

# Award Winner

THE INSTITUTE OF PACKAGING SA  
**Gold Pack**  
Awards  
2007  
PACKAGING AWARDS

COSMETIC PACK

## Congratulazioni **RAP** Products!

RAP Products International founder and director, ANDREA PROTTI, submitted three entries into the 2007 Gold Star Awards and left the recent awards evening with five prizes in his pocket, including a coveted trophy for Innovative Plastics Packaging and a prestigious World Star. BRENDA NEALL caught up with a thrilled Andrea a few days later to find out more about a man and a company at the cutting edge of cosmetic packaging in this country.



Looking very happy with life: Andrea Protti, the founder and marketing director of RAP Products International.

**BN: You look as pleased as punch!**

**AP:** It has been very exciting. This is the second time we've entered Gold Pack; in 2005 we submitted one and won one, while this year we entered three and took home five prizes. The World Star for our mother-and-child pack was the gold dust on the cherry on top of the cream!

**What do these awards mean for RAP?**

We were up against big players and fared very well against them, and we're very proud with this recognition of the innovation we offer the cosmetic, beauty and personal care markets.

**Clearly you thrive on the creative challenge that is innovation... do you see it as RAP's key selling point?**

Most definitely. In these very crowded arenas, packaging has never been more important as a means to grab attention, and we're constantly looking to do different things. Our aim is 'pro-action' instead of reaction; to do it first and to present customers with ideas they didn't yet know they wanted. But we also go an extra mile, and always present several ideas – it's an expensive investment in design time but it has helped us prosper in a very competitive market. And it means we have built up lots of fresh ideas in our design cupboard for future commissioning.

**Not many people perhaps know RAP's interesting origins; that for several years you were a successful hairdresser with a popular**

**salon in Birnam, Johannesburg; that you unsuccessfully tried to become an American citizen and then came home and set up a packaging venture in 1988 that has grown into a cosmetic player of significance. Do I have this synopsis right?**

The hairdressing and unhappy American emigration are true, but I started this business modestly as a marketer of pumps. From my hairdressing days, I was completely irritated by pumps that refused to function. Opportunity beckoned and, using my American contacts, set up as an agent for Emsar, the biggest global pump company. I was fortunate that the ozone scare stories had just exploded, and so everyone was looking to replace aerosols with pumps. But subsequently, as the pump market became increasingly commoditised – everything has a pump on it these days – we diversified into production and injection moulding of plastic bottles and containers. And that, too, was an opportunity, because back then you could have any bottle as long as it was round and white. Today we offer about 150 different bottles, and our inventory is growing all the time.

**Have your coiffuring days been helpful in growing RAP?**

I think it reflects a creative nature, an artistic flair, that I'm fortunate to have. Maybe it's because I'm Italian – and all Italians appreciate design and style, don't they? But this is what I love about my job as marketing director of the company; that we can take existing products for customers and modernise them, or that we can realise their dreams, put

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concepts into reality. No day is the same, and I believe we have an inspirational working environment – in fact, we have a great deal of fun at RAP. Of course, creativity also comes with some issues; sometimes you're just too far ahead of the market and nobody wants to touch your ideas. Our mother-and-child concept, for instance, was designed about four years ago.

**You mentioned earlier the words 'crowded' and 'competitive' – what's your take on the state of play in the beauty sphere?**

How long do you have? That's a big question . . . I would say, as with most things in life, we are witnessing good and bad; there's a lot of market activity that's been boosted by the good times and expanded consumer spending, but there's major competition in servicing this market. And there's often little loyalty and customers will move for a tenth of a cent in price.

The slices of pie are getting meaner – we have as many vendors of pumps in this country as they do in Europe, but alas, we have a tenth of its population with a tenth of its spending power. It's crazy, really. The numbers just don't match up. And then the price of oil is hardly helping when it comes to raw materials; and let's not forget about China . . .

**Ah, the dreaded China. What are you doing about it?**

China is scary for everyone in any walk of business. But I believe there are a few ways to cope: it makes sense to use China's cheap production capacity as long as you choose your suppliers carefully; and you have to be constantly one step ahead, because what's new today, will be copied tomorrow at half the price. For instance, we see new things at Cosmoprof, the big annual cosmetics fair in Italy in April, and sure enough, they're on shelf here, Chinese made, a few months later, before the originators have even blinked.

**A World Star and Gold Pack trophy champion: Skin Kidz Sunscreen mother-and-child dispensing bottles. A 'mother' with four 'children' concept that allows daily or weekly sunscreen doses to be dispensed from the larger bottle to smaller ones. Mum keeps the big one at home, and kids take the little ones to school. This product is marketed directly through schools.**



Fortunately for the rest of the world, I don't believe China is yet up to speed with the quality of Europe, they're happy, for now, to be second best. But how much longer?

And, as an employer [of some 140 people], I can only admire the ethic of China; where it's an honour to work, to have a job. We could be the China of Africa if that were the case here.

**So you have jetted East?**

Yes, RAP has joined the migration, but we like to think we're getting the best of both worlds. We're sourcing quality pump components in China, putting savings in our packs through the 'invisible', and then adding our touch in terms of visual appeal and finishing.

**There's a huge cosmetic and perfumery market exploding under the traditional big brand, big store radar – is RAP involved in this?**

Absolutely . . . and the numbers are extraordinary! New middle-market perfumery retailers like Fragrance Boutique are doing superbly well, and at the lower end, there's massive uptake of 'copycat' and other inexpensive perfumes that are sold in spaza shops, at taxi ranks or on the street. There are low barriers to entry in this industry, and there has been an explosion of entrepreneurs who can't find work in the formal sector and who are successfully exploiting alternative distribution chains. It's a huge and dynamic segment of the perfumery and personal care markets.

While RAP doesn't play the high-volume, low-margin game, we're very active in supporting this entrepreneurial endeavour through our willingness to supply small quantities. All our premises, in Jo'burg, Durban and Cape Town, have a shop front for direct sales with over 1 000 line items on offer.

**So Andrea, with your pocket full of prizes, where to from here?**

The crystal ball is looking good, but there's no time to relax in this industry; it feeds and flourishes on innovation and our aim is always to be on hand to assist brand owners.

RAP is moving into the nutritional sector with several new products such as specialised tablet containers, with specialised droppers, and there are some new aromatherapy containers and interesting child-proof closures. And we've not only been to China, but we're importing some beautiful glass packaging from Argentina.

RAP is an innovator of exciting and different cosmetic packaging – and one thing's for sure, we'll never be run of the mill.

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