

TAPPING IN TO MEN'S SOFTER SIDE



COLIN O'CONNOR FOR NATIONAL POST

Brian Lau was so irritated by men's grooming products and how they are advertised he started Bread & Butter, a fragrance free line of skin care sold online.

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BY HOLLIE SHAW

Much has been written about the unfair stereotyping of women in beauty advertising — they are typically too thin, too white, too young — but what about how beauty products are marketed to men?

Brian Lau was irritated, literally and figuratively, by men's grooming products when in 2008 he embarked upon his skin care venture, Bread & Butter Skincare (BreadandButterSkincare.com).

"What irritated me [in advertising] was how many of them are sold," the Toronto entrepreneur said. "Essentially, a lot of claims in the advertising or the packaging are misleading. They are all created to make the customer believe something that is not true." Ads such as those for Axe body spray, which feature people fawning over the wearer of the body spray as though it had aphrodisiac properties, are part of the problem. "Three to four years ago, men were being depicted as complete Neanderthals," he says. Or, by "the Axes of the world," as "ridiculously virile."

After spending years in the beauty

industry, including five at Unilever, which makes the Dove brand, Mr. Lau knew what he did not want to make — products filled with perfume that dried out skin. He learned more about that after completing his MBA at Kellogg, and working for a holding company whose subsidiary did design and manufacturing for Aveda beauty products.

"I knew how a lot of the products are made so I knew what was in them that was irritating [to skin]," Mr. Lau said. "The industry tries to put in fragrances men like, but those are the very things that are irritating to men's skin. A lot of companies that do not use fragrances put in very fragrant plant oils like lemon peel extract and orange extract, which are even more irritating. In the end you are doing the men no good: Imagine getting a few nicks on your skin and pouring orange juice on it."

The male grooming industry can be a tricky — and sleepy — business. It grew 1.27% to \$2.7-billion in Canada for the year ended May 2009, according to researcher Nielsen's MarketTrack, after growing 2.92% a year earlier.

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Subscriber model keeps prices down

MARKET

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Sharon MacLeod, the brand-building director of Dove at Unilever, said there is an untapped market for men's grooming products. After seeing success with Dove's Campaign For Real Beauty the brand began selling a Dove Men + Care line earlier this month.

"We have seen growth in male grooming and it is much more advanced than it would have been when my father was a young man," she said, noting the recession slowed the business somewhat.

"If you can buy a product [that works] for your whole family when things are not financially right, [male grooming] might get cut back there, but I think you will see the segment come back," she said, noting there is a demand for products that offer more moisture in the market.

"A lot of men complain that their skin feels tight, dry or irritated from men's products. Body wash products in particular are very drying on their skin."

Another issue is the lack of comfort men might have using beauty products, although that seems to be changing, according to Toronto-based gender expert Michael Kaufman.

"We are still bombarded with images every day with images of rugged men, but this idea that men don't care about themselves, for more and more men it just doesn't work, because it just doesn't make sense.

More and more men have less fear about looking after themselves. Whether it's thinking about our health, paying attention to how we eat and exercise, or what product we buy."

While mass marketers might be tapping into the male grooming segment, Mr. Lau found an online business model

would take care of a lot of overhead costs associated with retailing. A few other key ideas helped him keep Bread & Butter's prices at \$7 to \$8 an item — much closer to mass-market prices than luxury prices.

First, the products are fragrance free, while most of the costs of beauty products come from fragrances, he said — the additives that often dry out skin. Mr. Lau also sells his wares through a subscription model, selling a biannual lineup of grooming products. A year's worth costs \$84.99 (a six-month supply goes for \$49.99) and the company delivers two beauty "kits" to clients twice a year. Both contain staples such as face cleanser and moisturizer, and the Summer Kits include sun protection.

The model allows Bread and Butter to consolidate manufacturing to two specific times of the year, which also lowers costs substantially, and the line's packaging is in a standardized 90-millilitre tube. "Other skin care lines have variety of different packaging, which costs more, and [since it is under the 100-ml flying restriction in Canada], all of our product is approved for airline carry-on."

Mr. Lau started the business, which went live in December, with \$50,000 of his own money, \$20,000 from family and friends and \$30,000 from the Canadian Youth Business Foundation. His marketing drive has included building social media awareness through a Twitter feed and a custom Facebook page, advertising on Google, search advertising, and a public relations agency.

"Once this summer starts, we'll start to see what percentage of our six-month subscribers will come back to us. We are in the four digits now." As for sales, Bread & Butter Skincare is on target for the first quarter, "and we are looking toward a very good summer," Mr. Lau said.

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