

# Bringing Brands to Life

Beauty Barrage Founder and CEO Sonia Summers shares her perspective on current market trends while also shedding light on what makes her company tick.

As traditional retailing continues to go through a self-induced transformative period, solution providers are stepping up to help companies realize higher conversions, better margins and improved sell-throughs via various technologies.

On the human capital front, retailers and beauty brands are turning to companies such as Beauty Barrage to bolster the front-line of their businesses with skilled and highly educated brand ambassadors at the beauty counter. The outsourced sales force solution provider is positioning itself as a cost-effective and sustainable alternative to hiring freelancers or managing teams directly.

Here, Sonia Summers, founder and chief executive officer of Beauty Barrage, shares her insights into current market trends and how her company differentiates itself as well as the firm's culture and her leadership style, which includes having a life-changing impact on others.

**WWD: What are some of the latest hiring trends you've been seeing in the beauty industry?**

**SS:** Companies are looking at operational budgets related to their field teams and realizing how archaic, top-heavy and expensive they are...not to mention the inefficiencies from an ROI perspective.

If you really look at it, they have multiple field executives on the team with car allowances, T&E and all of the other ancillary overhead SG&A costs that go along with supporting a territory. On top of all that, add in "freelance budgets," field coordinators and VP's, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that this isn't a sustainable business model. This model is further compounded by the inability to properly and effectively service all of the doors, let alone educate the store staff.

Additionally, brands are realizing that the expense of a full-time education team can be reduced using qualified third-party resources like Beauty Barrage. In the past, the term "third-party" carried with it a negative connotation, and we fight every day to challenge that bias of, third-party means third-rate. Beauty Barrage invests heavily in the education of our field team -- education that goes beyond brand, field and retailer instruction. We have an educational portal whereby proprietary modules for social media workshops, consultative selling and brand training techniques are housed.

**WWD: What are some ways to meet the human capital demands of a contact-based economy?**

**SS:** For us, we are always in hiring mode because building out a bench of beauty micro influencers is a top priority for us. Prior to even getting an interview with Beauty Barrage, candidates have to take a behavioral assessment and score within a specific range of successful traits of our most successful beauty ambassadors. Fortunately for us, we receive more referrals now than job board submissions because the word is out --our business



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CEO, Beauty Barrage

model is effective and we treat our employees how they should be treated -- and not the first ones to be fired when corporate has a bad quarter.

**WWD: What are some of the latest innovations and development at Beauty Barrage?**

**SS:** We have spent the last two years developing proprietary software that helps run our business more effectively and efficiently. The software has three

components to it -- a centralized sales, operations and accounting dashboard, a brand portal and a mobile app for our beauty ambassadors, which includes GPS tracking and GeoFencing capabilities.

We launch new functionality about every three weeks, so the platform is constantly evolving. Through this software, we are able to provide our brand partners with real time information after each and every store visit, we also track sales performance, and compare it to historical sales data to show our ROI. We've also been doubling-down on our investment in our field team, hiring eight newly-created market based influencer roles to help lead teams regionally, through coaching and mentorship. We're also in the process of building out an intranet to really solidify the sense of community for our team. With over 300 people in the field, it's important for them to feel a connection to the home office, live our core values, and communicate with each other.

**WWD: Are there any new partnerships for Beauty Barrage that you'd like to highlight?**

**SS:** When we go in-store, our team always goes in as the "brand partner." They never introduce themselves as working for Beauty Barrage. We're a part of their strategy that they don't always want to share!

However, there is one partnership in particular that we can announce and we are thrilled to be working with: Beauty Barrage will be the field team launching Flesh at Ulta stores nationwide this summer.

**WWD: What do you perceive as being Beauty Barrage's overall impact on the industry right now?**

**SS:** I think our tagline says it all, "We breathe life into brands at retail" and we are disrupting the old retail service model that requires bloated full time staffing.

We provide brands the most cost-effective solution that gives them the

freedom to become nimble and strategic in their planning.

It's an amazing feeling to be the leader in this space -- something I take very seriously.

As long as we continue to evolve as a company and nurture our relationships with our employees, brand partners, and retailers, I believe we'll continue to stay on top.

**WWD: How does your experience inform your leadership style?**

**SS:** In my past lives, I've run several field teams and understand what a CEO, head of sales, HR and accounting are looking for in terms of the KPIs for success. I understand their pain points and have built our model with that in mind while also remaining two steps ahead of them. I've never stopped learning and growing in any of my roles (especially this one!) and I require that from my team. Complacency is an absolute business killer and as long as we continue to learn, grow, adapt and evolve, I think we'll continue to do well.

**WWD: What do you generally look for in a job candidate?**

**SS:** All candidates, regardless of role or job title, need to align with our core values. For roles in our corporate office for example, it is critical that they can flourish in a fast-paced environment, and one of our core values is, "embrace the chaos -- it might be beauty but it ain't always pretty." Our team has to live that, or they don't work here anymore. We tend to over-deliver to our clients and it is critical that our team be ingrained with that same sense of hustle and urgency.

Accountability and transparency are other core values and it's imperative that we do the right thing, even when nobody's watching. I have some incredible people in our organization that live and breathe these core values every day!

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Beauty Barrage makes investment in education of its field team a top priority.