

The Role of the Perfumer at a Finished Goods House

By Thomas J. Pampinella, Chief Perfumer, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Inc.
Dallas, TX

The role of the perfumer at finished goods houses has gone through many changes. Years ago, most finished goods houses maintained staffs of working perfumers whose function it was to develop all manner of fragrances for the company. In most cases where they did not possess the manufacturing capabilities of actually blending the fragrance oils, the formulations created by their in-house perfumers were tolled out to other companies.

As the years went on and with the expansion of essential oil houses into the fragrance field, the finished goods houses saw a huge reserve of talent that could now be utilized for the asking. Instead of one in-house perfumer working on a project, outside vendors were often asked to submit. This healthy competition worked very well with the finished goods houses getting the best quality fragrances at the best possible price. But this didn't last.

The next step was to rely entirely on outside vendors and either cut back or totally eliminate the in-house perfumery staffs. Economic considerations, raw material knowledge, purchasing power, as well as specialized compounding, brought about this cut back. Gradually valuable in-house fragrance expertise was lost to nearly all finished goods houses.

Today, the cycle is turning once again to in-house perfumers, but with a changed set of criteria.

The present state of the economy requires finished goods houses to have the very expertise lost to them just a few years ago. Working under these new conditions calls for a person who is

capable of and willing to work as a team member. Gone are the "Ivory Tower" days of solitude having long periods of undisturbed time allocated to the creation of a fragrance.

Today's finished goods house perfumer has a diversified background, not only in fragrance creation, but also in raw materials be they natural or synthetic, instrumentation, toxicology and a passable knowledge of marketing. Job responsibilities may also include the application laboratories, as well as panel testing. Being able to successfully communicate with other departments within the organization ranks high on the list of indispensable assets.

Fragrance Creation

We might not have the long periods of time for creating we once enjoyed, nevertheless, we still have successful creations. Working under stricter guidelines and regulations than ever before, fragrances are created for alcohol-based products. We may either work on these projects alone or compete with submissions from outside vendors.



All fragrances being considered for a particular project are coded and run through a preliminary research and development panel to see if they meet the assigned profile. Winners from this panel are then forwarded to a marketing group for their consideration—still with the assigned code. This code remains with the fragrance until a winner is selected.

Line Extension

Given a selected fragrance, the in-house perfumers must be able to modify it for a wide range of product forms ranging from creams and lotions to soaps. If it is their creation, they will usually find the going a little easier since all knowledge is in-house, i.e. bases and fragrances. They may also be responsible for the coordination of all outside work, in this case the forwarding of proper unperfumed bases for line extension work.

Cost Savings/Raw Material Substitutions

These programs are usually ongoing where selected fragrances are reworked for a lower raw material cost, removal of a potentially bothersome ingredient or an unavailable raw material. In all cases, the reworked fragrance again is incorporated in the proper base and subjected to a complete battery of tests.

Fragrance Optimization

The in-house perfumer, in cooperation with marketing and other departments, may also be responsible for establishing the levels of fragrances used in the company's products. This may be a result of an existing cosmetic product, the rework of an existing fragrance, or a direction from the marketing group to explore the possibility of a different level for a particular reason.

If bases are supplied, the perfumer directs the incorporation of the fragrance at selected levels.

Safety Considerations

We all strive to make the best and safest product, but in light of a host of regulations, this is even more important today. The finished goods house perfumer must be aware of and involved in safety in its many forms.

The first consideration is to check the formulations to see if they conform to the latest guidelines laid down by Research Institute for Fragrance Materials and International Fragrance Association as well as any the company's toxicological group may have.

A second consideration, and one that is very important to finished goods houses that solicit submissions from outside vendors, is to screen all incoming fragrances for questionable ingre-

dients using the same guidelines as previously stated. This includes all added ingredients as well as components of specialties and bases.

The above may be accomplished both organoleptically and instrumentally via gas chromatography/mass spectroscopy. In this manner, only those compositions shown to contain no disallowed materials are passed on to the next level of testing.

The toxicology group sets up and runs required tests on all fragrances passed on to it by the perfumer. Since these tests are both time consuming and costly, it is imperative that all of the above prerequisites are met first. Even in-house creations that have been carefully screened may surprise.

Reactions between synergistic materials will cause a fragrance to fail in one or more of the various tests.

Panels

Still another responsibility of the finished goods house perfumer may be to establish and interpret panel testing. These are primarily screening panels as the final testing is usually conducted on a much larger scale by the marketing group. The perfumer will evaluate the odor detecting abilities of research and development personnel and select a group of from ten to twelve for the panels. Although this is usually not required, they can be further classified into professional and consumer panels.

The function of these panels is to insure that only those fragrances which closely match a given profile are passed on to marketing with their recommendation. These prescreening panels are very valuable in saving time.

Marketing Interface

At most finished goods houses, the one department that in-house perfumers will interface with the most will be marketing. It will turn to the perfumers for their knowledge and expertise. They can be responsible for examining and explaining new fragrance market ideas and exploring the possibility of how well such a new trend might fit into the company's overall plan. Knowledge of perfumery language makes the perfumers' position invaluable when planning fragrance profiles. They may also be the coordinator in all rework efforts with outside suppliers.

Conclusion

The perfumers' function at a finished goods house today encompasses much more than fragrance creation. Perfumers are now part of a team, lending their special expertise to all areas of new product development as well as quality control and production trouble shooting.