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Giving legacy a facelift

A SOCIAL-FIRST STRATEGY AND EXPANSION BEYOND WINTER SKINCARE HAVE HELPED VASELINE IN REACHING THE ₹1,000-CRORE MARK

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THINK VASELINE AND the iconic little blue-capped jar of petroleum jelly comes to mind instantly. Whether you associate it with healing dry lips and cuticles or dealing with flaky knees, the Hindustan Unilever (HUL) brand has been a generational staple in medicine cabinets and on nightstands for close to eight decades now. The brand crossed the ₹1,000 crore annual turnover milestone in India during the financial year 2025-26, joining stablemates Pond's and Glow & Lovely in the coveted club.

Launched globally 150 years ago, Vaseline now offers a range of products such as body lotions, serums, lip balms, sun protection and face care. The milestone comes at a time when the Indian beauty and skincare market is seeing explosive growth, valued at an estimated ₹2.4 lakh crore. Over the last 3-4 years, Vaseline has expanded its range to address one of the major hurdles to its growth —.that its *raison d'être* is but a seasonal trigger. The body care market in general has singlemindedly focused on solving the problem of winter dryness. Consumers reached for body care products when their skin cracked in the cold and put the bottles away when the mercury began to climb.

To that extent, Vaseline, despite its rich legacy and household presence, became relevant only during the winter. Its challenge was to make its brand aspirational and relevant all-year round. Pratik Ved, vice-president, skin care, HUL, says Vaseline addressed this challenge in recent years with a transformation that was rooted in certain key pillars. "We 'de-seasonalised' body care with lighter sensorials and benefits. We extended the brand's moisturisation equity to face care. We accelerated penetration by recruiting new users in the winter with improved core body lotions," says Ved.

Going social-first

At a time when D2C or digital-first brands are driving the beauty market's explosive growth by reframing category narrative, Vaseline's legacy has in fact been the key to its success. "Consumers meet Vaseline long before they have an opinion on skincare. By the time a young Indian is old enough to read an ingredient list, Vaseline already carries the weight of memory. Moreover, Indian consumers tend to add rather than discard. That means the rise of D2C brands has only widened the product repertoire without displacing the staples, and Vaseline sits comfortably beside a flashy actives brand because each is doing a different emotional job," observes Rutu Mody Kamdar, founder, Jigsaw Brand Consultants.

Vaseline has in fact taken a leaf out of the D2C marketing playbook that rests largely on creator-led collaborations on social media. Ved explains that one of the pillars of the brand's transformation was "designing for the social-first demand generation". Vaseline did that effectively with the launch of its Gluta-Hya offering, which has a serum-like texture and benefits similar to face care. Ved notes that Gluta-Hya successfully scaled up to become a bestseller across e-commerce, quick-commerce, and modern trade platforms. "It has shown that agile execution can create sizable new businesses and redefine what a legacy brand like Vaseline can be," he adds.

Vaseline's boldest move has been its entry into face care, with the launch of its Cloud Soft light moisturiser designed for "weightless" facial and body moisturisation in India's hot summers. The brand flew top digital creators to unveil the product while skydiving, mid-freefall, making the social-first demand generation the core of its playbook.

Industry observers note that D2C brands are driving legacy brands such as Vaseline to add new products to their portfolio or cater to new consumer segments such as Gen Z that are driving growth. Santosh Sreedhar, partner, Avalon Consulting, says, "D2C brands have been able to address micro-segments in ways legacy brands have not been able to or stayed away from because volumes were lower. Legacy brands today either add new variants for categories that are emerging or acquire brands that have built scale in these categories."

Sreedhar points to HUL's acquisition of skincare start-up Minimalist last year, as well as other acquisitions by large firms. Marico acquired Beardo in the men's grooming segment while L'Oreal too recently acquired a majority stake in Innovist, which owns brands like Bare Anatomy and Sun Scoop. Sreedhar expects legacy brands to continue their dominance in the beauty and personal care market, much like other FMCG categories, though D2C brands will continue to make some dents.

Kamdar has a word of caution for Vaseline as it aligns itself with D2C trends. "Every step towards serums and social glow pulls Vaseline into a crowded 'beauty' aisle where it must fight everyone at once. Its real moat is healing, a territory no D2C brand can credibly claim overnight," she sums up.

BIG BEAUTY BETS

■ The Indian beauty and personal care market was estimated at **₹2.4 lakh cr** in 2025, set to reach **₹2.9 lakh cr** in 2028

■ Vaseline hit **₹1,000 cr** revenue in FY26, driven by double-digit growth in premium skincare

■ Vaseline is sharpening its focus on younger consumers with creator collaborations, social-first marketing and the launch of Gluta-Hya

■ The brand recently forayed into face care with the launch of Cloud Soft