



Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Case Series

JOANNA GARDINER

OVELLE PHARMACEUTICALS

Sitting in her office on the Coes Road, Dundalk, Ovelle's newly appointed Managing Director is brimming with enthusiasm for the pharmaceutical business that her grandparents had established some seventy years previous. She has just signed off on a series of quirky radio ads using the "Save your Skin" slogan, designed to boost brand awareness on a national level. She has, by all accounts, already turned what was a small, family-run and, according to some, floundering company into a highly competitive, growth-oriented venture, widely respected within the skincare market. After all, Ovelle's Elave[®] range of irritant-free body washes, shampoos and intensive creams is now a well-established brand in the marketplace. However, for this young, dynamic Trinity graduate, the biggest challenge is yet to come. Having, by her own admission, taken the company "by the scruff of the neck" and made "really tough business decisions along the way", Joanna is gearing up to lead Ovelle through a major expansion phase which will extend their export sales to the global market – a market controlled by just a handful of multi-national companies. From a marketing perspective, the time is right – the general toiletries market, within which the skincare market is categorised, is forecast to grow by some 16 per cent over the next five years. But competing at *the global level* will inevitably mean more changes within the company: significant further investment, a new recruitment drive and an international marketing campaign. This will undoubtedly present Joanna with another exciting challenge, fuelling her marketing drive as well as her passion for advertising. Thinking about her small team of just fifty staff and the tough decisions she had to make in the recent shake-up, Joanna can't help but ask herself the question – is Ovelle ready for another major restructuring?

© Colette Henry 2006.

This case was prepared by Dr Colette Henry* as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a business situation.

The *Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Case Series* highlights the entrepreneurial pathways and strategies of successful Irish entrepreneurs. By platforming positive role models, the cases aim to foster entrepreneurial endeavour among students. The cases are based on the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award finalists and are edited by Dr Colette Henry at the Centre for Entrepreneurship Research. This project is a joint initiative of Ernst & Young, the Centre for Entrepreneurship Research (DKIT) and InterTradeIreland. InterTradeIreland is responsible for the promotion of trade and business on an all-island and cross-border basis.

*Colette Henry is Head of Department of Business Studies and Director of the Centre for Entrepreneurship Research, Dundalk Institute of Technology (Colette.henry@dkit.ie). The author is extremely grateful to Joanna Gardiner for her time and her inspiration in helping to prepare this case.

Company Background

When you walk into Ovelle Pharmaceuticals the first thing that strikes you is their compliance with industry standards. The reception walls are filled with quality certificates issued from the recognised national and international authorities – evidence that the company meets the highest technical standards in terms of both product and process. The commitment to their staff is also evident, with a range of Excellence through People awards hanging on the reception walls alongside various other export and environmental awards.

Founded in 1934, Ovelle Pharmaceuticals is a privately owned family business based in Dundalk, Co. Louth, Ireland. The company has always been viewed as a small owner-managed business, manufacturing old-fashioned, unbranded traditional creams and lotions, such as Calamine Lotion, Silcock's Base and emulsifying ointments. Such products were typically sold over the counter by pharmacists all over the country and were highly regarded by GPs.

Joanna only became involved in the business in 2000, when the company was, for the most part, seen as small and static, content to continue servicing its existing markets without deliberate expansion. Joanna's role at that point had been mainly marketing and promotion, a role she envisaged retaining for the foreseeable future. However, shortly after Joanna joined the company, Ovelle underwent a major restructuring. Staffing levels were reduced and a strategy was developed to refocus the business as a sales-led organisation. To fund the planned restructuring, two local private investors were secured, in addition to funding from Enterprise Ireland.¹ This resulted in the company moving from a family-owned business run by her father, Sean Gardiner, to a company with significant external shareholding. Joanna played a major role in the restructuring process and, in 2002, was appointed Managing Director.

Under Joanna's direction, Ovelle's new challenges would include growing the export business and introducing a branded skincare product line. With an increase in skin complaints such as eczema, psoriasis and dry skin, Joanna saw an opportunity to produce irritant-free pharmaceutical products that were not damaging to the skin. The resulting Elave (formerly Emulave) brand would be more consumer-friendly, taking less time and effort to administer, yet it would deliver the same benefits as the company's existing product line. Another key challenge would involve bringing the company from a turnover of around €2m with a loss of €0.3m, to a profitable, growth-oriented operation.

