

Ulta Q2 2025: Paid Share Is Up, but Real Growth Looks Different

Ulta's digital shelf is starting to feel a lot like Amazon's. Sponsored placements dominate the first page. Media investment is increasing. And in most categories, the same 3 to 4 brands show up again and again.

But when you go deeper, the picture changes.

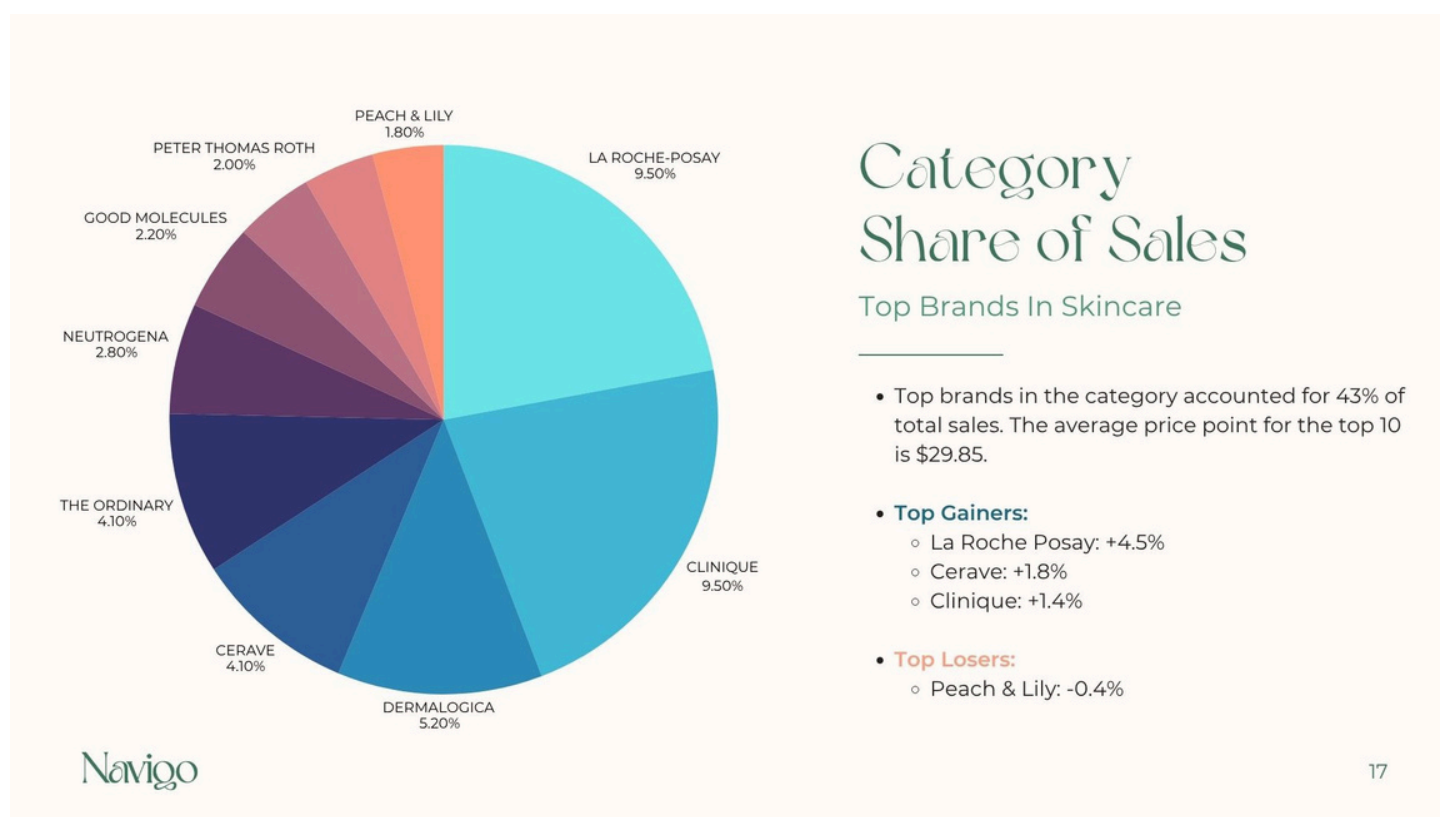
In Q2, we analyzed performance across every major Ulta category, fragrance, skincare, hair, makeup, and tools. What we found was consistent. Media spend is growing. But the return on that spend is becoming less reliable. The brands that look like they are gaining ground often aren't the ones building long-term traction.

