swym

Flawless CX: How Beauty Brands Can Eliminate Online Shopping Friction This Holiday Season

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Executive summary

Thanks to a potent combination of social media influence and convenience-driven shopping, the beauty ecommerce space is booming. According to Forbes, social platforms and ecommerce now drive over 50% of beauty sales globally. Yet despite this explosive growth (or maybe thanks to it), competition is fierce. Not every online shopping experience can match the personalized, tactile experience many retail consumers expect.

That's a challenge for beauty products in particular. As Statista reports, about 80% of U.S. respondents desire a uniquely personal cosmetics shopping experience. Beauty is never one-size-fits-all: it varies based on routines, skin types, style preferences, cultural backgrounds, and unique inspirations. In this environment, any additional friction with the online shopping experience is going to make in-person retail shine in comparison.

> "In beauty, the path to purchase is deeply personal — driven by preferences, routines, and moments of inspiration. At Swym, we help brands tap into those intent signals to create experiences that feel less like marketing, and more like magic."
> **- Arvind Krishnan, CEO of Swym**

That leads to a key question: How can beauty brands eliminate ecommerce friction to build trust and convert more browsers into buyers, especially during the BFCM season?

We analyzed today's beauty ecommerce market to uncover the key points of friction: where it's occurring, what frustrates users the most, and how tools can help remove it. The result? A playbook to help you reduce drop-off, personalize every step of the shopping journey, and turn intent signals into sales.
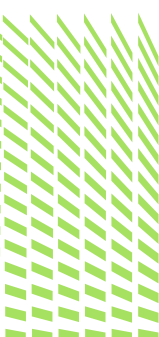
Key takeaways

When BFCM rolls around, you should have already removed the key points of friction from your beauty brand's online presence. To do that, you have to:
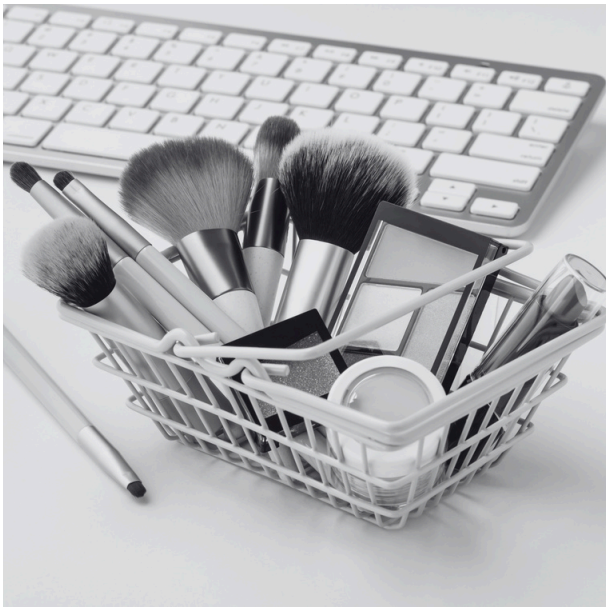
Remove any friction, especially early on

In beauty ecommerce, friction happens early and often, meaning you can lose potential customers who are only in the "discovery" phase. Per Forbes, over 50% of customers will gladly switch merchants with less friction during this phase.

For example, requiring users to log in before they can add to a wishlist can add unnecessary friction when a potential customer simply wants to save a product for later.

Your job:
know what consumers are thinking when they land on your site. Here are some key friction points to avoid during the discovery phase, as Forbes reports:

- Give consumers plenty of payment options.
- Minimize 404s and out-of-stock notifications.
- Mention your timely delivery options.
- Enable real-time status tracking.
- Make your return policy clear and easy to access.

Add intent-based personalization to your messaging

If you can use data from your wishlist activity — such as products most frequently saved-for-later — you can get a sense of what users are thinking, especially leading up to the BFCM season.

