

LUCIRE BEAUTY INSIDER

Sugar babies

Their products' packaging may be inspired by the 1950s but SugarBaby's Nicci and Lizie Clifton are thoroughly modern mavens. *Lucire* talks to Lizie about the company

NICCI AND LIZIE CLIFTON are just like any couple of sisters: they gossip together, hang out together, shop together, discuss everything from work to family together, but what makes these two different from most siblings is that together they have created a cosmetic brand, SugarBaby. It has not only swept the local market in Australia but is the latest Australian export to hit the US market. From Hollywood to the Hamptons, girls everywhere seem to be falling head over heels for this brand—good old-fashioned glamour created with good old Aussie know-how.

SugarBaby has caught the imagination of a captive audience through its iconic branding. The poster girls of the '50s are the inspiration for the artwork, packaging and content. Think Monroe, Grable, Turner. Think cashmere sweaters and kitten heels. American in inspiration, but Australian in conception. Through its soft girly imagery, the Clifton duo have put the personality back into pampering products.

Like the brand itself, Nicci and Lizie are a couple of blonde bombshells, but don't make the mistake of labelling these girls as just a couple of pretty faces. Having worked for major retailers including Red Earth and Sportsgirl in senior strategy and creative roles, Nicci and Lizie decided to do it for themselves, and in 2000 created accessories' brand Wicked Sista. With the taste of the success of this venture still fresh, the girls couldn't resist the concept of creating a glamorous cosmetic line and fell in love with a novelty brand called SugarBaby which they came across in 1998 specializing, at the time, in bath bombs. Partnering with Australia's leading cosmetics' and personal care products' marketer, Sax International, the consortium bought the brand outright in 2001.

SugarBaby has been a labour of love for the sisters and Sax, and it appears their little baby is growing up and taking the world by storm. The girls see their brand as a true personality that speaks directly to its customer. 'We'd love to think that a true SugarBaby's day is all about manicures, visits to beauty salons and arranging her social calendar. But more likely, a SugarBaby is almost certainly going to be found sweating it out at the gym after work, busily trying to fit the daily chores and activities around her work schedule and her responsibilities as a modern woman. She's not entirely predictable, she's spontaneous yet focused, she's like you, she's like me ... she's everybody,' Lizie states.

While the business has become a serious entity, the sisters still run



What have been your most interesting or exciting experiences thus far since starting the company?

Getting 5/5 on Beauty.com for our Satin Body Soufflé is exciting—that's today's high anyway! Every day, there are interesting and exciting proposals and experiences, they all meld together to create the buzz. The interest and excitement is always there, because this type of business is driven by passion. It's very fashion forward so you're on your toes the whole time—it's ever-evolving.

What has been the most challenging?

Recovering from a large customer going into voluntary administration. I think financial pressures on a small business are always a struggle. Getting the right people to assist you is essential and this can cost a lot of money, which is daunting for a small business. However in the bigger picture, they're essential. Our biggest ongoing challenging is to secure alliances for distribution of the brand with the right people around the world—we like to think of the business as a family and a distributor becomes an extension of that unit—so the synergy has to be right.

Define beauty in three words.

Inner self-confidence.

The poster girls of the '50s are the inspiration for the artwork, packaging and content. Think Monroe, Grable, Turner

on creative instinct and not written direction. And while they may be very proud of their achievements, they have no intention of resting on their lippies. 'You can't afford to become complacent in this business,' says Lizie. 'Retailing is very demanding and you're only as good as your last product.' She speaks exclusively with *Lucire*.

Lucire: How did you get started with SugarBaby?

Lizie: We were approached by a young girl who had registered the name and was manufacturing bath bombs in her garage. When the boom on bath bombs bubbled over we were approached to see if we would be interested in buying the business. SugarBaby became an instant sweet obsession—we were sold! We didn't have the infrastructure to do the global distribution that we had in mind, so we joined forces with Sax International to handle that side of the business.

left to right: Golden Glamour tin; Beauty Queen lipliner; Lip Candy glitter gloss; Pucker & Pout lip lacquer; Fairy Gloss lip glaze ; Pot of Gloss lip shine; Kiss 'n' Tell lipstick; Ice Princess Silky Smooth body scrub; Sun Bunny Cheek, Eye and Lip Tint; Kiss 'n' Tell lipstick; Cute Tips nail lacquer.





you just the lift you need. Personally I love Sugarbaby Princess in Paradise Self Tan: it gives my skin an instant sun-kissed glow; couple this with a dab of Glow Baby Glow Bronzing Crème and voilà: anyone would think I've been on an overnight Hawaiian adventure.

Describe a typical day at work for you.

Lately it's been hard as I've just had my first child, so I've been heavily reliant on Nicci. Right now I'm just winging it and working whatever hours I can. Generally speaking, things have settled a little as the range is somewhat established now, so we're currently working on promotional activity and merchandising issues, along with PR and the general day-to-day issues relating to brand distribution.

Because we're global, we'll take calls all day and night from suppliers and distributors. The courier arrives between 11 A.M. and noon and that's when all our product samples arrive—they come in daily! Sometimes there are great cheers, and sometimes there are tears.

The phone doesn't stop throughout all of this and we're busy cutting and pasting to prepare mock-ups for major presentations (these appear endless). Sometimes we're desperate to sit in silence but we've got staff knocking on our doors to enquire about barcodes, shipping schedules, payment terms ... and the list goes on. We manage every part of our business from the warehouse up—we're very hands-on.

Where in the world are you available?

After national success in Australia, SugarBaby is spreading its sweetness across the world. We are currently stocked in the USA, Canada, the UK, France, Indonesia and the Philippines and are finalizing distribution agreements for Hong Kong, Japan and New Zealand. Although SugarBaby is an independent player in the cosmetic market, we'd like to think that over the next five years we can sweeten the whole world with SugarBaby and become a glossy name on everyone's lips!

What are the most glamorous and not-so-glamorous aspects of what you do?

It all sounds so glamorous, being in the cosmetics' business. People probably think we teeter around the office in cashmere and kitten heels, spending the best part of the day topping up our lippie, but really, we're always up to our necks in work. Attending some of the PR events is glamorous in the sense that we dress up, but behind the scenes your adrenal levels are running high with the day-to-day activities of the business, so you don't tend to take in the glamour side. It's just business as usual.

As for unglamorous, it has to be finances (yuck). The paperwork. Out-of-stock situations and simply keeping up the energy levels.

THE CLIFTON SISTERS will be keeping their passports current as they jet off around the globe to secure distribution deals in other countries and whilst these two power princesses have the world at their finely manicured, kitten-heeled feet, they still plan to keep them firmly on the ground. Good luck for '05, girls! •

What are your can't live without beauty essentials that everyone should have?

A good moisturizer is an absolute must—it creates the base for any makeup application. An all-time favourite lip-gloss—it can be whatever colour suits you, but a quick application anywhere at any time can give

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