



Innovation Partnerships: Case Study – Irish Skincare



Building a name and market share in the competitive field of skincare and cosmetics is no small task, given the global pulling power of the world's leading brands. But Irish Skincare has found the right recipe for success -- high-quality products that are unique in the market, and are developed with technical expertise accessed via the Innovation Partnerships Programme.

Based in the Campus Innovation Centre of the Carlow Institute of Technology, Irish Skincare came about when its managing director sought to develop a so-called single-application sun protection cream. In 1993 the company succeeded: it introduced Parasol, a unique cream based on natural extracts. After applying Parasol once and waiting around 30 minutes, an individual can safely go into the sun for long periods of exposure without reapplication.

But the company quickly realised it would need to develop the product further -- it needed Parasol to give more protection against the Ultraviolet-A rays that were then being linked to cancer. This is where the Innovation Partnerships Programme proved invaluable.

A successful partnership

In addition to its Parasol range, Irish Skincare also offers herbal products for the control of skin conditions. Via the Innovation Partnerships Programme, the company had successfully worked with Institute researchers on this product range, so the programme was a natural choice when the company wanted to enhance Parasol.

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Arnie Stevenson,
Irish Skincare

Overseen by Dr. Paul Tomkins, Head of the School of Science at the Athlone Institute of Technology, a team of researchers collaborated with Irish Skincare to modify and test the new formulation of Parasol with advanced UVA protection. The enhanced product was successfully introduced in 2003. Arnie Stevenson, Managing Director of Irish Skincare, notes that the assistance of the Institute was essential:

- **Complex formulation requires expertise:** a unique feature of the Parasol product, and part of the reason a single application lasts all day, is that it is based on silicone, not on water or oil as competing products are. But silicone complicates product development - adding new ingredients could jeopardise the product’s stability, leading to separation. The technical know-how of the researchers helped ensure successful enhancement of Parasol while maintaining stability.
- **The innovation imperative:** companies like Irish Skincare must continue to innovate to maintain a competitive edge. *“We’ve got to continuously improve our product, that’s why the link with the colleges makes so much sense,”* said Arnie. *“If we stop R &D, our competitors are going to catch up with us and destroy us. Our R&D is a marketing advantage. Without the R&D we did into UVA, we wouldn’t even be in the races.”*
- **A seal of approval from technical experts:** a challenging aspect of the skincare market is the question of safety and liability; Irish Skincare needs to be confident that its product does what it says on the label and poses no danger to the public. *“With the Innovation Partnerships Programme, we have documentary evidence that proves we’ve tested the products and that shows our methods of testing,”* Arnie said. *“It’s like a quality mark, having these independent experts who stand over our product.”*

Mutual benefit for institute and industry

For the Institute of Technology, too, the Innovation Partnerships Programme offers a valuable opportunity for researchers to engage in projects with an applied focus. *“The area of applied research is so important to the Institutes of Technology, and the Innovation Partnerships Programme builds the profile of the institution to show that we can do applied research,”* said Paul Tompkins, adding that the programme also makes real sense for companies, especially those who are small in size.

“SMEs are focused on challenges like managing their cash flow -- they need to pay the bills, and feel they can’t invest the time or the people in research and development,” he said. *“It makes sense for them to piggyback on third level institutions to do it for them.”*



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