Your job:
collect data. The more insights you gain into your customer's thinking, the more you can build campaigns that fit neatly into that messaging.
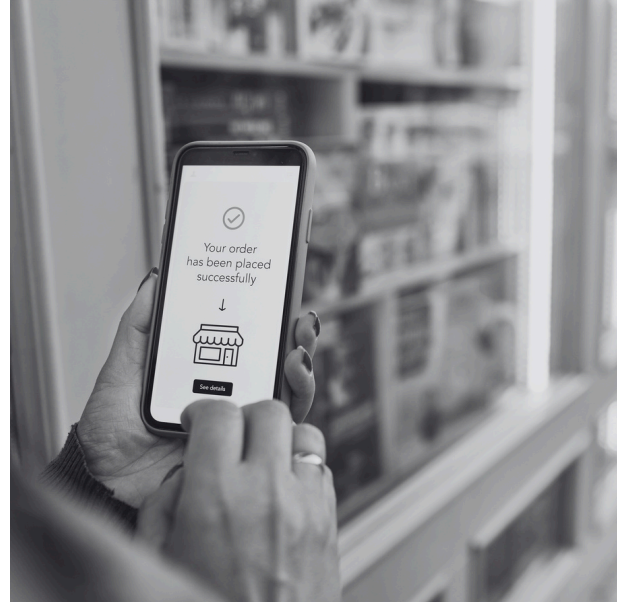
Key takeaways

Collect first-party data to help reduce friction

Since out-of-stock alerts can feel like "404" dead ends to your new customers, you'll want to use first-party wishlist data to plan your inventory for the BFCM season.

Your job:
Use that data to guide inventory decisions and shape campaigns that reflect what customers actually want.

Read your signals of intent

Imagine your wishlist features show you that customers are saving multiple similar-category items for later. This is a strong signal that the customer is running a price comparison.

Your job:
Add features to your website that make it easier for customers to conduct product research without having to backtrack to a search engine.

Why is friction so common in beauty ecommerce

Beauty shopping is often an emotional and social experience. Shoppers may scroll TikTok for recommendations, read influencer reviews for validation, text a friend for their thoughts, then finally add that product to their wishlist. (In fact, 67% of millennials say they're influenced by social media when they shop for beauty items, according to Statista.)

Then there's a pause in the buying process. Shoppers in the beauty category tend to browse first and research later. They're not just buying lipstick in a vacuum. They're seeking a perfect match, pairing their lipstick within the context of everything else they own and love. Or maybe they're assembling a particular look based on an influencer they admire.

That pause between the wishlist add and the purchase? That's where many brands might lose the customer's interest.

If social and emotional context weigh heavily on beauty ecommerce (22% of beauty product sales are shaped by social media commerce), friction can still creep in fast. That's especially true if your site doesn't meet their expectations for convenience and personalization.

Is it easy to make an impulse buy based on a recent TikTok? A friend's rec? If not, even the slightest friction could tank the sale. Customers figure: there are always other shops.

So don't lose them during the pre-purchase phase. You need to give these active social media shoppers a place to discover your products, even if they're only in *research mode*. Consider just how many people are browsing sites looking for information first:

- 29% people browse price comparison websites
- 31% engage with social media like TikTok
- 55% try a search engine
- 34% will browse the retailer website directly
- 32% check out customer reviews
- 36% try Amazon
- 30% listen to word of mouth

Don't ignore the fact that this is how your shoppers are thinking when they "meet" you. They're info-gathering. They're curious. But they're not sold quite yet. Instead, build a web presence that embraces this behavior and even caters to it.

Friction often happens before anyone adds to their cart. Poor navigation. Slow load times. Lack of personalization. Missing stock alerts. Any one of these elements can kill momentum during your customer's research phase.

Beauty shoppers are constantly juggling multiple tabs, which is why they may rarely convert on the first visit. They expect your site to carry some of the mental load: to remember what they loved and to tell them what's available in your inventory.

