



Brand Audit Report
by Regan Cassady

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Executive Summary

This audit provides an in-depth assessment of e.l.f. Cosmetics' current brand positioning, equity, and potential for growth within the mass market cosmetics category. Through an analysis of the competitive landscape and target market, an evaluation of the brand's product offerings and messaging strategies, and primary and secondary research, this report identifies key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that may inform e.l.f. Cosmetics' future brand strategy.

These findings indicate that e.l.f. Cosmetics benefits from high digital brand visibility, cultural awareness, and a strong affinity for connecting with millennial and Gen Z consumers. These strengths are reinforced by the brand's value of accessibility, innovation, and ethical practices. However, increased reliance on its digital presence alongside rising market saturation by similarly savvy competitors present challenges that e.l.f. must navigate to maintain footing as a unique challenger brand.

Based on the insights from this research, this audit recommends several strategic actions that e.l.f. Cosmetics should take to benefit its brand equity and market share. This includes expanding its traditional marketing to compete with legacy brands and tapping into the strongest parts of its online identity to maintain individuality against brands that prioritize the same value and ethics that e.l.f. does in a market that is beginning to demand it. These recommendations intend to support e.l.f.'s current strategies while making suggestions to sustain the brand's continued upward trajectory and its position as an influential challenger brand in the cosmetics market.

Brand Audit Need & Rationale

A brand audit was recommended to be conducted for e.l.f. Cosmetics. A brand audit is a comprehensive evaluation of a brand's overall health designed to determine its sources of equity and to provide strategic recommendations to strengthen that equity (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). This audit will thoroughly evaluate e.l.f. Cosmetics' brand mission, values, and strategy through a review of internal and external factors. An analysis will be conducted on the e.l.f. product line to determine current strengths and weaknesses as well as threats and opportunities. This evaluation will inform areas that e.l.f. can improve marketing efforts to best reach its desired target market. The brand audit will explore consumer associations with e.l.f. Cosmetics and their interpretations of the brand messaging strategy, voice, and visual identity. It will also assess the brand's positioning statement to identify whether or not it reflects e.l.f.'s value proposition. The final focus of this audit is identifying the brand's ideal customer by analyzing consumer profiles, buying behaviors, and market trends. These findings will help e.l.f. Cosmetics refine its strategy to retain its position in the cosmetics market as an effective challenger brand.

Target Market Assessment

The target e.l.f. Cosmetics customer is a Gen Z or a younger millennial aged 18-35, predominantly female, budget-conscious, and concerned about the environment to the point of seeking sustainable practices and products to incorporate into their life. This consumer is highly active on social media platforms, namely Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Many of these consumers are college students or

early-career professionals with limited disposable income, which makes product affordability crucial to decision-making.

These consumers are usually urban or suburban and frequent makeup users that experiment with new products and make purchases often based on social media recommendations. This demographic seeks affordable, high-quality, cruelty-free, and vegan products that allow for self-expression not at the expense of their budget and align with their values and ethical principles. Sustainability and inclusion are increasingly critical factors in their purchasing decisions.

Competitive Landscape Overview

According to IBISWorld (2025), the Cosmetics and Beauty Products Manufacturing industry is expected to generate approximately \$39.3 billion in 2025 with cosmetics manufacturing accounting for 27.3% (\$10.7 billion) of that revenue. On the consumer-facing end, according to Statista, the Beauty & Personal Care industry is expected to generate \$104.74 billion in revenue in 2025, with the cosmetics segment contributing 20.48% (\$21.45 billion) of this total.

Within the multi-outlet color cosmetics subcategory, the corporation of L'Oréal USA holds a 45.7% share of the \$5.2 billion market; although data for individual brands under a corporation is not easily accessible, e.l.f. Beauty—parent of e.l.f. Cosmetics—held 9.5% market share in 2023, tailing L'Oréal and Maybelline, indicating that these brands are category leaders (Mintel, 2024; Roman, 2024).

L'Oréal Paris states that, “beauty is synonymous with luxury and accessibility.” The brand focuses on a primarily female audience and emphasizes empowerment

through its iconic slogan, “Because you’re worth it.” (L’Oréal Paris, n.d.). Its portfolio emphasizes anti-aging formulas and premium, long-term performance, likely due to its target audience being Gen X and Baby Boomer women who only need a few staple products. As a result, L’Oréal’s positioning best aligns with traditional feminine marketing and mature beauty needs, which feels out of line with Gen Z and millennial preferences for combination skincare-makeup and value-driven brands.

Maybelline, the top-selling makeup brand, according to its brand site, similarly leverages a strong brand identity through the slogan, “Maybe she’s born with it. Maybe it’s Maybelline.” Maybelline’s edgy, New York-inspired personality emphasizes large-scale campaigns and trend-driven innovation (Maybelline, 2024). Despite being a legacy brand, Maybelline has broadened its appeal in recent years and now targets a younger audience of 18-to-34-year-olds with its bold, trend-focused marketing.

Key Market Issues

In recent years, the cosmetics and beauty products market has undergone major shifts which have affected e.l.f. Cosmetics’ position in the market. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, revenue of the cosmetics segment fell 19.9% from \$17.02 billion in 2019 to \$13.64 billion in 2020 (Statista, 2025). In the years following, revenue has risen, but consumer needs are changing, with emphasis on the affordability, sustainability, and even skincare benefits of beauty products. This rising demand for hybrid cosmetic products—such as tinted moisturizers and BB creams—and an uptick in social media marketing forces brands to adapt offerings and communication efforts to stay relevant in an evolving industry (Sangisetty, 2025). Celebrity-founded brands such as Rhode

(2022) and Rare Beauty (2019) with inherent brand loyalty place new pressure on both legacy and challenger brands (TFL, 2025; Chikhoun, 2024).

