

# Project Connect Finalists Announced

The grant initiative from Unilever Prestige and WWD aims to uplift the next generation of entrepreneurs who are humanizing tech and bridging the digital divide.

Following a review of applications from innovative companies across many industries, Council Members of Project Connect: Bridging the Digital Divide, WWD and Unilever Prestige’s most recent grant program, picked the top four finalists as well as an honorable mention. They are bold visionaries and trailblazers who are solving real problems. And all are women-owned.

We are pleased to announce the finalists, in no particular order, are: Klara, Savitude, Hue Beauty, and GlossWire. The honorable mention went to Safai.

All applicants were graded against a diverse set of criteria, focused on how the business solves a clearly defined problem in the market; if the business model prioritizes social impact; and whether they offer industry advancements at the intersection of technology and human touch.

Esteemed Project Connect Council Members include Vasiliki Petrou, Executive Vice President and Group Chief Executive Officer of Unilever Prestige; Amanda Smith, President of Fairchild Media Group (parent of WWD); Carla Nelson, Founder of the Black Fashion World Foundation; Kevin Fried, Director of Retail at Google; John Melo, President and Chief Executive Officer of Amyris, and Vicky Tsai, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Tatcha.

## Klara

FOUNDED IN 2020 BY KIMILOLUWA FAFOWORA

For Klara founder Kimiloluwa Fafowora, shopping is a social experience. “Just take a second to think about what drove you to make your last skincare purchase,” she said. “If you’re like most consumers, you were introduced by a sales associate, friend, family member, or influencer whom you identify with. That’s because today’s shopper trusts regular people sharing honest experiences to make purchase decisions.”

Founded in 2020 during the global pandemic, Klara’s solution integrates personalized product advice into the digital shopping experience in an easy, AI-driven way.

“Unlike other social proof solutions on the market, we embed content that is high-quality, educational, and personalized,” Fafowora explained. “As creators discuss ingredient details, how specific products affect their unique skin type, concerns, etc — the shopper watching gains a thorough overview on whether or not a particular product might be a fit. As we build out our data set, our machine

“We’ll advance the overall industry by bringing the human feel back to the shopping experience.”

**Kimiloluwa Fafowora**, founder of Klara

learning capabilities will help us build increasingly complex models that help us recommend the perfect products for shoppers in need of good recommendations. As such, we’ll advance the overall industry by bringing the human feel back to the shopping experience.”

Regarding lessons learned in launching the company, Fafowora said testing was essential. “As a vision-oriented

founder, I’m constantly tempted to turn my ideas into reality as soon as possible,” she admitted. “The truth is that’s not how the best products are built. Instead, we’ve learned to take every new idea, deconstruct it into a series of assumptions, and then run small experiments to test those assumptions. That small change has led to some of our most successful features and ensures that we continue to build a solution that our customers love.”

When asked about the long-term goals for the company, Fafowora has a bold and bright vision: She sees Klara humanizing the digital world by building solutions that facilitate an inclusive and interpersonal connection in various online environments.

“We’re starting with a video shopping solution that is native e-commerce pages, but we have a roadmap of solutions that will also digitize the best parts of shopping in person,” she noted. “We’re hoping Project Connect will introduce us to mentors who can use their prior experience to offer strategic guidance and coach us through important decisions. We don’t take institutional knowledge for granted, and would leverage this relationship with Unilever Prestige and WWD to scale in the smartest way possible.”

Klara Founder Kimiloluwa Fafowora



GlossWire Founder Kimberly Carney

## GlossWire

FOUNDED IN 2017 BY KIMBERLY CARNEY

When Kimberly Carney launched GlossWire, it was with the goal of disrupting the beauty space with a platform that provides brand amplification and enables consumers to discover new products in a highly digital and direct-to-consumer world.

