH printed shopping bags and sold canvas bags with the same message. They gave store customers the option of signing a petition for the cause. LUSH managed to obtain 70,000 signatures (Siegler).

Additionally, the company does not buy raw products from companies that test on animals. This way, it is able to ensure that none of its items sold have ever been tested on animals at any step of production. Should any of its suppliers refuse to sign a contract promising never to test products on animals – whether they distribute these products to LUSH or another buyer – LUSH does “everything in their power to convince the supplier to change their methods” (“LUSH Cosmetics Launches . . .”). This contract comes with the guarantee that LUSH will buy materials from the

company after the switch from animal testing. To date, the company has helped two raw material suppliers convert to having a no-animal testing policy throughout their business. The company has a long history of being against animal testing, starting with Constantine originating the Body Shop's "Against Animal Testing" campaign in 1985.

Although this particular campaign only lasted for a brief time, LUSH is still very open about its beliefs. On the lushcosmetics LiveJournal community, user chitinous writes: "I am really impressed with what I know of Lush's accountability for its ingredients. When I worked in [one shop], my manager told me a story about how the company had switched egg suppliers when it found out that the previous supplier had been misrepresenting their chickens' free-range status."

LUSH also stands up against waste and unnecessary refuse. In August 2007, the Get Naked campaign began. In stores throughout the world, employees got as unclothed as their modesty would allow in a clever protest against extra packaging ("LUSH Workers Bare Their Behinds . . ."). LUSH reinforced this with a promotion of "buy two, get one free" for all naked products on a minisite called The Naked Truth. In addition to this, they gave users a "bingo" card with the goal of obtaining a stamp in each "zone." These zones were hair care or henna, facial cleanser, deodorant or massage bar, and body butter. As they filled the card, customers were given a free body butter or shampoo bar with a free storage tin. Fifty-eight percent of LUSH's products are package-free, making it easy for buyers to fill their cards.

This is all part of their effort to reduce waste. According to The Naked Truth minisite, "[I]f the . . . people of North America used solid shampoos, we could prevent the waste of 198 million plastic bottles! But, because they all still use liquids . . . 58.5 million metric tons of preserved shampoos are released into the environment! If the population used LUSH solid shampoos instead, 54 million fewer metric tons of un-preserved substance would enter the environment." It's a lofty

goal, but LUSH is not giving up on their “nudist colony of products that reveal their beautiful fragrances and ingredients to all” (The Naked Truth).

In many ways, we can see the strongest aspect of LUSH in its relationship with consumers, affectionately termed “LUSHies.” Through the forum, LUSH has created an exquisite community. Sprinkled throughout the forum are threads devoted to “LUSH meet ups” in various cities around North America. Every month there are threads related to secret buddy gift swaps and card swaps. In the Idle Chatter section, there are often cries for the positive thoughts of the “LUSH force” to be sent in the direction of the poster. These requests come after any form of bad news, from failing a test to being diagnosed with cancer. Without fail, every such post garners numerous responses letting the poster know he or she is in peoples’ thoughts. While this is not directly a strength of the company itself, it is certainly a testament to the comfort felt by members of the LUSH community.

The LUSH forum is key in creating a strong relationship. People are immediately able to interact with store managers, sales associates, and company owners. Oftentimes, a person will post something in the Rants and Raves or Product Questions sections of the forum and receive a response directly from the person in charge of mail order, product development, or whatever department appropriate to the comment. Forum members are also secure in the knowledge that these are real people and not just fake names: During the summer of 2007, user hilary@mailorder, real name Hilary Jones, LUSH Director of Ethics, made a visit to New York from England to debut new products along with Constantine, affectionately nicknamed “Big” by forum members. Hilary posted her schedule on the forum and set aside time for meals, sending an open invitation for anyone to join her. A small group of forumites did, and were granted the opportunity to meet some of the most important members of the LUSH family.

