

DIGITIZING **Beauty Businesses** REPORT



AUGUST 2021

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Appointments at spas and salons now exceed pre-pandemic levels

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How digital-first technology that sustained the health and beauty industry during the pandemic will be key to its recovery

DIGITIZING
**Beauty
Businesses**

REPORT

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What's Inside

A look at how the pandemic's social distancing requirements devastated the health and beauty salon and retail industry and how technology is playing a role in its rebound

Feature Story

An interview with Jason Foodman, president of Rosy Salon Software, about how the salon industry has incorporated contactless payments and other digital innovations

News & Trends

Notable headlines from the health and beauty space, including how contactless payments are fueling a 79 percent jump in beauty workers' tips and how clients at Amazon's new brick-and-mortar hair salon can use augmented reality to try out new hairstyles

Deep Dive

An in-depth examination of how digital-first technology implemented to survive the pandemic is now a mainstay at spas, salons and cosmetics retailers

About

Information on [PYMNTS.com](https://pymnts.com) and American Express

Acknowledgment

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**WHAT'S
INSIDE**

The United States beauty industry consisted of more than 1.2 million businesses that [brought in](#) over \$62 billion in sales in 2019.

The pandemic wreaked havoc on the sector, however, as these businesses traditionally require in-person, up-close contact. Millions of hair and nail salons, barbershops, spas and brick-and-mortar cosmetics retailers were forced to close for months at a time or operate with significantly reduced capacity. The Federal Reserve estimated in a recent [report](#) that the salon and spa industry lost 100,000 businesses across the nation during the pandemic, making it the hardest-hit economic segment.

Many of these businesses once again are seeing sales growth as restrictions have eased across various states. Competing in today's landscape is much more challenging, however, as companies must focus on meeting

the increasingly digital-first needs of their customers. Many health and beauty shops were forced to adopt technology solutions during the pandemic to operate safely and cater to wary customers, with online booking, contactless payments and curbside check-in and pickup being just some of the features increasingly common in the space. Customers now can leave tips for their stylists by scanning QR codes, schedule in-home appointments for a wash and trim or even use augmented reality to try a new lipstick shade.

What is important to realize is that these eCommerce features are not merely temporary stopgaps but instead consumers' preferred — and even expected — options. Sixty percent of Generation Z consumers in a recent PYMNTS [study](#) said their choice of retailers depends in part on whether they accept digital wallets, for example. Modernizing the payment and overall guest experience may have served as a major



Industry INSIGHT

What are the key concerns of beauty businesses when it comes to rolling out innovative payment experiences? What should these businesses understand about the return on investment they stand to gain from digital payments innovation?

“Customer preferences for how they pay for beauty services continue to evolve, with contactless and mobile payments becoming the preferred method. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend – even in a high-touch industry like beauty.

Increasingly, salons are digitizing their business operations and enabling digital payments as part of that shift. There is also an increased adoption of salon management systems and scheduling apps, many of which have embedded payments to automate the entire customer experience.

The setup and training cost can be a concern as salon owners evaluate these new systems and apps. Salons can benefit from upgrading to them, as it enhances end-to-end operational efficiencies (automated billing [and] receipts and reconciliation), enables management of customer preferences and preferred payment choice (card-on-file payments) and [offers the] flexibility to take payments on the go. Features like these allow the salon owner to more easily focus on what they love while helping drive revenue growth for their salon.”

AKUA ARDAYFIO

Director, FinTech Marketing
American Express

survival tactic for the beauty industry over the past year, but it also will be essential to its growth in the year ahead.

AROUND THE HEALTH AND BEAUTY INDUSTRY

The pandemic’s loosening grip over much of the country is unleashing a surge in spending at beauty and personal care businesses, with bookings and payments now exceeding pre-pandemic levels. The number of reservations across the industry was up 156 percent year over year in May, according to data from Square Appointments, marking an 81 percent increase from February 2020. Gross year-over-year payment volumes jumped 121 percent as well – up 25 percent from before the pandemic began. Consumers say they are ready to spend money on looking and feeling better, with 74 percent of shoppers [expecting](#) to increase their expenditures on makeup as more businesses reopen. Ninety-four percent plan to invest in health and wellness routines as well.

