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Natural Parent

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Naturally beautiful

As the baby body care market grows up, we showcase the sector's health store superstars



Parents looking for the purest possible products mean that baby body care is a growth category for independent health stores. As well as the bonus of high margins, when word of mouth gets around it can make stores a destination for local mums seeking natural and organic brands.

"Parents are more aware these days of what they are using on their children's skin because they live in an age where they are bombarded with information about what is best for their children," says Harriet Bush from Pitta Patta.

"They are also much more aware of the many potentially harmful chemicals used in so many products. In order to sift through this information and make an informed decision they need to be knowledgeable about what they are using on their children's skin and this often leads them to pursue 'natural' and organic products."

"There seems to be a general understanding with parents that the more natural the product is the better it will be for their children. Children's skin is mostly soft and supple and only needs a handful of products to nourish it and keep it this way. The body 'reads' natural products with more ease than synthetic ones."

Natural beginnings

"Every parent wants the best for their baby," adds Jayn Sterland, Weleda's commercial director.

"Natural and organic baby care makes perfect sense in that it guarantees the purest and most natural of ingredients you can put onto your baby's skin. There is a growing awareness of how precious a baby's skin is. It is five times thinner than adult skin and so much more sensitive. This is probably the one area in which natural baby skincare competes with the mainstream and we are judged against conventional

babycare for user-friendliness and performance. As awareness grows so will sales."

Pitta Patta is a family-run brand specialising in certified organic products for children and babies from shampoo and body wash to barrier cream.

"We use some unique active ingredients that have been carefully selected by the founder of the range, Alex Field, who is a mother of young children and a Naturopath," says Bush.

"She used her extensive professional and clinical knowledge to create a range that would support and nurture children's skin in a gentle way."

To boost the baby care category in-store Bush recommends ensuring staff are properly educated about the products, and that samplers are provided for shoppers to try on their skin.

Fresh thinking

For some manufacturers a busy market means focusing on innovation to capture consumer spend – rather than concentrating on the normal run of balms and moisturisers.

"The baby market is swamped," says Fiona Wood from Naturally Cool Kids.

"Everybody's doing the same thing – a balm or massage oil. We wanted to do something different – there was niche there."

The niche Wood found, inspired by the experiences of her own children, was for affordable but functional everyday natural body care products like sun cream, lip and cheek protector, after sun and vapour stick.

"We're aiming at parents of children with sensitive skin or problems like eczema," explains Wood. They're struggling to use mainstream products. Our range is higher end too – so you're looking at more affluent parents."

Wood founded the company

Marketing to mums

Parents are a close-knit lot – and demand for a particular product can lead to it selling out at local independent health stores. But first manufacturers have to get the brands in parents' hands. This often means working closely with the organisations that provide a vital touch-point for parents during the early months. After all, parents that adopt a brand early will likely stick with it as their little ones grow up.

For instance, to celebrate Fairtrade Fortnight 2012 Organic Monkey teamed up with the Red Jelly creative play class to launch their 'Baby's First Steps to Fairtrade' campaign. They gathered 'footprint pledges' to Fairtrade which were entered into a competition to win Organic Monkey prizes.

And as parents spend more time sharing their experiences on dedicated sites like Mumsnet and social media, Facebook is becoming an increasingly important marketing tool.

"Weleda Baby has its own Facebook page because this offers a very different kind of forum to the social media sites for the general Weleda brand: a community for like-minded parents to exchange ideas and find out more," says Sterland.

"We work with sympathetic organisations such as the NCT and mother and baby groups – at events or clubs – and introduce the range to new parents via sampling activities (that link to Weleda advertising in baby press, social media, reaching out in all sorts of ways)."

in 2010, and she says that there was instantly plenty of interest. She ensures all the products are manufactured in the UK and that removing petroleum from the range – a major bugbear for modern parents – was actually straightforward. However, making sure the products set properly was more of a challenge.

Wood also put a lot of thought into the distinctive packaging. "Kids don't like having things put on their skin by mum – so we wanted to create something that felt like it was 'theirs' rather than something parents forced on them. The bright design creates a fun atmosphere where the kids think 'this is mine.'"

Functional body care

The move towards functional products that offer basic first aid for the skin is definitely a grow-

"Kids don't like having things put on their skin by mum – so we wanted to create something that felt like it was 'theirs'"

ing trend in the market.

"Apart from baby products for day to day care (nappy cream, baby lotion, baby shampoo and so forth) there is future growth in more specialist health products, for example our Calendula Soothing Bath harnesses the power of herbs such as thyme to calm and soothe fractious children before bedtime," says Sterland

"We are seeing a growing incidence of baby skin problems in northern Europe, sometimes linked to family tendencies and allergies, but also possibly due to the use of synthetic products on the skin at too young an age. So more medical inspired products are in development to address these growing issues."

Calendula is also at the heart of Kiwiherb's baby products.

"Calendula has a long history of safe and effective use on a wide range of skin complaints, mainly due to its gentle soothing action and its potent healing abilities," says Phil Rasmussen, creator of the Kiwiherb herbal remedies range.

"Modern research confirms that calendula's curative powers come from its naturally high carotenoid content that plays a major role in the herb's therapeutic abilities. Calendula also possesses special anti-inflammatory and antiseptic properties, all of which help repair damaged skin by supporting the skin's natural healing process. The beneficial properties of Calendula combined with its mild, gentle nature makes the herb a natural choice for easing a baby's skin problems, including dry skin, eczema, nappy rash, milk spots and cradle cap."

Rasmussen points to new research which suggests that calendula can actually speed-up the healing of wounds by improving blood flow to affected areas to promote the body's natural repair processes.