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# Beautycounter Promotes Its Environmentally Themed Products



Erin Baiano for The New York Times

Top, at a party promoting a line of cosmetics by Beautycounter, guests sample the wares. Bottom row, from left, Lela Rose, the party's host; Mandy Moore; and Stephanie Eolin, a company consultant. The line was started by Gregg Renfrew, bottom right.

By EDWARD BARSAMIAN  
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On an evening in June, guests from the worlds of art, fashion and film were mingling at the airy TriBeCa loft of Lela Rose, the designer. In the crowd was the actress and singer Mandy Moore, clad in a slinky dress designed by Ms. Rose and carrying a silver Givenchy clutch purse.

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This wasn't a fund-raiser for a political candidate or a meeting about the

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neighborhood, but a chance for Ms. Rose to introduce her friend Gregg Renfrew's new company, [Beautycounter.com](#) — which sells a line of environmentally minded cosmetics using the model of Avon and Mary Kay (minus the pink Cadillacs) — to a well-connected set that included Selby Drummond, an accessories editor at Vogue, and Margaret Spencer, the chief operating officer of Plum TV, the lifestyle network.

Scattered around the party were unassuming white packages with pink labels, all avowing their absence of known carcinogens, hormone disrupters and other current beauty-industry boogeymen.

"I'm a little scared to know everything, but I definitely want to be more conscious," Ms. Moore said.

Socially and medically responsible grooming products have become a rallying cause for stars like Ms. Moore and the actress Jessica Alba, who started her own line, the Honest Company, after becoming a mother. Now Ms. Renfrew, 45, is betting they can also be a way for women to make a living for themselves, while raising awareness about potentially harmful ingredients.

"The idea that people can build a business selling products they care about and believe in is a win-win situation for all," she said.

Ms. Renfrew started the company after seeing the Al Gore documentary "An Inconvenient Truth," upon the urging of Ms. Rose. "It made me connect the dots between the health of the earth and human beings," Ms. Renfrew said in a speech to guests explaining how she subsequently measured her life and consumption habits against the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep Index.

She could find household cleaning products that were sustainable, she said, "but there was a real void in the beauty industry."

[Whole Foods might beg to differ](#). But Ms. Renfrew's Web site does offer a glossy, feminine look unusual for the category. The site was started in March with Ben Fischman, the founder of the flash-sales site Rue La La, and Candice Kislack, a former executive at Toms shoes, among others, and named, she said, in part for the double entendre of going "counter" to the rest of the beauty industry. "There are many brands sold in a very earthy way, struggling to be all-natural and organic," Ms. Renfrew said, "but I wanted that stylish, high-fashion feel."

Though anyone can buy products from the site, the business focuses on memberships nurtured by Beautycounter's network of consultants, many of whom give "socials" like the one at Ms. Rose's loft to introduce the product in a convivial setting, like the Tupperware parties of yore.

"We want to meet our clients wherever they want to shop with us," Ms. Renfrew said. "Women have had great success in the mornings after they drop off the kids or doing it over breakfast."

She said that [Beautycounter.com](#) already had 2,500 clients and 600 consultants in more than 40 states.

Stephanie Eolin, 42, a consultant based in Westport, Mass., said [Beautycounter.com](#) had

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yielded better dividends for her than when she worked for the Swiss-developed cosmetics company Arbonne, which uses a similar profit model. “My income in the past three months has exceeded the one of the company which I had built over the past six and a half years,” she said.

Consultants are encouraged to promote the products on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, in addition to personal Web sites set up by Beautycounter.

“Women share information and products with each other all the time,” Ms. Renfrew said. “It’s time for women to be able to monetize this and their social networks.” (Beautycounter also benefits, of course: consultants work on commission, currently 25 percent of sales.)

Ms. Renfrew employs a staff of 16 from offices in Santa Monica, Calif., including Christy Coleman, vice president for creative design and a makeup artist whose clients include Connie Britton and Emmy Rossum. With the Environmental Working Group, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics and Healthy Child Healthy World, the team has created a “Never List” of ingredients posted on its site detailing what they will not use in any of their products, like parabens. Among the shunned ingredients are 1,300 that the European Union has either banned or restricted, many of which, like benzalkonium chloride (found in mass-market hand sanitizers) and lithium hydroxide (found in hair-straightening serums), the United States still permits.

“We’re hoping to create a situation where people don’t need to read our labels because we’re telling you the truth and trying to make you an informed consumer,” Ms. Renfrew said. “We believe we have the strictest ingredient selection process in the country.”

While all this scrutiny doesn’t come cheap, prices are comparable to lines like Fresh and Bobbi Brown, starting at \$18. The entire 14-product line is available as a package for \$455.

“I always hated the message that if you can’t afford to buy the organic raspberries, that’s not acceptable,” said Ms. Renfrew, who is planning to release a children’s line at the end of the summer and color makeup beginning in 2014.

She acknowledged that her own mirror still reflects compromise. “I’m not preaching perfection,” Ms. Renfrew said. “I still love to wear nail polish even though I know it’s not perfectly healthy.”

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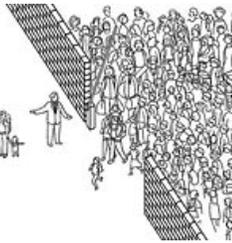
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