Beauty and personal care businesses have also wasted no time getting up to speed with growing digital trends. Square, which provides retailers with eCommerce tools, says its customer base in the beauty and wellness industry grew 296 percent between January and May. A recent industry [study](#) found that 39 percent of salons began using touchless checkouts during the pandemic, 28 percent adopted curbside check-ins, 18 percent embraced eCommerce platforms and 16 percent began offering virtual

consultations. The average value of tips paid to personal beauty technicians also is up significantly, thanks to cashless tipping and payment tools. Irish FinTech Strikepay recently [reported](#) that barbers, hairdressers, beauticians and nail technicians using the service saw a 79 percent increase in tips this spring.

Shoppers are feeling better visiting stores, too, with foot traffic in beauty retail [growing](#) 226 percent year over year in April, but many are finding that the pandemic has changed the face of beauty retail shopping. Ulta Beauty products, for example, now come with a QR code linked to a mobile app that allows customers to try on products virtually. The salons and beauty shops that thrive post-pandemic may be those able to offer a more flexible blend of in-person, online and even at-home experiences. Shortcut, a platform that allows consumers to book in-home appointments from specific salons, [said](#) that businesses using its technology have grown their revenues by about 10 percent and expanded their customer territories by roughly 20 miles so far this year.

Even the biggest online retailer is now [showcasing](#) its omnichannel offerings at a new, two-story brick-and-mortar hair salon in London. Amazon Salon patrons can receive traditional hair care and styling services and also use augmented reality to try out new hairstyles.

For more on these stories and other headlines from the space, read the Report's News and Trends section (p. 12).

HOW THE SALON INDUSTRY LEVERAGED CONTACTLESS PAYMENTS AMID THE PANDEMIC

Social distancing and stay-at-home orders resulted in a dark time for the salon industry, but as the economy opened back up, beauty salons and barbershops were forced to adapt to the new normal. Chief among the innovations salons adopted were contactless payments and online booking tools. In this month's Feature Story (p. 9), PYMNTS talked with Jason Foodman, president of [Rosy Salon Software](#), about how the industry weathered the pandemic and its plans to adapt to the digital-first environment of the future.

DEEP DIVE: TECHNOLOGY HELPS BEAUTY RETAILERS MAKE UP LOST GROUND

Consumers are more aware than ever of their personal health when out in public, so it comes as no surprise that they are expecting new technology that allows them to try out health and beauty products without actually having to put them on in a store. Some retailers say this technology even is resulting in higher sales conversions. This month's Deep Dive (p. 17) looks at some of the technology that health and beauty businesses brought on board to survive the pandemic and how it will be instrumental in rebuilding their clientele.

FIVE FAST FACTS

96%

Share of consumers who expect to use debit or credit cards for novel connected transactions such as augmented reality product apps



60%

Portion of Gen Z consumers who consider mobile wallet acceptance crucial when choosing merchants



74%

Share of U.S. consumers who say the stores at which they shop have recently added or increased contactless payments acceptance capabilities



74%

Portion of consumers who have shifted from brick-and-mortar to online shopping and plan to maintain these shifts beyond the pandemic



57%

Share of consumers who plan to continue using mobile wallets even after the pandemic subsides



The background is a solid blue color with various semi-transparent geometric shapes, including rectangles and a large, stylized number '5' in the lower half. The shapes are in different shades of blue, creating a layered effect.

FEATURE STORY



How The Salon Industry Leveraged Payments Technology To Weather The Pandemic

Pandemic-induced social distancing and stay-at-home orders dramatically altered day-to-day lifestyles around the country. This perhaps was nowhere more evident than in the patronage of in-person businesses providing all but the most essential services — including salons.

Declining case numbers and new health guidelines gradually allowed these shops to reopen, but the landscape had changed drastically. Barbers, stylists and customers alike wore masks and limited their appointments to guard against overcrowding. Even payment habits shifted, according to Jason Foodman, president of [Rosy Salon Software](#).

“[There’s a new] desire and demand for contactless types of experiences, such as mobile check-in and checkout,” he said. “Something

that doesn’t involve touching things a lot of other people touch.”

PYMNTS recently spoke with Foodman about the pandemic’s impact on the salon payments scene and how consumers’ newfound desire for contactless and digital experiences will inevitably shape the beauty industry moving forward.