GlossWire is a two-sided global marketplace offering a one-stop solution for personalization, innovation and real-time insights into consumer shopping and behavior patterns. For the consumer, the platform offers a journey of organic discovery of worldwide beauty through its curation, education and community and immersive swipe voting. For brands this means gaining access to real-time data as well as insights on consumer trends and shopping behavior on the GlossWire platform.

The platform is designed to help beauty brands more effectively plan to expand offerings or streamline strategies by leveraging consumer feedback collected through immersive experiences.

“GlossWire is about connecting brands and consumers,” Carney said. “Our swipe technology and social inte-

“Long term we will continue to leverage technology for even stronger brand-consumer connectivity.”

**Kimberly Carney**, founder of GlossWire



gration tools offer our brand partners tools that do not exist anywhere else in the beauty space. Long term we will continue to leverage technology for even stronger brand-consumer connectivity.”

A key priority for the company, Carney said, is to stay on the cutting edge of new technologies and constantly present innovative user experiences that drive user adoption and engagement. At the same time, as GlossWire has grown consumer education as key piece of its hyper-curated product offering, particularly in the relatively new world of direct-to-consumer beauty. To fuel education and transparency, GlossWire has started offering BeautyTalks, a series of brand interviews and deep dives on products through social media which offers both brands and consumers a place for interactive feedback.

“The pandemic gave rise to an immediate conversion to buying online,” said Carney. “We adapted quickly to making that transition to digital seamless by allowing consumers a great online alternative to their former in-store experience. Today’s consumers want information about the products they are buying that goes beyond efficacy, and they expect to have a voice. What used to be a simple purchase that focused around, ‘does the product deliver what it says.’ Now, the consumer wants to know where the product was produced, the brand’s connectivity to social change and deep information about product ingredients.”

Looking ahead, Carney said this connectivity is something the company plans to continue to build upon. She hopes to continue to make an impact by working with inclusive emerging and established brands in the beauty and grooming space.

“It deeply aligns with my passion, as a female founder, to inspire a movement in the beauty ecosystem,” said Carney. “Through our GlossWire pitch competitions, commitment to philanthropy, and support of our worldwide network of brands, I want to offer more resources for female founders, while making technology more approachable for everyone.”



Co-founders of Hue Beauty, Anvi Shah, Nicole Clay and Sylvan Guo.

**Hue Beauty**

FOUNDED IN 2021 BY JANVI SHAH, NICOLE CLAY AND SYLVAN GUO

Created from a shared understanding of the personal struggle with the lack of representation in the beauty industry, Hue Beauty is a beauty tech startup on a mission to empower every beauty shopper to find the perfect makeup products for their unique complexion.

Poised to become the ‘Pantone’ industry-wide standard for color matching, Hue Beauty offers a clear solution for the lack of skin tone standardization in beauty with a creative approach that bridges the gap between tech and touch. Already in beta with brand partners and shoppers, the beauty tech platform aims to help consumers find the perfect shade to match their unique skin tone through a combination of photo technology, an

“  
We’ve learned that what people are really looking for beyond AI and technology is authenticity and human connection.”

**Anvi Shah, Nicole Clay And Sylvan Guo,**  
co-founders of Hue Beauty

in-platform social community of beauty advisors (called “Skin Twins”), and customized sampling kits that let consumers try-at-home.

“In speaking with shoppers about shade matching today, we’ve learned that what people are really looking for beyond AI and technology is authenticity and human connection,” said Janvi Shah, Nicole Clay and Sylvan Guo, co-founders of Hue Beauty. “Our goal is to marry the two by using technology to connect shoppers with a community of people with a similar skin tone who give authentic recommendations.”

Further, the three women of color said as the business has grown, they have learned that “beauty is inherently subjective and it’s not just about giving accurate matches but [also] taking into account personal preferences and seeing yourself represented. That’s why we were so excited by Project Connect, as we resonate deeply with their mission of advancing the connection between technology and human touch.”

