

## **The Market Makers**

### **Sephora**

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## **Introduction**

Sephora is a global specialty beauty retailer with over 2,700 stores in 35 countries and a fast-growing U.S. presence, including 500 locations (Sephora, 2025). Founded in 1969 in Limoges, France by Dominique Mandonnaud, Sephora revolutionized the beauty industry with its open-sell format, allowing customers to try products before purchasing (LVMH, 2025). Since entering the U.S. in 1998 with its SoHo, NYC store, Sephora has become a dominant force, blending prestige beauty with accessibility for a diverse customer base.

Now headquartered in Paris and a subsidiary of LVMH, Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, Sephora is known for its wide selection of premium and emerging brands. Its interactive store layout, generous return policy (30-day full refunds, 60-day store credit), and strong brand partnerships encourage product exploration and build customer trust (Sephora, 2025).

Exclusively focused on beauty and personal care, Sephora offers a deep assortment of makeup, skincare, haircare, and fragrance. Top brands include Rare Beauty, Charlotte Tilbury, Drunk Elephant, The Ordinary, Olaplex, Dyson, Jo Malone, and Tom Ford (Sephora, 2025). As a corporate-owned chain, Sephora ensures consistency in branding, product offerings, and customer experience. Through exclusive launches and innovative merchandising, Sephora continues to lead the beauty retail industry (Newman, 2025).

## **Target Market Assessment**

With our options given, we feel as though the Silver and Gold target market is ideal for our Sephora location. With a median age of 60.5 years and over 70% aged 55 or older, we can tailor our products to their needs. Our Sephora will focus on maintenance and preventative

treatments in skincare and haircare rather than primarily makeup. Clean, age-friendly brands like Clinique and Dr. Jart+ will attract this older demographic. Importantly, 56% of these households still earn wages, indicating they have disposable income and time to shop (Newman, 2025).

Silver and Gold residents are interested in skincare and beauty and enjoy traveling, so we will offer travel-size products. They also spend significant time outdoors and in the sun, making quality sunscreen essential, as skin cancer risk increases with age. Additionally, they enjoy dining out and attending classical performances, seeking clean, quality makeup.

We considered Midlife Junction and Simple Living as target markets. However, we moved away from Midlife Junction due to their careful spending mindset, which doesn't align with Sephora's positioning (Newman, 2025). Simple Living's younger median age and budget-conscious habits, reflected in their median household income of \$27,284, also made them less likely to shop at Sephora, which offers fewer deals than discount alternatives.

### **Competitor Assessment**

Sephora enters the Oxford market already served by two competitors, Ulta Beauty and Belk, which have a distinct advantage with different demographics and product mixes.

Ulta Beauty is Sephora's most direct competitor in Oxford. Ulta offers a different approach, selling drugstore brands and luxury beauty in a single location. This makes Ulta highly appealing to a broader customer base, from budget-conscious college students to high-end beauty buyers. Ulta carries brands such as CeraVe, La Roche-Posay, and Tula in skincare; YSL and Dior in fragrance; Olaplex, Redken, Amika in hair care; and makeup favorites like MAC, Urban Decay, e.l.f., and NYX (Ulta, 2025). Ulta's ability to span drugstore and luxury categories sets it apart from Sephora, which focuses almost exclusively on luxury.

Ulta rivals Sephora in their pricing and promotions. With prices ranging from \$5 to \$150+, Ulta appeals to shoppers at all economic levels, making it more accessible than Sephora for value-driven customers (Ulta Beauty, 2024). Their Ultimate Rewards program is highly regarded for its frequent discounts, birthday gifts, and point redemption options, which attract loyal repeat buyers. Ulta's location at 600 Merchants Drive in Oxford also places it in a popular shopping center, making it a convenient stop for students and local residents. Another significant advantage of Ulta's in-store salon services includes haircuts, coloring, and skincare treatments, services that Sephora typically does not offer (Ulta, 2025).