Ovelle's Product Range

Ovelle's core competency is the formulation, development and production of dermatological, pharmaceutical and healthcare products. Fully licensed by the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) to manufacture multi-dose liquid, semi-solid and solid pharmaceuticals, Ovelle's manufacturing permit is recognised in all EU countries and by the World Health Organisation. Their product range includes emollients, antiseptics, muscle and skin treatments, coal tar preparation and sun blocks for the domestic and

¹ Enterprise Ireland is the State agency responsible for supporting indigenous enterprises in the manufacturing or internationally traded services sectors.

export market, which they supply to pharmaceutical wholesalers, pharmacy chains and independents.

Ovelle operate the Quality Assurance Standards (QAS) and Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) in their production processes – internationally recognised standards for the pharmaceutical industry. Their manufacturing license requires quality assurance of the highest standards, typically in excess of ISO9000 and the Q Mark. As a result, Ovelle are in the envious position of being registered suppliers for the United Nations and the United Nations Children’s Fund, and carry out contract manufacturing on behalf of aid agencies worldwide.

The company’s key brand – Elave – is a range of irritant-free body washes, shampoos, lotions, oils, facial cleansers and intensive creams (see Exhibit 1). These products contain no alcohol, soap, colouring dye, perfume, parabens or formaldehyde. Sales of the Elave range have grown dramatically over the past three years, making it the number one brand in the Irish skin care market for dermatology products, ahead of its key competitor E45. Highly recommended by pharmacists, dermatologists and GPs for the treatment of a wide range of skin conditions, Elave products are now sold nationwide in selected multiples, including Boots, McCabe’s and McCauley’s retail pharmacy chains, as well as in some of the Dunnes Stores, Tesco and Superquinn outlets. In addition, Elave products have just recently become available online <<http://www.elave.ie>>, adding a significant new dimension to Ovelle’s sales strategy and their turnover.

The Competition and Industry Trends

As mentioned above, Ovelle’s biggest competitor product is E45, a range which consists of products specially formulated for people with dry skin. All E45 products are perfume-free and their washing products contain no soaps or detergents. Like the Elave range, E45 products have been dermatologically tested and endorsed by healthcare professionals <<http://www.E45.com>>. However, the exact make up of the competition depends very much on your particular perspective, i.e. what market is Ovelle actually in? In the strictest sense, Ovelle is firmly grounded in the skincare market, more specifically, within the dry-skin and dermatological market. But these days the lines between dermatological and cosmetic skincare products are more than just slightly blurred, with the crossover from one market to the other becoming increasingly evident in media coverage, market reports and industry statistics.

Since the mid 1990s, individuals worldwide have been spending more per capita on skincare than ever before. The trend towards better skincare is set to continue, with European and Japanese consumers showing even greater awareness of the retail skincare market than in the United States (Feedback.com, March 2004). Today, the consumer skincare market includes a vast array of anti-aging products, anti-fungals, moisturisers, medicated shampoos, body washes, lotions, oils, facial cleansers, intensive anti-irritant creams and sun-care products.

However, accurate data for the skincare market is difficult to come by, with not all over-the-counter sales being tracked and marketing reports typically categorising skincare products within the more general *toiletries* industry, which tends to overlap with the *cosmetics* industry. In the USA, for example, the skincare market witnessed a compound annual growth rate of 14.5 per cent between 1995 and 2000 (see Exhibit 2).

In the UK, the toiletries industry, which is led by multinationals Unilever and Procter & Gamble, grew by 3.3 per cent in 1999 to around £3.42bn. Current forecasts indicate that the sector will continue to grow by more than 16 per cent between 2005 and 2009 (Research and Markets, 2000; 2005).

The reasons for the phenomenal growth of the skincare market can be explained in part by the industry's improved access to research and technology on a global scale, better scientific testing facilities, greater consumer awareness of skincare (including being better educated about the potential skin damage caused by the sun and other environmental effects, as well as being able to recognise potentially harmful chemical ingredients), and an increase in Internet shopping. Furthermore, the industry has been quick to note that skincare consumers are loyal customers who tend to stick with their chosen brand, something that is not typically seen in cosmetics, its sister industry.

According to the *New York Times*, today's skincare companies are marrying science to mass customisation, but this scientific approach comes at a price, with consumers witnessing as much as a 100 per cent price increase on some of the traditional leading brands, such as Olay or Neutrogena. Visually attractive packages that carry labels with complex formulae and high tech-sounding ingredients promising to 'reduce', 'diminish' and 'protect' are not without their critics:

[T]hey talk about some high-tech sounding protein that slows the aging process...but very few ingredients do the things they say they do, and I'm not sure all of them are safe. (Dr Leslie Baumann, University of Miami School of Medicine²).