The ones that are winning are converting. They are using paid media to amplify products that already work. They are backing spend with structure. And they are showing that what looks like momentum from the outside can often mask a more fragile foundation.

Here's what stood out.

ROC Spent the Most. La Roche-Posay Took the Win.

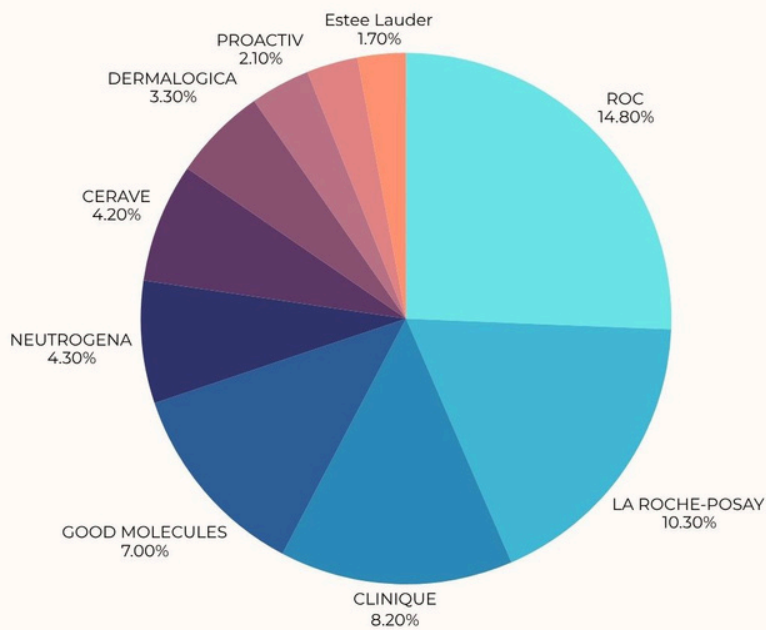
Skincare was one of the most competitive categories in Q2. Every major player was active. Sponsored placements surged. But when we compared ad rankings to sales performance, the gap was clear.



ROC ran 8 of the top 10 sponsored SKUs in skincare. They had massive coverage across retinol, vitamin C, and peptide formats. But despite the spend, not a single one of those SKUs made it into the top 10 for sales.

La Roche-Posay, on the other hand, didn't dominate the sponsored leaderboard. But they showed up multiple times in the top sales rankings. The products were familiar. Trust was high. And conversion followed.

This is what media fragility looks like in real time. One brand paid to be seen. The other earned it.



Skincare Advertising Activity

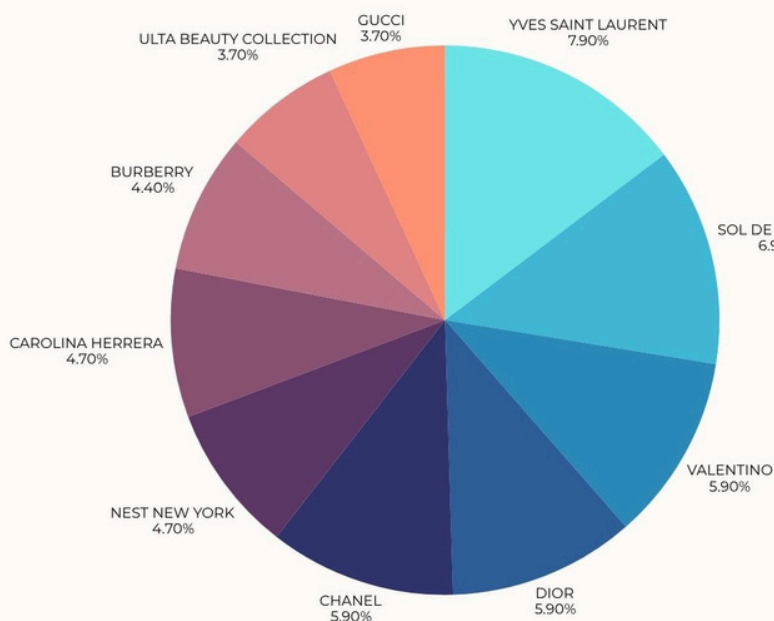
- The Top Brands represented **57.7% of all sponsored product activity** – see breakdown to the left.
- Both Roc & LRP saw big gains QoQ with ROC jumping 13.4% and LRP increasing a more modest 5.7%

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Fragrance Is Splitting in Two

Dior, YSL, and Valentino continued to invest heavily in fragrance. Dior's Sauvage and Miss Dior held top spots in sponsored listings. But when we looked at actual sales, they were overshadowed.



