

How to Build the Best E-Commerce Product Filters for Beauty Retail

With the boom in online shopping, a familiar challenge has surfaced: decision fatigue—also known as the Netflix effect. You know the feeling—endlessly scrolling through shows, unsure what to pick.

Futurist and author Alvin Toffler coined the term *choice overload* back in 1970's *Future Shock*, predicting that future generations (that's us) would struggle with too many options—and he was right.

This issue is particularly acute in e-commerce, where thousands of products can overwhelm even the most decisive shopper. Fortunately, modern filtering tools allow users to narrow down their choices based on what matters to them. Granular filters are among the most effective. While common in industries like fashion and furniture, the beauty sector has yet to fully embrace them.

What Are Granular Filters?

Think of how brick-and-mortar stores are organized—clothing is segmented by gender, category, and use-case. Online stores mimic this system with filters that help shoppers refine results based on criteria like price, color, or material.

The more specific the filters, the easier it becomes for customers to find exactly what they're looking for. In beauty e-commerce, however, granular filters are still rare.

Even major players like Sephora and Douglas don't consistently offer filters by skin tone when browsing for foundation. Many retailers rely on broad categories instead of providing targeted, product-specific filtering options. Why? Because capturing this kind of detailed product metadata retroactively—across thousands of SKUs—is a massive lift.

That said, a few specialty beauty retailers like SpaceNK are beginning to adopt smarter filtering systems, allowing shoppers to search by brand, product type, and even skincare goals. But these are the exception, not the rule.

Why Smart Product Filtering is Crucial for E-Commerce Growth

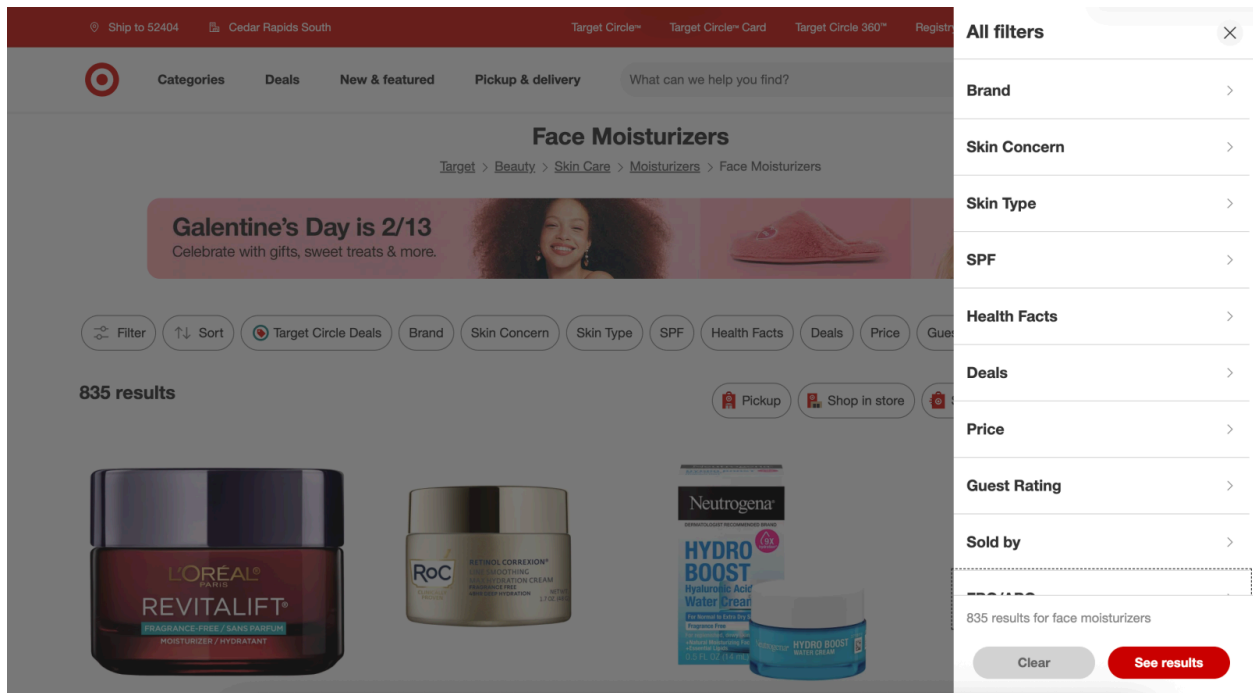
Shoppers don't want to sift through hundreds of items—they want relevant options, fast. That's where smart filters make all the difference.