Notwithstanding the above, on a purely commercial level the scientific marketing approach would appear to be working:

The plethora of molecules du jour was probably inevitable. More than a decade ago, companies began putting alpha hydroxy acids, retinols and retinoids, vitamins C and E, and all kinds of other scientific ingredients into what used to be mundane creams. Their sales shot up. (Deutsch, 2003).

However, in contrast to the scientific approach, there is also evidence of an underlying trend towards natural ingredients, with an interest in herbal derivatives and an increased awareness of potentially harmful chemical ingredients (see Exhibit 3). Indeed, in recent years critics of the skincare industry have been quick to alert consumers to the staggering proliferation of toxic chemicals appearing in everyday personal care products. The long-term safety of continued exposure to chemicals such as Propylene glycol (PG) – used in toothpastes and aftershaves; Polyethylene glycol (PEG) – found in most skin cleansers; Isopropyl and Alcohol – found in body rubs and hand lotions; Sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) – a foaming ingredient found in toothpastes and bubble baths, and Formaldehyde – used in moisturisers and shampoos – is now becoming a key concern for consumers. It is claimed that such harmful and toxic chemicals not only contribute to the development of skin complaints such as asthma and eczema, but that they can also cause much more serious conditions such as Crohn's disease, IBS, ME, MS or cancer (Epstein and Day, 2006).

² As cited in the *New York Times*, 13 July 2003.

Back at Ovelle, Joanna Gardiner is all too aware of the resulting confusion in the market place, but sees a clear opportunity for her product range:

These days consumers are more educated about good skincare, and are not just buying to treat skin complaints such as eczema, psoriasis or dry skin; rather they are buying to protect their skin. They are much more conscious of the dangers of long-term exposure to chemical-based ingredients that appear in so many everyday skin products. The time has come to cater for the ‘worried well’, not just those with actual skin complaints.

The Making of an Entrepreneur

Personal Background

The mother of three children – a girl and two boys (aged 10, 8 and 3 years respectively) – Joanna grew up in Dundalk and attended the local Louis School. Her parents were pharmacists but Joanna never considered herself to be a scientist. “I never really liked Science subjects at school”, she admits, “I just ended up studying Physics and Science because I was told to – it seemed to make sense at the time”. At university she picked business-type subjects, which seemed to suit her well. As Joanna puts it, “at least with Business I didn’t have to struggle with complex scientific formulae”.

Joanna graduated from Trinity College Dublin (TCD) with a Degree in Business and Politics in the early 1990s when there were virtually no jobs. At that time, there were many state-funded programmes available to provide fresh graduates with much-needed work experience. However, the average salary on these schemes was around €14k, prompting most graduates to head for London or further afield in search of work. Joanna managed to get a marketing placement with an engineering company, where her job involved developing a marketing image for the business. She quickly made the company realise that they were not capitalising on their product offering and were, as she put it, “giving an awful lot away for free”. While this placement worked out well, Joanna’s real interest was in advertising. She had always loved watching the ad campaigns on TV and her passion eventually landed her a job as an account executive in design with the Helm Partnership in Dublin. The range of both products and clients that she encountered gave her valuable experience of different markets – she just loved advertising. She became really impressed with the entrepreneurial and management style of the company’s Managing Director, Donald Helm. She admired his interpersonal skills, his creativity and the way he worked with his clients. In particular, she noted how he often took time out to just think things through before making decisions.

I used to come in to his office and he would be just sitting there and it looked like he was doing nothing. But after a while he would start to write or get on the phone or call us together to outline a new idea. I really admired his approach. That’s the problem with business today – we don’t seem to take time out to just think.

The Decision to Join Ovelle

Despite her obvious passion for her work, on a personal level Joanna was going through a difficult time. Living in Dublin with (then) two children was not easy and, apart from the obvious stresses of city life, appropriate childcare was hard to find. So, in 1999, Joanna moved back to Dundalk in search of a better quality of life for both herself and her children. Her parents were based in Dundalk and this sense of family was important to her. Soon, she began working for the family business as Marketing Manager.

