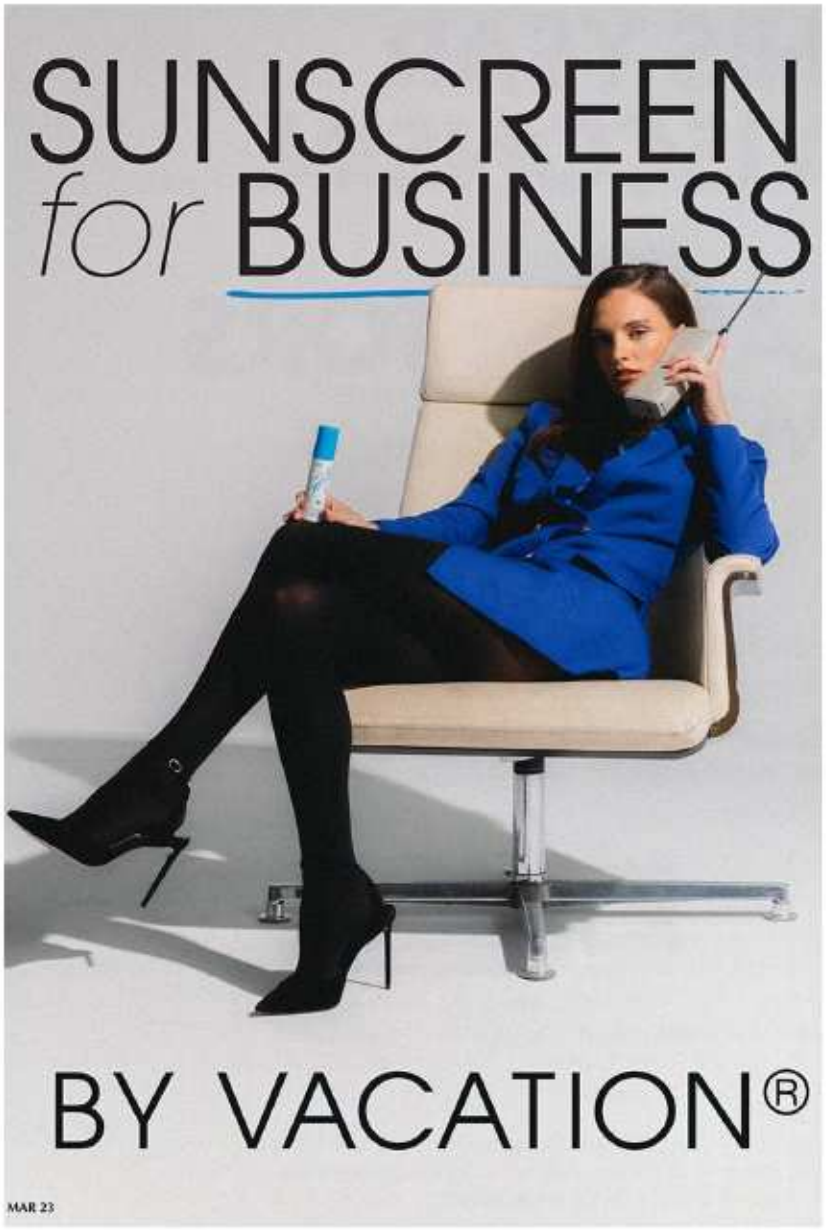
BOF The Business of Fashion
Agenda-setting intelligence, analysis and advice for the global fashion community.

BEAUTY

Sunscreen Brand Vacation Takes Its Miami Pool Party Vibe to the Suburbs

Following a $6 million Series A funding round, the sunscreen brand prepares to move past its club of creative clientele and reach the masses.



Vacation introduces its latest product, the Spritz. (Courtesy)

By **PRIYA RAO**

20 March 2023

BoF PROFESSIONAL

Vacation, the "leisure" beauty brand, likes to be known for one thing: making sun care fun.

Since soft-launching direct-to-consumer in April 2021 — first targeting the listeners of always-on internet radio station Poolside FM — the line has committed to that philosophy with sunscreen that looks like Reddi Wip, oils that smell like Chardonnay, retro-inspired collaborations with tennis brand Prince and ads that ooze Club Med.

Despite offering a chance to revel in 1980s excess decades later, the brand is no gimmick. In December 2022, the brand secured a $6 million Series A capital raise, led by Silas Capital, bringing the brand's total fundraising to $11.2 million.

Now, Vacation is ready for a bigger, broader audience.

This month, the brand expands to 700 more Ulta Beauty locations, its largest national partner, bringing its total door count to 1,200-plus stores. It's growing its product assortment in tandem: last week Vacation launched its Super Spritz SPF 50 face mist, the label's first daily product meant to take customers from the "beach to the boardroom and vice versa," said founding partner Lach Hall; in April, it will its introduce an After Sun Gel.

Though Vacation initially attracted attention for its insider, cool kid club vibe — the brand created fictional roles and business cards for fans like "head chair of the Jimmy Buffett excellence committee" and sold NFTs at Art Basel — 85 percent of sales come from shoppers in non-coastal cities. 60 percent of customers are under 44 and the remaining 40 percent are over 45.

