

MONTHLY COLUMN FOR SOAP, PERFUMERY & COSMETICS

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How to formulate a natural product and stay out of trouble?

It is a warm autumnal day, the leaves are just turning golden and you are enjoying a well-deserved reflective moment. All of the projects for Christmas have just successfully completed their stability testing, passed the microbiological challenge test and you have pulled together all the documentation required under the 6th Amendment. As we all know, these moments are rare and to be greatly treasured and savoured.

A phone call breaks the euphoria, the Marketing Manager is in a state of near hysteria and needs you in her office, because she has just had a telephone call from the Chairman and needs to talk to you right away. You pick up your battered notebook and head from the clinical austerity and bustle of the laboratory to the sophisticated comfort of the marketing suite. You remove your lab coat, jacket and pullover in preparation for the tropical heat that is needed for the exotic pot plants that grow in her office to survive.

You avoid the clutches of her *Monstera deliciosa* (Swiss Cheese Plant) as you squeeze past the doorway and in no time at all, you are sipping "Carte Noire" (un café nommé désir) and a little disappointed that the meeting only warrants custard creams. It transpires that the Chairman's wife has come up with an idea. The coffee, which up until that moment had the flavour of nectar, took on a taste reminiscent of Bitrex.

Like a poisonous snake, you are pinned by the throat in the cleft stick of a dilemma. The cream (like E45 but better) is to be for problem skins, and the words psoriasis, eczema and itching skin are being presented in wild abandon. Other terms like "traditional herbal medicine", "medicinal" plants and "healing remedies" hit you with spine-chilling fear. Your warnings about infringement of the Medicines Act of 1968 are dismissed by the magic phrase "it is for the Chairman".

In no time at all you have been wrapped up, stitched up and dispatched better than an Egyptian mummy. In the political stakes, your position is little better than Joan of Arc at lighting up time, and the Marketing Manager is already making that call to the Chairman that will accumulate a healthy number of bonus points in the annual assessment fund.

You know that you have to develop a product that will deliver all of the promises and that you dare not use any legally emotive wording in the pack copy. The first step is to give every document the title "The Chairman's Project", which will automatically bring you respect and

sympathy.

The second step is to invoke the chemist's lifeline known as 'the legal requirements'.

Science

- Since this is a specialist product, you will need to use the very best esters that are available, concentrating on ones like Polyglyceryl-2 Sesquiosostearate and Propylene Glycol Diisononanoate which have very long names. The Purchasing Manager (whose main aim in life is to keep the number of different raw materials in the stock inventory as near to zero as possible) is furious that you have introduced yet more new raw materials. You mention in hushed tones that it is for "The Chairman's Project" and with a beaming smile he shows you the door.

Warnings

- As this is a range for people with very sensitive skins, it is vital that the appropriate warning are included, "do not use on skin that is broken or irritated", "keep out of the reach of children", "avoid contact with the eyes", "contact your doctor if symptoms persist", etc. A comprehensive *directions for use* is also advisable

Ingredients

- Preservation is an important part of any product, so it is a very good idea to use a preblended product that contains six preservatives and one could always use a little Methylchloroisothiazilonone, Magnesium nitrate, Magnesium Chloride and Methylisothiazolinone to be absolutely certain of the stability.

Latin

- Use plants that are not only effective, but also try and choose those that have the longest Latin names possible. In this case you choose Soapwort or *Saponaria officinalis*, because it is effective in treating boils and dermatitis, and a decoction applied externally is used for pruritic skin conditions (cures the itch). It is also used traditionally as a remedy for skin diseases.

You also include Chickweed or *Stellaria media*, which is a wonderful anti-inflammatory used primarily for skin problems with irritation, bruising and itching and particularly recommended for the treatment of dermatitis, eczema and acne.

Finally, in order to complete the formula you choose Cleavers or *Galium aparine* (also known as Goosegrass), because as a lotion it cleanses the complexion of acne and other impurities and is

indicated for psoriasis. There is also a long tradition for use of this plant in the treatment of ulcers.

Labelling

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You are now able to write the most romantic part of the label, which is the pack copy. Unfortunately, the length of the ingredient listing and the requirement for international translations of warnings and instructions has left only a small amount of space for the descriptive text - "A cream containing a blend of extracts for problem skin".

The Marketing Manager is clearly disappointed, and even the Swiss Cheese Plant is looking decidedly Gorgonzola and misses the opportunity to inflict its customary slap in the face. She fully understands the reasons why there is little or no space to extol the virtues of the product, but the traditional names Soapwort, Chickweed and Cleavers are hardly commercial, nor will they fit in with the romantic aspirations of the Chairman's wife. There must be other common names you could have found to brighten up the product title.

As you stand in the corridor nursing a savage and unprovoked leaf wound to your cheek, you realise that whatever exhilarating answer was expected it was not "Bouncing Bet, Mischievous Jack and Sticky Willie Cream".