Looking ahead, Shah, Clay and Guo’s vision for Hue Beauty is to enhance the platform to include other color categories including lip, eye, skincare and nails in the U.S. as well as expanding into global markets. At the same time, they envision expanding the “Skin Twin” community beyond skin tone to other areas of conversation such as skin type and skin maturity, giving consumers access to evidence-based and highly personalized recommendations they can trust, from people with similar skin characteristics.

“Project Connect will be a gamechanger in helping us to reach our goal of becoming an industry standard, as Unilever Prestige and WWD will give us direct exposure to beauty brand leaders across the industry for us to partner with to develop our shade matching platform,” said Shah, Clay and Guo. “Additionally, we’ll greatly benefit from mentorship from Unilever’s industry leaders as we scale our business.”

**Savitude**

FOUNDED IN 2016 BY CAMILLA OLSON

Camilla Olson’s Savitude addresses the \$120 billion “inclusivity gap” in fashion by leveraging technology that helps designers and merchandisers at apparel brands bring a range of shapes and sizes to market that reflect realistic body types of today’s consumer base.

“Savitude’s Design Studio has powerful image recognition technology, machine learning, and a knowledge base rooted in aesthetics and preservation of brand DNA,” Olson said.

The company not only looked at fit as a broad problem, Olson went deeper into the root causes of it. “Our solution focused on fitting the consumer by matching specific items to a body shape of the consumer,” she said. “Even though we proved an 11 percent lift after returns, we saw that groups of consumers had no clothes recommended to them. Nothing would fit their body.”

So, instead, Savitude asked why this was occurring. “We found that designers weren’t designing by body shape, leaving so many people out of fashion with no clothes to fit their broad shoulders, short or long torsos,



Founder of Savitude, Camilla Olson.

and height or weight differences,” Olson said, adding that the company developed a product “to help designers create for all body types and for merchandisers to help with assortment planning. We realized the true problem to be solved was society’s bias toward the hourglass woman.”

As a result, the Savitude Design Studio created a solution that increases sales and conversions, reduces end-of-season excess inventory, and builds a better relationship with consumers

through personalization, Olson said.

When asked how being a finalist of Project Connect can help reach her company’s goals, Olson said the long-term goal is more than inclusion. “We want to change the definition in what is beautiful, in how we create clothes and improve everyone’s access to beautiful clothes,” she explained. “It’s not about fast fashion, it’s about who is being considered by the design studio. Some 40 to 50 percent of women cannot go to the store and find something that was designed with their body in mind. Imagine going to the store time after time and feeling rejection instead of joy.”

Behind the company’s solution is a business philosophy that is also pioneering. Olson said since the company’s launch, “we have believed in choice and transparency. These go hand-in-hand.”

“Giving everyone a choice has given us wonderful relationships, understanding, and a better vision of our future,” Olson explained, adding that she presents opportunities in “contrasts and alternatives.” This helps remind her team that their customer has their own POV. “Getting to understand others with empathy will always improve the self and organization,” she added.

**Honorable Mention: Sufai**

FOUNDED IN 2020 BY ADEYINKA ADIATU

Sufai is on a mission to shift the CPG industry toward sustainable packaging by creating a digital platform and physical refill stations that make it easy for consumers to transition to sustainable lifestyles. Stuck overseas at the onset of pandemic, founder Adeyinka Adiatu saw first-hand how hard it was for low-income communities to access essential cleaning supplies because of price hikes and world-wide shortages. Recognizing a real need, she started buying bulk products to resell at a fraction of the cost by refilling existing containers.

Upon returning to the states, Adiatu conceptualized how to scale the initiative into automated refill stations to benefit consumers and environment. Though they are still in the development phase, Sufai inspired the Council with their vision for a sustainable future, earning them an honorable mention.

“[While] innovation is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own to be able to make mass changes towards sustainability,” said Adiatu. “By educating users with our digital platform we hope to incentivize people with the benefits of sustainability and its efficiency to create a natural movement and favor for a way of living that is long overdue.”