Fragrance Share of Sales

Top Brands In Fragrance

- Top brands in the category accounted for 53.7% of total sales. The average price point for the top 10 is \$76.
- **Top Gainers:**
 - Sol De Janeiro: +2.9%
 - Nest: +3%
- **Top Losers:**
 - Dior: -2.2%
 - Chanel: -1.3%

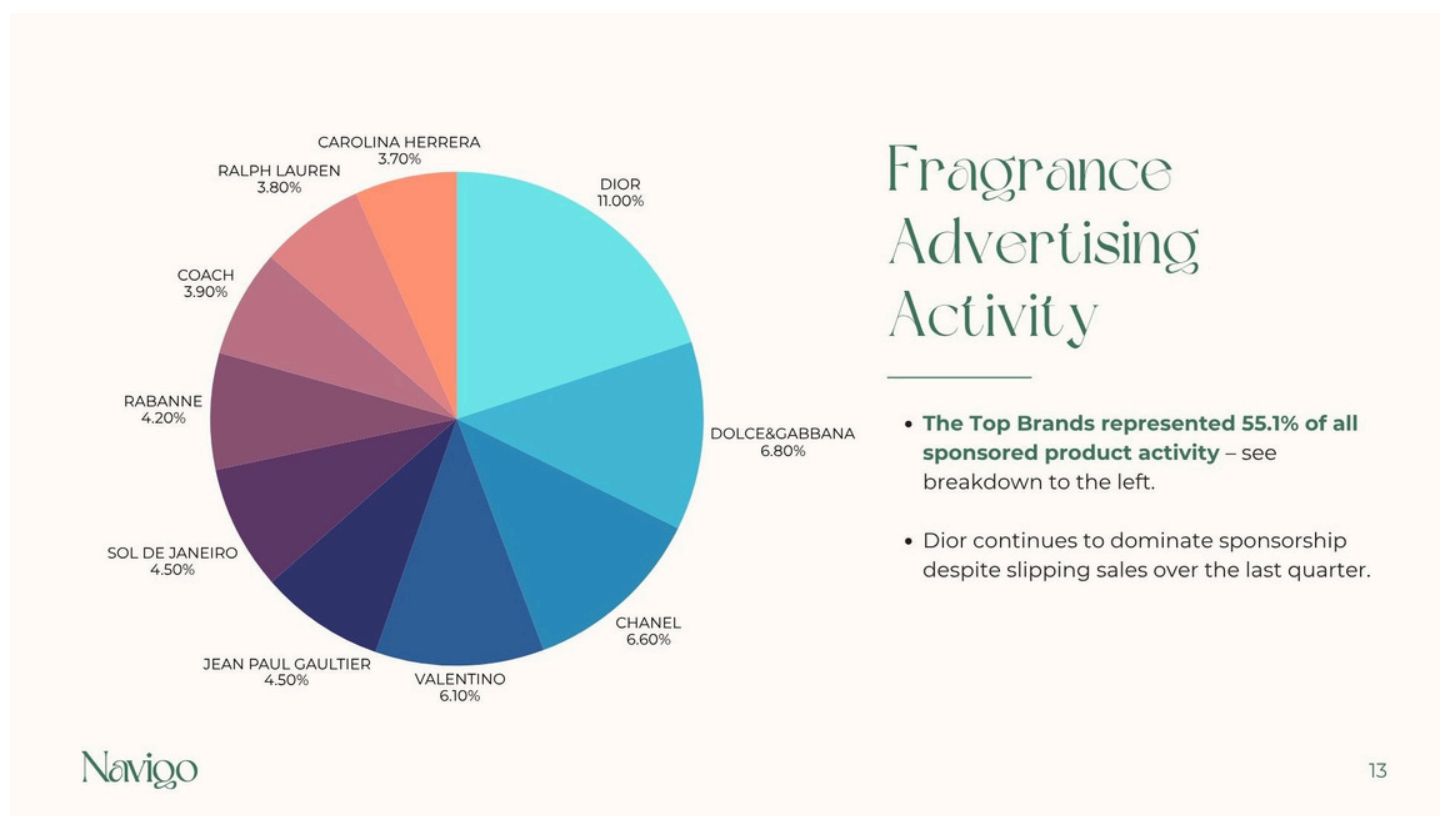
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Sol de Janeiro placed six Cheirosa mists in the top 10 selling SKUs. Cheirosa 62 — priced at \$24 — led the category. Only one traditional prestige EDP made the list: YSL's MYSLF. It

held its own in volume but came in behind several SDJ SKUs, despite a much higher price point.

