



SPECIAL REPORT
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A look back at... Metropolitan Cosmetics

Only two years old and Metropolitan Cosmetics has already carved itself a niche in South Africa's beauty market. Wilfrid Moulin and wife Melissa Brown came up with the prestige, multi-brand store concept in June 2004, when they opened their first outlet in Johannesburg's up-market Hyde Park Shopping Centre. The formula seems to have worked: Metropolitan now has four doors in the country.

The retailer's elegance is unique in a market where prestige and mass are sold side by side in department stores and pharmacies, and its policy of only stocking exclusives contributes to its quality image.

With mainstream brands sold in department stores, Metropolitan's niche approach is a refreshing change, and the little extras—efficient service, intelligent sampling and elegant packaging—make it a success.

Smashbox vice president international Norm Barsky, who is about to launch the US color-cosmetics brand in South Africa through Metropolitan, comments, "Metropolitan knows its customer well and it

has very good beauty assistants."

In keeping with its prestige strategy, its four doors are all located in upscale shopping centers. In fact, when the lease for the Cape Town outlet at the V&A Waterfront ends in March 2007, Metropolitan will look to relocate to a more upmarket area.

More stores are on the cards, with two new outlets to open in 2007 in Pretoria and in Johannesburg's Eastgate Shopping Centre. Moulin explains that in order to maintain its image, these will probably be the only new standalones for some time. The company will then focus on its shop-in-shop concept, Best of Metro, which will offer the month's bestsellers in department stores.

The retailer also has a growing online business and all of its brands will be available on its website from late October. Moulin says that the online sales can exceed those of the retailer's Cape Town outlet.

With a 2006 forecast turnover of R26m-R30m (\$3.82m-\$4.41m), we can expect Metropolitan to continue pioneering niche beauty in South Africa. ■

ICN mystery shopper: Bergdorf Goodman

► **Location:** 754 Fifth Avenue, New York City

► **Time:** Weekday evening

Although most New Yorkers are used to the fact that Bergdorf Goodman's beauty department is in the basement, it is still confusing for the less frequent visitor. On entering the store there is little signage to the escalator, which is hidden behind a pillar. Going to the beauty floor via a single escalator is also disorientating, as one emerges to see only a small part of the area, most notably Shu Uemera, La Mer, Natura Bissé, and Chanel. A customer looking for a particular brand would struggle to find her way.



The acoustics also mean that the noise is initially overwhelming. However, the lack of natural light is overcome by a white color scheme and airy layout. The main floor offers staples such as Clinique, alongside more exotic South Korean brand Amore and US foundation specialist Becca. The niche fragrance area is cleverly allocated to complement an offer that includes Clive Christian and the Jar fragrances exclusive from Paris.

One downside is the Wolford (lingerie) offer confusingly placed the middle of the beauty hall.

While staff proffered samples and makeovers, their product knowledge was sometimes lacking: "an old French brand" is how Guerlain was described to ICN. But overall, the basement pulls the consumer in, and ICN happily lost 45 minutes in the space. ■

ICN Store scoreboard

- **Layout:** 7/10
- **Product selection:** 9/10
- **Product advice:** 6/10
- **Staff efficiency:** 7/10
- **Staff attitude:** 9/10

Interview

Boosting service

Harvey Nichols Hong Kong puts the focus on personalized services. The store's director of beauty Anita Yuen talks to ICN about the strategy

ICN > The company opened its Hong Kong outlet last September. How has the store performed?

AY > We have arranged a lot of press events and a promotional campaign in addition to our concept to target consumers, and it was fruitful. Being new to the market, we are starting from zero and there is room to improve, but we are satisfied with the performance so far.

We launched the magazine *HN Beauty* in May, organized joint promotions with the press, and are holding high tea events in our restaurant. We plan to organize more product- and quality-driven personalized services.

In September, we are launching a "must-have panel" in a special area to help consumers discover the "musts" in personal care and will also open a nail art service counter.

ICN > How is the store's beauty business going?

AY > Skincare is the best-selling category, followed by make-up and fragrance. Prestige skincare brands, such as Chanel, are the most popular, while limited edition or trendy make-up brands like Sue Devitt, and designer fragrance brands Aqua di Parma, have also done extremely well.

ICN > What do you see as the next big trends in skincare and make-up?

AY > For skincare, it will be doctor brands using natural ingredients as consumers are requesting higher quality. For make-up, artistic brands, such as Shu Uemura, will lead the way.

ICN > How should brands improve their offer and way of working with you?

AY > To fit with our concept, brands could offer more personal service—invite more consumers to experience the product in-store. They could also improve their displays to be more functional and show the brand's style. ■