

LEAD



Eye Tech. Kerryne Krause-Neufeldt has created a unique cosmetic eye treatment.

[SNAPSHOT] All Eyes on Innovation

LOCALLY DEVELOPED EYE PAD TREATMENT TAKES GLOBAL MARKET BY STORM

BY SUZIE KOEMAN WHEN KERRYNE KRAUSE-NEUFELDT first had an idea to market a cosmetic eye treatment pad product, she had no idea she would have to add 'technologist' and 'scientist' to her title of 'entrepreneur' before she could enjoy success. The 32-year-old is the mastermind behind eyeSlices, an innovative hydro-gel polymer eye treatment product that uses cryo-technology to encapsulate the properties of various active ingredients in a gel pad. The reusable pad is placed on

the eyes and slowly releases the active ingredients into the eye area, combating a range of cosmetic eye problems. Initially launched in beauty salons, eyeSlices are unique in the world and have taken local and international markets by storm.

The story of their eventual delivery to market is one of perseverance, faith and tenacity. The idea was first sparked when Krause-Neufeldt came across a sample of an Italian fabric eye mask that was impregnated with various ingredients.

Photo by Des Ingham-Brown

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BUZZ

CYBER-SNOOP?



CYBER VETTING IS BEING USED INCREASINGLY BY COMPANIES TO SCREEN PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES

Given the fact that many companies have chosen to ban employees from using social networking tools such as Facebook during office hours, it seems ironic that many of them appear to be using such tools themselves to dig up potential dirt on prospective employees. Known as cyber vetting the practice is becoming increasingly popular among employers who want to screen out unsuitable candidates.

Says Debbie Goodman-Bhyat, MD of Jack Hammer Executive Headhunters, "In a recent poll of 500 employers in the UK, two-thirds admitted to regularly carrying out Internet searches, including searches of social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and YouTube." An even larger poll carried out by social networking site Viadeo suggested that one organisation in five carries out such checks – and that a quarter of those that did had rejected applicants as a result. Goodman-Bhyat adds that South African companies are following these trends.

SCREENING WITH ONLINE TOOLS.

The most popular sites used are Facebook, MySpace and Google and Goodman-Bhyat explains why companies are finding cyber vetting a useful tool: "Prior to approaching potential candidates (as we do when headhunting), one can do a fair amount of information gathering and screening using online tools – this arms one with some basic information as to whether an individual might suit a certain role from a skills and experience point of view. It might also ▶

"I wanted to import it and market it in South Africa, but the product was a bit gimmicky, dried out too quickly and didn't deliver what it said it would," she recalls. After three years of experience as a national wholesale distributor for an oxygen cosmetic cream, Krause-Neufeldt decided that the time had come to develop her own product and find distributors throughout the country and the world who would market it for her.

"What I did know was that I wanted to create something that delivered results – I wanted technology behind the product," she says. At a chance meeting with an aloe vera product manufacturer, Krause-Neufeldt described what she wanted to create. "About two weeks later he came back to me and told me he'd found my technology and that it was sitting on a shelf in the CSIR," she recalls. The technology her contact was referring to was a water-soluble polymer gel, as Krause-Neufeldt explains: "It was basically a carrier or what they called a dermal delivery system."

But the technology had a long way to go before it became a marketable product. "I thought I'd just get someone else to create the product and that I'd then market it globally but this is not how it happened," she recalls. The product she envisaged was so unique that there was no standard manufacturing technique to make it, either locally or globally, and the scientists who had originally developed the technology had long since left the country.

Unperturbed, Krause-Neufeldt set about becoming a scientist. "We turned a room in our property into a laboratory, cooked up the polymer in our slow cooker, purchased some second-hand freezers and conducted experiment after experiment on hundreds of different freeze/thaw cycles. If you didn't do it perfectly at the right

temperature for the right amount of time and repetitions, the eye pad was either too gooey or too brittle," she recalls.

Once she had the formulation right, Krause-Neufeldt faced the challenge of how to package it. "The original recipe from the CSIR was to cast the gel into trays and cookie-cut it out but this made the process far too labour-intensive and meant we couldn't upscale the process to produce large enough quantities," she says. She and her team developed specialised filling and freeze-thaw processes, environmental controls and customised trays, and eventually purchased a packaging machine that delivered the required solution.

In total the product and processes took six years to perfect. During this time, Krause-Neufeldt funded the operation by applying for – and in most cases receiving – finance

from every funding instrument she could think of. The technology was so impressive and the product she was trying to develop so unique that she secured over R3,3 million worth of funding from 13 institutions. "My husband was in film and video technology and we worked nights and weekends on extra jobs to support ourselves and fund the project," she explains.

eyeSlices was finally launched at the Professional Beauty Exhibition at Gallagher Estate. "We sold out in two hours on the first day – it was a phenomenal response," says Krause-Neufeldt. After first launching into salons to secure the professional reputation of the product, she and her team are busy developing a retail line. The interest is global and comes from cosmetic outlets, beauty stores, airlines and mass retailers. There can be no doubt that Krause-Neufeldt has paid her dues and is now set to reap substantial rewards. □

There are 8,99 million workers aged 15 - 65 in the formal sector. **43%** earn R2 500 or less per month.



VITAL STATS

PLAYER: Kerryne Krause-Neufeldt (32)
BUSINESS DESCRIPTION: Cosmetic polymer gel eye treatment pad manufacturer.
SECTOR: Health and beauty.
ESTABLISHED IN: 2004
BUSINESS FUNDING: Self-funding together with capital, loans and investment from various funding instruments.
STAFF IN YEAR 1: 5
STAFF TODAY: 8
'X' FACTOR: : A unique, world-first product, the ability to see and exploit a gap and a thorough understanding of the market.
ON THE LOOK-OUT FOR: Global and local markets.
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