Beauty shopping bounce rates can hover around 50%, which means shoppers are just looking for an excuse to click away. Don't give it to them. Let's highlight three distinct phases — **discovery, consideration, and purchase** — and how to eliminate friction across all three.

Discovery: How to remove friction in the first few seconds

By the time someone clicks on your site, they've probably already done a little product research. They want to find the right product now. Your job is to remove all the little barriers that block momentum. Here are some ways to do it in that critical discovery phase: when it's time to make a good first impression.

> Capture convenience-minded shoppers

> Highlight what's already trending

> Build merchandising around customer intent

> Personalize discovery for return visitors

→ Capture convenience-minded shoppers

According to NielsenIQ, 41% of all beauty/personal care product sales happen online, with Amazon's convenient options "dominating the shift." What's happening? The more convenient it is to shop, the more likely people are to convert into customers.

That means making it convenient to shop. Mobile-friendly shopping. One-click orders. Not requiring extensive registration or log-ins before adding items to wishlists.

Removing friction during the discovery phase is all about fast load times, thumb-friendly layouts, and big, obvious, tappable CTA buttons.

→ Highlight what's already trending

Since beauty ecommerce is also highly social, many potential customers shop based on what other people buy. In beauty, trends always matter. Don't fight this. Lean into it.

Feature product tags like "Most Wishlisted" or "Trending in Skincare" alerts to draw attention to certain products. Employ social proof tags — "#1 product in Personal Care" — to lower decision fatigue. Follow the example of Princess Polly, which launched a mobile app that made it easy to sync wishlists from social platforms like Instagram into a wishlist that lived on their website. They quickly tripled their wishlist engagement based on this alone.

Another example is how Sephora will gently nudge its users on its home page, building custom browsing buttons based on its trending categories:

Need a Little Guidance?
Check out what's popular now.

| Value Sets | Fragrance | Face Creams | Lip | Minis $15 And Under |
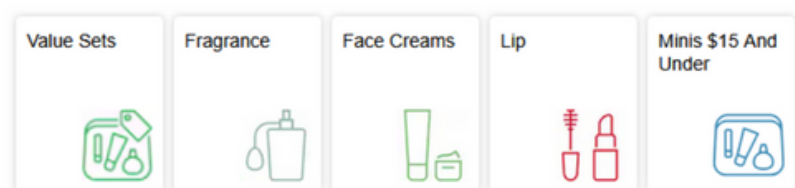
→ Build merchandising around customer intent

If trends rule the beauty ecommerce world, use your own customer activity to find unique data on the browsing trends on your website. Can you browse the customer wishlist activity? Watch the impressions for particular products or subcategories? Just what do customers care about specifically?

While watching customer intent can help you build BFCM campaigns that capitalize on what you're seeing in the industry, you can also use this data to capture more conversions in the moment. One Accenture study showed that 91% of customers were more likely to shop with brands that remembered — and recognized — their preferences. As ecommerce CX expert Jess Cervellon recommends, go beyond the product. Find the need your product is filling to create more trust and connection.

> **"**Beauty brands can crush CX by owning education and entertainment. Customers trust these brands, stay longer, and buy more. Sell results. Sell the routine.
> **-Jess Cervellon, Ecommerce CX expert**

→ Personalize discovery for return visitors

Remember: it's not just about reducing buying friction. During the discovery phase, you want to reduce research friction, since that's what so many potential customers are doing.

So personalize the discovery experience for your users. Build "previously viewed" tags so customers remember if they've seen a product before. Add a "new product" alert if they haven't. Let them view "Saved for Later" collections they've built to remind them what they had in mind before. The result is a logged-in experience that feels personal, even if they never registered yet.

Consideration: Replacing customer uncertainty with confidence

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Now that you've engaged the browsers who were in research mode, it's time to help shoppers feel more confident about adding an item to their cart. Eliminating friction during the consideration phase is the core of this strategy.