Belk competes with Sephora in the prestige beauty space, particularly among a more traditional and mature demographic. Belk's customer base includes working professionals and older shoppers who value classic department store experiences. In beauty, Belk features luxury skincare and makeup brands such as Estée Lauder, Lancôme, Clarins, and Clinique (Belk, 2025). It also carries iconic fragrances like Chanel, Tom Ford, and Dolce & Gabbana, which appeal to an older clientele who may prefer timeless scents over trend-driven fragrance launches.

While Belk's selection in hair care is more limited, offering mostly CHI and Biosilk, it maintains strength in fragrance and skincare, two of the highest-margin and most loyalty-driven beauty categories (Front Row, 2025). Prices typically range from \$25 to \$150+, aligning Belk closely with Sephora's luxury positioning. However, Belk's department store convenience gives it an edge with multi-category shoppers who may shop for clothing, home goods, and beauty in one visit (Belk, 2025). In Oxford, Belk's long standing presence and trusted brand name give it substantial emotional equity among locals, especially in the 50+ age group (Belk About Us, 2024).

Sephora enters Oxford with a clear focus on high-end beauty but must differentiate itself from Ulta's broader assortment, inclusive pricing, and Belk's heritage-driven prestige appeal. Ulta competes strongly across the board by offering mass and prestige products, salon services, and a more promotional pricing model. While narrower in assortment, Belk excels in classic skincare and fragrance, appealing to customers who are already loyal to heritage beauty brands. For Sephora to succeed, it must focus on personalized experiences, skincare expertise, loyalty programming, and curating a unique store atmosphere that resonates with luxury shoppers and mature consumers.

After looking at Sephora's competitors, some key differentiators of Sephora's strategy is its ability to cater specifically to the 'Silver and Gold' demographic by offering a curated selection of products, exclusive brands, personalized services, and a welcoming shopping environment. Sephora creates a differentiated experience that differentiates it from competitors like Ulta and Belk, which may not focus as intently on this demographic. Many beauty retailers focus on younger, trend-driven customers; Sephora will provide a curated assortment of skincare, makeup, and beauty products designed with our target market in mind. This includes formulations that address common concerns of aging skin, such as anti-aging ingredients, sensitive skin solutions, and products for mature complexions. By focusing on this underserved market, Sephora will stand out as the go-to destination for consumers who need specialized products. Another differentiating factor is having specific exclusive brands. Sephora will carry brands not available in competitor's stores. These brands will offer products specifically formulated for the needs of our target market, providing a range of options that cater to their preferences. Sephora will create a sense of loyalty among this demographic by offering a

selection of brands that older shoppers trust, focusing on familiar and established names that give customers confidence in their purchase.

By adding personalized experience and expertise, Sephora will further distance itself by offering personalized consultations and beauty advice tailored to the needs of older consumers. Many older consumers may ask for help enhancing their appearance while addressing age-related changes to their skin. Sephora will position itself as an expert in this area by providing knowledgeable staff and personalized services, giving shoppers confidence in their purchases, and making the shopping experience more engaging.

Giving our target market a good store experience beyond just the products is something our audience is looking for. Sephora will focus on creating a store experience that feels welcoming and accessible to an older audience. This will include a convenient store layout, clear signage, and a quieter shopping environment that feels comfortable for mature customers. Additionally, the in-store experience will be enhanced with services like makeup lessons or skin care consultations geared explicitly towards older consumers. By implementing these practices, Sephora will foster loyalty and community.

### **Retail Location**

After looking into the competitor analysis and target market assessment, we have chosen site #4 for our Sephora location. This site will be in the shopping center where Belk, Buffalo Wild Wings, Newk's, and El Agave are. This location is ideal because of the strip center style the stores have nearby, an anchor store of Belk, and a vast parking lot. Being in close proximity to Ulta will benefit us, as we can be the store with the products nearby that Ulta does not carry and ultimately use traffic flow across the street to our advantage. The location right off Jackson Avenue, one of the most traveled roads in Oxford, is also advantageous because of its convenient

location for everyone (*Traffic volume*, 2025). Since people typically travel this road at least once a day. Having a space that is 6,900 square feet is perfect for setting up a store as we want, with plenty of room to roam the aisles and no one feeling cramped when shopping. The one year lease is a significant period for us to see if we like the space and if it works for our vision, and the rent of \$2,000 per month is feasible if our store flourishes as planned.

