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S. A. Life



Mía Mariú calling, via the Web

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Elaine Ayala
Express-News

Move over, Mary Kay. María Eugenia is in town.

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The new makeup maven's full name is María Eugenia Price. Her maiden name is Bermudez, and she goes by Jeanie.

But the name she's hoping you'll remember is Mía Mariú, the first health and beauty direct-sales company specifically aimed at Latinas, she says.

San Antonio is its first test market, and she's here for promotional events. Her goal is to recruit "associates" who will sell products ranging from nutritional supplements made of *nopal* (cactus) to lipsticks with names such as Tentación and Tango.

In between are mineral-based foundations that Price says will match all Latina skin tones.

But unlike Avon ladies who have sold and delivered products for more than a century, Mía Mariú will ship directly and sell online, shifting the traditional business model.

Price worked for two direct-sales giants — Mary Kay and Home Interiors, which are based in the Dallas area, where Mía Mariú is headquartered, too.

At the famous pink cosmetics company, she worked on its Latin American expansion, in Western and Eastern Europe and in Russia before the Iron Curtain came down. At Home Interiors, she saw its business in Mexico grow from \$4 million in sales to \$75 million.

But she was frustrated about not reaching more Latinos in the confines of a mass-market company. Her dream was to set up a business aimed at Latinas, not only because it could be lucrative for her but because she believes it can empower them as entrepreneurs.

From Dallas, she answered a few more questions.

Q. Describe your products.

A. They're made of natural ingredients, beginning with the nutritional products, which are made of *nopal*, known in our cultures for centuries as being incredibly healing. They're filled with antioxidants and natural fruit extracts like papaya, berries and green tea. The color line is made from pure minerals enriched with vitamins and antioxidants. They contain no binders, no chemical fragrances, no talc. They're sheer and natural. They have a luxurious, creamy texture.

Q. How does Mía Mariú fit into the market?

A. When we talk about the beauty industry, you have the prestige-level lines that are sold at Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom's. Then you have the mass brands like L'Oreal, Revlon and Maybelline. Then you have the direct sellers like Avon and Mary Kay. We are above mass market and just below prestige.

Q. Where does your line fall in terms of pricing?

A. The most expensive item is our \$52 Thermal Microdermabrasion. The least expensive are eyeliner and lip-liner pencils that are \$10. Our lipsticks, which we call stick gloss, are \$14. A bronzer is \$15.

Q. You say you're the first direct-sales company geared to Latina health and beauty?

A. I know that for a fact. (While other Latina cosmetics lines have been created) none of those are direct sales. We are the first one of our kind.

Q. How does your sales strategy shift from “the tradition model”?

A. We want to leverage the time the associate has to talk about product benefits and techniques, not administrative tasks (like delivering the product). So we direct-ship to the customer. She also gets a free personalized Web page for six months, making it a 24/7 fully transactional online store. We don't want people to carry inventory, and you don't need a minimum order. It's a lot easier to do. (An associate's starter kit costs \$85.)

Q. What is the Latina share of the beauty market?

A. The Latina index is significantly higher than the general market on cosmetics and fragrances. We tend to use more makeup anyway. We're more *coquetas* (coquettish) and like to show off our beauty.

Q. What is the status of the health and beauty industry?

A. It's big. The U.S. personal-care market is approximately \$15 billion (in 2006). The nutritional supplement market in the United States exceeded \$75 billion in 2005. Hispanic women spend over \$1.6 billion in cosmetics, fragrances and personal care products. They spend 27 percent more on cosmetics and 43 percent more on fragrances than the general market.

Q. What did your research tell you about Latinas?

A. There's tremendous frustration with the majority of cosmetics. I would say 99 percent of Latinas I've spoken with are frustrated with being unable to find a foundation that matches their skin tone naturally. Not that they don't find them, but they have to mix shades. A lot of Latinas have rosacea and skin discoloration. We have different undertones, from the Puerto Rican woman, who may be of African and Spanish descent, to the Mexican with an Indian and a German mix.

Q. Why did you decide to include nutritional products?

A. One of the reasons why is what I've seen in the Hispanic community with cardiovascular disease and diabetes. As a company we have the ability, through our associates' personal relationships, to influence the mom who then influences her family. It's the most important thing we've done.

Q. Why the name Mía Mariú?

A. Mía obviously means 'mine' in Spanish. We wanted people to feel the company is theirs. Mariú is a nickname for María Eugenia. We highlight Mía (graphically) in the products, though.

Q. Why did you pick San Antonio as your first test market?

A. I've been extremely impressed with how well-organized San Antonio is in terms of

Latina identity. It's celebrated and nurtured.

Q. What is Saturday's event?

A. It's a session where people can come and experience the product and learn about the business opportunity. We'll do some product giveaways. We'll teach some techniques.

Q. Describe what you're looking for in terms of an associate.

A. We're looking for people interested in improving their lives and that of their families, people who want to grab onto an incredible, ground-floor opportunity. We're looking for people who want to help other Latinas, who like feeling and looking good. Of course, we're looking for people interested in making money. That goes without saying.

Q. How big is the company?

A. We're just in diapers.

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