〉 Engage user-generated content

〉 Collect zero-party data

〉 Offer save-for-later options across multiple pages

〉 Offer personalized alerts

Engage user-generated content

Eliminating friction at the consideration stage sometimes means finding creative ways to gently nudge browsers into buyers. User-generated content (UGC) is a great way to do that. For example, a Christmas Wishlist Gifting contest is an ideal way to reduce friction for BFCM. The contest has urgency built in: the Christmas season only lasts so long, after all.

Your contests can also encourage social sharing during BFCM campaigns. For example, entering a contest may require UGC like uploading a brief story — along with a designated hashtag — onto social media. Now you've done more than engage people on a more visceral level. You've also gotten some additional insights into which campaigns make people want to engage.

Collect zero-party data

Collecting data from UGC campaigns is great. But you also have to know how to use it. a Forrester survey once said that while 82% of respondents do have zero-party data, only about half know how to use it effectively.

So what do you do? If you can use wishlists, product sales data, and inventory changes in your marketing campaigns, then you can get more specific about how you approach your offerings in the store. Maybe you use customer data to help...

- Personalize shade or skin-type-based recommendations
- Cross-sell relevant add-ons
- Surprise VIPs with birthday or milestone discounts
- Send customers birthday surprises, such as temporary discounts
- Segment customers based on buying behavior and favorite product categories

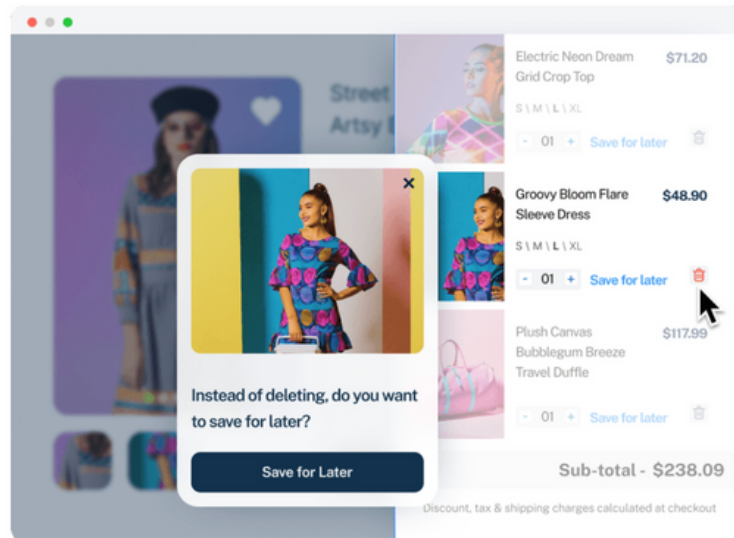And don't forget to reward those who help you with their data.

> Be generous with any customers who take the time out of their day to give you feedback; they can quickly become your most loyal brand advocates.
> **-Alexa Kilroy, VP of Marketing at Fermat Commerce**

→ Offer save-for-later options across multiple pages

Image source

Saving a product for later can be a critical moment between discovery and consideration. It's a way of clicking on something without the heavy pressure to "BUY NOW."

A simple save-for-later feature has saved $13 million in revenue across 250,000 orders in one year, according to our customer data. It reduces shopping cart abandonment, prompts users to enter their email address, and makes your website "stickier" because people will start to feel like they're conducting research using your store as a platform. That's a critical moment of moving from discovery to consideration.

→ Offer personalized alerts

What if someone clicks "save for later" but takes no action? You don't want them stuck in consideration phase forever.

Send them personalized alerts according to their preferences. Was an item out of stock for "honey beige?" Send them a back-in-stock alert. It's not an interruption in their inbox when they asked for it, but rather a gentle reminder that they were about to buy something. If not for that little inventory problem.

> "During BFCM, beauty shoppers are already looking for the right products at the right price. A wishlist tells you exactly what they're waiting for. Use it to send reminders, highlight price drop offers, or alert them when something's back in stock. It's a simple, high-impact way to turn interest into action, without guessing!
> **-Swati Baruah, PMM, Swym**

Purchase: Making the checkout smooth and trustworthy

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At this point, you've earned their trust with minimal friction. Adding friction during the checkout phase is the worst possible time to waste all that good work.