Brand Inventory

Corporate Overview

e.l.f. Cosmetics is the flagship brand of its parent company, e.l.f. Beauty, Inc., a publicly traded company listed on the New York Stock Exchange under the ticker ELF (United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2024). e.l.f. Beauty is headquartered in Oakland, California and has a growing brand portfolio that also includes e.l.f. Skin, Keys Soulcare, W3LL PEOPLE, and most recently rhode, founded by Hailey Bieber. The company is known for its emphasis on sustainable and cruelty-free practices as well as its prominent social media and retail presence, especially within the “dupe” culture, which is the practice of brands producing lower-cost “knock-offs” of luxury products (Litton Legal, 2024).

Corporate Brand Management

e.l.f. Cosmetics is e.l.f. Beauty’s largest and highest-performing brand, accounting for much of the company’s financial success and market visibility. In fiscal year 2024, e.l.f. Beauty reported \$1.31 billion in worldwide revenue and \$1.06 billion in U.S. revenue, much of which can be attributed to the flagship e.l.f. Cosmetics brand. (TradingView, 2025). Because the corporation and its leading brand share nearly identical names—and because the flagship brand accounts for much of its parent company’s performance—e.l.f. Beauty and e.l.f. Cosmetics are frequently referred to interchangeably in marketing analyses. As a result, it is reasonable to infer that e.l.f.

Cosmetics receives the largest portion of e.l.f. Beauty's marketing spend. In the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2024, e.l.f. Beauty's digital communication and marketing expenses totaled \$256.0 million, accounting for 25% of its net sales (United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2024).

Product Line

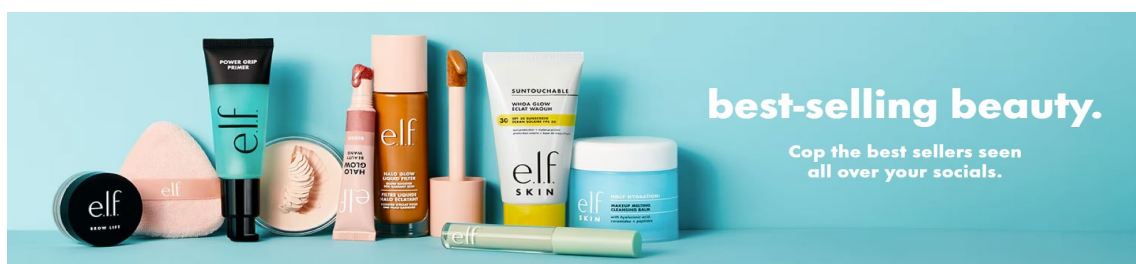
e.l.f. Cosmetics' portfolio of products spans eye, lip, and face cosmetics (representative of its acronymic name) as well as cosmetics tools. The brand has attained a widely social-media-fueled cult following, and much of which comes from several standout products hailed as "dupes" of a luxury product for a significantly lower price or from viral performance reviews by anyone between large influencers and everyday users on social media.

One of the brand's top SKUs is its Power Grip Primer, the number one SKU in mass-market cosmetics as of a press release by e.l.f. in March 2024 (e.l.f. Beauty, 2024b). This product went viral for its tacky formula designed to help makeup stay put all day. According to a press release by e.l.f., one Power Grip Primer sells every 3.5 seconds (*Game On: E.l.f. Cosmetics Introduces New Campaign "Eyes. Lips. Face. Fandom." to Rally Sports Fans around Power Grip Primer*, 2024). Another best-selling SKU is the Halo Glow Liquid Filter, a hybrid makeup and skincare product formulated with hyaluronic acid and squalane for functional benefits on top of a pore-blurring effect. The e.l.f. Website says that "Liquid Filter can be worn 4 ways: alone, over or under makeup, mixed with foundation, or as a highlighter," (*Halo Glow Liquid Filter*, n.d.). A beauty editor from *Marie Claire UK* described the product as more of a

lightweight tinted moisturizer than a foundation, saying that it “blurs rather than covers” for a dewy finish (Bakolli, 2024). The viral Glow Reviver Lip Oil is another major seller in e.l.f.’s product line. Referred to as a “dupe” of lip oils from Dior, the product went viral on social media for replicating the shine and high-end feel of a luxury lip oil at an accessible price point. The formula contains ingredients such as jojoba oil and pomegranate extract, creating a product that is glossy without being sticky (Clancy, 2025). The Power Grip Primer and Halo Glow Liquid Filter are featured in a banner on e.l.f.’s best-selling products page, seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Featured e.l.f. Products



Place

e.l.f. Cosmetics is widely available across the United States with a presence in retailers including CVS, Kroger, Walgreens, Target, Ulta Beauty, and Walmart. In most locations, e.l.f. displays offer some variety of each of their product offerings, spanning skincare, eye, lip, and face cosmetics. As shown in an in-store display of products in Kroger in Figure 2, e.l.f. Cosmetics has a large line of products in many of these locations.

Figure 2
Kroger In-Store Display of e.l.f. Products



The brand is also sold online through Amazon, the e.l.f. Cosmetics website, and retailer-owned e-commerce websites, shown in Figures 3, 4, and 5. The United States is the largest market for e.l.f., as the region contributed to 80.92% (\$1.06 billion) of the company's revenue in 2024. e.l.f Cosmetics is sold in all 50 states, Washington D.C., and U.S. territories. As of March 2024, e.l.f. operated its main distribution center in Ontario, California, which serves national retailers. Centers in Georgia, Ohio, and Utah account for e-commerce customers (United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2024). In March 2020, e.l.f. only operated the California and Ohio

locations (United States Securities and Exchange Commission, 2020), which indicates significant e-commerce growth over four years. While e.l.f. Beauty also manages brands like W3LL PEOPLE and Keys Soulcare, their niche markets and more premium pricing do not directly compete or interfere with e.l.f. Cosmetics.

Figure 3





e.l.f. Website Best-Sellers Page

All Best Sellers Makeup Best Sellers E.L.F. SKIN Best Sellers Eyes Best Sellers Lip Best Sellers Face Best Sellers

Filter & Sort (0)

pick your FREE holy grails kit!
Get a lip or skincare kit and free shipping with orders \$35+.