Advantages to this location are that it offers easy parking for our customers, there are other stores and shops nearby for them to go into, there is very high foot traffic, rent is affordable for the number of square feet, and there is potential to become an anchor store there. Another proponent is the potential to expand within the same area. Buildings close by could go under, and if it is the right time, we can relocate to a bigger store without significantly changing locations.

On the other hand, accessibility can be considered an obstacle. While off Jackson Avenue is ideal for most businesses, the store location is tucked away toward the back of the shopping center. The Chick-fil-A and bank are up front, and people must pass them to get to this area. That is not ideal, but being in a strip center is crucial for success.

Site #2 the Midtown Shopping Center and #6 Tradewinds Shopping Center are similar to our chosen location. We chose our site because, unlike #2, we have flexibility in store space. We need to have that flexibility to set up our store because makeup and cosmetic brands are on a rotating schedule of their shelf life, and we need to be able to change up the displays, move products with ease, and have the ability to move around centerpieces without too much struggle based on the store. We want to cater to our target market. Hence, they have the space and freedom to move around within the store and not get stuck in a traffic flow every time they enter the store. Site #6 had potential, but the location was not ideal for us. We need stores nearby that will bring in similar customers, like Belk. Our target market does not fit into the shoppers at

Cash Savers or University Cleaners because that area does not have an anchor store that is helpful to us. We also prefer to be located near Jackson Avenue, as the main road in Oxford and University can sometimes be challenging to navigate.

### **Merchandise and Brands**

For a Sephora in Oxford, Mississippi, serving a median age demographic of 60.5 focused on maintenance and preventative skincare, selecting national brands is critical. The following brands resonate with the Silver and Gold segments: Clinique, L'Oréal, Supergoop, and Chanel.

Clinique is a trusted heritage brand ideal for older consumers seeking gentle but effective skincare. Known for being fragrance-free and non-comedogenic, Clinique addresses signs of aging with lines like Repairwear and Smart Clinique Repair. Their skin-friendly makeup, including Even Better foundation, offers coverage while supporting skin health (Clinique, 2025).

L'Oréal provides science-backed skincare at affordable prices, making it an essential choice for mature consumers. The Revitalift line features anti-aging products like the 1.5% Hyaluronic Acid Serum. The Age Perfect makeup collection is tailored for aging skin, promoting an age-positive message (L'Oréal Paris USA, 2025).

Supergoop stands out for its focus on sun protection, essential for our outdoorsy demographic. Products like Unseen Sunscreen SPF 40 are designed to be weightless and makeup-friendly, incorporating beneficial ingredients that hydrate and protect skin without greasiness (Supergoop, 2025).

Chanel, despite its luxury positioning, remains popular for its association with timeless beauty. Their Les Beiges foundation provides a natural finish, while the Sublimage skincare line offers premium textures aimed at enhancing radiance. Chanel's emotional appeals of confidence and prestige make it particularly relevant for older shoppers (Chanel, 2025).



While these brands cater to mature consumers, their benefits of hydration, protection, and elegance appeal to all ages. For the Oxford market, they balance clinical results and brand credibility, making them suitable for Silver and Gold customers at Sephora.

Additionally, we will carry Sephora Collection, a premium private label that stands apart from generic store brands through exclusive packaging, proprietary formulas, and unique shade ranges (Sephora, 2025). Rather than competing with high-end brands like Clinique or Chanel, it complements them, offering quality products at accessible prices.

This line appeals to our Silver and Gold target market in Oxford, Mississippi, where the median age is 60.5. Mature consumers often seek reliable, affordable skincare and makeup, especially for travel or trying new items without the luxury price tag. Sephora Collection is perfect for customers who blend premium and budget-friendly products in their routines.

Expertly formulated, cruelty-free, and included in the “Clean at Sephora” initiative, it meets the needs of ingredient-conscious and health-aware shoppers (Sephora, 2025). Its exclusivity as a Sephora-only brand adds to its appeal, offering a curated, elevated experience that resonates with customers seeking quality and value.

