

THESE THINGS ARE scent to try us!

By Deborah Mangum Copelli

Enter, your typical client, into their favourite salon or spa and in desperate need of cleanser, toner and moisturizer, what do they do but rock up to the testers, apply something on the back of their hand, take a sniff and smooth it into their skin. So, what do they think? Hmm, like the smell, and the texture seems nice too; I wonder what it costs?

Big question...the cost, or the risk to their skin and health, and maybe their bank account too. It would make sense that the more the product appeals to their nose, the more it might cost. In focus group testings, if couture brands were any indication of the relationship of cost to sniff appeal, to doing the job on their skin, then clients would most probably choose the most appealing fragranced product, pay the big bucks and assume the diamond-dusted whipped miracle cr me frappe will work. Sadly, consumer optimism and enthusiasm for that product might have more to do with it working than the ingredients in the jar. For those of us who've been in the skin and body care business for a long time, we most probably already know this, but for most consumers as long as it smells and feels good, it's most assuredly going to do what it says on the label. Really?

Talking with Diana Kirkpatrick, a well-known Sydney expert in cosmetic chemistry, her feathers get very ruffled just by reading ingredients on the labels of skin care products. She believes the more a consumer sees hundreds of ingredients in the finest of print, loves the packaging and of course, enjoys the fragrance, the more they believe it will work, hence the more they will pay. She understands the need for marketing, but as a scientist, Diana is mostly concerned about the claims a product makes ethically. And in Australia there are only two governing boards that really give a hoot. Go to their websites if you want more detailed information on which products come under what regulations: www.NICNAS.gov.au or www.TGA.gov.au.

"The National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme only regard chemicals to be naturally occurring, but if they have been extracted by steam distillation, solvent extraction or have

undergone further processing they are classified as synthetic chemicals." Stating the obvious, cosmetics in this instance include soap, shampoo, moisturiser, hair dye, perfume, lipstick, mascara and others, but do not include products regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, which include mostly medicines. SPF products, some anti-ageing and acne products, depending on their ingredients, could also be covered under the TGA. "Cosmetics are deemed to be made from industrial chemicals" - ouch! When you read this on the website it's a bit shocking that the same governing body who's regulating fertilizers, insecticides and embalming materials are also in control of what's safe for our skin. It does go on to say that, "industrial chemicals can be synthetic or naturally occurring like ammonium lauryl sulphate, lanolin, and Blue 1, a dye used to give colour to products."

There's a fairly open field in Australia for new product development, provided you observe some very basic chemical ingredient guidelines, unlike the regulatory bodies in Europe and the USA, where the rules and guidelines are far more strict. So remember, let the buyer beware and as always, education for your client is key. Know the ingredients in the products you are buying and prescribing to your clients, so you don't make the mistake of prescribing a highly active facial peel without prescribing sunscreen, for example. This is what sets the beauty and spa industry apart from the cosmetics counters, now doesn't it? And be wary of cheap products manufactured in countries where there are little or no chemical usage restrictions; they might be legally distributed here in Australia and meet the NICNAS requirements, but could also be harmful or harsh on the skin, if used consistently over time.

With her twenty-five year tenure working for some of the largest cosmetic companies in the world, Ms. Kirkpatrick was quite forthcoming with information. Marketing is the nature of the business, but the business is not necessarily natural or "organic". I asked Diana to explain a bit about claims of natural and organic and her reply was, "If it's packaged as a single use container, free of perfumes and preservatives or any synthetics, refrigerated when purchased and kept refrigerated, with a short shelf life displayed, then it could be organic." Well, I can't say I've come across any skin care product like this recently, and might only liken it to purchasing live acidophilus at the health food store, so I'm not going there in this article.

Now back to fragrances in our skin and body care products. Dr. Diana Howard, whom I've followed for years, earned her Ph. D in Plant Biochemistry and is the V.P. of R&D and Global Education at The International Dermal Institute, headquartered in Los Angeles. She's written many articles, appeared at numerous industry events, and spoken to audiences across the world. One of her passions, as evidenced by her credentials in the field, is plant essences and the use of these in the products she develops. She's an expert on the use of naturally occurring essential oils in products over synthetic fragrances, perfumes and or mineral oils.

