IAC’s Dotdash is quietly building a beauty empire to compete with the likes of Condé Nast and Hearst

by Lucia Moses

Dotdash, the IAC-owned media company that was born out of service publisher About.com, is quietly building a beauty business to take on the likes of Condé Nast and Hearst.

Dotdash bought Brides, Byrdie, and MyDomaine this year and plans to use them as a springboard to crack online beauty.

It's planning to expand their live events and even create its own line of direct-to-consumer products.

Dotdash has had success growing other service categories like home, personal finance, and health. But beauty is a massive category and Dotdash is still a tiny and relatively inexperienced player.
Dotdash, the IAC-owned media company that was born out of service publisher About.com, is quietly building a beauty empire to take on the likes of Condé Nast and Hearst.

Dotdash bought Brides (from Condé Nast) and Byrdie and MyDomaine (from Who What Wear owner Clique Brands) this year and is aiming to double their audience, similar to how it's grown in other lifestyle areas like home, personal finance, and health.

Dotdash is a rare bright spot in online media. While other companies are laying off staff and looking for merger partners, Dotdash is projected to grow revenue 20% to $157 million this year and make up to $45 million in EBIDTA this year after losing $3 million in 2017. IAC is pushing Dotdash, formerly About.com, to grow aggressively.

Dotdash has grown by shunning the sexier parts of the web like news and celebrity gossip in favor of service content that has a long shelf life.

Its CEO Neil Vogel revved up About.com's outdated service content by relaunching it as sites like Verywell and The Spruce and speeding them up, stripping out the low-quality content, and removing annoying ads, and he said he thought there was a chance to do the same for beauty content. So he bought three beauty-oriented sites and hired experts in Leah Wyar from Hearst and Melissa Guy from Refinery29 to help run them.

“We want to and can be the largest, most important player in that part of the internet,” he said.

That’s saying something given Dotdash's size and experience. The online beauty/fashion category reached all of 152 million unique visitors in July, by Comscore’s count, dominated by giants like Hearst, Yahoo, and Refinery29.

Then there's Byrdie, which had just 5.3 million unique visitors in July, making it the 16th biggest beauty/fashion site.

**Dotdash’s playbook: Hire experts and make the sites great for users**

Dotdash’s point is that those bigger sites cover a lot of things besides makeup and are slow and crammed with ads that turn off users.

“It’s cluttered, but I don’t think it’s cluttered with places that are doing it right,” Guy said of online beauty sites.

The cornerstone of Dotdash's plan is Byrdie, which started in 2013 and is written mostly by beauty-obsessed contributors. The site describes itself as being “committed to creating an inclusive space that lifts up diverse voices and celebrates the unique beauty found in each of us.” Sample articles: “I Was a Size 0 When a Modeling Agency Labeled Me Plus Size” and “The 9 Best Cruelty-Free, Vegan Foundations for Women of Color.”
To succeed, Dotdash has to take a lot of the same beauty content others are doing and do it better. That’s meant combing through 13,000 articles and adding step-by-step photos, videos, expert information, and keeping it updated.

**Dotdash plans to launch events and direct-to-consumer products**

“If you want to have the best post on how to do smokey eyes, you don’t have to do a ton of pieces – you need to keep updating ‘how to do smokey eyes,’” Vogel said. “It’s a lot of heavy lifting.”

Dotdash also plans to grow the awareness of its small sites by throwing pop-up events like its Byrdie Beauty Lab and launching Byrdie-branded, direct-to-consumer products.

But Dotdash isn’t looking to take on Revlon. It sees these products as a form of marketing, not a way to make a ton of money.

If it all works, Vogel said, “I think we can be twice our size in a year.”