CYBER MONDAY

lip kit includes:
(full-size gifts)








★★★★★ (2802)
Glow Reviver Melting Lip Balm

SELECT SHADE \$9

FREE SHIP + PICK A FREE HOLY GRAIL KIT (VALUE STARTING AT \$25) WITH ORDERS \$35+
GET 2 FREE LIP LINERS + BAG CHARM (\$14 VALUE) WITH PURCHASE OF 2+ GLOW REVIVER...

pick your FREE holy grails kit!
Get a lip or skincare kit and free shipping with orders \$35+.

CYBER MONDAY

skincare kit includes:








★★★★★ (34)
The Glitz is e.l.f.ing Glitzing 24-Day Advent Calendar

ADD TO BAG \$95

FREE SHIP + PICK A FREE HOLY GRAIL KIT (VALUE STARTING AT \$25) WITH ORDERS \$35+
GET 2 FREE LIP LINERS + BAG CHARM (\$14 VALUE) WITH PURCHASE OF 2+ GLOW REVIVER...

pick your FREE holy grails kit!
Get a lip or skincare kit and free shipping with orders \$35+.

CYBER MONDAY

lip kit includes:
(full-size gifts)








★★★★★ (63)
Glow Reviver Plumping Lip Oil Kit

ADD TO BAG \$32

FREE SHIP + PICK A FREE HOLY GRAIL KIT (VALUE STARTING AT \$25) WITH ORDERS \$35+
GET 2 FREE LIP LINERS + BAG CHARM (\$14 VALUE) WITH PURCHASE OF 2+ GLOW REVIVER...

pick your FREE holy grails kit!
Get a lip or skincare kit and free shipping with orders \$35+.

CYBER MONDAY

skincare kit includes:







★★★★★ (13744)
Power Grip Primer

SELECT SIZE \$11

FREE SHIP + PICK A FREE HOLY GRAIL KIT (VALUE STARTING AT \$25) WITH ORDERS \$35+
GET 2 FREE LIP LINERS + BAG CHARM (\$14 VALUE) WITH PURCHASE OF 2+ GLOW REVIVER...

pick your FREE holy grails kit!
Get a lip or skincare kit and free shipping with orders \$35+.

CYBER MONDAY

skincare kit includes:








★★★★★ (11364)
Power Grip Dewy Setting Spray

ADD TO BAG \$11

FREE SHIP + PICK A FREE HOLY GRAIL KIT (VALUE STARTING AT \$25) WITH ORDERS \$35+
GET 2 FREE LIP LINERS + BAG CHARM (\$14 VALUE) WITH PURCHASE OF 2+ GLOW REVIVER...

pick your FREE holy grails kit!
Get a lip or skincare kit and free shipping with orders \$35+.

CYBER MONDAY

lip kit includes:
(full-size gifts)





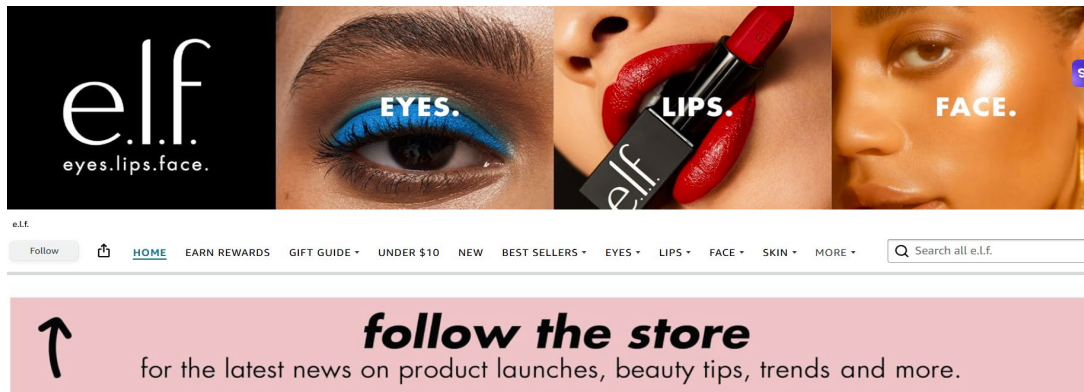
★★★★★ (1486)
Sheer For It Blush Tint

SELECT SHADE \$6

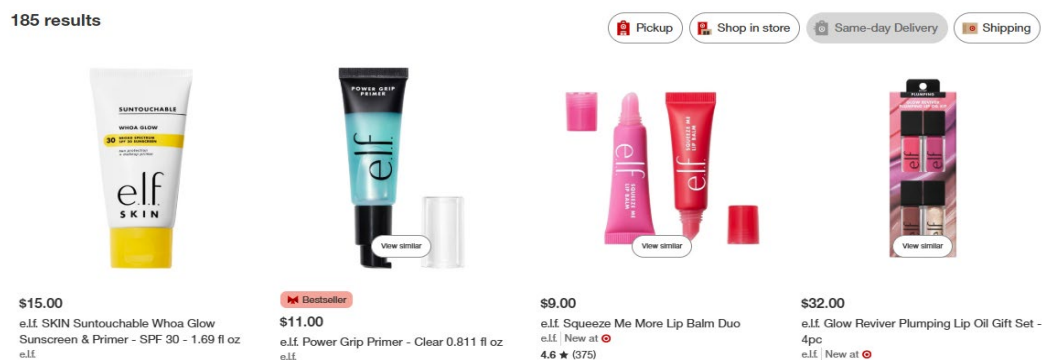
FREE SHIP + PICK A FREE HOLY GRAIL KIT (VALUE STARTING AT \$25) WITH ORDERS \$35+
GET 2 FREE LIP LINERS + BAG CHARM (\$14 VALUE) WITH PURCHASE OF 2+ GLOW REVIVER...

