

By BRR senior writer Mike Hodge – 9 November 2009

Bush-born Beauty

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Bush-born Beauty:

PUSHING NEW ZEALAND'S PROVENANCE

These days with every women's glossy fairly oozing body-care products between their advert-rich pages, you might wonder about the wisdom of launching yet another product into this crowded space. But a little closer inspection reveals that there just might be a little territory amongst the big brand hitters that could be carved out and, in time, owned.

The surfeit of contenders for the body-care dollar hasn't fazed the instigators of Kio Kio, a new brand of body care products offering a distinct New Zealand botanical provenance.

Like most pharmacists, Kio Kio co-founder Liz Young's daily exposure to her customers' countless questions and viewpoints offered valuable insights into the human condition. When it came to body-care products, many of her customers felt the traditional branded creams tended to look good on the outside but were often heavy to use, irritating, actually had poor moisturising properties and contained petrochemicals.

On the other hand, the more natural products often lacked the pharmaceutical elegance that her more discerning customers were now expecting. Kio Kio's view is that the majority of green/ethical products, with their hair-shirt purity, herbal aromas and limited design ethic, have fallen below many consumers' cosmetic radar. Kio Kio's aim, as with other successful companies entering the environmentally ethical space, is to bring consumers into the fold without them feeling they are making a sacrifice to do so.

In fact, Kio Kio is seeking to enhance desirability by putting the 'gorgeous' into 'green' – emphasising a pleasurable, sensuous, regenerative connection with New Zealand's unique natural landscape.

With the world taking a distinctly greener turn and customers increasingly looking for product efficacy, as well as effectiveness, a clever range of natural body care that performs with integrity, captures some of our unique botanicals and carries an engaging New Zealand backstory would appear to have strong appeal.

There's little doubt that there's a yearning amongst the world's harried urbanites to savour a simpler, more natural world. Where better to focus that desire than New Zealand, a country so richly endowed with natural advantages.

It's perhaps surprising then that, as a country, we have yet to truly grasp the potential gains our national persona can create in such areas as food, beverages, body care and fashion. Such added-value products would point the way out of the commodity rut that many of our primary products still seem to be stuck in.

While beating our chests will never be our style, New Zealand's natural modesty and our tendency to take our inherited gifts a little for granted do sometimes get in the way of appreciating our national appeal offshore. Natural products from New Zealand are every bit as credible as Swiss watchmaking, German engineering or Scandinavian design; we just need to work harder on instilling this perception.

With a few exceptions, it's the smaller, nimbler export businesses that are gaining the most traction when it comes to optimising our natural-based strengths of provenance. Businesses run by people like those at Kio Kio who can sense changing consumer wants, spot a niche and shape quality products to neatly fit them.

The inspiration and brand positioning for Kio Kio (a native fern often found along stream banks) was derived from the New Zealand forest and its natural botanicals. The name itself, with its primitive repetitive rhythm, echoes the birdsong heard in pristine New Zealand forests.

With BRR's input, Kio Kio body care products have been designed to have multi-sensory appeal and sell at the premium end of the international market. The logo design captures many different plant references, including native flowers and the pattern of the plant's stem. The colours of the range reflect Kio Kio's South Pacific origin and the richness of New Zealand's botanical heritage.

Kio Kio's initial range of body care products is in the process of being launched this month through premium, design-led retailers.