The company benefits strongly from the LUSH forum, located at <http://forum.lush.com/forum/>. On 19 November 2008, there were 21,523 registered users on the forum with more than 833,000 articles posted. As of 1 December 2008, the 21,796 registered users had posted more than 846,800 articles. The many people and topics make for happy customers, swapping ideas and commenting on products. Out of these comments come the benefit to the company: The immense number of product reviews reduce the need for formal market research. Knowledge that company heads are taking the time to read and respond to comments increases LUSH product involvement. The forumites brought to light the need for a lighter hand cream, naming it Smitten, as well as inspiring chocolate orange shower gel Sonic Death Monkey (Boggenpoel).

LUSHies have a strong online presence off the forums as well. There are two LUSH communities on LiveJournal; lushcosmetics is devoted to discussing LUSH products while members of lush_swaps barter one LUSH product for another. A quick search on YouTube for phrases such as “LUSH bath” or “LUSH ballistic” brings up at least twenty videos. Some of these videos have thousands of views. One video has just over ten thousand views (“Think Pink Bath Bomb”). The content of these videos is rarely more than a camera held over a bathtub while a person drops a ballistic into the water. A search for “LUSH cosmetics” brings up handheld videos of store openings and parties. Nonetheless, the links to these videos pop up anywhere from the LUSH North American forum to the lushcosmetics LiveJournal community.

LUSH also increases product involvement by creating a hedonist consumption event each time consumers go shopping:

As you walk along the street where there is a LUSH shop you start smelling the fragrances from far; but since the exotic, fragrant scents do not belong to an urban landscape, your senses are alerted . . . And you are naturally led to enter the shop.

Once inside the shop all your senses literally wake up in a fraction of a second; the colours of the forms of soap or of the bath ballistics make the effect of a rainbow in the room, your eyes are continuously attracted by different objects and you would like to experience everything . . . Everything seems to be carefully orchestrated to make the stay in the shop and enjoyable experience and to make the customer feel more comfortable. You simply look, touch, smell and try whatever attracts your attention and at the end of the process you pick up the products you like, go to the counter and pay. (Jenkinson, et. al.)

LUSH stores are among the more distinctive shops, particularly in the cosmetic world. It is set up to resemble a grocery or deli. They make products in bulk. Sales associates cut off a chunk of soap on a wooden board and wrap it in greaseproof paper, sealing it with an identifying sticker. Face masks are ladles out of cold pots and kept in salad bar-like tables. “Its soap bars are often designed to look and smell like huge bars of chocolate or coloured fudge, giving its stores a ‘sweetshop’ ambience” (“The Sensory Experience”). Anyone can touch anything; most products have samples out for buyers to “play” with and try out. Every item has a sticker on it with the image of the person who made the product and the dates on which it was made and when it will expire. Consumers can fantasize about the taste of products with ingredients ranging from chocolate to honey to avocado to egg while learning about the benefits. They can see the face of the person who spent time making the item. The store is “an interactive experience . . . [with] rough wood finishings, chalk boards with product information, and a fresh bar of skin care products” (Lazarus). In these manners, LUSH stimulates the sensory systems of vision, smell and touch – and, for some, taste! (See Appendix A)

LUSH also increases product involvement through their own form of character neonatalization. When the holidays come around, LUSH introduces a limited amount of holiday items. In addition to this, they often sell different versions of everyday products. In 2008,

Haagenbath was also sold as Christmas Angel (see Appendix B). More adorably, Butterball was renamed Mr. Butterball for the holiday season, complete with red peppercorn “buttons” on his winter coat.

LUSH has done this in the past, recreating Avobath as Green Wing and, for Easter, releasing the soap Bunny I Washed The Kids alongside the popular Honey I Washed The Kids soap. These products are no different from the ball-shaped ballistics or soap, nor do they perform a different function. Interestingly, Haagenbath weighs 6.3oz while Christmas Angel weighs only 3.5oz.: Same product with a price difference that does not match up to the weight difference. Nonetheless, Christmas Angel has been selling even better than the new and already loved Haagenbath during the 2008 holiday season, according to a long-term LUSH employee (Jeudy). People “love giving them as gifts, because they make lush extra fun” (etoiledetir). As another employee puts it, “We definitely sell way more of the cuter shaped products. The folks [on the forum] of course know what is going on with their Lush and stuff, but I think the people that just buy casually are much more attracted to the cuter shapes” (kweenrebel). She goes on to cite an example of one woman who bought twenty Christmas Angel products without ever having used a bath bomb before.