With granular filters still underutilized in beauty, brands that adopt them now can gain a competitive edge. Here's why these tools are so impactful:

Meeting Consumer Expectations

Today's shoppers expect tailored, efficient online experiences. Filters that reflect actual user needs—like skin type, concern, price range, or ingredient preferences—save time and reduce frustration.

Whether it's matching undertones in a foundation or avoiding specific allergens in skincare, precise filters empower users to self-select what works for them. Clear language and intuitive UX are essential—confusing terms or disorganized filters lead to drop-off. The more relevant and transparent the filter, the better the shopping experience—and the higher the chance of conversion.



Target failing to offer Ingredient Filters for Skin Care

REFINE BY

KEY INGREDIENTS

☒ Retinol & Retinoids
 ☐ Hyaluronic Acid
 ☐ Vitamin C
 ☐ Acids (AHAs & BHAs)
 ☐ Peptides

SKIN TYPE

☐ Normal
 ☐ Dry
 ☒ Combination
 ☐ Sensitive
 ☐ Oily

SPF

☐ No SPF
 ☐ SPF 15 & Under
 ☐ SPF 16–30
 ☒ SPF 31–50+

SKIN TONE

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

UNDERTONE

☐ ☐ ☐

Improving the Customer Experience

Great filters simplify the journey from product discovery to purchase. They help users avoid decision fatigue and keep browsing from becoming a chore.

When filters are well-designed—clean layout, clear hierarchy, real-time updates—shopping feels effortless. This ease builds trust, improves retention, and encourages repeat visits.

Faster Product Discovery

Smart filters significantly cut down the time it takes to locate the right product. Rather than scrolling endlessly, users can instantly surface items that match their criteria.

Quick, personalized results lead to greater satisfaction and reduce the likelihood of abandonment. When users find what they want faster, they're more likely to convert.