The trend is clear. Prestige brands are buying attention. Sol de Janeiro is converting it.



This shift isn't just about pricing. It's about format, identity, and routine. SDJ is tapping into a repeat use case that feels more discoverable and less committal. And right now, that is winning.

Conversion Is the Common Thread

Across every category, we saw the same story play out. Paid media helped. But conversion decided the outcome.

Clinique, La Roche-Posay, and Bubble all moved up in sales rankings without leading on ad spend. Their PDPs were strong. Imagery was clean. Reviews were recent. Messaging was specific.

Too many brands are still pushing traffic to pages that aren't ready. No amount of spend can fix a PDP that lacks clarity.

Tools Are Catching Fire

Tool and device brands increased paid media investment by 78 percent in Q2. That was the biggest jump of any category.

Brands like Virtue, Ouai, and Lolavie led the way, focusing their spend on styling tools, brushes, and high-impact single-SKU products. Most positioned their tools as hydration

or scalp-focused solutions. But what really stood out was how clearly they explained it.

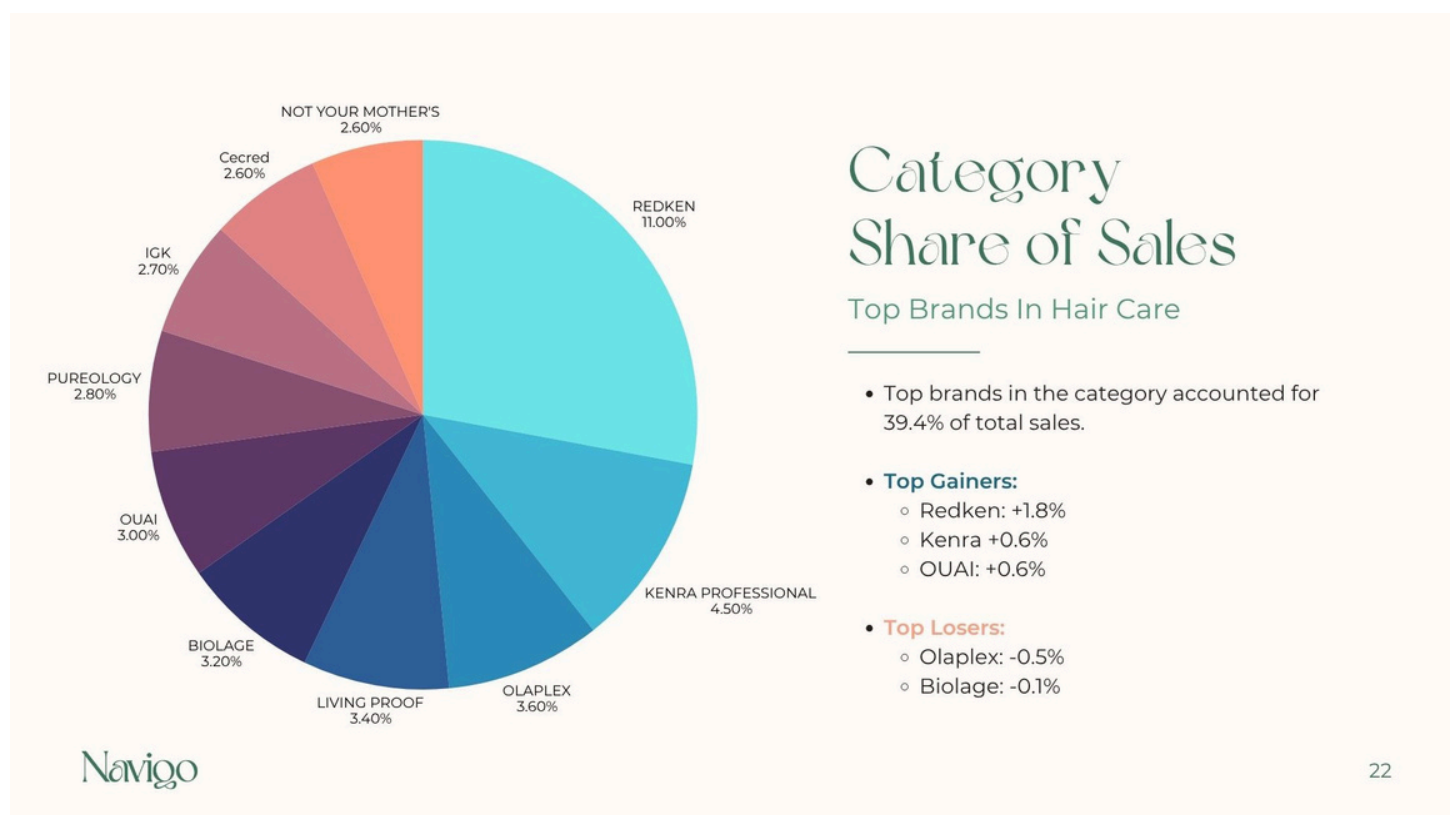
These PDPs worked because they didn't just say "here's what it does." They said "here's why it matters, and how to use it."

