



*The beauty
of **Skin
Things***



When beauty therapist Caroline Bugg tossed all of her cosmetics and beauty products into the bin, disposing of thousands of dollars worth of lotions, body scrubs, eye creams and other products that still had months of mileage within their glossy, branded packaging, it wasn't a bout of insanity – it was an educated decision that was to change the direction of her life. Story and photography by **Michelle Hespe.**

It all started in 1995, when Caroline was working as a beauty therapist and promotional consultant at Myers in Adelaide. "I wanted to know what the ingredients of the products I was selling were – to further my knowledge and help promote them. I've always been a person who likes finding things out for myself rather than just believing what companies tell me, and to be honest, I didn't know what the ingredients on most of the labels meant because most of them were chemical names."

So after finishing work one day, Caroline headed to her local bookstore and found what she was looking for – a cosmetic chemical dictionary. "What I found in that book changed the direction of my life," she said. "I realised that these world-famous, billion dollar companies are using ingredients that not only have no beneficial effect on the skin but in many cases are

harmful. A lot of the ingredients are bought from other manufacturers and are the by-products and waste of their manufacturing processes. This means the manufacturer – for example, someone making plastic chairs – does not have to pay someone to dispose of their toxic waste, but can actually get paid for it by selling it to cosmetic manufacturers as preservatives. Because the waste is toxic and no bacteria will grow in it, it makes an ideal preservative."

Caroline decided there had to be a way of creating skincare products that were not harmful and that could be naturally preserved. So began the research and the many kitchen-bound experiments that would lead to the creation of her rapidly expanding business – Skin Things.

"I was concocting beauty products in my kitchen for myself and people started commenting that my skin looked fantastic,"



Caroline Bugg

Caroline said. "Then I started making products for my family and friends. They were willing guinea pigs for me – testing the different products while giving me valuable feedback."

Knowing what worked and what didn't work on her friends was a great start for Caroline, but her first big hurdle was how to make a perfect product that would last. "I had to work out how to preserve things naturally and it wasn't easy!" Caroline said. "Mashing bananas and sticking them on your face is all very well, but who has the time to do that every day? So then how do you preserve a mixture that works for you without chemicals?"

"The inspiration and concept behind Skin Things has been pure and simple – to make products that are safe, honest, ethical, reasonably priced and most importantly, that work."

While Caroline worked on that problem she was also taking the first steps towards officially setting up the business. She applied for the Federal government-funded New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS), took on the course offered and went through the demanding process of making a comprehensive business plan while studying accounting, marketing and sales. At the end of the course, Caroline and the other participants were required to present their business plan and the board made a decision as to whether it was inventive enough, unique and of course, whether it had a good chance of working.

Needless to say, the board passed Skin Things with flying colours and Caroline was awarded an income for a year (similar to the Job Start allowance) while she set up shop in Adelaide's

trendy seaside suburb – Glenelg.

She has never looked back. Right from its humble beginnings, the inspiration and concept behind Skin Things has been pure and simple – to make products that are safe, honest, ethical, reasonably priced and most importantly, that work.

Caroline's enthusiasm and passion for her work is obvious. "I get so much joy out of helping people with their skin. If someone has a problem like acne or eczema it can affect their self esteem and confidence. I just love it when my customers come to me, so excited because they had tried everything and our product is the only thing that worked and they now have clear skin. I am still amazed by the effectiveness of nature and our bodies to heal if we give it the right nutrition and ingredients to work with."

Skin Things is moving on and up. In November 2005, the business opened its first franchise store because the manager at the original store, Nicole Hepple, loved the salon so much she wanted one of her own.

"Nicole is an integral part of the beauty side of Skin Things and she has done much of the work towards getting the salon working to an extremely high standard," Caroline said. "This has been transferred to our training program and procedures which have been put in place for future franchises. We're now taking expressions of interest from people who may want to own their own Skin Things franchise. This can range from someone who already has a salon but wants to go the next step to increasing their business or it could be someone who has not had a business before and may not even be a beauty therapist, as we can provide the training and guidance."

As of 2006, Skin Things products are now being stocked in various retail shops and Caroline is looking to stock the products in salons around Australia before going global. "We've been getting requests for a long time from retail shops keen to stock our products, but I wanted to ensure that our business was structured to deal with large orders before we did that and not try and fix the problems as we go. We also like to build a strong relationship with our retailers," Caroline said, adding that she ensures any business stocking Skin Things is passionate about natural products. Retailers are also given extensive education in the products and how they affect the skin.