> Offer express checkout options

> Don't add hidden expenses

> Don't make someone create an account

> Use low-stock nudges to convert your wishlisters

Offer express checkout options

Can you get the purchase down to as few clicks as possible? A reported <u>68% of ecommerce users</u> will abandon their cart when the checkout process seems too complicated. Similarly, not having a "Guest Checkout" option featured prominently on your checkout page led to 14% of users bouncing.

People not only need a low-friction checkout, but they need to know it's going to be a low-friction checkout. Make the message of convenience and speed prominent during the checkout process.

Don't add hidden expenses

According to <u>Forbes</u>, the most common reason online shoppers abandon their cart? The sudden onslaught of additional costs like shipping, taxes, and fees. They were enough for 47% of potential customers to suddenly turn in the other direction.

If you do have additional expenses, try to include them upfront. This way, customers can gauge those expenses when comparing products. And it will feel less like a "gotcha" moment when they're finally ready to pull out their credit card.

→ Don't make someone create an account

Capturing a customer's information is important. Capturing a customer's long-term loyalty is important. Making each purchase "sticky" — so your customers keep coming back to your site — is important. But they're not so important that it's worth losing the sale in the first place.

> Follow customer decision trees and retail merchandising logic — even online. Keep the path to purchase short and product placement intuitive.
> **-Tannaz Ghanbari, Operator & Retail Expert**

Forbes also reports that 25% of online shoppers will abandon their cart simply because the site prompted them to create an account. The longer you can keep wishlist features and purchases account-free, the less friction you'll introduce.

- **47%** of customers drop off due to hidden taxes and fees
- **25%** of customers drop off when the site wants them to create an account
- **24%** of customers drop off when they see slow delivery options
- **19%** of customers drop off when they don't trust the site with their credit card information
- **18%** of customers drop off when the checkout process is too complicated

→ Use low-stock nudges to convert your wishlisters

One of the advantages of a robust wishlist is that you can use these features to nudge would-be customers who are sitting on the fence. Ideally, your customer has already passed into the "consideration" phase here: they've saved an item and showed some intent by signing up for options like back-in-stock alerts.

Something as simple as "Only 3 products left in your favorite shade!" can drive urgency without feeling pushy. And as an added bonus, low-inventory alerts highlight the fact that other people are buying into these trends.

> This industry is hyper competitive, so brands must stand out by offering something most companies don't offer--like free style and grooming advice via SMS from a real human without the requirement of purchase.
> **-Eric Bandholz, Founder of BeardBrand**

What we learned about removing friction in beauty ecommerce

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Discovery friction

Use back-in-stock alerts to entice customers. The more you can personalize the "discovery" phase, the more you bring a browser into your store's umbrella. When they notice you personalizing according to their history on your site, they may stop using other sites to run their comparisons. They may just settle on yours.

One example is Tibi, which integrated multiple locations into a centralized inventory system. They were then able to send out site-wide "back-in-stock" alerts for anyone who had saved an item on their site during the discovery phase. The inventory system even tracked local changes in inventory, so these alerts could be location-specific.