HOW THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY ADAPTED TO THE PANDEMIC

The beauty industry, similar to the grocery and retail sectors, was forced to conduct more of its business digitally as individuals sought to avoid transacting in person. Purchases of personal beauty products, such as soap, fragrances and makeup, shifted online, and although haircuts must be done in person, they

were not immune to this transformation: Their bookings moved online as well.

“When we talk about salons, there are two online aspects most in demand: One is booking online, [and] the other is shopping online for products,” said Foodman. “Spas are also shifting toward [allowing customers to order] their products online.”

Payment methods changed in significant ways too. Customers began leaning toward contactless payments because of the perceived risk of infection through contaminated surfaces, and hair stylists were able to leverage these methods to serve customers even when the salons themselves shut down.

“The individual stylists have the same types of scheduling ... and payment needs as a salon,” said Foodman. “They still want to have an online check-in and contactless payments. Rosy’s software helped make it possible for stylists to go out on their own when the shops they were working in closed.”

Many of the changes in both consumers’ habits and stylists’ booking processes are here to stay, according to Foodman, and the beauty industry could be changed forever by this new digital-first approach.

THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF THE SALON INDUSTRY

Customers have had to adapt to this new pandemic-driven paradigm for so long that their recently acquired habits will likely become permanent, said Foodman. Contactless payments in particular are a favored choice, but

consumers have also grown used to having an array of options rather than just the typical cash-or-card binary.

“Everyone is carrying around a small computer with the capability to do payments,” said Foodman. “Part of the overall experience is having that client leave [feeling] safe and comfortable. You don’t want to give them a service that makes them feel comfortable and have them touch something that makes them uncomfortable going out the door.”

On the business side, salons are growing accustomed to having the ability to book appointments online and keep payment methods on file. Many salons are reluctant to switch payment providers, however, due to the difficulty of carrying over stored customer payment information.

“We have salons [that] use our scheduling software [but] use a different payment solution,” said Foodman. “It’s difficult getting them to switch because if they have a card on file somewhere else, they don’t want to lose that. Nobody wants to lose cards on file.”

The next challenge for the beauty industry will be to ensure that consumers can pay using the latest payment methods in a contactless manner, and, for its part, Rosy enables full token migration to salons switching to its RosyPay solutions. Salons and other beauty businesses that fail to match their customers’ changing payment needs could find themselves losing business to competitors.

**NEWS &
TRENDS**

Health and beauty industry rebounding to pre-pandemic levels

SQUARE DATA SAYS BEAUTY APPOINTMENTS, PAYMENT VOLUMES EXCEED THOSE OF FEB. 2020

The pandemic is waning in many parts of the country, and people are rushing to spend at beauty and personal care businesses. The number of completed reservations across the industry was up 156 percent year over year in May, according to [data](#) from Square Appointments. This represents an 81 percent increase from February 2020 – before the pandemic shuttered many hair and nail salons, barbershops, cosmetics retailers and other service industry shops. Gross payment volume is up as well, with numbers in May 2021

jumping 121 percent over May 2020 and up 25 percent from February 2020.

Beauty and personal care businesses also appear to be hip to growing consumer trends, which are calling for a more online, seamless experience. Square, which provides eCommerce tools to retailers, says its customer base within the industry grew 296 percent between January and May.

BEAUTY RETAILERS EYE VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGY TO REDUCE TOUCH POINTS AS IN-STORE BROWSING RETURNS

Foot traffic in retail stores [plummeted](#) during the pandemic as government restrictions and personal health concerns put a pause on in-store browsing. Shoppers now are feeling better about spending time in stores, with foot traffic at beauty retailers [growing](#) 226 percent



year over year in April. This has resulted in a remarkable reversal, according to one U.S. retailer that saw a nearly 100 percent conversion rate at the pandemic's peak, as every shopper came in to purchase a tried-and-true product. Shoppers are now starting to crowd stores once more, and the desire to touch every tester and try new products is surging.

The pandemic has changed how shopping occurs at beauty retailers, however. Many products at Ulta Beauty, for example, now come with a QR code linked to a mobile app that allows customers to try on products virtually. A growing number of retailers also are bolstering popular digital features such as online ordering and curbside pickup. Thirty-four percent of U.S. consumers under the age of 45 – including the [largest](#) U.S. generation, millennials – consider the ability to make purchases online or pick up purchases in-store or curbside as “very important,” according to a January [study](#). Customers have grown used to the omnichannel options that retailers have added and, with some states issuing new mask guidance as risks evolve, protocols can change daily, according to one company spokesperson.

