

MONTHLY COLUMN FOR SOAP, PERFUMERY & COSMETICS

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Designing a new product based on naturals

Imagine a scenario where a new creative marketing person has just joined the department. She is usually about eighteen, seen the world (been to Madrid with her boy friend), vastly experienced in the marketing of toiletries having recently launched a pencil that glows in the dark, and was responsible for choosing the colour of the string in a new disposable plastic bin bag.

Her brief is to develop a range of toiletries based on tropical fruits.

The first marketing task is to go competitive shopping, which can take one of several forms. It is either a day up in town having coffee with Mummy in Harrods or it is a trip to somewhere local like New York or Tokyo to spend a week looking in the most expensive designer shops and superstores.

The second task is one that I have always envied. This is akin to a Blue Peter Project and involves cutting out pictures from glossy magazines of anything that is remotely in focus and sticking them with Gloy onto a very large board. To this collage is added bits of cardboard, fragments of cloth and words in various font styles cut from various headlines. The end result is a huge blackmail note stuck on an horrendous patchwork of images with bits that are continually falling off.

At this stage, she is ready to brief the research team and sets off for the conference room clutching her 'story board'. You can follow her path by the trail of debris, a gothic script announces "lemon" on the stairs, a piece of orange skin on the banister, a dismembered native leg fluttering by the door. In a designer carrier bag she has her competitive samples and the 237 leaflets that she has managed to purloin from unsuspecting beauty counters.

The brief

The R&D team is assembled and the easel with the montage is in place as another piece of detritus falls gracefully onto the floor. Her boss clucks enthusiastically as the scene is set for "the brief". The technical chaps, who have seen more presentations than the storyboard has pictures, set about the important task of drinking the coffee and eating the biscuits.

The project is going to be based on tropical fruits and will contain Loquat fruit as the main extract. Examples of the competitive shopping appear like rabbits out of a hat as she reaches into the Calvin Klein tote that had been carefully folded in her luggage (so that it would not get

creased) on the way back. An exquisite Christian Dior bottle costing £35, a Shiseido bottle costing £25, a silk covered box containing a crystal decanter (which mercifully had lost its price tag) are lovingly placed on the table.

A chemist eats the last chocolate biscuit to leave all the boring ones for the marketing team. The packaging technologist writes the word Boston Round on his notepad followed by the words “too expensive?” in the margin. The marketeers begin to warm to the presentation, words like “lovely”, “super” and “gorgeous” begin to circulate, the presenter points to the story board at the peeling scripts cut from Hello! magazine and the Tatler, words like “Exotique” and “Fantastique” are heralded. The concept of helping out poorer countries is the platform on which the products will ride.

The euphoria is broken by the Technical Manager who has managed to finish the last dregs in the coffeepot and has numerous tasks awaiting him in the laboratory. He raises the question of the selling price. The presenter with great fortitude announces that it will retail at less than £3, a chemist writes £2.99 in his notebook as the euphoria dissipates like mist on a sunny morning.

The development

The meeting breaks up, the technical team replenished by the splendid feast provided by marketing head back to their laboratories. The marketing assistant dons her pristine starched white coat and designer hair net to join the procession.

The traditional routine for a development brief is followed. All the usual requirements are stressed, the base must be better than all the competitors, it must contain all the latest active ingredients and it must be cheaper than any current formula. The Technical Manager suppresses a knowing chuckle.

Having chosen the Loquat as the main ingredient (all her own idea), the Marketing Assistant wants to know what it will do. After much consulting of learned texts it is discovered that Loquat, known in INCI by the name *Eriobotrya japonica* is used by the Chinese for chronic burping, nausea and vomiting. It is also used for making jellies, because it has a flavour reminiscent of sour cherries. A useful fact, in 1787 it was imported from Canton and introduced to Kew Gardens. The Marketing Assistant produces her “pack copy”, but alas, the promises so carefully attributed to the Loquat are just not true.

Meanwhile....

In a small village to the east of Canton sits an elder, who relishes the brandy that he has been keeping for a special occasion. A whole party of “gwai lo” (white devil’s) have just visited him to talk about buying his crop of *Pi Pa Ye*. He has contacted neighbouring villages, who also grow this crop, and there is going to be a party.

Later that year....

There is going to be a party, the launch of the new range “Tropical Fruits with a **hint** of Loquat from the mysterious East”.

In a small village to the east of Canton sits an elder, who stares at a heap of fruit rotting in the sun.

A leaf falls off a discarded storyboard.

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