Tibi saw 13% higher average order values (AOVs) for its efforts, including a 6% overall jump in revenue.
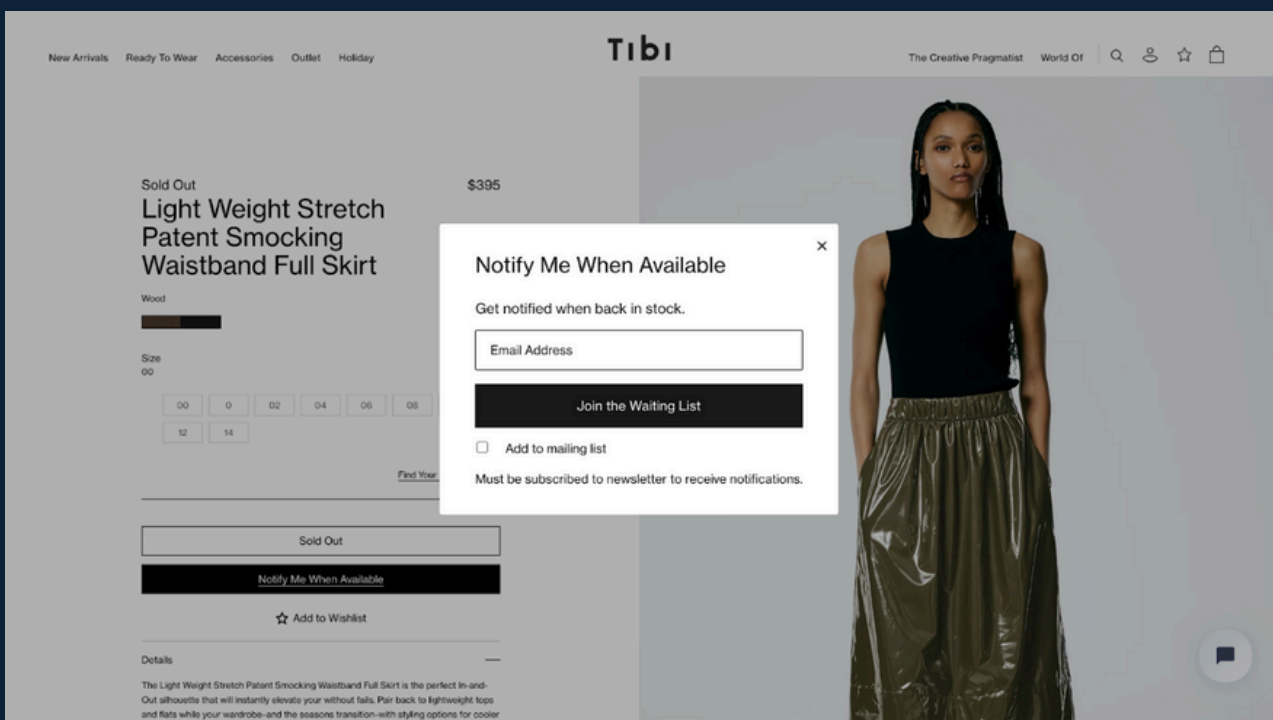
Image source

Performance Snapshot: A Swim Through Our Company Data

Swym's Wishlist features, including social sharing and save-for-later functionality, helped beauty merchants see measurable improvements in their performance:

After adding Swym to their stores, beauty merchants saw:

| Metric	Result
🛍️ Swym AOV Boost	Up to **+310%**
📈 Site Conversion Rate	Up to **+46%**
💸 Revenue Growth	Up to **+72%**
🛒 Swym Conversion Rate	Up to **+14%**
🧾 Site AOV Improvement	Up to **+30%**

What does it mean?

- Shoppers using Swym features spend more and convert faster
- One brand saw AOV triple on Swym-influenced carts
- Another saw CVR jump by nearly 50%
- Simple features like Save for Later and Smart Save drove serious results

