

Natural Business Talent

Anna Pikura, the founder of a company that sells a range of natural cosmetics named after her, talks to Elżbieta Wrzecionkowska.

■ You made your debut in 2010 during the international Cosmoprof fair for the beauty and cosmetics industry in Bologna, Italy. What difficulties did you encounter at the beginning?

I started from scratch as a young university graduate. No capital of my own, no rich parents. I became interested in an innovative new cosmetic product and became one of its dealers. The other dealers, experienced salesmen, treated me as a drudge of sorts, quite sure that as a greenhorn I wouldn't make it. But after a year my sales were bigger than their sales combined.

■ How did you manage that?

By working hard and not being afraid of new ideas, like buying full-page ads, while others were satisfied with small ads. I did not have money to hire workers, so I did everything all by myself, from packing parcels and carrying them to the post office to personally answering the phone and talking to all the prospective clients. Most of those first clients of mine have remained faithful to my products.

■ Why would a sociologist create her own beauty brand? Famous cosmetics brands have usually been started by chemists.

But there are many exceptions, for example fashion brands like Chanel, or such high-end brands as Sisley. My sociological education and interests were very close to what I am doing now. My master's dissertation was entitled *Beauty Canons Throughout History*. Thanks to my interests, I am well aware of what people expect from cosmetics. This knowledge helped me create my own unique approach to the cosmetics industry and propose what I call "a new culture for beauty." The idea is to change illusion—a typical tool in the beauty market, which is generally known for "selling dreams"—into reality, products that actually work and truly rejuvenate the skin, and not just look nice on the bathroom shelf. So, as you see, a sociologist can be quite innovative in the beauty sector.

■ So you decided to create something exceptional for clients who expect substantial results. And you started with collagen...

Biologically active collagen is a true breakthrough in the area of cosmetology, a gen-



uine achievement of modern bioscience and biotechnology, a state-of-the-art product capable of things that are unattainable for traditional cosmetics. Our biologically active collagen preparations were presented during our Cosmoprof debut and were very well received. Our collagen defined the philosophy of our brand, which is naturalness, safety and effectiveness. Our botanical bio-creams—our second product line—are exceptional in their natural contents, including expensive botanic oils, butters, hydrosols, extracts and essential oils, with no chemicals, which are unfortunately encountered daily by people who use conventional cosmetics. Interestingly, when applied after our collagen, our bio-creams gain additional strength. The thinking we have adopted places the safety of our products above immediate business calculations. Our clients appreciate this approach, which is of course advantageous for the business itself.

■ You lend your own name to your cosmetics. Does that reflect the degree of confidence you have in your products?

Of course. I would not sign products I don't use myself on a daily basis; I wouldn't produce them to begin with. I strongly believe my products are the best on the market and I do everything I can to ensure they remain the best. Our clients are my closest allies—I have listened to them carefully from my very first day in business and I know I can

count on them for their opinions. On the other hand, our philosophy of naturality ensures our products are safe and of the best quality. We purchase the best possible ingredients, all natural, and most of them have organic certificates. Can anything be better than nature itself?

■ 6. Is that why bio-cosmetics are of key importance to you?

That's right. We know we can offer our clients nothing better than 100 percent natural products. Both our collagens and botanic bio-creams, as well as our white rose water mist and professional beauty products, are all nature. The botanic ingredients are purchased from the best growers, for example in the famous Rose Valley in Bulgaria. Of course, we take advantage of new scientific discoveries and innovations which help in obtaining and retaining the very best of nature. I am really indebted to ingenious and knowledgeable experts, the scientists who work on our products.

■ What kind of obstacles do Polish start-ups face?

It's an open secret that the law and regulations determining the way businesses are run in Poland are not entrepreneur-friendly. The red tape can really be depressing. Still, many businesses seem to flourish, which means it is possible to function even in adverse conditions. If you want to run a business, especially in Poland, you've got to have character and you can never give up.

■ You have also built up a chain of Anna Pikura Clinics...

This is a natural extension of our products, places where our clients can have a full-on experience of what we offer, so to speak, because our cosmetics are applied by talented professional cosmetologists, often with the use of cutting-edge technologies. The clinics serve two purposes. On the one hand, they are another channel for introducing and selling our products. On the other hand, they build the image of our brand as one that provides a comprehensive range of products, able to tend to all kinds of client needs in the field of beauty.