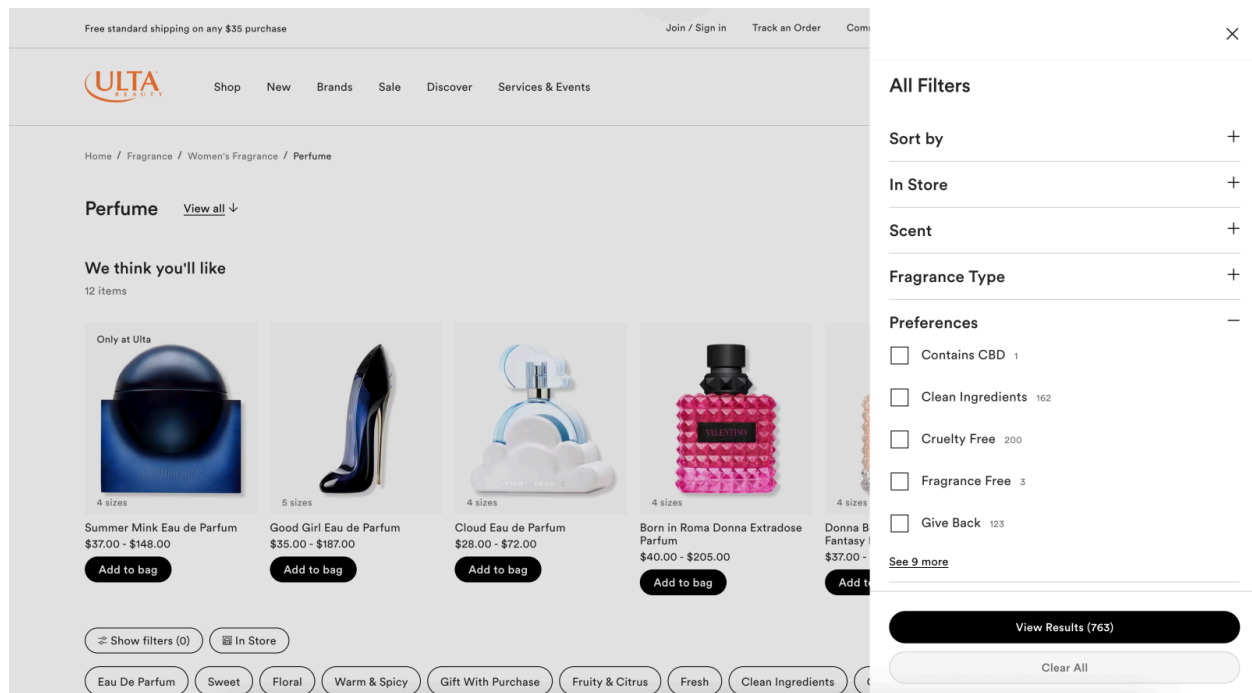
REFINE BY

HAIR TYPE	SCALP TYPE	HAIR GOALS	HAIR COLOR
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curly	<input type="checkbox"/> Sensitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hydrating	<input type="checkbox"/> Blond
<input type="checkbox"/> Kinky	<input type="checkbox"/> Greasy	<input type="checkbox"/> Heat / UV Protection	<input type="checkbox"/> Platinum
<input type="checkbox"/> Wavy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dandruff	<input type="checkbox"/> Colour Protection	<input type="checkbox"/> White
<input type="checkbox"/> Straight	<input type="checkbox"/> Dry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thickening	<input type="checkbox"/> Black
<input type="checkbox"/> Colored		<input type="checkbox"/> Volumising	<input type="checkbox"/> Brown
<input type="checkbox"/> Fine		<input type="checkbox"/> Detoxifying	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Copper
<input type="checkbox"/> Thick		<input type="checkbox"/> Scalp Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Chestnut
		<input type="checkbox"/> Damage Repair	<input type="checkbox"/> Red

Higher Conversion Rates

The faster a customer finds what they're looking for, the more likely they are to make a purchase. Smart filters reduce friction and lead shoppers directly to relevant products, which increases confidence—and sales.

Websites that feel intuitive and user-friendly foster trust. That trust translates into more completed purchases and stronger brand loyalty.