THE FUTURE IS LOOKING GOOD FOR HEALTH AND BEAUTY RETAILERS

Consumers emerging from pandemic-related restrictions are ready to spend money on looking and feeling better, according to a recent

74%

of consumers say they will spend more on makeup than they did while under stay-at-home orders.

[survey](#). Ninety-three percent of shoppers say they will be increasing their expenditures on health and wellness products as they start to go out again, and 74 percent say they will spend more on makeup than they did while under stay-at-home orders.

A healthy percentage of sales could be made in person instead of online. Eighty percent of

respondents say they missed going to physical stores during lockdown periods. Forty-two percent of shoppers in May 2021 said they bought beauty products at brick-and-mortar stores, compared to 28 percent who made purchases online. This split was even in March, by contrast, at 26 percent buying in person and 26 percent online. One-quarter of health and wellness shoppers said they had tried a virtual livestream shopping event, with six in 10 saying it made their online shopping experiences better.

New technology helping salons grow business

BARBERS, HAIRSTYLISTS, NAIL TECHS USING CASHLESS PAYMENTS REPORT HIGHER TIPS

The average value of tips being paid to personal beauty technicians is up significantly, according to an Irish FinTech company that specializes in cashless tipping and payment tools. Strikepay recently [reported](#) that barbers, hairdressers, beauticians and nail technicians using the service saw a 79 percent increase in tips this spring.

Forty-one percent of consumers started [using](#) cashless payment types during the pandemic, with the adoption of digital wallets growing 46 percent. Companies such as Strikepay supply retailers with technologies that allow

customers to pay by tapping an employee's tag or scanning a QR code.

SALONS TURN TO ONLINE BOOKING, EXPANDED DIGITAL SERVICES

The salons that thrive post-pandemic may be those that are willing to be more flexible. Some customers grew accustomed to receiving services in-home when physical salons were closed and, frankly, would rather keep it that way. Shortcut, a platform that allows consumers to book in-home appointments from specific salons, [says](#) businesses using the technology have grown their revenues by about 10 percent and expanded their customer territories by about 20 miles this year. Approximately 70 percent of those using Shortcut to book a salon appointment are first-time customers of that particular salon.

A recent industry [study](#) found that 39 percent of salons began using touchless checkouts due to the pandemic, 28 percent implemented curbside check-ins, 18 percent brought in eCommerce or touchless retail platforms and 16 percent offered virtual consultations. Independently owned Aveda salons also are adding options that digital-first consumers say they want, including contactless check-in and checkout, online appointment booking and curbside pickup.

ONLINE COSMETICS COMPANIES NOW ACCEPT CRYPTOCURRENCY

Multiple online health and beauty merchants, including Glamnetic, Lush, R+Co and Wake Skincare, recently [announced](#) they now are accepting cryptocurrencies for online purchases. Glamnetic said it is teaming up with BitPay and will accept bitcoin, ethereum and dogecoin, among other cryptocurrencies.

Glamnetic founder and CEO Ann McFerran said the step marks the brand as one of the first female-founded beauty retailers to accept cryptocurrency, a sector historically dominated by men. Men are nearly twice as likely to own cryptocurrencies, according to a recent PYMNTS [report](#).

“We are equally proud to be empowering our predominantly female consumer base with the tools they need to ... become comfortable using digital currency as a method of payment,” McFerran said.

“Crypto is a \$2 trillion industry that is all about creating an open and inclusive financial system,” added Sonny Singh, chief commercial officer of BitPay.

Big Tech embracing small-time retail

AMAZON OPENS BRICK-AND-MORTAR HAIR SALON IN LONDON

The world’s largest online retailer is now [operating](#) a two-story hair salon in London in an omnichannel effort to showcase and test its new industry offerings. The global spa and salon market is expected to exceed \$217 billion by 2026, and Amazon wants a piece of that pie.

The shop is offering traditional salon hair care and styling services, but patrons can also browse new hair products, use QR codes to check out product pages on Amazon’s website and use augmented reality to test-drive new hairstyles. Amazon currently does not have any plans to open other similar shops.