As kweenrebel explains above, a difference exists between the casual LUSH customer and the regular. LiveJournal user lilartists1215 says, “I didn’t know what the concept of brand-loyalty was! ...Well, until I met Lush.” It’s fairly surprising that a company without any form of basic reward reinforcement structure has such a following, but LUSH works hard to create a sense of family for its customers – and people are very loyal to their families. “They don’t see their customers as just consumers, it’s a real ‘people’ company” (evangeline2670).

It's obvious consumers tend to feel a very strong bond to LUSH. On the North American forum, hundreds of threads exist discussing "enabling," the LUSHie term for getting another person hooked on the company. One customer says:

I enable because I can. I enable because someone once brought me this weird wrapped thing she said was soap, but it looked like it came from a deli. The soap was Fresh Farmacy and it changed my life. I go to many of the parties and often receive goodie bags with items I can't use [due to allergies], so I pass them off to friends and co-workers. I held a birthday party at my local Lush store for my friends. I haul friends to store parties. I share my Lush products at work. I enable because the products are high quality, well made and work. I agree with their ethics and enjoy what they make . . . I have friends who have tried other soap companies and prefer different soaps or ballistics but I've been hesitant to try, because I really like what I can get from Lush. (simonelo)

As strong as the company-customer relationship is, LUSH is not terribly keen on using positive reinforcement to increase sales. We can say they follow a variable interval reinforcement schedule, but that may be pushing it. This type of reinforcement schedule means that "the time that must pass before reinforcement is delivered varies around some average" (Solomon 94). However, this schedule also means that the person must respond at a consistent rate because he or she is unsure of when the reinforcement will be provided. This is not completely true for LUSH.

The company has a history of rewarding the LUSHies randomly through The LUSH Times and LUSH Life. The former is a print newsletter; the latter is an email newsletter. By signing up just once for these newsletters, readers are sent promotion codes for discounts or free items on their next purchase in a store or online. These promotions have nothing to do with previous purchases or website visits; One sign-up and the customer is part of the LUSH Times and LUSH Life community and can partake in their rewards without ever making an actual purchase. Additionally, LUSH

sometimes hosts “chat parties,” during which people receive promotion codes. While a random amount of time must pass before the reward is given, making it similar to a variable interval reinforcement schedule, they require no consistent behavior on the part of the customer. However, LUSH employees tend to be very consistent in their attitudes.

Robert Cialdini called likeability one of the six fundamental principles of persuasion. He uses the example of the Tupperware party in which “the guests’ fondness for their hostess weighed twice as heavily in their purchase decisions as their regard for the products they bought . . . [Informal conversations] create an ideal opportunity to discover at least one common area of enjoyment, be it a hobby, a college basketball team, or reruns of Seinfeld” (Cialdini). LUSH trains its employees to introduce themselves to customers upon entrance into a store and act as friends, walking them around the store and showing them how to use products. Employees are encouraged to hold conversations that go off in tangents, discussing school, outside work, likes and dislikes – so long as the buyer seems interested in the conversation (Jeudy). They do their best to create an immediate bond with the customer. As a result, people buy to please the seller as much as to please themselves.

Beyond this, LUSH can be said to use Cialdini’s idea of deference to experts on a particular matter. When a customer questions the purpose behind anything, LUSH employees are truly the authority to which they defer. Upon being hired, new employees are given a gift basket of LUSH products they have never tried. They are given extensive training on the benefits of the products themselves and each ingredient in the products (Jeudy).