Ulta failing to provide Fragrance Filters for Season and Occasions

REFINE BY

SCENT TYPE

☒ Floral
 ☐ Citrus
 ☐ Fruity
 ☐ Oriental
 ☐ Woody
 ☐ Warm Spicy

LONGEVITY

☐ Long-lasting
 ☐ Intense
 ☒ Subtle

SCENT STYLE

☐ Modern
 ☐ Traditional
 ☒ Delicate
 ☐ Confident
 ☐ Intense
 ☐ Sporty

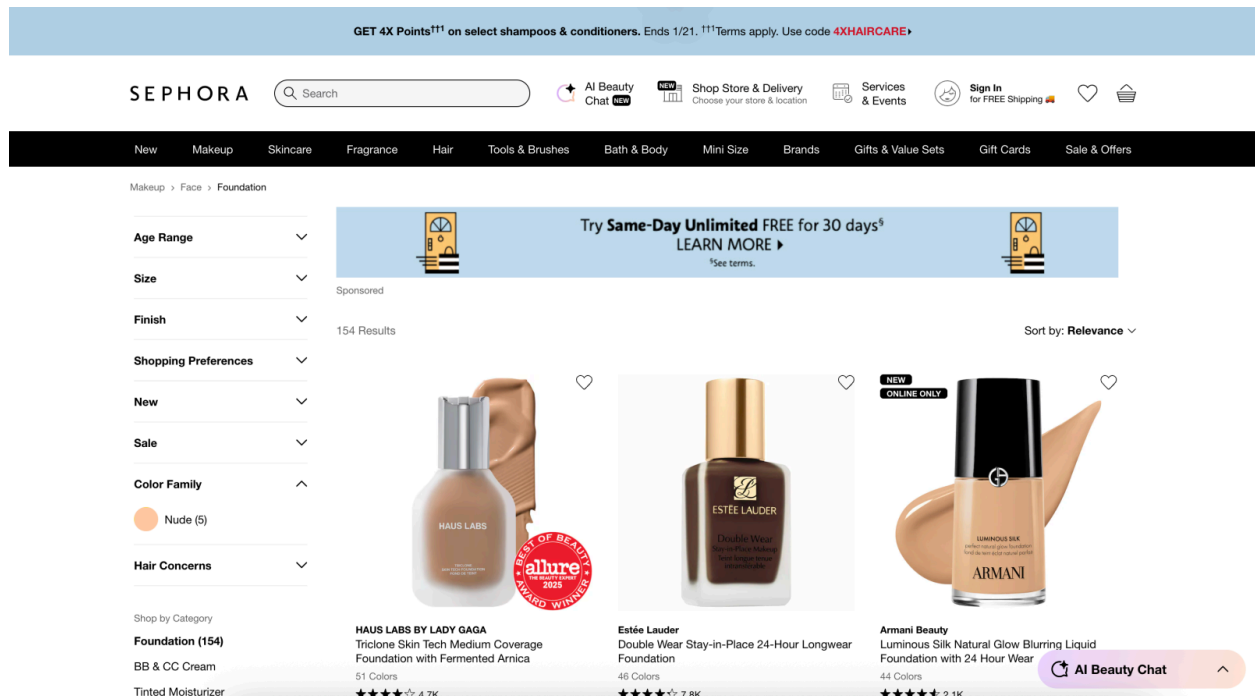
OCCASION

☐ Versatile
 ☐ Day
 ☒ Evening

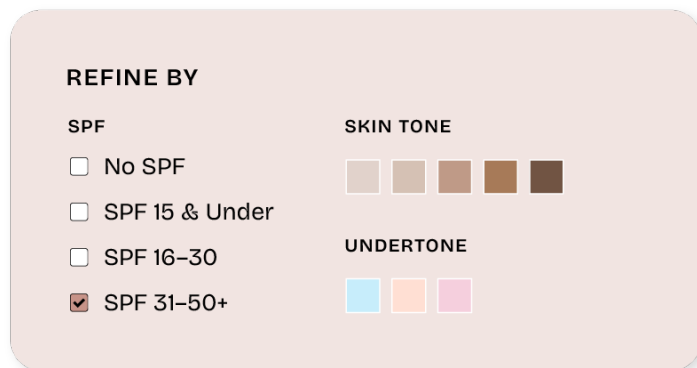
Reduced Bounce Rates

Confusing or missing filters often lead to higher bounce rates. Shoppers will leave a site if finding a product feels difficult or time-consuming.

On the flip side, intelligent filtering systems keep users engaged. When browsing is simple and enjoyable, shoppers stick around longer—and often buy more.



Sephora.com failing to filter by Skin Tone



The Power of Visual Filters

Visual elements make filters faster to use and more intuitive. A red color swatch communicates faster than the word “red.” Mini-icons or images that show consistency (gel, cream), shades, or even key ingredients can enhance usability and minimize cognitive load.

Visual filters are especially valuable in categories like makeup, skincare, and fragrance. Done right, they elevate both function and design.

Supporting Values-Based Shopping

Shoppers increasingly want products—and brands—that align with their values. According to a 2022 Google Report, 82% of shoppers prefer brands that share their values, and 66% actively seek eco-conscious products.

Granular filters support this shift by enabling users to search by sustainability criteria, such as “vegan,” “recyclable packaging,” or “free from” specific ingredients.