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Consideration friction

Make your add-to-list features "bespoke" to your brand. SARDA's brand is bespoke, custom-made jewelry that's built to order. To that end, using unbranded third-party applications to help during the consideration phase would have added friction. Customers might wonder: "how great is this jewelry if an add-to-cart button looks 'off'?"
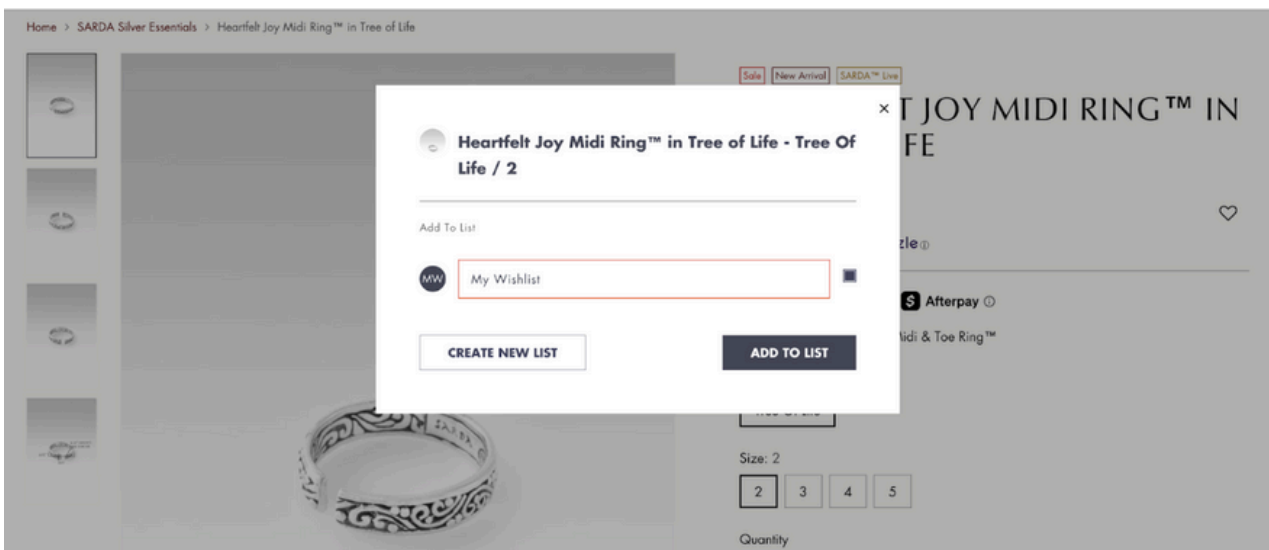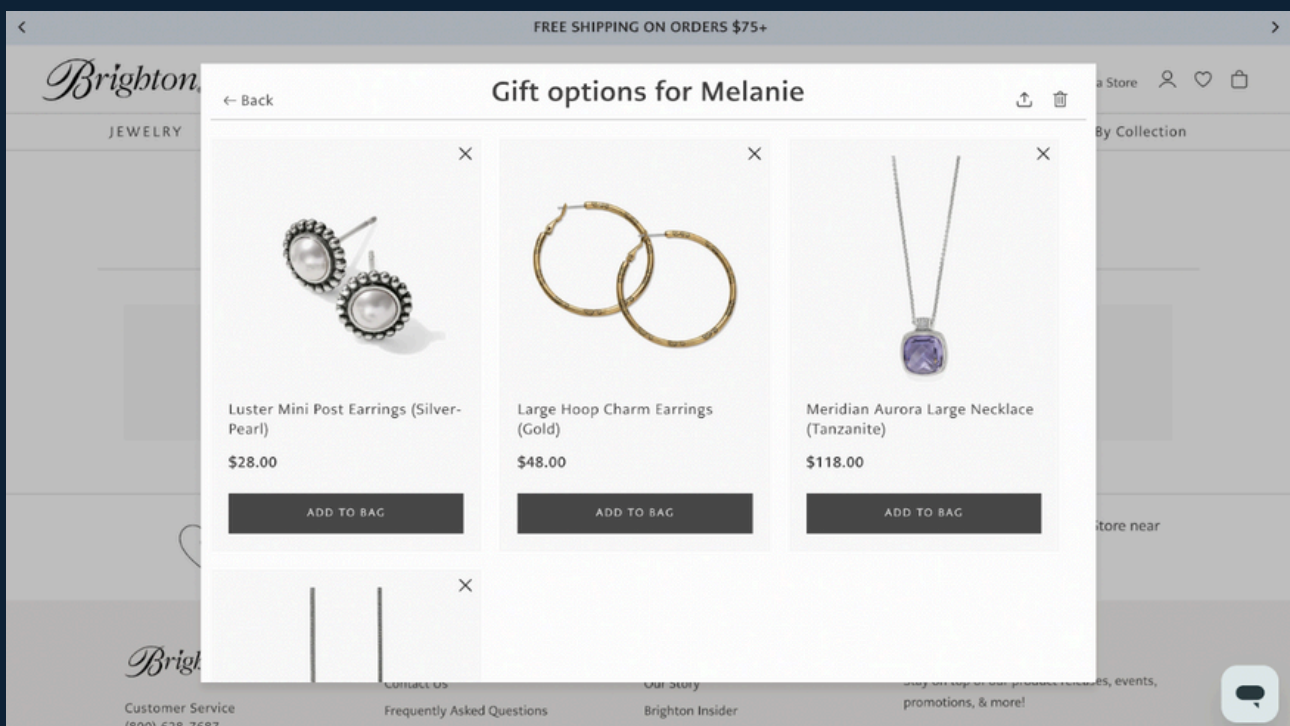