Launching a Sephora in Oxford, Mississippi, targeting a mature Silver and Gold demographic, offers both advantages and challenges. Sephora’s prestige image, even with affordable lines like Sephora Collection, gives it a “luxury halo” that appeals to older consumers seeking quality, travel-friendly skincare and makeup. Its strong focus on clean, cruelty-free skincare and curated shopping aligns with the values of health-conscious, practical older shoppers.

However, challenges include Sephora’s youth-oriented branding, which may alienate a 60+ audience who feel more represented by competitors like Ulta and Belk. Sephora also

underemphasized key categories like haircare and classic fragrances, which are priorities for older women. Additionally, a lack of age-inclusive marketing could make mature consumers feel overlooked.

To succeed, Sephora must localize its visuals, curate offerings to include trusted legacy brands, and create a welcoming, age-inclusive experience that balances its modern image with the needs of Oxford's older population.

### **Managing the Merchandise**

When looking into appointing a category captain, we feel as though it is crucial to implement one into our Sephora for our store's success. The advantages include expertise, improved category performance, efficient resource allocation, stronger collaboration, and enhanced shelf space management. Having a category captain will guide our strategy and drive growth, as store managers and floor workers typically lack the time, tools, or training to connect with customers effectively (Brown, 2023). We will appoint category captains for Clinique (skincare), Laura Mercier (makeup), Chanel (fragrance), and Oribe (hair care).

Several factors impact our specialized store in Oxford, where local demographics vary from middle-aged and retired students to young college students. The Silver and Gold group is brand loyal and splurges on high-end products. While there is no other Sephora within 43 miles, a competitive Ulta exists nearby.

Ulta and Sephora differ significantly. Ulta combines high-end and drugstore brands, appealing to a broader audience with a laid-back atmosphere (Schildhouse, 2023). However, this doesn't attract our Silver and Gold group, who seek luxury brands in Sephora's upscale, chic environment. Exclusive products at Sephora also draw consumers.

The Oxford population, excluding students and non-residents, aligns well with our target market (Oxford, MS, 2025). Location and accessibility are crucial, and our site on Jackson Avenue is easy to reach from anywhere in Oxford, rated 5/10 for accessibility. Ample parking, including handicap spots, enhances our customers' shopping experience and is rated 7/10.

### **Merchandise Pricing**

After appointing our category captains, we needed to strategize our pricing techniques. Sephora will adopt a high/low pricing strategy to provide flexibility for sales promotions and discounts, particularly due to our mix of higher-end luxury brands and Sephora's branded items. This strategy enables us to attract premium consumers paying full price for luxury goods and budget-conscious shoppers drawn to discounts.

The ability to run sales and temporary discounts is central to Sephora's business model. High/low pricing offers a premium shopping experience while providing value through periodic discounts, keeping customers engaged and encouraging repeat visits. It allows us to appeal to a broad audience by offering luxury products at full price and Sephora-branded items at more affordable rates, balancing exclusivity with accessibility. This approach supports efficient inventory management and increases the perception of value, enhancing brand loyalty and encouraging repeat business. The anticipation of future sales also motivates purchases.

We've chosen not to use EDLP, as it would limit sales opportunities and reduce price differentiation between luxury brands and Sephora's items. EDLP would not create the same excitement or sense of exclusivity as high/low pricing, potentially blurring distinctions and diminishing our premium brand positioning.

For pricing tactics, we will implement leader pricing by offering specific products at lower prices to drive traffic and boost sales. For instance, offering a popular face wash at a lower

price will draw attention and encourage purchases of complementary products at full price.

Similarly, we will discount staple makeup items to increase visibility and encourage the purchase of less frequently used products. We'll also discount the largest bottle size for perfume to attract customers, strategically placing all sizes together to highlight the deal.

We will use rounded pricing across our product range to encourage impulse purchases, pricing items at whole-dollar amounts (e.g., \$25 instead of \$24.72), as this aligns with consumer tendencies to feel better about rounded prices. This approach aims to lower mental barriers, encouraging more purchases while enhancing the shopping experience (Newman, 2025).