In an article Dr. Howard wrote titled, "Save the Shave", she points out — and I quote — "Gone are the days when a man splashed alcohol on his face to remove the oily shave cream, close the pores, kill the bacteria and subtly perfume the skin. Fragrance, especially delivered via alcohol, is a leading cause of contact allergy in men and hyperpigmentation of the skin," And women



too, of course. “More appropriately, post-shave products should calm the skin, treat inflammation, control ingrown hairs, help eliminate congestion of pores and provide antioxidant and UV protection to the skin.” In the extensive product line she has developed, she goes on to say, “We don’t use any synthetic fragrances, only essential oil blends. Our first choice is to use phytochemicals (plant extracts) and plant-based actives to affect the structure and function of the skin; however, I do believe the solution is a combination of plant-based and synthetic actives to get the best results.”

To quote another famous author and expert in the cosmetics industry, Paula Begoun, the US guru who’s appeared on 20/20, Dateline NBC, The View, ABC Primetime and Oprah but best known for her book, “Don’t Go to the Cosmetics Counter Without Me”, she professes that, “fragrance-free” is a myth and misleading to the consumer. Even plant extracts have a scent and some can cause skin irritation or allergic reactions. She says often times fragrant plant oils and extracts may be added to “fragrance-free” products to hide offensive odours originating from the raw materials used, but sometimes in such small amounts they might not impart a noticeable fragrant smell. The claim “fragrance-free”, can be made regarding cosmetics, as the FDA in the US nor the NICNAS in Australia or even the EU governing body, regulate it. She regards, “fragrance-free” as useless label information, but she’s also the strictest of industry critics with most cosmetic company’s poo-pooing her research. Her book is in its ninth edition with over three million copies sold, so I guess Beginning Press, her publisher, sees things more realistically than do some of the top brands she reviews.

Now having completely ruined your appetite for your beloved skin care industry, let’s get a grip on reality. We’re in one of the fastest growing businesses in the world and men and women everywhere will continue to lather mountains of moisturiser on their most precious assets - their face and body. They will still seek and spend to attain their ultimate goal toward the proverbial “fountain of youth”, and they want to smell great getting there. Mammals are naturally attracted to pleasant scents, be it for dating, mating or just feeling damn gorgeous. Just like in the classic 1992 movie, “Scent of

a Woman”, there’s an irresistible appeal to the opposite sex when the chemistry is “just right”.

Take first thing on waking in the morning and you breathe deeply...what do you sense? The smell of your partner’s aftershave, a subtle scent of your environment, a whiff of a fragrance in your cleanser or moisturiser, or maybe the smell of freshly brewed coffee? That smell, wherever it’s come from, will leave a lasting impression on your memory. Most definitely something will happen in your brain, your limbic system to be precise, and it will trigger a thought, a memory or a vision.

Have you ever stepped off an airplane onto a tropical island where the air is thick with the scent of frangipani? Maui immediately comes to my mind. You’ll always remember that moment, that fragrance, and the next time you smell frangipani it will evoke that delightful memory and fill your sensory system with joy and pleasure. Our brain takes great care to keep us in perfect “balance” at all times. So even if a sensory memory related to a specific smell was an unpleasant one, our brain will usually turn that around into a satisfying experience. When we remember, “that smell”, we typically remember all of the scenery, people and positive relationships to the actual event.

People often mention the smell of “fresh air”, but does it really have a smell? In a sense, yes it does, at least for our sensory memory. And it often conjures a thought of where we were when we remember the smell of fresh air. Perhaps it was high on a mountain, at the seaside, or possibly

in a pine forest, but we each have an individual sensorial memory for “fresh air”. Many retailers have bottled what they think we think of as “fresh air” and we buy it. But to some, “fresh air” doesn’t really have a scent; it’s fresh, clean and pure, with no fragrance. But if they bottle that, would it sell? Here’s a bottle of scentless fresh air; now does that have any marketing appeal?

It is truly amazing, however, that a few, simple airborne molecules can trigger such vivid recollections. A smell can influence your mood and affect your work performance. The olfactory bulb, part of the brain’s limbic system, is an area so closely associated with memory and feeling that it is often called the “emotional brain”. Smell can download powerful memories and recollections almost instantaneously. It’s all stored in our grey matter ready for when we might trigger its response with a flower, a herb, smoke, petrol or perfume.