Figure 4

Amazon e.l.f. Store Page

**Figure 5**

Target e.l.f. Store Page



Price

e.l.f. Cosmetics was founded on the principle of delivering luxury-quality cosmetics at affordable prices, with first products starting at \$1 (Farkas, 2024). Today, while prices have increased, most of its individual products retail for under \$15. Across over 300 SKUs, e.l.f. Cosmetics averages at approximately \$6 per product (*Who Owns Elf Cosmetics? The Surprising Story behind the Brand [2025]*, 2025). Current pricing on the e.l.f. Cosmetics website lists the Halo Glow Liquid Filter at \$15, the Power Grip

Primer at \$11, and the Glow Reviver Lip Oil at \$9 (*Halo Glow Liquid Filter*, n.d.; *Power Grip Face Primer*, n.d.; *Glow Reviver Tinted Lip Oil*, n.d.).

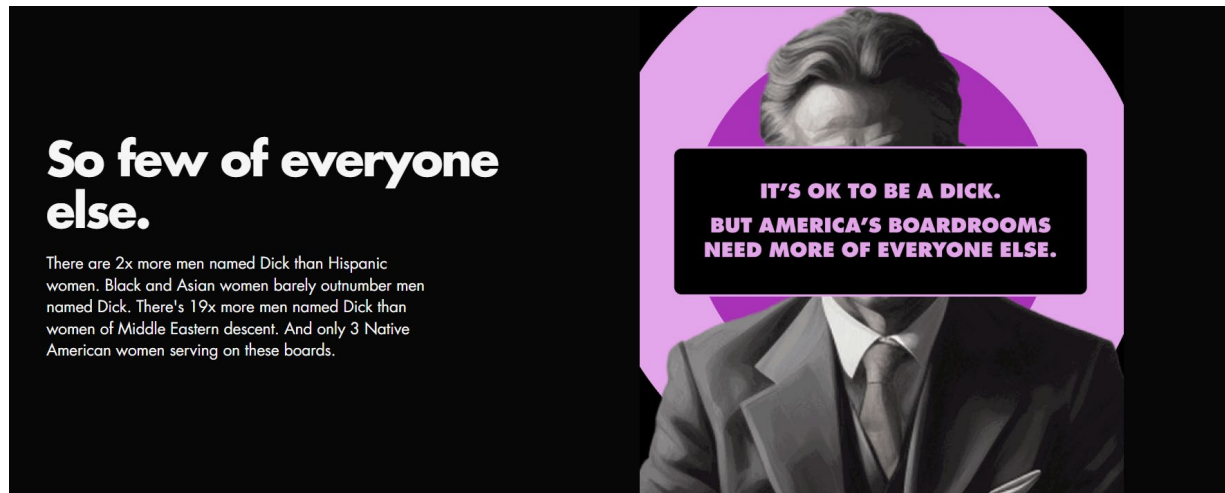
Communications

e.l.f. Cosmetics' overall messaging prioritizes accessibility, self-expression, and sustainability. The brand emphasizes inclusivity and its mission to "make the best of beauty accessible to every eye, lip, face, and skin type." The brand is cruelty-free, vegan, and fair-trade certified. Its messaging targets digitally active audiences through social media, influencer partnerships, user-generated content opportunities, and viral marketing strategies. e.l.f. is known for its strong presence on social media, with 2.6 million followers on TikTok and 7.5 million followers on Instagram (@elfyeah, n.d.; @elfcosmetics, n.d.). The brand thrives on these platforms where user-generated content and influencer marketing breed virality.

e.l.f. also extends beyond product marketing into purpose-driven campaigns. One example of this is its "Change the Board Game" initiative where e.l.f. aims to diversify corporate boards. Under this initiative, e.l.f. ran a campaign titled "Sooo Many Dicks," which highlighted the fact that on United States public corporate boards, there are more men named Dick, Richard, Rich, and Rick than there are of women of underrepresented groups. Shown in Figures 6 and 7—despite its cheeky and risqué messaging—this campaign showcases an important problem in this large gap in representation; there are two times more men named Dick than Hispanic women on these boards, 19 times more than women of Middle Eastern descent, and only three Native American women in total (e.l.f. Cosmetics, 2024b).

Figure 6

Online Campaign Graphic

**Figure 7**

Billboard Campaign Display



Key Brand Elements

Key brand elements for e.l.f. Cosmetics include its signature lowercase “e.l.f.” acronym brand mark and its lowercase typography throughout a significant portion of its marketing. Additionally, the brand’s recognizable black-and-white packaging communicates modernity and sophistication despite its budget price points. e.l.f.’s visual identity features clean typography, minimalistic design, and straightforward product naming conventions that clearly state the product’s intended purpose (e.g., “Power Grip Primer” and “Halo Glow Liquid Filter”). e.l.f.’s brand personality is playful, confident, and sometimes cheeky as seen in “Sooo Many Dicks.” This appeals to a widely social-media-forward audience that prioritizes informality in marketing. More key brand elements include e.l.f.’s cruelty-free, sustainable, and vegan identity as well as its reputation as a “dupe” brand for many prestige products.

Brand Positioning Statement

For digitally-savvy beauty consumers seeking high-performance cosmetics at accessible prices, e.l.f. Cosmetics is the affordable beauty brand that provides prestige quality without compromising on cost or ethics. Consumers can trust this because e.l.f. products are vegan, cruelty-free, made with dermatologist-tested ingredients, and fair-trade certified; because the brand consistently produces viral “dupes” of luxury products; and because its prices average below \$10 per item. e.l.f. Cosmetics embodies a bold, expressive brand character that believes in innovation, creativity, and accessible beauty for every eye, lip, face.

Prime Prospect

The prime prospect for e.l.f. Cosmetics is a value-drive, digitally active Gen Z or young millennial consumer between the ages of 16 and 34. This consumer frequently engages with beauty gurus on social media—especially TikTok and Instagram—for reviews, tutorials, and trends. This prospect is budget-conscious but prioritizes quality, often seeking out “dupes” of popular luxury products. They give special consideration to brands that partake in ethical practices such as vegan and cruelty-free formulas, and they prefer brands that emphasize inclusivity for all and self-expression. This prospect shops across mass retailers such as Target, Walmart, and Ulta Beauty, and on direct-to-consumer e-commerce platforms.

