



**rackspace**

Customer Case Study – Retail

# Ulta Beauty enhances its digital customer experience

Rackspace helped this national beauty retailer delight online customers in time for the holiday rush with digital services that mirror an in-person customer experience.

## Our customer

Ulta Beauty is the largest beauty retailer in the U.S. and the premier beauty destination for cosmetics, fragrance, skin, hair care products and salon services.

## The obstacles they faced

The organization wanted to deliver an online experience that mirrored the ease, delight and variety in its stores – but was facing technical challenges leading up to Black Friday.

## How we helped

Business/IT Transformation; Infrastructure; Digital – Oracle Retail; Managed Private Cloud – VMware®; Managed Hybrid Cloud – RackConnect® Global.

## What we achieved together

Ulta Beauty operates a popular website that handles peak-season traffic flow, new-feature beta testing, zero-downtime deployments and near real-time disaster-recovery.



*“Rackspace’s agility and speed in implementing solutions made all the difference in their effectiveness in supporting our growth.”*

Michelle Pacynski  
VP, Guest Facing Systems,  
Ulta Beauty



Ulta Beauty (NASDAQ: ULTA) provides All Things Beauty, All in One Place™. Ulta Beauty also offers a full-service salon in every store, featuring hair, skin and brow services.

Ulta Beauty is recognized for its commitment to personalized service, fun and inviting stores and its industry-leading Ultimate Rewards loyalty program. As of July 2017, Ulta Beauty operates more than 1,000 retail stores across 48 states and the District of Columbia and also distributes its products through its website, [ulta.com](http://ulta.com), which includes a collection of tips, tutorials and social content.

## Preparing for Black Friday

Ulta Beauty’s guests look to [ulta.com](http://ulta.com) for an online experience that mirrors the ease, delight and variety they expect in the store. In late 2012, as they were facing some challenges with upcoming Black Friday, time was of the essence to quickly deliver improvements to support the online guest experience.

To start, they needed to create a consistent look and feel, mirroring the design of their advertising circulars — with the biggest sales getting the largest real estate on the page. And the team needed the flexibility to quickly rearrange and update the page as items sold

out, without the need for caching. The goal was to prevent guests from diving deeper into a product, when it had already sold out and become unavailable.

At the time, the process of updating sold-out items was handled manually. Inventory planners and merchants would watch the inventory levels and, each hour, communicate out-of-stock conditions to the creative team, who would add a “sold out” label to the product image. The IT team would then sync the updated images during its hourly batch run.

Ulta Beauty is always trying to improve to deliver a great guest experience for holiday and throughout the year.

## A complete infrastructure makeover

With help from Rackspace, the Ulta Beauty team started by completely rebuilding their website’s physical infrastructure. “We did so in a very robust way, to support volume and growth,” explained Michelle Pacynski, Vice President of Guest Facing Systems at Ulta Beauty. “More hardware, more thoughtfully deployed.”

Instead of having their entire infrastructure in one location, they separated it. Production would be in Dallas, and non-production disaster recovery would be in Chicago, for geographical diversity.

Also, instead of using all dedicated gear, they began leveraging scalable, virtual servers and Content Delivery Network (CDN) technology.

To overcome the manual process of managing sold-out inventory, the Ulta Beauty team instituted a new system, where all offers were comprised of a set of SKUs, and inventory levels for each SKU were tied to the offers. As the promotions would sell out, “sold out” images would automatically appear on the page, without requiring caching changes.

The result on that Black Friday: **delighted guests**.

## Flexibility and agility to support continued growth

But Ulta Beauty is never complacent with their website performance and reliability. And in 2015, they were ready to take on the next stage of their transformation.

They wanted to take full advantage of current technology architectures, for increased capacity at a reduced expense. So, they started by switching from an Oracle standard agreement to an Oracle unlimited license agreement, which provides flexible deployment options, like virtualization.

“[The unlimited license agreement] really gives us even more flexibility with Rackspace, because now we can put in the latest and greatest processors. We can have it be virtualized,” said Pacynski. “[Virtualization] allows us to scale the infrastructure as traffic volumes grow.”

That year, they migrated over 70 servers within Rackspace to newer platforms, allowing them to easily add on-demand capacity to all of their environments — including production, stress, multiple

non-production development and test environments, and disaster recovery.

Specifically, they migrated their existing Dell R710 / R720 servers to new HP DL380s; replaced or upgraded roughly 45 physical Dell R710 / R720 servers; replaced or upgraded 4 Dell R720 hypervisor servers; and replaced or upgraded 25 existing VMs.

The environment refresh also involved an upgrade to their core infrastructure and application software stack, to include: RHEL 6.7; Apache 2.2.15, JBoss EAP 6, Mod\_JK 1.2.40, JDK 1.8; Commerce 11.2, Endeca 6.5.2; and Oracle 12C.

More importantly, they implemented a dual-site solution, where two guest-facing sites share a single domain and database backend. This allows both sites to work in active-active fashion, splitting traffic 50%-50% during heavy sales seasons. It also makes it possible for them to immediately switch to the other site if there is ever a problem, allowing them to continue with business as usual.

As a result, ulta.com experiences zero-downtime deployments, the freedom to beta test new feature functions by controlling traffic flow and almost real-time disaster-recovery capabilities.

## Leveraging the Rackspace relationship

In late summer 2016, during Ulta Beauty’s routine stress testing, they identified a capacity constraint at the network layer. With only a few weeks remaining before their peak season, they collaborated with their partners, including their dedicated team at Rackspace.

“In a very compressed period of time, a couple of weeks, we had to place equipment and secure key, mission-critical components,” explained Pacynski. “Rackspace was able to

make the change to that tier quickly, with no disruption and before peak season.”

She added, “Our ability to be able to leverage our partnership, and have them react quickly to support our business, in a short period of time, speaks volumes.”

*“Our relationship with Rackspace means we can make changes to our environment, at will.”*

**Michelle Pacynski** – VP, Guest Facing Systems, Ulta Beauty

## About Rackspace

Rackspace is modernizing IT in today’s multi-cloud world. By delivering IT-as-a-service, we help customers of all industries, sizes and locations realize the power of digital transformation without the complexity and expense of managing it on their own. Our comprehensive portfolio of managed services across applications, data, security and infrastructure on the world’s leading public and private cloud platforms enables us to provide unbiased expertise. Rackspace has been honored by Fortune, Forbes, Glassdoor and others as one of the best places to work.

Learn more at [www.rackspace.com](http://www.rackspace.com) or call **1-800-961-2888**.

This case study is for your informational purposes only. RACKSPACE MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, IN THIS CASE STUDY. All customer examples and the information and results illustrated here are based upon the customer’s experiences with the referenced Rackspace services and are not necessarily indicative of the future performance of Rackspace services. Rackspace detailed services descriptions and legal commitments are stated in its services agreements. Rackspace services’ features and benefits depend on system configuration and may require enabled hardware, software or additional service activation. Actual cost of specific hosted environment and performance characteristics will vary depending on individual customer configurations and use case.

Copyright © 2019 Rackspace :: Rackspace®, Fanatical Support®, Fanatical Experience™ and other Rackspace marks are either registered service marks or service marks of Rackspace US, Inc. in the United States and other countries. All other trademarks, service marks, images, products and brands remain the sole property of their respective holders and do not imply endorsement or sponsorship

June 21, 2019 / Rackspace-Case-Study-Ulta-Beauty-ECM-PRI-924