

Global CEO of Dermalogica shares past, present and shining future of innovation

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Aurelian Lis, recently appointed global CEO of [Dermalogica](#) which was acquired by [Unilever](#) last year to form part of its Prestige personal care portfolio, is currently in South Africa to engage with various stakeholders and share the plans the company has for the brand.



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Lis previously worked for Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy Group (LVMH) as GM of Benefit Cosmetics in the United States (US). Under his leadership, Benefit quadrupled its revenues with initiatives like '[they're real!](#)' – now the leading prestige mascara in the US, as well as significantly increasing the awareness of the brand through various marketing campaigns. As a result, Benefit was named Sephora's Most Innovative Marketer of the Year 2014.

In light of this, [Innovation Month](#) and the [SA Innovation Summit](#) taking place next week, I asked Lis why innovation has always been important to Dermalogica, about the new Phyto Replenish Oil – a product that showcases the brand's innovation well, and plans to bring other innovations to market, giving them their chance to shine...

■ What plans does Unilever have for Dermalogica going forward, and what skills managing Benefit have you acquired that will enable you to action these to help take the brand to the next level?

The Dermalogica brand has a long history. It started with education when we were the International Dermal Institute for six years before the product line was even created. Our intention is to continue to build out this unique positioning for the Dermalogica brand. It's the brand for skin therapists by skin therapists.

Dermalogica is a fully standalone company within the Unilever Prestige portfolio. Unilever is a wonderful owner because it cares about the brand for the long term. Unilever loves Dermalogica's unique positioning and is committed to safeguarding the unique business and culture. The culture of the Dermalogica tribe (dTribe), as so well exemplified by Dermalogica South Africa, has been a key reason for our success.

The future is less about my skills as a manager; it's about enabling the capable teams to whom we delegate around the world. They have the creativity, the ability and the enthusiasm to bring our award-winning product to more consumers. My job is to ensure that they have all the tools to create this success.

■ Why are you proud to be working for a) 'the world's number one professional skin care brand', and b) for Unilever?

I am deeply respectful of brands with true history. Ever since Jane and Ray Wurwand founded the business, they have espoused a way where we build on education and use the knowledge of the professional skincare therapist to ensure our consumer gets the perfect product for her skin. This has led to our success in the past and will continue to lead us in the future. It's pretty incredible to be part of this journey.

■ Comment on your journey with Dermalogica so far, since joining in January. Any learnings, opportunities, challenges?

Very soon after joining we started discussing a new product, Dermalogica's Phyto Replenish Oil that had been in development for quite some time. This facial oil which strengthens the skin's lipid barrier and is wonderful to create that sought after dewy skin look deserved to get noticed. Maybe in the past innovations did not always get their chance to shine. Much of my work with the team since January has been in learning how best to get this message across throughout our international distribution, in store, at the skincare therapists and online.



Dermalogica.com

■ **Benefit is a manufacturer of cosmetics whereas Dermalogica is a skincare brand. What are some of the similarities/differences to managing each?**

We are in the luxury goods industry where we sell so much more than just a product. There is an element of how we connect to our customers both in interpersonal and even physical terms. That's a powerful connection that needs to be respected and cherished.

■ **What are some of the challenges for a man working in a predominantly 'women's world'?**

A lot of my past has been working in a predominantly women's environment so it's not much of a change for me. Our consumers are predominantly women, most of our customers are independent and entrepreneurial women, and most of the employees are women. That is good.

■ **Why do you believe innovation is particularly important in this day and age?**

Dermalogica has always shown a lot of innovation. Many of our greatest successes came from understanding the therapist environment and translating it into take-home products that allowed the consumers to continue their care at home. In the future we will accelerate our product and service innovation. The team has done so much excellent research that it's time to bring much of this to market. It's what makes us different, what competitors cannot do and also what we enjoy. We have just introduced Phyto Replenish Oil which showcases our innovation well. And I would suggest you tune into a livestream we will be doing on 15 December at 6pm local time where we will be showcasing some really cool innovation that launches early 2017.

■ **Jane and Raymond Wurwand retained an interest in the company and continue to work with you to grow the brand. How does this relationship play out, practically?**

The founders created the company, the brand, the dream. They will always be a part of our fabric. They are currently active in innovation and leading our important foundation that fosters 'financial independence through entrepreneurship' (FITE). It's a privilege for me to be able to work directly with the founders – a privilege that so many brands do not have.

■ **In the [acquisition release](#), Paul Polman, Unilever CEO, said that Dermalogica is "a company founded on strong values and a common belief, shared by Unilever, in the role of business as a force for good in society". Elaborate on any initiatives running at the moment or planned for the near future.**

Our commitment to being a force for good is undiminished and is very much aligned with that of Unilever. We continue to

accelerate purpose-driven education (vocational training) as a pathway to financial independence. Jane was recently named by President Obama as a Presidential Ambassador for Global Entrepreneurship (PAGE) which I think shows our thought leadership in this area.

📌 **Comment on your trip to South Africa.**

South Africa is wonderful in so many ways. The people, the culture and the geography are just so impressive. I cannot wait to come back to visit again.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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