We will not engage in variable pricing, as individualized pricing could alienate customers and negatively impact sales. Our store model focuses on providing a consistent shopping experience. Instead, we will offer a rewards program that allows customers to earn discounts through points, providing value to our loyal customers.

### **Store Layout, Design, and Visual Merchandising**

As for our merchandise with our pricing, our merchandise will serve both utilitarian and hedonic needs, with the majority focusing on hedonic values. For example, high-end anti-aging creams appeal to emotions, as older women may think, "I want to try this because I want to be anti-age." Similarly, our fragrance collection targets hedonic needs; enticing names like "Flowerbomb" draw customers in and evoke emotions tied to smelling good. Our makeup section, including highlighter, liquid eyeliner, and eye shadow, also caters to hedonic purchases.

We will implement a free-form layout in our store, typical of specialty stores and upscale boutiques (Newman, 2025). This layout allows customers to roam comfortably and explore products in depth. While this arrangement promotes browsing, it can also lead to inefficient space use and increased susceptibility to shoplifting (Newman, 2025).

We plan to incorporate a variety of signage around our store to guide customers effortlessly to the different sections, such as hair care and various makeup brands. We will implement further category signage within the aisles and rows of kiosks to inform our customers what brand they are looking at. This way we make it convenient for shoppers to locate their favorites, brands and items. (Newman, 2025). Lifestyle signs will also be used to improve the shopping experience. In the beauty industry, customers want to see what the products look like, utilizing models that are selling them.

We will utilize cash wraps to create a checkout line filled with mini products for impulse shopping. End caps will highlight luxurious brands with minimal inventory to promote higher-priced items. Promotional aisles will display bundled kits offered at discounted prices, fostering profit and brand relationships. Our walls will serve as a power perimeter, showcasing popular brands like Sephora to enhance sales.

We'll use bright, flattering lighting to highlight makeup colors and skincare details, with spotlights drawing attention to key areas like new arrivals and exclusive collections. LED strip lights in skincare and fragrance sections will add a sleek, modern feel while maintaining an inviting, upscale atmosphere. The music will feature a curated playlist of smooth R&B, light electronic, and gentle pop to create a calming, positive vibe. It will gradually shift throughout the day by utilizing softer tones in the evenings to offer a relaxing experience for after-work shoppers (Newman, 2025). In the fragrance section, scents will remain subtle, allowing customers to sample featured perfumes without being overwhelmed. The overall environment will feel personal, self-care focused, and thoughtfully designed. We'll stick with white walls, like most Sephoras, to let the vibrant makeup products take center stage.

In-store joint promotions could include brand collaborations, such as offering a free lip liner with the purchase of a featured lip gloss. We also plan to host brand pop-ups to generate excitement around new products. These events will not only attract more customers but also allow our target market to engage directly with brand representatives to benefit both our store and the partnering brands. Lastly, some effective add-on sales strategies include complementary product pairing (Biri, 2021). For example, if a customer buys an anti-aging cream, we can suggest an anti-aging sunscreen to go with it. Similarly, recommending beauty blenders or applicators alongside serums can boost sales. These thoughtful pairings not only increase revenue but also build client trust through personalized recommendations.

### **Retail Communication Mix**

To discuss our communication methods, we will incorporate advertising, promotions, personal selling, and online marketing from the communication methods. For advertising, we plan to use a billboard, the town newspaper, and the Chamber of Commerce's social media and website to spread the word. Sephora is a worldwide company; planting seeds would allow it to grow into an unpaid advertising dream. The cons include the cost of advertising due to limited space for billboards and newspaper space and the size of our town (Jobling, 2024). Next, we would mail out promotions promising customers a free high-end sample with every purchase over \$100 during our first week. This promotion would attract customers, encouraging them to spend more. A small risk is that it may attract unloyal customers who do not plan on returning. Personal selling is crucial for fostering a welcoming experience, a Sephora staple we would continue to nurture. A consultant's expertise will draw people in, providing personalized experiences and higher customer satisfaction. However, not everyone may want input from employees. Online marketing, such as app push notifications and text messages, along with email

subscriptions for discounts, helps keep shoppers informed. A location-specific social media presence would also aid in spreading the word and allow for measurable results and engagement. The drawback is that social media posts can get lost in the competitive noise of consumers' feeds.

