

The umbrella brand

With progress comes promise and with demand comes diversity. Michelle Porter, MD of Spa Products International, tells **HELENA BIGGS** how her company has revolutionised and why a change is as good as a rest...

Well where do I start?" begins Michelle. "It's been an eventful, fascinating foray through the world of nails, but now I'm proud to be firmly established as a supplier of beauty products and training to our industry."

A hairdresser by trade, Michelle saw an opportunity to enter the world of beauty when she was working an additional job part-time at a Nottingham video store. Using her natural communicative skills, she met a customer who had just been offered a job at a new salon. Urging the customer for the salon name,

Michelle boldly rang the owner and was offered an interview and subsequently a job. "I was thrown in at the deep end," explains Michelle. "I proved what I could and couldn't do and learnt more and more about the nail industry, as nail services were offered in the salon. I made contacts along the way and was soon approached to sell products

for Star Nails International." Working for Star Nails Int. for almost three years, Michelle took up the role of UK sales manager for the brand. "I was introduced to the wholesale business and also started to work in the training department, learning how the business and training side of nails worked."

With ambition, drive and a strong head for business, Michelle jetted to a trade show in San Francisco to see the latest offerings in the world of nails and beauty. Dabbling in salon management and ownership and inspired by the products she saw and people she met, Michelle left Star Nails to begin her voyage into the manufacturing side of nail products.

"My journey began in 1997, when I set up Michelle Porter Beauty Products from an office at home," explains Michelle. "I'd spent time putting a small range of products together, including acrylic, fibreglass and tips – it was basic, but it was everything that a nail tech would need."

A naming battle

"I never really agreed with my mentor at the time that I should name the company after myself - I was concerned that people would think I was far too vain - but I listened to what he said, that people buy from people they trust and believe in and saw the business grow from strength to strength.

"We pride ourselves on our products and customer service and people have travelled from all over the country for our training workshops."

Soon, I was supplying my products to nail professionals across the country. I'd spent all of my working life in the beauty industry and relied on my reputation, and one thing's for sure - there's no hiding from obstacles that come your way when your name is above the door; you have to face them, deal with issues and learn en route!

"The name Michelle Porter Beauty Products only became an issue when I realised that my regular liquid and powder products, resins and activators didn't really have a brand name alongside the other products I had developed - including AcryGel, Fabric Gel and Acrylic Plus. So Michelle Porter Professional Nail Systems stepped forward as a brand in its own right."

Triumph in training

Keen to utilise her knowledge of training techniques, Michelle established her Nail Training School of Excellence with the assistance of daughter Chantal, a qualified nail tech who received her NVQ at Michelle's Nottingham salon.

"I believe that training should be affordable for all if industry standards are to be improved," reveals Michelle. "Training is paramount, so I made the decision to close my salon down and concentrate on the training and product development aspects of Michelle Porter Beauty Products. As a company, we took some time out to move to a bigger, more practical premises and streamline our brands. Chantal took some advanced training workshops and took up the position of sales and training coordinator and we began to offer natural and

enhancement nail courses for both amateurs and professionals."

The growth of the company led Michelle to set up Spa Products International Ltd with the intention of placing all her products, services and inherited brands under one 'umbrella'. "Michelle Porter Beauty Products, incorporating Michelle Porter Professional Nail Systems, now resides under this umbrella," explains Michelle. "Change is good, so I took the step five years ago to give the company a more international appeal and greater presence in the nail world. And it's worked! We now have a distribution network in quite a few European countries and the team has also been fortunate enough to be involved in the celebrity world, although I can't shout names from the rooftops as much as I would like to!

"I have had a lot of time to think about my business and we are still the same company; though the name has changed, our business ethic is still the same. We pride ourselves on our products and customer service and people have travelled from all over the country for our training workshops.

"I'm so proud of my brands and the way my company has grown," Michelle gushes. "I have the ability to see what is and isn't working with the business and have the confidence to change it, so the future's looking bright!" **S**

Spa Products International

T: 0845 345 1223

www.spaproductsinternational.com



Opposite page: Chantal and Michelle Porter of Spa Products International. This page (clockwise): Chantal educating at a training day; Michelle gets her nails done at Spa Products Int. HQ; Chantal explains and demonstrates; a selection of Imagery crafted using Spa Products Int. products