Having studied marketing, Caroline is very conscious of placing her products where her target market will be exposed to them. "Our target market is mostly women between the ages of 25 to 55 years old. They tend to be well informed about environmental issues and are concerned about their health. They like to look after themselves by keeping fit and minimising the impact of chemicals through the food they eat, cosmetics they use and other environmental factors."

However Caroline is also hasty to add that the packaging of Skin Things was designed to attract both men and women.

“I just love it when my customers come to me, so excited because they had tried everything and our product is the only thing that worked and they now have clear skin.”

“My friend’s partner is a burly truck driver who’s always on the road and has had very dry skin. He tried a hand cream of mine and decided it was perfect for his face and arms and everywhere else! It really works for him and he’s never even used a moisturiser before!”

Caroline also insists that her salon staff are highly trained in beauty therapy and they must also have an extensive knowledge of natural ingredients and how they work.

Training is an essential element of Skin Thing’s success, and the bright, contemporary yet timeless packaging also plays a vital role in attracting new consumers and retailers. But of course, the core of Caroline’s burgeoning business lies in the fact that Skin Things is truly like natural food for the skin – it even

smells like food - whether it’s the Ylang Ylang and Lime bath salts, the Vanilla and Rose Brown Sugar scrub or the Orange and Cinnamon scrub, Skin Things smells good enough to eat and leaves skin feeling as though it’s just had a good dose of a concoction put together by mother nature herself.

There are very few all-natural skincare ranges available and most have some degree of chemical preservatives, at the least,” Caroline says, and she should know – she’s spent years looking into her competitors’ products. “Of the few that are totally natural, Skin Things is superior because of the types of ingredients used and the concentration of the ingredients. I have found the formulations of our competitors to be quite diluted compared to ours. The high concentration of our active ingredients means the products are really effective and work – and you only need to use a very small amount. This has developed from my beauty therapist background. I want to be able to create a change in the skin, for example making an oily/acne skin slow down its oil output and behave more like a normal skin while combating the bacteria that has caused the breakouts and healing the scarring that has resulted. This can be achieved by using high-grade essential oils and plant extracts proven from thousands of years of use to be highly effective. I am not using any new miracle ingredients - just natural ingredients that have been known to be effective and that have been used for thousands of years by people.”

Caroline is a hard working woman who has never lost sight of her business goals, but she is also a modest woman





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who says she owes much of her motivation to her family, because she wants her children to grow up in a world that she has contributed to and that is better for them. Knowing that what she makes will not harm the Earth and actually help people to manage their skin is also something that makes her job so rewarding and keeps her smiling. "Seeing Skin Things grow, witnessing the passion our employees have for what they do and seeing our consultants grow and challenge themselves also makes me so happy to get up every morning," she says.

The consultancy service Skin Things offers is a major facet of the company. Skin Things currently has 20 consultants and they are particularly interested in putting on more in NSW and Victoria. The party plan facet of the business has also seen remarkable success. Basically, groups of women get together and are able to try the products in a night of pampering for the host. "Our party plan consultants are the most highly trained in the industry," Caroline comments. "They receive similar training to a beauty therapist in the anatomy and physiology of the skin and how it functions and they are also trained in skin analysis, the ingredients that our products contain and how they affect the skin. Our emphasis is on this, rather than making sales training the priority. If the consultants are knowledgeable in our products and their client's skin, this comes across and the products will sell themselves."

As with all other elements of her business, when it comes to the future of Skin Things, Caroline knows what she wants. "I want Skin Things to be a mainstream product that gives people an alternative to using chemical cosmetics and I want to continue to expand through retail outlets as well as have Skin Things concept store franchises and a future expansion into Asia."

And in an industry where plastic surgery and paramedical beauty procedures seem to become more the norm by the day, Skin Things stands a chance of redressing the balance between people and the world around them.

"Knowing that what she makes will not harm the Earth and actually help people to manage their skin is also something that makes Caroline's job so rewarding and keeps her smiling."

"I think the beauty industry will fall into two categories in the future," Caroline says. "One will go the 'paramedical, Botox way', while the other group will use more natural methods to achieve a wholistic goal of inner and outer health and beauty. Skin Things will meet this challenge – showing our customers how to achieve this through being aware of the food we eat and the way we treat our bodies. Let's face it, there is no quick fix and people will realise this eventually. Knowledge is powerful and we aim not just to advise our clients but to educate them so that they can make informed decisions regarding their skin, beauty and health." ■

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