Secondary Brand Associations

e.l.f. Cosmetics leverages a variety of secondary brand associations to strengthen its brand equity. The brand emphasizes high-quality, ethically sourced ingredients that are cruelty-free and vegan as well as dermatologist-tested. Collaborations with influencers and celebrities such as Jennifer Coolidge and Judge Judy help to increase visibility and engagement amongst digitally active consumers (e.l.f. Beauty, 2024a; e.l.f. Cosmetics, 2024a). Additionally, key partnerships with other brands—such as with Reese Witherspoon-led Hello Sunshine to create Sunnie, a Gen Z-focused lifestyle brand, or e.l.f.’s acquisition of Hailey Bieber’s rhode—extend the brand’s reach (Montemayor, 2025). In fact, the brand’s stock surged 24% after the announcement that it would acquire rhode (Javate, 2025). The brand’s U.S. origins and headquarters in Oakland, California associate it with American beauty innovation and

California's trend-forward, sunny aesthetic. e.l.f.'s engagement in corporate social responsibility and purpose-driven campaigns helps to align the brand with inclusive values. e.l.f. Cosmetics' association with its sister companies e.l.f. Skin, Keys Soulcare, W3LL PEOPLE, and rhode extends its reputation across niches within the beauty and skincare industries. Consistent placement in major retail and e-commerce outlets helps reinforce e.l.f.'s reliability, convenience, and accessibility.

Marketing Mix Issues

e.l.f. maintains a portfolio of over 300 SKUs across makeup, skincare, and tools. A key issue is finding the balance between rapid innovation to keep up with trends and maintaining consistency to ensure quality in both new and existing products. The brand's products are distributed across the country in mass retailers, specialty stores, and e-commerce platforms. Challenges include managing inventory across multiple channels, keeping up with rapid online fulfillment demand, and ensuring consistent in-store availability to retain brand visibility and convenience. One of e.l.f.'s core values is luxury quality at low costs. Maintaining this price positioning amidst rising costs of operation, ingredients, and labor is a key issue. In August 2025, e.l.f. announced a universal increase in the price of its products by \$1, likely making price the most relevant issue for the brand (Coleman, 2025). In a fast-moving digital landscape, e.l.f. has to keep content fresh and relevant without sacrificing sincerity. While it relies heavily on social media, influencer partnerships, and viral marketing campaigns, it also must balance its investment in traditional advertising to maximize reach.

Situational Analysis and SWOT

The following SWOT assessment was conducted to evaluate internal capabilities (strengths and weaknesses) and external dynamics (opportunities and threats). This analysis further contextualizes e.l.f.'s market positioning and highlights how e.l.f. could leverage its brand equity while remaining conscious of potential areas of improvement.

SWOT Table

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong brand awareness amongst Gen Z and millennials • Ethical brand identity • Omnichannel distribution • Rapid product innovation 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overly reliant on social media • "Dupe" brand perception • Low prestige/luxury perception • Low price sensitivity • Many SKUs risks inconsistency
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of hybrid beauty • Affordable luxury makeup trends • Global market expansion, particularly through social media marketing • Shift towards expectation for ethical and vegan practices • Diversification via acquisitions 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid trend cycles • Ethical beauty market saturation • Inflation reducing cosmetic purchases • Reputational risks from "duping" perceived as copying • Rising competition from celebrity-founded powerhouse brands

Brand Exploratory

Primary and secondary research was conducted to better understand e.l.f. Cosmetics' brand equity, consumer perceptions, and market positioning within the mass beauty industry.

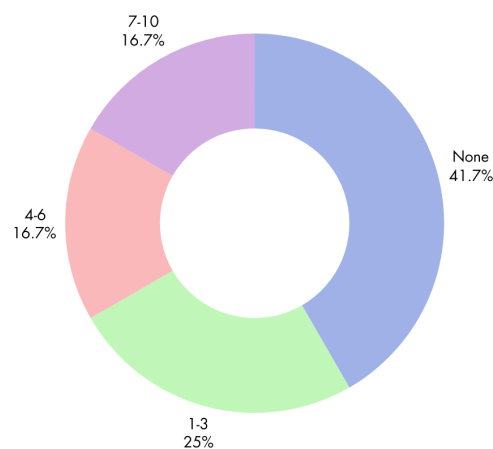
Primary Research

Primary research was conducted through a five-question consumer survey. In order, respondents were asked about the frequency of their cosmetic purchases, the factors that influence their cosmetic purchasing decisions, their familiarity with e.l.f. Cosmetics, their perceptions of e.l.f.'s brand, and how they would describe e.l.f.'s desired brand image (trendy, innovative, affordable) relative to category leader Maybelline.

Shown in Figure 8, survey results revealed notable variation in the purchasing frequency of cosmetic products.

Figure 8

In the past three months, approximately how many beauty or cosmetics products (mascara, bronzer, lipstick, eyeliner, etc.) have you purchased?