At that point Sean Gardiner, Joanna's father – the company's Managing Director – had just developed a dermatological wash product, Elave. Joanna saw immediate value in the product. As a mother who often took her children swimming, she had witnessed first-hand the difficulties that other mothers encountered as they tried to administer the traditional heavy-duty lotions to children suffering from skin complaints such as eczema, psoriasis or dry skin. At the time, Elave was being marketed as a unisex product, ("yes, despite its pink packaging!" declares Joanna). Joanna immediately set about re-branding the product, developing it into two separate products: one wash and one cream. However, while Joanna was now Ovelle's Marketing Manager, she essentially had no budget: "a Marketing Manager with no money to do marketing" she recalls. Joanna was beginning to get an insight into the financial side of the business. She was beginning to realise that this long-established family business was in trouble. The company had lost focus; too many products, high overheads and no strategic direction. It was losing money fast, and staff morale was at its lowest. Joanna's father was clearly worried, and with just cause. Joanna began to wonder whether she had made the right decision in joining Ovelle.

The Turnaround

However, just when the business reached crisis point, two private investors were found for Ovelle and things really began to change. For the first time since its establishment, 45 per cent of the Ovelle family business would now be owned by two outsiders. This was clearly an emotional time for the family, especially for Joanna's parents. However, Joanna had a different view. She saw it as a great opportunity to develop and refocus both the company and the entire product range. While the investors – two local businessmen – took a keen interest in the business, they left the day-to-day running of the company to core Ovelle staff. They did, however, attend the company's monthly sales meetings and used their influence with the local banks to leverage a better financial deal for Ovelle. While they had clearly seen potential in the Ovelle product range, it was evident that significant changes would have to be made if the company was to be financially viable and the investors were to get a return on their money. They were going to have to rethink the entire business direction of the company. With Joanna busy working on the company's marketing and promotional strategy, the investors and their external consultants were contemplating a new leader. Joanna was in for a surprise. In May 2000, she was appointed to the role of Managing Director, as she recalls:

It really came as a shock at the time. In fact, it was a shock to everyone. I think, since the obvious choice – my brother – was still studying, there was an expectation, particularly among the production staff, that an experienced outside manager would be brought in to take over. My father had already indicated that he would step down to focus on product development, so while that part of it was sad, it was sort of expected. It was his proposed replacement that was unexpected.

Realistically, while perhaps not exactly the traditional choice Joanna was the obvious one. She recognised straight away that the business had to change. In fact, she embraced change. She appreciated the true value of the product and could see its potential. She understood the market and was notorious for coming up with new ideas for promoting the product range. If anyone was able to take Ovelle through a period of significant change it was Joanna – and she was going to make lots of changes.

Up until then, the company had no real management team in place. Joanna's parents were both still working in the business as QPs³ and her father was heavily involved in developing product formulations. Today there are seven staff members on the company's core management team. Furthermore, there had been very little staff training taking place in the business, and one of the first things Joanna did was to introduce appropriate training procedures. Part of her staff training strategy involved generating new ideas from every part of the business through an innovation programme called "Out of the Box" – a highly inclusive initiative which encourages staff to be more creative and encourages team working.

Communication also featured strongly as a core part of Joanna's new approach, with the primary aim of ensuring that all Ovelle staff were aware of the brand, the brand strategy and the overall direction of the business.

But, when Joanna took over as MD, she also had to make some very tough decisions, decisions that were not always popular. When she joined the business, the company had around eighty staff, including four sales representatives on the road serving the retail market. As part of the new strategic direction of the business, Joanna had to downsize, which inevitably meant redundancies. Joanna moved 50 per cent of the business to wholesalers. Now, Ovelle has a total of fifty staff and no sales representatives on the road. There is just one sales manager with whom Joanna works to negotiate with the big buying groups. Sales are growing and, what's more, they are costing less to manage.

In rationalising her tough decision to take the company's sales reps off the road, Joanna simply explains that it was the most cost effective way of doing business:

We're good at making product. Why on earth were we trying to break our backs distributing? That's not what we're good at. It was a really tough time, and obviously some jobs had to go and people took that very personally. But the company needed to be taken by the 'scruff of the neck' and some really tough business decisions had to be made. It was really hard for me but, had I not made those sorts of decisions, everyone's life would have been affected because the business would simply not have survived.

Although she had the Elave strategy in her mind long before she realised that the business was in difficulties, there is no doubt that some of the changes Joanna has introduced would simply not have been possible had the business not reached crisis point. In many cases, there was simply no alternative: "that's when a crisis can really help you perform", comments Joanna.

