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Este Lauder exec: Beauty industry is catching the Korean Wave

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SEOUL, South Korea South Korean beauty trends are taking the global skincare and cosmetic industry by storm as the Asian nation's demand for innovative solutions impacts product development.

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The effects of the Korean Wave on international beauty companies are evident in the rising popularity of BB creams and cushion compacts, but that is just the tip of the iceberg. Speaking at the Cond Nast International Luxury Conference on April 20, an Este Lauder executive gave insights into why Korea has become the prime source of inspiration for the beauty industry and explained how the company identifies ways to integrate and leverage Korean trends in its own businesses.

"One thing's for sure: the Korean wave is showing no sign of slowing down," said Christopher K. Wood, general manager of The Este Lauder Companies Korea. "Korean consumers will continue to seek the latest and greatest products, demand the most high performing products and pursue perfection."

Riding the wave

The Korean Wave began in the 1990s, driven by the popular television drama "What is Love." Since then, other pop culture influences have put Korean trends on the map, such as the chart topping K-pop artist Psy.

Koreans have a strong heritage of beauty, which spurs a desire for perfection. Today's women may use upwards of six or seven products a day in their regimen.

This goal for flawlessness makes them demanding beauty clients, as they want results that are speedy and effective for the long haul. They do not want to wait four to eight weeks to see results.

Three key drivers of the Korean Wave's success are the innovation of products, the influence of Korean celebrities and social media's ability to connect a global audience.

The wave has the most immediate effect on China and Hong Kong, where Korean-inspired beauty brands are popping up and Korean owned brands are opening shops.

Depending on where a consumer is, the wave can be interpreted differently. Just like in the luxury industry, consumers are at varying degrees of sophistication.

A purely aspirational consumer will look at a Korean star and want to copy her look, while those who are slightly more sophisticated might appreciate and aspire to a celebrity's lifestyle. The most sophisticated will be inspired by the star's heart and values.

Therefore, Este Lauder's actions surrounding the wave different depending on the market.

Showing the importance of Korea for Este Lauder, the company opened an innovation hub in the country two years ago, which joined existing centers in Asia within Japan and China.

Este Lauder as an organization blends creativity and consumer inspiration for development. The group works to differentiate between fleeting fads and longer standing trends, since the latter is actually usable.

While Este Lauder does not try to become Korean or Chinese, it identifies key attributes within its brands, products, packaging or service that fit within trends it is seeing, allowing it to make its offerings appealing in a locally relevant way.

Sometimes products can be repurposed for different markets. For instance, the successful Clinique Even Better Clinical franchise launched in North America as a skin tone evener, but it was based on a Korean whitening product.

Last year, Este Lauder Cos. also strengthened its presence in South Korea by purchasing an interest in Have & Be Co. Ltd.

The terms were not disclosed but the deal brought Este Lauder closer to skincare brands Dr. Jart+ and Do The Right Thing. The purchase helped the company increase its presence in Asia and capitalize on a growing South Korean beauty wave ahead of a potential global flourish ([see story](#)).

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