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Because we experience new smells while growing up, many times the scents conjure up childhood memories of people, places or events. We actually begin to associate smells while in the womb. If a mum ate garlic and hot spicy foods while pregnant then her offspring would be more likely to also enjoy those smells and foods too. But unfortunately if she enjoyed cigarettes and alcohol, then her teen or adult children might also enjoy it as well, or at least not be adverse to it. Smells that might upset other babies after birth might be pleasant or even comforting to those whose mothers indulged during pregnancy; something to remember for new mums.

If you have a problem with your sense of smell, it might be because you’ve smelt all the wrong things for too many years and it’s time to give your olfactory system a break. In the USA they actually have a research centre that can help you recover your sense of smell and taste, as they are so closely related. The “Smell and Taste Research and Treatment Foundation”, was founded and is run by an American neurologist, Dr. Alan Hirsch. Here they carry out many studies, but one that’s particularly interesting is how our sense of smell can evoke its own type of déjà vu. We tend to believe that sight is our most powerful sense, however our sense of smell is also related to our taste, so it is indeed a doubly strong sense. With the relationship to memory, our sense of smell can turn a possible negative experience into a positive and lasting harmonious childhood feeling.

And this is where fragrances and perfumes come into our products. As you would know, humans were attracted to essentials oils, flower

essences, herbs and spices from ancient times. Women and men spent many hours searching for scents that made them feel romantic, powerful and regal. Modern perfumery began in the late 19th century with the commercial synthesis of aroma compounds taking over from essential oils. This allowed for the smells in perfumes to be composed of fragrances other than natural aromatics. The advent of chemicals in essential oils and spices gave perfumes complexities and “notes” for the trained “nose”. In France, where fragrance is taken as seriously as wine, a perfume enthusiast can actually go for training to become a “nose”. And one must have a “nose” in order to work successfully in the “parfum” industry in Paris.

Creating that perfect scent is big business with most companies outsourcing this aspect to the experts of perfumery. Having a cacophony of essential oils, scents and fragrances at their disposal in the lab is synonymous with big money. Product manufacturers know that people are so attracted to smelling like something other than themselves or a product, that they will pay big bucks for that perfect scent in a bottle.

Marie-Antoinette had her own personal perfumer who gave her the “smell of Spring”. He was Jean-Louis Fargeon and he was the first known to use the Queen of France as an ambassador for his fragrances. Not only was he a master

“nose” but an entrepreneur marketer and keen businessman, as he proposed to boost the economy of France through fragrance. As France is well known for its famous brands of parfum, Monsieur Fargeon was very successful indeed.

But the fragrance business has also made some people very sick with their sense of smell. We know some scents can make us feel sexy, sensual, desirable, pretty, clean, handsome or strong. But some also makes us sneeze, cough, feel anxious, give us red, itchy and watery eyes, or even give us headaches and upset stomachs. And most don’t mix well with the sun, so we end up with pigmentation to boot, just as Dr. Howard explains. The culprits are most likely those formulations with very little or no essential oils or natural ingredients, which would include many of the popular commercial brands. And even some of the organic and natural ingredients can make us downright nauseous. The ones that come to mind are musk, civet, celery, grapefruit and oak moss.

One of the first chemicals ever used with essential oils to dispense more scent onto the body and into the air, and which also increased intensity and a longer-lasting element, was aldehyde. This, and others found in many fragrances today, are toxic substances and many of these same chemicals are also found in insect repellents. Nasty mixes are widely used in expensive products, including chemicals such as tricyclodecenyllalyl ether, and persol. It’s no wonder some of us are so highly allergic to the popular and most expensive and exclusive products on the market.

Given the world-wide “green movement” in our industry, when you visit a salon or day spa you will not only find name brand or professional products on the retail shelves, but you will also find a “natural or organic” range as well. Clients want a choice and a conscience-boosting purchase for their skin and body care. They want to feel like they are getting the results they need for moisture and anti-aging, yet they also want to be environmentally friendly in their choices and pick products that make a known contribution to worthwhile causes.

So get out there and start to feel good all over when you wear and prescribe your products. Choose skin care for yourself and your clients that makes sense to you. Share those sensorial memories around with those desiring a good, clean, allergy-free whiff of the scientifically scented, unscented, or essentially scented and “fragrance free”, products available on the market today, and enjoy. ■

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