Take Import Parfumerie in Switzerland as an example. With over 17,000 SKUs, they partnered with Inference Beauty to layer in additional filters such as:

- Olfactory Family and Fragrance Style
- Color Selections for makeup
- Ingredient preferences and Clean Beauty icons
- SPF, Skin Type, and Hair Type indicators

The result? A more curated, values-aligned shopping experience for their customers.

Gaining Consumer Insights

Filters don’t just serve customers—they provide actionable first-party data. Understanding which filters are most used can reveal consumer preferences and inform merchandising, marketing, and inventory decisions.

By leveraging this behavioral data, brands can better anticipate demand and optimize product offerings.

Must-Have Filters for Beauty E-Commerce

To build effective product filters, start with what matters most to your audience. Use filter types like:

- **Color** (including undertone/overtone)
- **Price range**
- **Skin type and concern**
- **Key ingredients**
- **SPF or coverage level**
- **Hair type or goal**
- **Values filters** (vegan, cruelty-free, etc.)

Make sure filters are easy to find, allow for multi-select, display active selections, and are mobile-optimized. Test and refine regularly for best performance.

Prioritize the Most-Used Filters

Put the most popular filters—like price, size, or skin type—at the top of your filter stack. These are often a shopper’s starting point. Burying them below less-used options creates unnecessary friction.

A thoughtful filter hierarchy improves navigation and user confidence.

Color Filtering

Beauty shoppers are often well-versed in their tone and color preferences. Offering color filters—especially those tied to undertone—helps them find products that truly match.

This is particularly important in makeup categories like foundation, blush, and lipstick.

Ingredient Preferences

Customers with allergies or ingredient sensitivities shouldn’t have to inspect every product page. Ingredient filters allow them to instantly exclude items with specific actives or allergens, streamlining their experience.

Price Range

Let users filter by what fits their budget. Price filters help eliminate irrelevant results and improve conversion—especially for price-conscious shoppers.

Highlight Key Filters

Certain filters drive faster decisions. Features like “Best Seller,” “Free Shipping,” or “New Arrival” can be highlighted with icons or color to attract attention.

These spotlighted filters help guide customers and increase engagement.

At Inference Beauty, we work with retailers to design custom granular filter systems that match their unique product mix. Whether you need filters for fragrance notes, hair goals, SPF level, or values-driven categories—we’ve got you covered.

Frequently Asked Questions

What makes a filter user-friendly?

A good filter is intuitive, clearly labeled, and easy to scan. Layout should be clean, with enough space between elements to avoid clutter or confusion.

How many filters should I use?

Focus on relevance. Use only the filters that truly help users find the right product. Too many options can overwhelm, so keep it curated.

Should filters be consistent across all pages?

Not necessarily. Tailor filters to the category. For example, skincare might include ingredients and skin type, while fragrance should focus on olfactory family or longevity.

Can filters work with search?

Absolutely. Filters and search bars complement each other. Search helps users express intent; filters help refine results. Together, they make for a seamless UX.

Should filters update results in real time?

Yes, real-time filtering keeps the experience fluid. Avoid full page reloads whenever possible—speed matters.

How can I support first-time visitors?

Keep it simple. Use tooltips or brief descriptions for complex filters. Prioritize popular options and use intuitive design.

Is it okay to hide some filters?

Yes. Place rarely used filters under a “More Options” dropdown to keep the layout tidy without sacrificing usability.

Do filters affect site speed?

They can. Poorly coded filters or heavy scripts can slow your site. Use optimized code and avoid unnecessary reloads for a modern, responsive experience.

How do I keep filters updated with inventory?

Start with structured product data or work with partners like Inference Beauty to enrich and organize your catalog. We offer beauty-specific filter solutions that scale with your business and drive results.

Inference Beauty is not a generic data provider. They are a beauty tech partner, helping brands and retailers implement smart filtering systems that enhance UX, reduce bounce rates, and increase conversions. From ingredient data to behavioral insights, we make it easy to deliver a personalized, transparent shopping experience—at scale.