We expect more growth here. But only for brands that help the shopper understand the why, not just the what.

Hair Was All About Quiet Strength

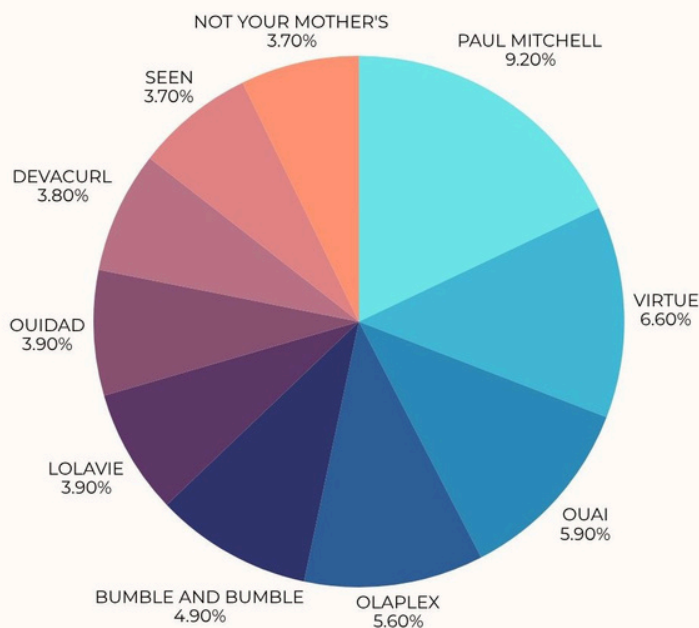
Redken was the top-selling hair brand of the quarter. But they didn't appear in the top 10 for sponsored investment.

This wasn't an outlier. It was a theme.



The brands that showed up in sales didn't always spend the most. They had other strengths — loyalty, shelf stability, repeat rate. Meanwhile, some of the most aggressive spenders failed to show up in top-line volume.

The takeaway is simple. Spend can buy exposure. But it can't replace product-market fit.



Hair Care Advertising Activity

- The Top Brands represented 51.2% of all sponsored product activity – see breakdown to the left.
- Redken does not place in the top sponsorship brands.

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When Spend Doesn't Stick

The brands that struggled in Q2 weren't necessarily invisible. In fact, many of them dominated search results. They had prime ad slots and aggressive placements. But once you turned off the campaign, the momentum disappeared.

Spend went up. Velocity stayed flat. Contribution margins fell short. And the business beneath the media never got stronger.

That is what structural inefficiency looks like. And it's becoming more common.

The Brands That Are Winning Built a System

Paid media is a tool. But it is not a strategy on its own.

The brands that gained share this quarter didn't just spend more. They built systems that made their spend count. They had SKUs that were already converting. They had PDPs that were already working. They had review engines that kept their content fresh.

And when they used media, it worked because it was reinforcing something real, not trying to create it from scratch.

Ulta may be a media platform now. But it still rewards brands that are ready to convert.

If you want the full breakdowns with visuals, PDP examples, and category data, we've pulled all of it into our [Q2 deck](#).



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