Within a relatively short space of time, Ovelle have significantly refined their product range. In 2000 they had just two products under the Elave range. By 2005 they had fifteen Elave products. They have also developed their export business, which now accounts for around 33 per cent of their turnover. In addition, the company holds a number of long-term agreements to supply UNICEF and the UN, worth in excess of €200k annually. Their products and processes had to be audited at length before being awarded the contracts, which they won on an open tender basis. They now also develop and manufacture private label products under contract for Merck Generics UK, Gerard Laboratories and Goldshield Healthcare. In total, including their Elave brand, Ovelle

³ QP (Qualified Person): a recognised term in the pharmaceutical industry for qualified and experienced people authorised to test formulations.

currently manufacture over one hundred products, and their export sales have increased by 121 per cent since 2000.

Given the above, it is not surprising that, in 2004, Joanna was selected as an Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award Finalist.⁴ Further recognition of her business acumen and innovative thinking came two years later in February 2006, when the Minister for Education and Science appointed Joanna as Chairperson of the Governing Body of Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT). Joanna would be DKIT's first female chairperson since the Institute was formally designated as a corporate body in 1992.

Entrepreneurial Traits

Joanna sees herself as a very positive person, an ideas person. She believes that her personal experiences, including being a mother, understanding the value of money and being driven by a desire for financial independence (rather than by money itself) have helped her to become more realistic in life. She can see 'the wood from the trees' and prioritise things in a crisis, important skills to have in the business world. However, when asked what she thinks is the most important entrepreneurial trait, she laughs:

But I'm not really an entrepreneur you know. An entrepreneur is someone who invents something and then makes money out of it, or at least that's the way I used to think. Now I think it's actually harder to re-energise an existing business rather than start one from scratch.

For Joanna, being a good judge of people is one of the most critical entrepreneurial skills.

I feel I have recruited really well for the business. Since I took over as MD, I have had the unfortunate experience of having to make people redundant – it's not a nice thing to have to do, believe me. When you run a business, managing people is the biggest draw on your time, and it's important to try and keep your team motivated and happy.

Moving Forward – The Decision to Compete in the Export Market

It has taken Joanna five years to turn Ovelle around from a floundering business to one with the potential to be a real player in the global market place. "We have a great team of people here now", says Joanna proudly. "There's a great atmosphere and it's all down to communication. Hey, we don't even have a personnel department".

Ovelle are now gearing up for the expansion phase, which will obviously mean new markets as well as a new export strategy. For example, the scale of the UK market is completely different to Ireland, and securing a major retail chain like Boots could add millions to Ovelle's turnover within the space of a few months. Joanna is planning to double the company's turnover within the next three years, and if she is serious about that then she needs to get really serious about the export business.

With the 'Save your Skin' slogan established alongside the Elave brand, Ovelle will be the first Irish company to market a product range that is completely SLS-free. As Joanna explains:

⁴ The Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Awards recognise the entrepreneurial achievements of Irish businessmen and women. See <<http://www.eoy.ie>> for further details.

I think we are ready now to move from managing a ‘dry skin problem’ to focusing on the ‘worried well’. When it comes to skincare, people are going back to basics, though so-called ‘organic’ skincare products are still a long way off. There are common chemical additives that can trigger adverse skin reactions, so we have simply removed them from our product range.

There is no doubt that Ovelle’s ‘Save your Skin’ and SLS-free principles have played a critical role in the company’s marketing strategy to date. However, the big challenge is how to weave them into the new export strategy to take on the global competitors. From a marketing perspective, the time is right. One-third of children nowadays get eczema – a figure that used to be one in twenty – the increase being largely due to chemicals in washes and harsh perfumes used in soaps. In many ways, concerns about skincare would appear to be developing in the same way as concerns about food; people are starting to check product labels for potentially harmful additives. Concerns over the safety of certain chemicals in skincare products are becoming more common.⁵ However, competing at the global level and taking on the big players will inevitably mean more changes within the company – significant further investment, a new recruitment drive and an international marketing campaign. But is Ovelle ready for another major shake up? Is Joanna? Regardless of what the future holds, it looks as if Joanna is going to be around for a while:

I really believe in what we are doing now. We are doing something with a lot of integrity; we are the first chemical-safe, skincare range on the market and I am very committed to that. Sometimes, I don’t know if I could ever leave this.

References

Deutsch, Claudia H. (2003) “Scientific Solution to Save Your Skin”, *New York Times*, 13 July, as cited by <<http://www.sensualism.com/beauty/skin.html>> [Accessed 3 April 2006].

Epstein, Samuel and Day, Phillip, ‘Toxic Chemicals in Toiletries’, *Health-Report.co.uk*, available at <http://www.health-report.co.uk/toxic_toiletries.html> [Accessed 3 April 2006].