Image source

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Purchase friction

The more "shareable" your products are, the better. Since beauty ecommerce is so socially driven, sharing products can eliminate a lot of friction. When you're considering a new brand to shop from, having the confidence that someone you know recommended it can remove lots of emotional friction at the point of purchase, even if your checkout page is pristine.

One option is to create shareable wishlists that fit into your existing ecosystem. This way, customers can shop for other people, especially during the BFCM season when friendly shopping is at yearly peaks. By making its wishlists shareable for holiday gifting, Brighton noticed 34% increases in AOVs.

Image source

A zero-resistance beauty ecommerce checklist

Now that you know what bugs beauty ecommerce shoppers the most, particularly around the holidays when they're browsing new shops, it helps to have a playbook for what comes next. Here is a checklist of all the takeaways from the three main categories of friction, and what you can do to erase them to create a smooth and user-friendly experience.

Discovery

- [ ] Optimize site for mobile-first performance (fast load times, thumb-friendly buttons, responsive layout)
- [ ] Add "Most Wishlisted" and "Trending" product sections for quick social proof
- [ ] Let users wishlist from any product tile — no login required
- [ ] Surface previously viewed or saved items to personalize the homepage
- [ ] Build product grids based on wishlist activity and browsing trends
- [ ] Show clear shade names and swatches on product thumbnails
- [ ] Avoid requiring sign-in before customers can interact with the experience

Consideration

- [ ] Display customer reviews, especially filtered by skin type, tone, or concern
- [ ] Encourage zero-party data sharing through wishlists, contests, or save-for-later tools
- [ ] Offer back-in-stock alerts with personalized notifications for specific shades/sizes
- [ ] Let users easily save items for later without pressure to "add to cart" immediately
- [ ] Use wishlist behavior to send thoughtful product recommendations via email or SMS
- [ ] Incorporate user-generated content and testimonials on product pages
- [ ] Avoid hiding product availability or vague "out of stock" messages without alert options
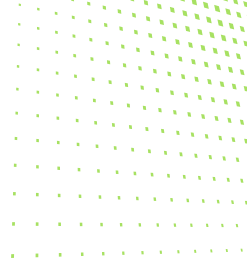
Purchase

- [ ] Enable guest checkout (don't require account creation to buy)
- [ ] Support one-click express checkout (Shop Pay, Apple Pay, PayPal, etc.)
- [ ] Be transparent with costs—clearly show shipping, taxes, and total price before final checkout
- [ ] <u>Highlight low-stock messaging on high-interest wishlisted products</u>
- [ ] <u>Let customers buy directly from their wishlist ("Move All to Cart" or "Buy My Wishlist")</u>
- [ ] Offer secure payment badges and estimated delivery windows
- [ ] Don't add surprise fees or withhold total costs until the last step

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