LUSH also implements Cialdini’s principle of reciprocity. When a person walks into a LUSH store, despite their purchase, they are given numerous samples and the chance to try out some products in the store. The idea of reciprocity is that people are unwilling to accept something free

– they believe they must reciprocate the action. In a store setting, this is done via a purchase or a return to the store.

In 2003, LUSH experienced firsthand the “Reactance Theory.” Constantine often discontinues approximately one-third of the present LUSH products each year to make room for new ones. One product on the list for 2003 discontinuation was a body lotion called Potion due to its extremely low sales. Although many people did not buy it, the lotion’s sudden appearance on the discontinued list caused an outpour of emotional responses. On the international forum, located at lush.co.uk, Potion devotees began “threatening a fleshy, Greenpeace-esque display in London’s Trafalgar Square” (Conley). Constantine’s response was to allow Potion fans to pre-order the product for a limited time, and produce just enough to satiate the fans while ensuring he would not lose money on production.

Since the Potion debacle, LUSH runs a “Fresh From the Past” promotion every year. Forum members and website visitors are invited to cast their votes for favorite discontinued items. The winning fifteen are made in limited supply. Many of these items had a small number of fans when they were in constant production. The Reactance Theory shows that “the threatened [choice] does not necessarily have to be the most attractive of the available choice alternatives; it is only necessary that it be included among the array of alternatives” (Clee, et. al.). By LUSH’s removal of the product, customers are suddenly motivated to get that choice back – even if it was not originally desired. Throughout the year on the forum, members “campaign” for their most beloved item to be voted into the top fifteen. Potion has been on the list three times.

In a sense, Cialdini’s principle of scarcity can also be applied here: “items . . . are seen to be more valuable as they become less available” (Cialdini). Only a small number of these discontinued items are made. By highlighting the unique opportunity to be a part of the group that

owns the product, LUSH fosters a sense of exclusivity among its customers. “The information itself may seem dull, but exclusivity will give it a special sheen. Push it across your desk and say, ‘I just got this report today. It won’t be distributed until next week, but I want to give you an early look at what it shows.’ Then watch your listeners lean forward.” (Cialdini).

As a privately held company, LUSH does not distribute reports to their customers. Exclusive information and products, however, are treated as prizes to be won. As previously mentioned, forumites and LUSHies have the opportunity to reach out to company owners plus participate in private chat parties and receive special promotion codes. Occasionally, LUSH will create a “forum item,” available on a first come first serve basis – and forum members are always given the chance to be first. Examples include ballistics such as the spicy sandalwood scented Plum Duff Letters and fruit punch-like Tennis Ball, which are completely new products, and perfume sprays of scents already considered favorites by LUSHies, such as the smokey jasmine Silky Underwear and strawberry vanilla American Cream. On the rare occasion, LUSH will create something completely exclusive to its forum members. The creation of a LUSH perfume is a big deal in itself, as it is not a common member of the product list. In 1995, the company created “V Forum Fragrance,” a limited edition, forum-member-only, champagne and violet scented perfume. These forum items are highly sought after.

This innovative approach to reaching out to its customers can sometimes backfire and show weakness. In September 2007, LUSH announced on the forum the extremely limited production of an October shower gel called Ghost. This product is white and shimmery, like a Ghost for Halloween, and smells like Lily Savon, a bar soap to be released in early 2008. To highlight the secrecy and excitement of Ghost, LUSH began a “sign up sheet” for those interested in Ghost,

promising an email to those who signed up so they would immediately know of the product's release.

When they released Ghost in the third week of October, there were already numerous complaints. It seemed the company had overreached itself, falsely assuring customers the product would be completely finished and mailed out in early October, and then failing to make nearly enough to meet demand – even though there was a sign up sheet letting them know not only how many people were interested in Ghost, but how many bottles each person wanted.

While for many companies, this faux pas would be quickly quieted and moved past, this is not so for LUSH. The LUSH North American forum has a section titled Rants and Raves. They censor nothing in this section. Forum members can unload their thoughts on anything from a dislike of certain product scents to LUSH customer relations. Currently, there are a number of threads on the forum devoted to complaints of the Ghost “debacle.”