"When we launched ... our community was 100,000 people who were design driven, trendy and in coastal areas. But within the first year, when we started to see our marketing, PR machine kick off, we started appealing to people across the country," said Hall. "That's really the mission that we are on."

Having A Good Time

Created by two former advertising executives, Hall and Dakota Green, and Poolsuite Suite founder Marty Bell, Vacation arrived as a novel, bright spot in the sun care market in 2021. It positioned itself far away from the more clinical sunscreens found in Sephora like Supergoop!, while maintaining equal distance from mass family lines like Banana Boat, Coppertone and Hawaiian Tropic.

Green said the brand is not out to "fearmonger" consumers into buying from Vacation, but rather make sunscreen a lighthearted and easy experience. Case in point: its Classic Whip SPF 30, which launched in December 2022, was made as a mousse formula with a tilt valve actuator to

Though Vacation does not gift products or pay creators, influencers have taken notice. A video of TikToker Athena Layna trying Classic Whip has 15.2 million views; another with Golloria George has 3.4 million views. More broadly, Vacation has had over 50 million views on videos featuring its products on TikTok in the last two months, though the brand has just 4,400 followers on the platform.

"The fragrance, textures and branding are all about getting more people to use sunscreen, and make it enjoyable. We see marketing as a way to extend our word of mouth," said Green.

Brian Thorne, partner at Silas Capital, which has invested in other beauty brands including **Ilia** and **Makeup by Mario**, argued that Vacation's creative products and virality makes up for the "digital marketing inefficiency in a post iOS14 social media landscape."

Potential customers, too, are caught by surprise by Vacation's products. Carl Kah, an Austin-based sales executive, who recently stumbled on Vacation at a resort in Breckenridge, Colorado, first thought its mousse sunscreen was a dessert garnish.

"When you see what looks like whip cream in a ski store at the register it stands out," said Kah, who shared the brand on his Instagram Stories. "It doesn't belong there. You notice it even if you aren't looking for sunscreen."

With its innovative, fun-filled approach to product development and brand positioning, Vacation believes it can be just as successful if not more than its competitors. According to Green, the brand expects to hit $20 million in retail sales by the end of the year.

Mass Reach

To get there, it'll need to extend its reach. Just a year after landing in Ulta Beauty, the brand is nearly doubling its door count. In April, Vacation will be debuting a "mini-bar" gondola in stores, complete with 10 products like its new Super Spritz face mist and Vacation Eau de Toilette, developed by Arquiste developers Carlos Huber and Rodrigo Flores-Roux. It smells like coconut, banana, pineapple, with notes of "pool water and swimsuit lycra." The brand's wholesale mix is varied: beyond Ulta, it's also sold at The Standard hotels, Kith and Nordstrom, among other local destinations.

Lisa Tamburello, Ulta Beauty divisional merchandise manager of skincare said Vacation is unlike any other brand it carries.

"It's not the clinical approach, where someone is saying, 'I have to have this product to fight cancer.' They are doing that, of course, but they are bringing top-of-the-line scents and innovation," she said.

She noted that line has resonated with young Millennials and Gen-Z, as well as multi-racial shoppers, consumers who self identify as two or more races and who Tamburello described as the beauty shopper of the future." Price points are also sharp; Vacation's Classic Lotion is $18; lip balms sell for $5.

Tamburello hopes The Super Spritz face mist will capture the consumer Vacation is not getting, i.e. true beauty consumers, who have gotten used to adding SPF to their morning makeup routines.

Hall is eyeing expansion to another national retailer by the end of 2023. The brand hired London Nielsen Krupski in November 2022 as SVP of sales and commercial strategy; a former Bondi Sands executive, who facilitated the line's expansion into Ulta Beauty, Walmart and Target.

"It's our long term mission to be in all the places [where] you buy sunscreen," said Hall. "The method to our madness is creating weird and wonderful and wild sunscreen products, so that when someone is walking past the sunscreen aisle it creates a bit of a WTF moment so people stop and say, 'What is this?'"

© 2022 The Business of Fashion. All rights reserved. For more information read our Terms & Conditions

More from Beauty

Analysis and advice on the fast-evolving beauty business.

How Beauty Will Steer the Hudson's Bay Turnaround

Sophia Hwang-Judiesch, who took the helm of the storied department story in September, is looking to find the sweet spot between leveraging new growth prospects and revamping brick-and-mortar.

What Can Beauty Expect From Generation Alpha?

The oldest members of the youngest generation turn 13 this year. Like Gen-Zers and millennials before them, they're already being defined by a fresh set of beliefs, aesthetics and attitudes.

Unravelling the K-Beauty Paradox

South Korea is one of the world's leading exporters of beauty products but the narrow definition of 'K-beauty' in international markets means many exciting brands in Seoul have yet to go global.

The makeup artist-turned-founder wants to fly solo with her second act: clean makeup range, Jones Road. Can she?

VIEW MORE