



Jim Markham

EDITORS' NOTE *Jim Markham is a highly acclaimed beauty industry icon who has led an amazing trailblazing career from being a prominent celebrity hair-stylist to developing and innovating over 300 products for five highly successful hair-care companies, four of which he founded and five owned including: ColorProof Evolved Color Care®, PureOlogy Serious Colour Care®, ABBA Pure and Natural®, Markham Products®, and Sebring International®. To date, under his leadership, Markham's combined companies have generated over \$1.2 billion in retail sales. He is best known for developing the first luxury professional line exclusively for color-treated hair and for pioneering sulfate-free shampoos that have revolutionized the way people care for color-treated hair.*

COMPANY BRIEF *ColorProof Evolved Color Care® (colorproof.com) is a complete line of award-winning, professional luxury products designed exclusively for color-treated hair. These next generation formulas combine the latest innovations in ingredient technology with best-in-class ingredients to create a new standard in color care.*

Did you know early on that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and can you talk about how that has been at the core of so much of what you have accomplished?

I guess I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit that was driven first by the desire to provide for my family, and later by my love for product innovation. I was married and had a child by the time I was 15. To support my family, I dropped out of high school and became a barber charging \$1.50 a haircut. I quickly found I had a talent for cutting hair, so I began entering hair-cutting competitions and won every one I entered. Competing taught me early on that I could do whatever I set my mind to as long as I worked hard, developed a strategy, and had confidence that I'd win.

I had read in *Playboy* that celebrity stylist Jay Sebring was charging \$50 per haircut in his Hollywood salon and that he had a product line. I was intrigued and called him up to

Building Brands

An Interview with Jim Markham,
Founder, Product Developer, and Chief Executive Officer,
ColorProof Evolved Color Care®, LLC

discuss distributing his products. I also pitched my cutting method to him, and he suggested I fly to California for a friendly wager to see whose technique was better. He ultimately won, but the visit solidified a partnership. I began training in his technique and opened a Sebring franchise in New Mexico. When Jay was tragically killed in the Manson Family Murders in 1969, I took over as President and CEO and I also adopted his client roster, which included high-caliber stars like Paul Newman, Steve McQueen, and Frank Sinatra. At that point my career launched into a much bigger arena, and I quickly became profitable. My celebrity clients demanded the very best, which could only be attained through proper technique paired with high-performance products, spurring my love for product development.

I ended up selling Sebring® and then started Markham Products®, which revolutionized the men's wash-and-wear category of daily shampooing and styling. Following Markham®, I launched ABBA Pure & Natural Hair Care®, which was one of the first 100 percent vegan lines in the United States and focused on naturals. After selling ABBA, we thought we would retire, but a few months in, we received a phone call from a friend who had been diagnosed with cancer. Her doctors told her to avoid products containing certain ingredients, most of which were found in common products. She asked me to develop products she could safely use. The products I developed were not only free of any known carcinogens, but also free of sulfates and salts and, coincidentally, were fabulous at keeping color in. That same year, I traveled to Cosmoprof in Bologna and saw that a color boom was happening, yet there were no brands preserving or enhancing color vibrancy. I jumped at the chance to take our formulas to market resulting in PureOlogy Serious Color Care®. With PureOlogy® we pioneered the sulfate-free revolution and quickly became the market leader in professional color care. Following the sale of PureOlogy® I thought we would retire again, but kept getting requests from stylists and industry friends to come back with new products. I returned to introduce ColorProof® – the most technologically advanced products the industry has ever known for color care, a category where we have almost no competition.

When you're starting a new venture, do you know early on that it will be successful?

A good indicator of success is when we are positive that our product performance surpasses anything else in the market. It is, however, hard

to predict how big our success will be. Some ventures will be more successful than others, of course, but all are learning opportunities.

Will you talk about the ColorProof® business and where you see opportunities as you look to the future?

We sell ColorProof® to independent distributors, and they, in turn, sell it to professional stylists and colorists. We have over 4,000 ColorProof® salons that use our products and also retail them to their color-treated clientele. We presently distribute throughout North America and in a few international territories. I see tremendous opportunity in untapped international markets while continuing to grow our business within our existing domestic network.

How hard is it to tell the story and show differentiation with your products?

If you have a superior product and a strong point of difference, it makes it easy to tell the story. The key is to find a niche, something that sets us apart from the competition.

Does innovation primarily take place with more entrepreneurial companies?

One of the only ways entrepreneurs can compete with the big guys is through innovation. While large companies may have access to new ingredient technology, their cost of goods and price points often restrict them from using it. With ColorProof®, we are not limited by the cost of goods of our formulas, so when a revolutionary ingredient is discovered, we can include the optimal amount in our formulas, giving us an edge and guaranteeing superior product performance. Our unique product development strategy keeps us on top of our game. Entrepreneurial companies just cannot compete with the big guys with conventional products, thus making them more innovative.

How hard is it to stay on top of the technology in this space?

Since product development is my passion, I am constantly on the lookout for innovation. I frequently meet with ingredient suppliers and our labs to see what is new. We are always prepared to improve our existing formulas to incorporate the next degree of technology that increases performance or to develop new products inspired by the latest revolutionary technology. We will never release a product unless we know it is far superior to anything that already exists on the market. This keeps us on the forefront and pushes us to evolve continually. ●