



FINDING ITS NICHE

Annemarie Kruse discovers how South Korean beauty and fragrance store Belport has brought European-style niche perfumery to the country, and in the process, created a new distribution channel

Belport is the first European-style perfumery in South Korea. Korea doesn't really have a perfumery retail channel as it exists in western European markets like France, Germany, Spain or Italy. Or at least, it didn't until the arrival of the Belport chain.

In the Korean C&T market, premium cosmetics are usually retailed in department stores, which offer international and Asian luxury brands at brand counters or via a shop-in-shop presence, or in so-called "single-brand stores".

These single-brand stores are retail chains operated by domestic beauty brands and sell only the product ranges of that particular brand, much like The Body Shop (L'Oréal) or Yves Rocher in western Europe. The best known Korean single-brand retailers include Innisfree and Etude House (both AmorePacific), The Face Shop (LG Household and House Care), Skin Food, Missha (Able C&C) and Nature Republic, but there are scores of other beauty brands that also operate their own store chains, like Holika Holika



(Enprani), Tony Moly, Too Cool for School, Clio or VDL.

In the mass market, the rapidly evolving drugstore sector is playing an increasingly important role in beauty retail but this distribution channel primarily focuses on mass market and masstige brands. There is another perfumery chain in Korea: AmorePacific's Aritaum. However, Aritaum only sells AmorePacific's own beauty brands such as Iope, La Neige, Illi Hanbang or Mise en Scène.

European inspiration

Belport, on the other hand, was the first beauty retailer to introduce a range of international cosmetics brands in Korea. The company describes itself as the country's first "beauty multi-store". With this retail concept, the company essentially launched a new distribution channel: European-style niche perfumery.

In its stores Belport sells more than 80 premium beauty brands from across the globe. Almost all of these are niche brands that are difficult to find in Korea and a number of beauty brands are exclusive to Belport stores. In addition, Belport sells exclusive Korean skin care and the retailer also has a range of own label brands in various product categories, including Colorneer and Hello my name is in colour cosmetics, and D28 and Avery in face care. Belport is also the official

Belport has seven standalone stores and sells more than 80 premium beauty brands from around the globe, most of which are hard to find elsewhere in South Korea

Belport: Fact file

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Korean distributor for Canadian colour cosmetics brand Cargo Cosmetics (TPR Holdings) and Italian skin and body care brand Bottega Verde.

And the retailer's high end niche beauty concept is proving to be very successful indeed. The first Belport store opened in September 2014 on Seoul's trendy Garosu-gil shopping street. One year later, the chain has grown to include seven standalone stores and 13 outlets located in upscale department stores. The first international Belport outlet in Hong Kong's Causeway Bay shopping area opened just a couple of months ago.

Flagship innovations

The Garosu-gil flagship with its three retail floors is the largest Belport in the country.

In the basement is a spa area which features brands like Kevyn Aucoin (Manzanita Capital) from the US; Estée Lauder-owned French brand Darphin (the Garosu-gil Belport store is one of two official Darphin spas in Seoul); niche spa label Omorovicza from Hungary; Sepai from Spain; and two Swiss premium brands, La Colline and Bellefontaine. Customers can book a number of face and body care treatments with Darphin, La Colline and Omorovicza.

The ground floor of the store is dedicated to fragrances and colour cosmetics. Perfumery brands on offer include premium niche labels like Olfactive Studio; The Different Company; Diptyque (Manzanita Capital) and L'Artisan Parfumeur (Puig); Fuegoia 1833 from Argentina; and the UK's Jo Malone (Estée Lauder), which is present with its own retail area.

On the colour cosmetics side, in addition to Cargo Cosmetics, Belport sells Stila and the BrowGal from the US, Glossip Milano (Apparel Group) from Italy, Bourjois (Coty) from France and Zuii Organic from Australia. Glossip and Zuii are exclusive Belport brands, while the nail polish line-up includes Uslu Airlines from Germany; Deborah Lippmann from the US; Korean brand Trou de Lapin; and Belport's own label range Hello my name is.

The first floor is dedicated to skin and body care, hair care and men's products. Since Belport is the official Korean distributor for Bottega Verde, the retailer's flagship store sells the brand's entire portfolio. Other skin and body care brands include Dermalogica and Glamglow (Estée Lauder) from the US; Korres from Greece; Botanicus from the Czech Republic; UK brand Cowshed; and Payot (LBO France), Phyto, Eugène Perma and Caudalie from France.

Then things become even more niche-oriented: the brand line-up also features Casmara from Spain; Skin & Co Roma, Abeauty Kurni and Laino from Italy; Heathcote & Ivory's Kaffe Fassett from the UK; Lollia from the US; and Sur Pur from Switzerland. Korean skin care brands on offer include Repère, Dr. Young and Freeze:24/7 and there are several international organic niche brands, like Botáni from Australia, Antipodes from New Zealand and Kahina Giving Beauty from the US.

Home fragrances are represented by Thai brands such as Erb, Princess and Karmakamet and



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men's care brands include Bluebeard's Revenge from the UK, Jack Black from the US and razors and wet-shaving gear from Mühle in Germany.

Online and onwards

In addition to its bricks-and-mortar stores, Belport also operates a successful online store which received a prestigious digital media award in 2015, the “&Award” in the Specialized Shopping category. Each month the retailer has special offers that are only available online, such as gifts with purchase or discounted prices.

Although the majority of Belport's stores are located in Seoul and other large cities – Belport is definitely an urban perfumery chain – the company's niche beauty concept is proving to be very successful. In just 15 months Belport has opened over 20 stores and the company is constantly adding new brands to its already impressive brand line-up. This also means that Belport is becoming an attractive distributor for international beauty brands looking to enter the Korean retail market – which in turn will most likely mean further expansion for the company.

Belport also offers a range of own label products, including skin care line D28 (above)



Belport Itaewon: a fragrance concept store

Belport's newest outlet, located in Seoul's upmarket shopping district Itaewon, is a high profile fragrance concept store. Although this Belport outlet also sells some skin and body care, including Korean niche brands Koy and Blossom Jeju, the primary focus lies on niche perfumes and home fragrances. The spacious ground floor area features brands like Miller Harris, Atkinsons, Jo Malone, Fuegoia 1833, Olfactive Studios, Diptyque, Maison Francis Kurkdjian and K. Hall Studio. And the first floor of the Itaewon offers a café area serving French-style macarons and other patisseries, coffee and tea and a selection of soft drinks.