### **Managing Customers**

We will practice Customer Relationship Management (CRM) at the Sephora store in Oxford, Mississippi. Given our target market's median age of 60.5, which often prioritizes trust, personal attention, and consistency, a strong CRM strategy is essential. Sephora's national success with CRM is well documented by utilizing data to tailor email campaigns, product suggestions, and loyalty rewards through its Beauty Insider program. These tactics create a personalized shopping experience and significantly boost engagement (Artefact, 2023). In Oxford, we will enhance this by encouraging Beauty Insider sign-ups during checkout and offering skincare consultations where notes on preferences can be added to customer profiles. For example, customers who frequently purchase anti-aging serums will be notified when related travel-size versions arrive, offering personalization and convenience.

The RFM analysis will be an integral tool for assessing customer profitability and loyalty (Newman, 2025). While recency, frequency, and monetary analyses are all important, recency is the most valuable indicator for our store and target market. By tracking who hasn't visited in the last 60 days, we can launch gentle re-engagement campaigns such as personalized skincare trial offers or exclusive early access to new travel-friendly sets. This strategy aligns with best practices in CRM, where recency is often the strongest predictor of future behavior, helping businesses identify at-risk customers before losing them (AIMultiple). We'll collect customer data using various interactive methods. First, the Beauty Insider program provides behavioral data like purchase frequency and preferences. Second, we'll implement mini skincare

consultations to record concerns like dryness or sensitivity. Third, we will use interactive quizzes or digital surveys, which is a method Sephora has successfully employed to collect zero-party data from customers (Odicci, 2023).

We will focus on building personalized relationships through value-added services and recognition to retain profitable customers. For example, customers who regularly purchase skincare or makeup might receive a personalized thank-you email with a deluxe sample or an invite to a seasonal skincare event. Unprofitable customers, such as those who return products frequently or primarily seek samples, will be managed carefully to maintain goodwill while encouraging more sustainable behavior. They might still receive excellent service, but we may limit their access to sample offerings or require Beauty Insider status for redemptions.

To prevent unprofitable behavior, we'll prioritize product education and clear sampling policies. Store associates will help customers select products that align with their needs, minimizing returns. Highlighting Sephora Collection minis or curated travel-size kits allows experimentation without committing to full-size products.

In conclusion, a thoughtful CRM strategy, leveraging RFM analysis with an emphasis on recency, and effective data collection methods will allow Sephora Oxford to build strong relationships with a mature customer base. Personalized experiences, attention to behavior patterns, and intentional outreach will help us retain profitable shoppers while guiding others toward beneficial shopping habits.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the possibility of opening a Sephora in Oxford, Mississippi presents a unique opportunity to serve a demographic that has often been overlooked in the beauty retail space. The current atmosphere of beauty retailers in Oxford focuses on the non-resident students,



and disregards our target market, and we wish to make them feel seen. Our focus on the Silver and Gold market—primarily older adults with both time and a disposable income—sets us apart. This group places high value on skincare, preventative treatments, and familiar, trustworthy brands. By curating our store specifically around their preferences, we are creating an environment that feels both personalized and elevated.

Where competitors like Ulta and Belk cast a wider net, our Sephora location will narrow its focus to serve this loyal and discerning audience. Offering luxury brands like Clinique, L’Oreal, Chanel, and Supergoop, along with exclusive Sephora Collection products, ensures we are meeting their specific needs with quality and care. Strategically placed off Jackson Avenue near high-traffic stores like Belk, our location gives shoppers convenience while providing a more refined shopping experience tailored to their lifestyle.

Our approach goes beyond product offerings. With pricing strategies that balance value and exclusivity, along with a strong focus on customer relationships and personalized service, Sephora Oxford will build lasting connections. By listening to our customers and offering skincare consultations, loyalty perks, and thoughtful promotions, we’ll create more than a store—we’ll create a space where beauty feels approachable, trusted, and empowering. That’s why this Sephora location is not only viable, but poised for long-term success.

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