It is fantastic that LUSH is secure enough in its products to provide a space for customers to discuss negative aspects of the company. However, this is a weakness of the company in that it could turn off potential customers when they read poor reviews of products or the company overall.

Additionally, the forum has a section called Other Companies You Love. This section allows forumites to discuss not only various clothing companies and drug stores, but also close competitors of LUSH. Many threads laud items similar to LUSH's bath bombs and face masks, with forumites stating their switch from LUSH to Company XYZ. Even with this seemingly poor choice, LUSH stays on top of its competition.

Major competitors falling into the organic and environmentally conscious cosmetics niche Origins and Burt's Bees. Similar to LUSH, Origins promotes the use of natural ingredients in its products through its tag line, “The genius of nature.” It has tried to position itself as a higher end

company. In late 2005 the company teamed with Dr. Andrew Weil, a well-known medical doctor trained in botany and integrated medicine. Among cosmetics aficionados, Origins seems to have a reputation for both natural and quality products.

Burt's Bees takes a more casual approach to its products. Unlike LUSH and Origins, the company does not have its own retail stores; rather, it retails through various drugstores, health stores and discount department stores. The company strongly promotes sustainable business practices and eco-friendly packaging. Similar to LUSH, Burt's Bees is against animal testing and uses only natural ingredients. Burt's Bees does not use any preservatives in its products and refuses to use items like Sodium Lauryl Sulfate – which, much to the chagrin of many customers, LUSH still uses.

LUSH also pays close attention to the fluctuations within the environment of consumer demand. They perform very little marketing research apart from the rare online survey or question posed on the forum. In late 2006 and early 2007 there was an increase in forum complaints regarding LUSH's use of sulfates in its hair care products. In the spring of 2007, the company announced that a new line of hair care products sans sulfates would be released in the next few months. They have also begun removing Sodium Lauryl Sulfate and Sodium Laureth Sulfate from products and replacing them with Ammonium Lauryl Sulfates, known to be less abrasive. LUSH closely monitors the selling patterns of all products and uses that information to make marketing decisions. This allows them to save money and better react to consumer demand.

Getting solid information on LUSH's target demographic and the manner in which they use market segmentation is difficult. The company is privately held and, as helpful as the customer service department is, they are hesitant to give out such information. Simon Nicholls, who runs the LUSH mail order operation, explains: "When LUSH started out, there was a young age focus . . .

Now, of course, we realize the ‘delicatessen’ approach appeals to a far wider group and our fastest growing sector is the 35-50 age group” (“The LUSH Interview”). In general, it seems the majority of customers are professional women who see many of the LUSH products as a special treat.

LUSH does do its best to position itself as an environmentally conscious company. This alone does not completely make the company stand out in the crowd of Origins and Burt’s Bees; It goes one step further. All products are handmade and customers are generally provided with the image of the maker. This seemingly small step gives customers a sense of familiarity to look for: ‘Knowing that thing [sic] are actualy [sic] made by people themselves, not people standing around and watching a machine do the work for them” is precisely what makes LiveJournal user blue_demon62 think of LUSH. Whichever North American LUSH store you visit, you can pick the shower gel made by your favorite soap maker, be it Sarah or Brett or Nic – or maybe some other employee. After all, “What other large company actually has pictures of the makers on their products? What other company would have soap makers who had fangirls? Seriously.” (simonelo). The company also stands out by positioning itself as a “cosmetic deli.” When shopping at a deli, a customer can choose the exact chicken cutlet he wants to have for dinner. Similarly, at LUSH, customers can select carefully their bath bomb from a barrel, have their soap custom cut, and grab the jiggliest shower jelly. It’s a LUSH experience.

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Appendix A: Images of Various LUSH Shops



Appendix B: Character Neonatalization



Haagenbath



Christmas Angel



Butterball



Mr. Butterball



Avobath



Green Wing



Honey I Washed The Kids



Bunny I Washed The Kids