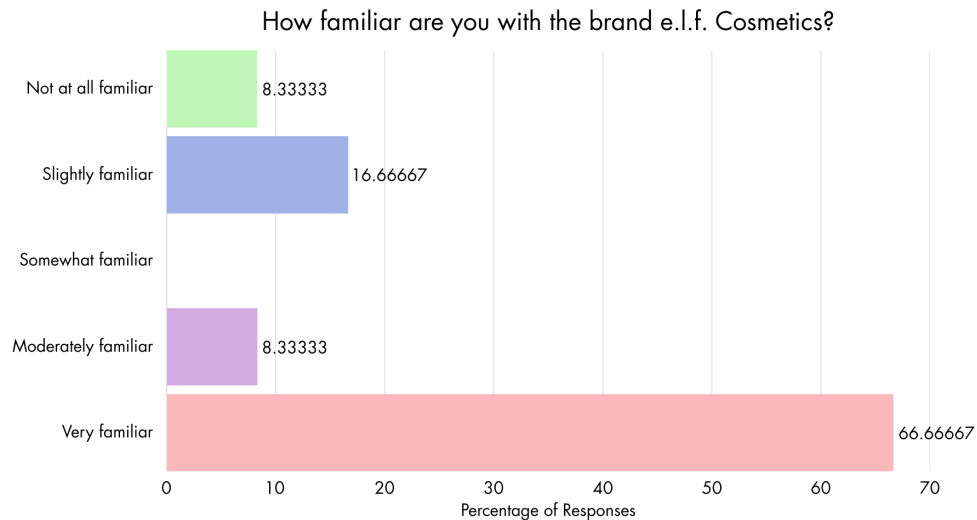
Most respondents (41.67%) had not purchased cosmetic products in the past three months, followed by 25% having purchased 1-3 items. 33.34% of respondents had purchased either 4-6 (16.67%) or 7-10 (16.67%) cosmetics in the previous three months, and no respondent had purchased more than eleven cosmetic products.

Represented by Figure 9, when asked which factor influenced their purchasing decisions of cosmetics the most, the majority of respondents prioritized price (41.67%) and quality (33.33%) when purchasing cosmetics, with the remaining respondents selecting brand reputation (25%). Notably, no respondents reported inclusivity, ethical practices, or packaging as primary decision-making factors in their cosmetic product purchases, indicating that functional and economic factors carry the most weight in this sample's priorities.

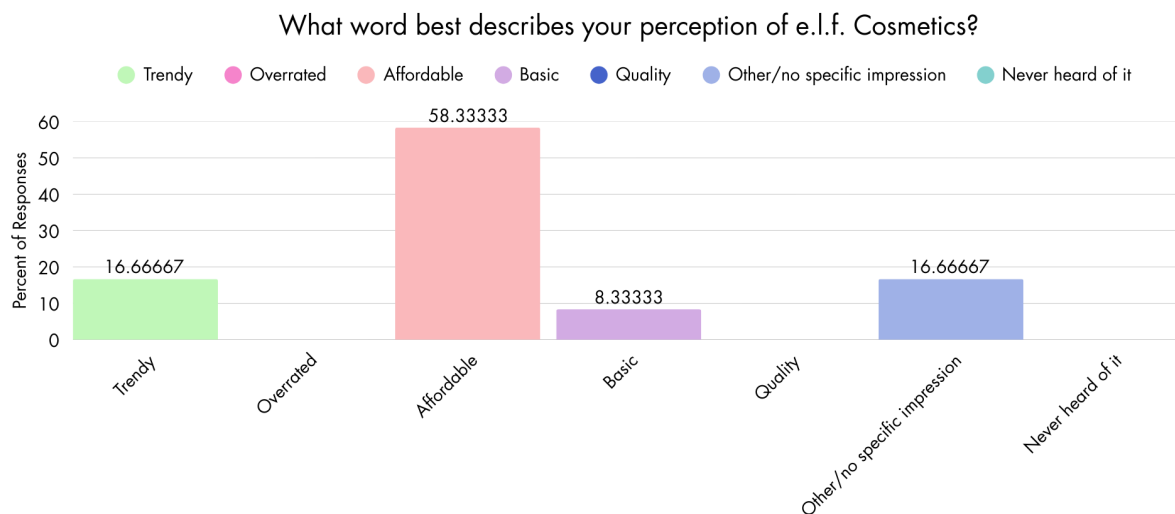
Figure 9



Represented in Figure 10, a significant majority of respondents (75%) reported being moderately (8.33%) or very familiar (66.67%) with e.l.f. Cosmetics, while 16.67% were slightly familiar and 8.33% were not at all familiar (8.33%). No respondents reported being somewhat familiar with e.l.f.

Figure 10

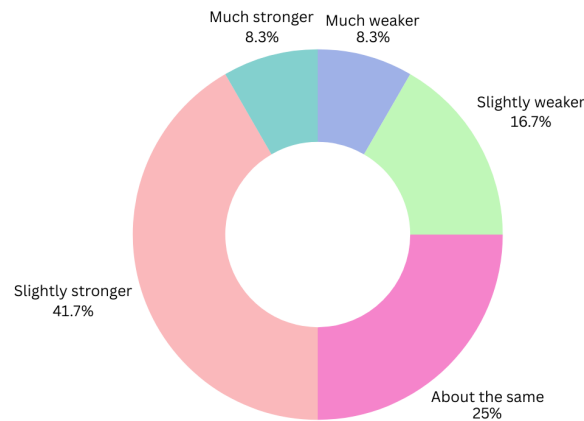
Results of the respondents' perceptions of e.l.f.'s brand identity reinforced its value-driven positioning. Shown in Figure 11, more than half of the sample (58.33%) selected that their primary perception of e.l.f. was affordable, followed by trendy (16.67%) and other/no specific impression (16.67%). The rest of the respondents (8.33%) reported that they perceived e.l.f. as basic.

Figure 11

Displayed in Figure 12, when asked to compared e.l.f.'s desired brand image—trendy, innovative, and affordable—to that of Maybelline, half of the sample (50%) rated e.l.f.'s image as slightly or much stronger. An additional 25% considered the two brands about the same, while the remaining respondents found e.l.f.'s image slightly weaker (16.67%) or much weaker (8.33%).

Figure 12

In the past three months, approximately how many beauty or cosmetics products (mascara, bronzer, lipstick, eyeliner, etc.) have you purchased?



Altogether, these findings indicate that e.l.f. Cosmetics is widely recognized amongst respondents and is strongly associated with value and affordability. Additionally, the brand's image is clearly perceived as competitive with, or even superior to, an established category leader. These results imply that e.l.f. holds a powerful position in the minds of consumers, combining value with cultural relevance in a way that legacy brands like Maybelline struggle to match. However, this survey only included 12 respondents, indicating that while these results are informative, the sample size greatly limits the generalizability of these findings to the broader beauty and cosmetic products market.