Express Newspapers (2004) ‘How Safe are Your Toiletries’, *Express Newspapers*, 14 December 2004.

Feed-back.com Ezine, (2004) ‘U.S. Consumer Skin Care Products’, *Feed-back.com Ezine*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March), available at: <<http://www.feed-back.com/mar04ezine.htm>> [Accessed 3 April 2006].

Research and Markets (2000) ‘Toiletries Market Report Plus’, *Research and Markets*, available at <http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reportinfo.asp?report_id=3906> [Accessed 3 April 2006].

Research and Markets (2005) ‘Toiletries Market Report Plus’, *Research and Markets*, available at

⁵ See, for example, UK first edition feature, ‘How safe are your toiletries’, *Express Newspapers*, 14 December 2004.

<http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reportinfo.asp?cat_id=0&report_id=307831&q=Toiletries%20Market%20Report%20Plus%20&p=1> [Accessed 3 April 2006].

Exhibit 1

Elave Product Range



[elave body wash](#)
250ml €6.99



[elave body oil](#)
250ml €9.99



[elave intensive cream](#)
125ml €7.99



[elave shampoo](#)
250ml €6.99



[elave facial cleanser](#)
250ml €7.99



[elave shower](#)
125ml €4.49



[elave body lotion](#)
250ml €7.99



[elave hand wash](#)
250ml €6.99

Source: <<http://www.elave.ie>> (Prices correct at 1 August 2006)

Exhibit 2**Total U.S. Consumer Skin Care Products Market, 1995–2000**

(Revenues are in Millions of Dollars at the Retail Level)

Year	Revenues	Growth Rate
1995	2,125.0	—
1996	2,496.0	17.5%
1997	2,850.0	14.2%
1998	3,270.0	14.7%
1999	3,755.0	14.8%
2000	4,187.0	11.5%

Compound Annual Growth Rate, 1995–2000 = 14.5%
Source: Feedback Research Services
<<http://www.feed-back.com/mar04ezine.htm>>

Exhibit 3**Article in the *Irish Examiner*****Irish Examiner.com****<http://archives.tcm.ie/irishexaminer/2000/10/21/current/ipage_4.htm>****21 October 2000****Women should not be fooled by expensive creams
by *Linda McGrory***

EVERY year Irish women spend millions of pounds on creams and lotions in the hope of finding the secret of eternal youth.

They willingly fork out anything from £10 to £50 for the latest line of anti wrinkle and cellular renewal potions, the ingredients of which sound more like the dinner menu on the Starship Enterprise.

What they might not realise however, is that the basic formula for many of these expensive creams has been made in Ireland since the 1940s and can be bought for £3 in a chemist.

Silcock's Base, which is made by Ovelle Ltd, Dundalk, is a thick white cream recommended by dermatologists for sensitive and problem skin including conditions such as eczema and psoriasis.

It consists of white petroleum, emulsifying wax and water the basics of nearly all good moisturisers.

There is no mention of anti oxidants to repair damaged skin cells, alpha hydroxy acids to brighten up the skin or retinol to boost skin cell regrowth.

But it is one of the best basic moisturisers available for skin and is also recommended by leading dermatologists.

Body Shop boss, Anita Roddick has rocked the cosmetics world by claiming that most modern cosmetics are 'complete pap'.

Roddick is not so much bothered by the creams' ingredients so much as the makers' claims that they are wonder cures for wrinkles and fine lines, accompanied by advertisements exaggerating the benefits.

Ovelle Ltd agrees that women should not be fooled out of their money by expensive creams and advertising hype.

Unlike multi billion pound cosmetics giants such as L'ancome and Estee Lauder, the company's annual turnover is around £500,000 while its return on Silcock's Base is a modest £100,000 a year.

Marketing manager Joanna Gardiner agrees with Roddick that women are only buying a dream if they think a lotion can reverse the ageing process. Instead she says women can only hope to look as good as they can for their age by using a good basic moisturiser, sun block and eating a healthy diet. "Silcock's base is basically water and petroleum which is in nearly all moisturising products. "It might be a bit messy in its generic form but in its refined state such as our Emulave range, and if used with a good sun block and a healthy diet, we believe women can do no better," said Ms Gardiner.

The product is named after a Liverpool dermatologist, Dr Silcock, who used it on Irish patients while on monthly visits to Dublin in the 1930s.

© Irish Examiner, 2000