

# Organic & natural: Where's the va va voom?

Natural cosmetics fans care about what they put on their skin, but brands can't ignore the power of packaging, **Nick Vaus** explains

**B**eauty, as we all know, is a scorchingly hot topic. Every day, new beauty brands, ranges, ingredients, collaborations and campaigns attempt to grab attention. And it is increasingly hard for brands to stand out on the actual – and virtual – shelf.

When it comes to strictly organic/natural beauty, it is tempting for brands to think that all that noise is not particularly important. Conventional thinking goes something like this: organic/natural beauty consumers, who care deeply about what they put on their bodies, really only want to be assured of the quality and provenance of products and that the business acts ethically – from packaging to animal testing. Rigorous certifications like the gold COSMOS standard in Europe or BioGro in Australasia provide just that, so nothing else is needed.

Being brutally frank, that's a great starting point, but it is certainly not enough to differentiate any brand among informed consumers, let alone appeal to the many mainstream consumers who are starting to think about ingredients and environment. And starting to think about them they most certainly are: research companies Mintel, NPD, Kline and Euromonitor International all report growth in 'clean' beauty far outstripping mainstream products.

But any burgeoning trend brings competition. And strictly organic/natural brands are being attacked on two fronts. First, the natural trend sees mainstream brands that actively co-opt terminology and ingredients from certified brands, sometimes cynically. Paraben-free, phthalate-free and even organic are two-a-penny on pack. Second, rival types of certification are emerging. Vegan-certified brands are shorthand for 'does good in the world'. Axiology, Kat Von D and Urban Decay are now stocked at Sephora, making big noises about their cruelty-free credentials and appealing to everyone from gen X to teenagers. Lush even manages to do both these things at once.

**Not every beauty brand has to scream luxury... but many natural/organic brands feel like they have been 'designed by numbers'**

Most organic/natural brands pale in comparison – quite literally. Not every beauty brand has to scream luxury with metallics and ultra-glam packaging, but many natural/organic brands feel like they have been 'designed by numbers'.

Usually they are named with some combination of green, natural, eco, organic, earth or bio. They have white, off-the-shelf packaging, with a flower/plant illustration and green highlights. They are almost indistinguishable from each other. And critically, they have nothing interesting to say other than they're organic/natural. No this, no that, no anything... not even efficacy cues or pack language to tell you their benefits over and above 'moisturiser' or 'wash'; in short, very worthy, but not a lot of fun.

Successful beauty brands rest confidently on two or more of three foundational beauty brand pillars: a beautifully uncomplicated look (non-serif lettering, lots of space and lightness); the power of touch and feel (tactile finishes, engaging packaging); and 'tells a compelling story' (geographical provenance, autobiographical story, ingredient, heritage and attitude). The majority of organic/natural brands just don't make this grade.

Brands need to have the confidence to stand for something over and above their 'green credentials' (wonderful though they may be) – from packaging design through to the language and messaging that goes with it. Some certified brands are already doing this. Bamford is stunningly simple. Zao Makeup's refined bamboo packaging is a sensorial delight. Und Gretel is 'a fashion heart with an organic soul'. Skin + Tonic brims with vigour and attitude. Tata Harper is imbued with place and personality. Studio 78 is chic, monochrome and playful and not a flower to be seen. All stand proudly among mainstream beauty brands.

They are glam *and* good. It is not a contradiction. And the best thing is: a new generation of beauty consumers desperately want that. So if you're an organic/natural beauty brand, maybe it's time to take an honest look at yourself and ask if you need a makeover ●

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**Studio 78's chic, monochrome packaging is an example of a green brand with mainstream visual appeal**