SHOPIFY TO ACCEPT NEW FACEBOOK PAY DIGITAL WALLET

Consumers buying products through Shopify sites can [use](#) Facebook Pay starting this month. The social media giant is joining Apple, Google, Amazon and PayPal in offering a digital wallet product its members can use.

The move represents an expansion of the existing partnership between the two companies. Shopify clients who sell products via Facebook and Instagram were allowed to [accept](#) Shop Pay as a payment method starting earlier this year.

DEEP
DIVE

How Technology That Helped The Beauty Industry Survive The Pandemic Will Help It Thrive Going Forward

One long-term, core memory from the pandemic for many people might involve their hair. The health crisis forced many hair salons and barbershops — along with other segments of the health and beauty industry — to shutter for months on end. Social media timelines were subsequently [flooded](#) with photos of friends and family members showing off their lengthening tresses, DIY haircuts or decisions to go fully gray.

The cheeky images came at the expense of an industry in shambles, however. Salon service revenues last summer were off by 33 percent, according to one [report](#), compared to an 8 percent drop during the depths of the Great Recession. Social distancing guidelines meant capacity was [down](#) 70 percent from pre-pandemic levels, and those who were able to visit salons did so much less frequently, with the average time between visits rising from 8 to 10 weeks to 10 to 16 weeks. Sixty-three percent of beauty salons and barbershops [surveyed](#) in March 2021 said they were “highly concerned” about their ability to remain solvent, especially without direct government funds from aid programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program.

Necessity has become the mother of reinvention for many beauty and fashion

retailers, however. Companies that were forced to [examine](#) tech-savvy solutions to save their businesses now are tapping tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality to increase sales conversions. Virtual product sampling has come to play a central role in beauty retailers’ sales strategies, as have many other digital-first options.

The following Deep Dive examines the pandemic’s impact on the health and beauty industry and explains why the technologies many of these businesses adopted to survive will be key to unlocking their future success.

THE PANDEMIC’S IMPACT ON THE HEALTH AND BEAUTY INDUSTRY

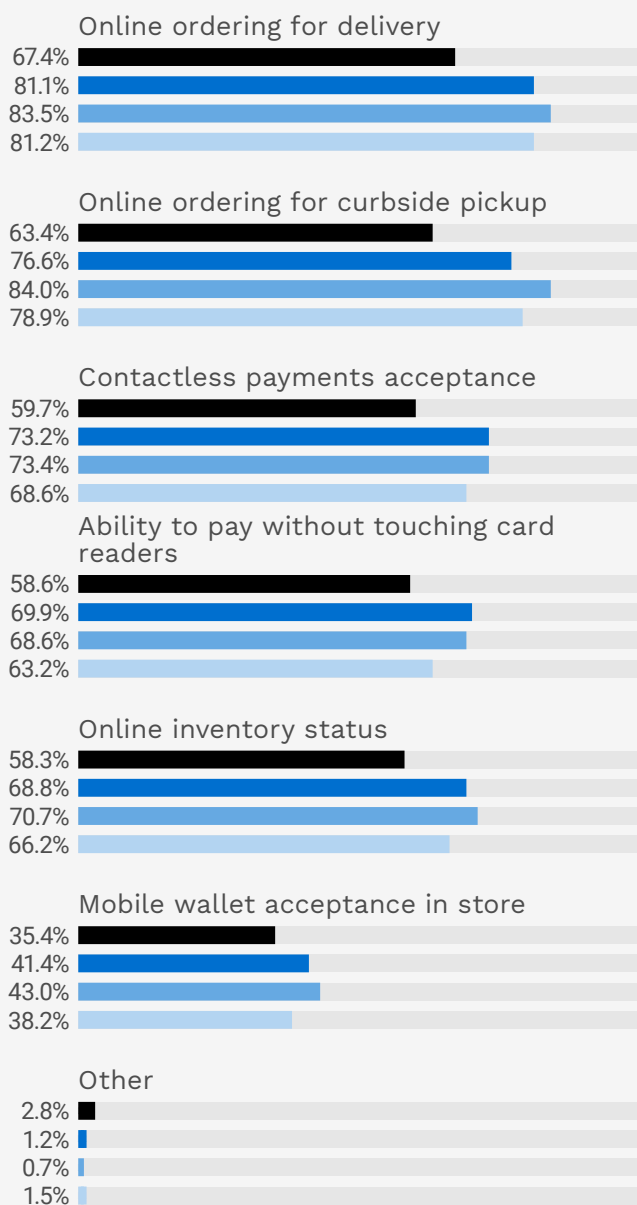
Extended periods of lockdown and concerns over health safety brought foot traffic at brick-and-mortar salons and beauty shops to a virtual standstill in 2020. Cosmetics retailers [reported](#) a 32 percent drop in revenue during the first few months of the pandemic.

