

## BEAUTY PRODUCTS

# HEALTHY NATURAL NICHE

*Organic healthcare products are winning adherents as concern grows about a toxic environment, writes Morris Kaplan*

It turns out beauty is more than skin deep: as the number of people who are concerned about toxins in our environment grows, more cosmetic companies are jumping on the natural and organic bandwagon.

The trend towards organic brands continues as overall organic retailing grows at 30 per cent a year in Australia.

There are benefits to organic skincare, according to Narelle Chenery, 37, founder of organic skin care success story Miessence. "We've got the top edge of the eco-conscious consumer, but the base is growing."

With revenues running at \$15 million this year and more than 100 products in the market, the organic skin care industry has proved a lucrative edge for Narelle and her two partners, Colin (her husband) and Alf Orpen. With more than 600 stores stocking organic products in Australia and 36,000 in the world, this niche market is looking decidedly healthy.

Chenery first began her foray into organic ingredients about 10 years ago when she realised most products making natural claims still contained synthetic toxins. She says up to 99 per cent of "natural" ingredients are actually synthetically processed after being derived from a natural source. "Not only were products not natural, but many of them were using ingredients that were not safe. I looked for products that were truly natural but couldn't find any, so I thought I would make some myself."

The Miessence range of skin or personal care range is cold-extracted from organic fruit, beeswax, honey, avocado oil, nuts, seeds and herbs, and is never exposed to heat during formulation.

Chenery says the overwhelming response to her brand demonstrates a market appetite for products that "feed the skin naturally" and that most consumers are eager to improve their understanding of the toxic properties of chemical ingredients. "There's not one harmful chemical in miessence. You could eat them," Chenery says.

Sustained consumer interest in health will drive natural product sales in the future, she says. This view is supported by the Australian Health and Beauty Report, produced by The Australian Centre for Retail Studies, Monash University. It reports a growing trend



**More green:** Narelle Chenery says the organic message is spreading

Picture: Lyndon Mechielsen

**'I looked for products that were truly natural but couldn't find any, so I thought I would make some myself'**

Narelle Chenery,  
Miessence

towards natural, herbal and organic ingredients in health products. Other trends to affect the skincare product sector include increased life expectancy, an ageing population, increasing popularity of men's products, health warnings, environmental concerns, ethical buying habits and organic attitudes.

"People fall in love with our products. They're extremely beneficial to the skin and they use no chemicals. The skin absolutely glows with good health," Chenery says.

The company claims to be producing the world's first range of skin care and cosmetics certified organic by Biological Farmers of Australia. For a product to be accredited, at least 95 per cent of its ingredients, excluding water, must be of organic food standard.

It is difficult to make stable organic preservatives and emulsifiers, so organic beauty products are usually oil-based.

An informed reading of the label is the consumer's best guide to understanding the merits of organic cosmetic products, according to Catriona Macmillan, co-founder of the Organic Traders and Consumers Network. Consumers can trust a product accredited by one of the available certifiers — which includes ACO (Australian Certified Organic), an arm of the

BFA. "They're audit systems. The quickest check is to look for the logo of certification." There are excellent organic beauty products available, but caution is advisable, she says.

"The cosmetics industry has always been driven by marketing and now they're marketing with that great word — organics."

Chenery says her marketing and distribution method is a mix of direct selling and retail. "The easiest market penetration for us has been health food shops. We're not attempting to compete with the big players. We're leaning towards educating consumers about the dangers of toxins in the environment, in what they eat and in what they put on their skin."

"Our customers are already educated consumers who are looking for healthy alternatives. They're leading an organic life. It's a trend that will grow."

"Even Estee Lauder has come into the game with an organic skin care range."

"I want to grow this business. I want to see this business 10 times bigger in 10 years. We can do this by expanding our market, our product range, by continuing to educate people in the benefits of our products. I can see people becoming much, much more green. Otherwise we're toast."