Secondary Research

Secondary research conducted further validates the findings from the survey research by examining consumer behavior trends, brand perceptions, and the competitive market of the beauty industry. In the highly saturated cosmetics and beauty market, e.l.f. Cosmetics directly competes with leading brands such as Maybelline and L'Oréal Paris, both owned by the L'Oréal USA conglomerate. e.l.f. Cosmetics is a good example of a challenger brand due to its out-of-the-box approach to cosmetics marketing and its parent company's 27 consecutive quarters—or almost seven years—of growth in an industry that has become increasingly competitive and fragmented (e.l.f. Beauty, 2025). This growth is especially notable given that legacy brands with decades of dominance have struggled to maintain customer loyalty and cultural relevance amongst younger consumers with shifting priorities.

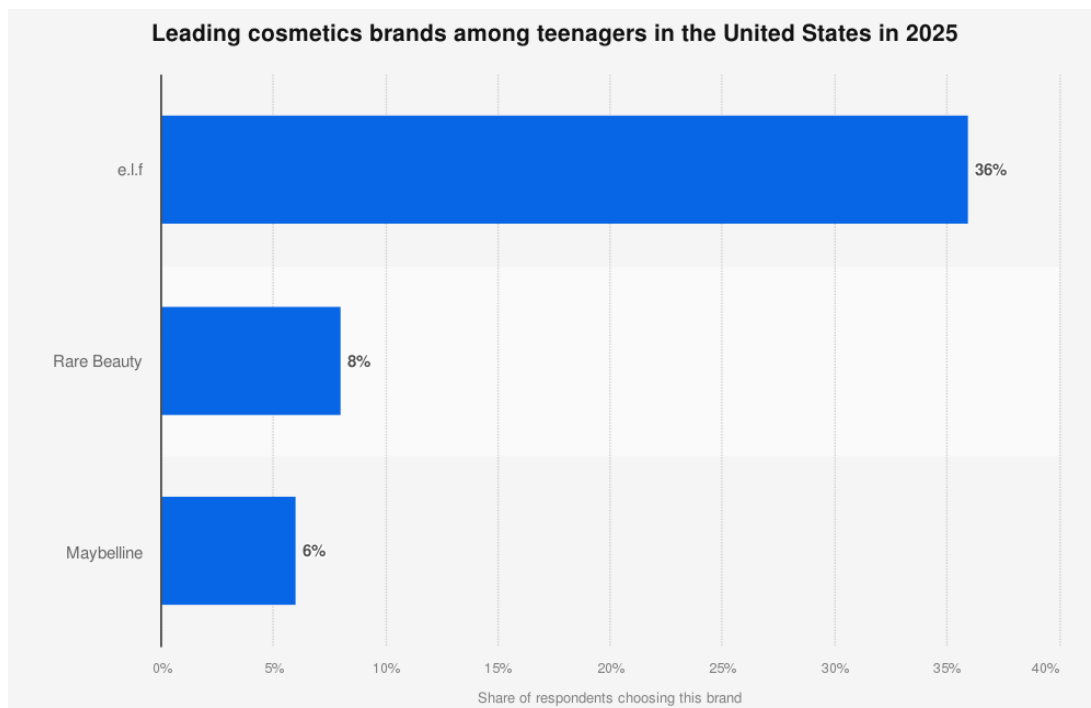
Maybelline, often described as the entry-level makeup brand, remains popular with older generations; however, it has lost relevance with Gen Z consumers who prioritize transparency, bold and inclusive branding, and ethical manufacturing practices. L'Oréal's anti-aging marketing falls flat with Gen Z, and its widespread distribution resulting from decades of prominence struggles to impress an audience that prefers products that promote skin health and eco-friendly production. Both Maybelline and L'Oréal sell their products in countries that still mandate animal testing, further driving a disconnect between the brands and Gen Z consumers (White, 2025). As a result, e.l.f.'s cruelty-free, vegan positioning and modern, culturally relevant brand

voice allow it to stand out to Gen Z in a category in which legacy brands struggle to adapt without alienating their long-established consumer base.

Recent industry data further indicates e.l.f. Cosmetics' strong position as a challenger brand, particularly amongst younger consumers like Gen Z. In 2025, a survey on leading cosmetics brands among teenagers in the United States was given to 10,969 female teen respondents with an average age of 15.7. As seen in Figure 13, e.l.f. was the most-preferred makeup brand with 36% of respondents choosing the brand, distantly followed by Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez with 8% and Maybelline with 6% (Piper Sandler, 2025).

Figure 13

Survey Data Visualization (Statista, 2025)



e.l.f. outperformed the next-highest selection four-and-a-half times over, underscoring its significant resonance with teenaged consumers. This preference gap

supports e.l.f.'s strong prominence amongst a Gen Z audience and highlights its success in capitalizing on the trend of consumer values such as affordability, digitally-native brand identities, and cruelty-free practices—attributes that have become central to Gen Z consumers' purchasing decisions and have contributed to a continuing upward trajectory.

While e.l.f. decisively leads the teenager consumer base, broader market data shows that the brand holds its own against dominant legacy brands. A 2025 survey of on the leading cosmetics & make-up brands ranked by brand awareness, found that e.l.f. had a brand awareness rate of 65% amongst American adults aged 18 to 64.

e.l.f. ranked seventh on the list behind legacy competitors such as L'Oréal (83%) and Revlon (78%). e.l.f. ranked only two spots below Maybelline at 71% brand awareness (Statista, 2025). This survey placed e.l.f. as the top brand catered to younger generations, ahead of several prestige and mass-market competitors, including M.A.C. (55%), bareMinerals (51%), NYX (46%), Kylie Cosmetics (45%), and Fenty Beauty (44%). e.l.f.'s growing mainstream recognition and overwhelming dominance amongst teenagers illustrates a unique advantage as a challenger brand: it captures the momentum of emerging consumers and establishes brand loyalty early, alongside gaining visibility within the general cosmetics market.