The Federal Reserve currently [estimates](#) that the spa and salon sector suffered an “excess” of losses — 100,000 businesses — during the health crisis. The industry appears to be rebounding sharply, however, with businesses that have adopted digital-first technologies leading the comeback. A July 2021 [report](#) said consumer spending in health and personal care

FIGURE 1:

The digital shopping options consumers want merchants to provide

Share citing select digital options as being “very” or “extremely” important, by persona type



stores grew 1.6 percent in June 2021 alone — up 14 percent from June 2020. Completed reservations at beauty and personal care businesses are now higher than their pre-pandemic levels, having increased 156 percent in May 2021 over May 2020, according to Square, an eCommerce tools provider. Square also says gross payment volume at these businesses is up 121 percent year over year. Cosmetics and beauty supply retailers [reported](#) a 226 percent increase in overall foot traffic in April 2021 compared to a year earlier.

RETOOLING THE BEAUTY BUSINESS FOR RENEWAL

Many of the customer-friendly strategies and technologies that retailers and service providers adopted during the pandemic — including online reservation systems, curbside pickup, seamless payments and virtual product testing — are becoming industry staples. Contactless transactions have [grown](#) more than 40 percent since the onset of the pandemic, and 73 percent of consumers in a 2020 PYMNTS [study](#) who changed their shopping habits for safety reasons said they wanted merchants to provide contactless payment options. Seventy-four percent of those [surveyed](#) in April 2021 who shifted to online shopping during the pandemic say they will continue to do so, suggesting a long-term or permanent behavioral shift.

■ **Sample**
 ■ **Social shifters**
 ■ **Safety shifters**
 ■ **Convenience shifters**

Beauty retailers [found](#) creative ways to help shoppers who no longer could browse in person and try on products due to the pandemic. Ulta Beauty said use of its virtual GLAMlab tool increased fivefold at the same time it was closing 19 stores. Estée Lauder and Sephora also use AI and augmented reality technology to enable virtual try-ons in an effort to drive sales while keeping customers safe. Estée Lauder says its online lip-shade sampling tool increased consumer conversions by a factor of 2.5.

One growing trend during the pandemic was in-home hair appointments. Even as salons reopen, some customers still prefer having their hair washed, cut and styled in the comfort of their homes. In-home appointment platform Shortcut recently [stated](#) that salons using its software have grown revenues by 10 percent and expanded their territory by 20 miles so far this year. Investment firms seem to agree that this is a growth industry: eCommerce tools that [offer](#) on-demand platforms for spa and salon services and B2B booking now account for 11 percent and 12 percent, respectively, of investment deals within the beauty and wellness industry.

Some appointment apps [keep](#) users' payment info on file so barbers and stylists can be paid and tipped without customers ever reaching into their wallets. Stripepay provides boutique employees with a tag or QR code so

that customers need only tap or scan to leave a tip. The average tip paid to industry employees was up 79 percent this spring, according to [data](#) from the company.

Digital payments can also enable flexible payment options, such as paying in installments, a feature that is overwhelmingly [popular](#) among all age groups when shopping for beauty brands – 76 percent of millennials, 75 percent of Gen Z and 74 percent of baby boomers and Gen X.

Not every health and beauty consumer who adopted digital-first habits during the pandemic will continue in that direction exclusively as businesses reopen. Going to the salon and visiting a brick-and-mortar cosmetics shop will remain enjoyable social activities, but consumers are increasingly expecting those digital-first features as options available to them. Large segments of the customer base now say features such as online ordering, curbside pickup and contactless payments are highly important to them moving forward. Businesses that do not respond to these trends could be left behind.

ABOUT

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