

COSMETIC NEWS

WEEKLY

No 459 / January 31 2011

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INTERVIEW

Wilfrid Moulin, founder, Metropolitan Cosmetics, South Africa Offering 'alternative high end' not 'niche'

Wilfrid Moulin is one of the founders, together with business partner Melissa Brown, of Metropolitan Cosmetics, the pioneering luxury beauty emporium in Johannesburg, South Africa. Focusing on results-driven skin care and exclusive cult fragrances and make-up brands, Metropolitan has, for the last six years, consistently offered an unparalleled range of products as well as a sophisticated level of service that is above the norm in South Africa. Recently, Metropolitan embarked on a store redesign, starting with the Sandton City boutique, which is part of its business strategy for 2011.

What is the rationale behind the store redesign?

The idea was to modernize the store and freshen up the look. We put in huge visuals in keeping with the French atmosphere inherent in the Metropolitan ethos. But we've also gone for a more high-tech approach to the whole experience. And, the fittings are modular – they can be moved around the store to create more space or to highlight particular product categories.

There is an emphasis on fragrance. We've created a fragrance wall that only displays testers, so you can take customers on a walk through. Think of it as a mood wall where you can actually tell a story through perfume, as the testers are displayed according to families of fragrances, such as, floral, woody, spicy, green, as opposed to arranging them according to brand.

As a pioneer in niche luxury beauty retail, how do you stay relevant?

I would prefer not to categorize Metropolitan as "niche" but as "alternative high-end". We have quite an exclusive array of brands in our portfolio and remain relevant by doing strategic launches of a few of our products but not too many.

For example, this year we will re-launch the miracle wrinkle cream Strivectin, which comes with a completely new formulation. This is an even more effective product than the original Strivectin. For men we will be launching the Jack Black line of grooming and skin care products.

What do you look for when scouting for new brands?

It must offer a different angle. In the case of skin care, we always look for problem solvers that deliver proven results. And a new brand must not cannibalize existing brands. In this current economic climate, however, good value for money has to be taken into consideration as well.

Price, paradoxically, is not as much of an issue for our customers when it comes to fragrance. In this category we always look for a sense of luxury and exclusivity. We want to give our customers the feeling of buying into a luxurious experience; we really feel people want to smell different.

How do you see 2011 unfolding?

We're really concentrating on the key brands that we have, and will only introduce a few new brands. We will strengthen the presence of existing skincare and make up brands. We expect purchasing trends to remain pretty much the same as last year. We will also continue to strengthen our e-commerce. Internet sales through our website www.metropolitaincosmetics.co.za have been very rewarding. We have a loyal clientele throughout the country who order regularly on a monthly basis.

Bambina Wise

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