Primary Buyer Profile



Photo by Shantanu Kumar on [Pexels](#)

Ava, a 20-year-old Indian American undergraduate student, represents the primary buyer of e.l.f. Cosmetics: the Gen Z Beauty Enthusiast. Typically female and between the ages of 15 and 24, this consumer includes students and early-career professionals with limited disposable income. Ava is thrifty and value-driven when it comes to purchasing cosmetics. She is also environmentally conscious and likes the brands she purchases to reflect these values. She prefers brands that practice cruelty-free and vegan manufacturing. Additionally, Ava responds positively to companies that demonstrate social responsibility.

Ava is very active on social media, especially TikTok and Instagram, where she gets a lot of beauty recommendations from influencers and brand accounts. She did not frequently wear makeup until early college, so she relies on social media as her

primary source of information on beauty products. As a consumer who grew up in the digital age, the online presence of a brand is important to her. e.l.f. stands out to Ava because of its values of affordability, inclusivity, and sustainability, as well as its digitally savvy persona promoting products that are quick to trend and consistently popular with online consumers. She perceives the brand as trendsetting, quick-paced, and responsive to consumer feedback. e.l.f.'s clean, eco-friendly packaging and playful persona displayed in traditional and digital marketing reinforce her trust and enthusiasm for the brand. As a frequent online shopper through retailers like Amazon and Ulta, Ava appreciates the convenient, extensive product range e.l.f. has. As she continues through early adulthood and into her future career, Ava is likely to establish long-term loyalty to e.l.f., carrying these early positive associations into the later stages of her consumer lifecycle.

Secondary Buyer Profile



Photo by Andrea Piacquadio on [Pexels](#)

e.l.f.'s secondary buyer is the Millennial Practical Beauty Consumer, who is predominantly female and aged between 25 and 35. She is either early in her career and advancing professionally or balancing work and home life. This buyer is lower-middle to middle class, and unlike the primary buyer, has more disposable income but maintains a similarly budget-conscious lifestyle due to rising costs of living and heightened financial awareness.

Sarah, a 29-year-old marketing professional, represents e.l.f.'s secondary buyer. As she has progressed in her career post-graduation, Sarah has reduced her frequency of purchasing cosmetics because her priorities have shifted to practicality and longevity in products over fast-moving beauty trends. As a result, she seeks brands that offer quality products, affordable pricing, and accessibility in purchasing. Sarah wore drugstore legacy brands such as Maybelline and L'Oreal throughout her teens and early twenties because they were the brands her mother used while she was growing up. This early exposure shaped her preference for widely available, reliable products. However, as she has matured as a consumer, she now relies on reputable reviews and ingredient transparency to inform her purchase decisions on products suitable for everyday wear. She prefers brands available at mass retailers like Target and Walmart where she already shops for household items, prioritizing accessibility and convenience. Sarah is less responsive to viral, trend-driven marketing, but still positively responds to branding that speaks to the modern consumer.

e.l.f.'s widely available product line and quality formulas often designed to dupe prestige cosmetics appeal to Sarah by offering dependability, affordability, and

convenience. She views e.l.f. as trustworthy and accessible because of its consistent position in many mass retailers and drug stores. Sarah perceives e.l.f. as high performing based on online reviews and strong word-of-mouth that reinforce the brand's credibility. These factors make e.l.f. a practical and appealing choice for Sarah and the overall Millennial Practical Beauty Consumer.

Campaign Recommendations

This section provides evidence-backed recommendations for e.l.f.'s continued integrated marketing communications strategy. Drawing from insights in the brand exploratory, these recommendations aim to promote growth, enhance audience engagement, and improve brand awareness across channels.

1. Expand beyond digital marketing reliance

Develop more pop-ups and in-store sampling to broaden touchpoints and connect with audiences that may not use social media to inform their cosmetics purchases. Expand these events beyond major metropolitan areas.

2. Strategically tap into "dupe" culture

Market products with playful comparison, but move towards highlighting unique product innovation to build a perception of being a challenger, not a follower.

3. Reinforce purpose-driven messaging

Amplify e.l.f.'s positioning around ethical practices and social initiatives through product marketing rather than in separate campaigns.

4. Increase user-generated content and engagement

Use social media visibility to promote hashtag campaigns and trend-driven challenges. Encourage consumers to make authentic review, recommendation, and “get ready with me” content.

5. Strengthen offline presence with retail storytelling

Integrate playful and value-driven messaging into in-store displays and signage. Let consumers know the “e.l.f. Way” before ever making a purchase and without having to engage online.

6. Focus on marketing staple “affordable luxury” products

Rely less on constant trend cycling and tap into the staple best-sellers. Focus more on the products that have stayed popular rather than seeing 15 minutes of fame.

Conclusion

Overall, this audit affirms that e.l.f. Cosmetics has achieved a strong culturally relevant presence within the mass cosmetics market through digital fluency, ethical practices, and digital fluency. The brand’s ability to connect with Gen Z and millennials through social engagement and trend-driven innovation emerged as its strongest and most defining asset. However, as the competitive landscape evolves, e.l.f. Is forced to confront both legacy brands and other digital-first rivals head-on. This indicates both a problem and an opportunity: e.l.f. must evolve past its dependency on social media and digital marketing and strategically leverage its balance between a reputation as a top “dupe” brand and a product innovator in its own right. By capitalizing on its authentic brand voice and its position as a pioneer in

inclusion in beauty as well as enhancing traditional marketing through storytelling, e.l.f. can continuously build upon its current brand equity. These strategies allow the brand to not only maintain its current momentum, but to break barriers in an oversaturated market, ensuring that the brand maintains its cultural relevance and solidifies its position as an accessible, revolutionary challenger beauty brand.

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