

# BEAUTY STORE BUSINESS magazine



**SUKI KRAMER**  
All about suki skincare

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Suki Kramer, president,  
founder and formulator  
of suki skincare

# All about suki skincare

Her namesake line aims to empower women by addressing common skin issues and sensitivities through pure, responsible products.

by Regina Molaro

**AT DIFFERENT AGES AND STAGES OF LIFE, WOMEN CERTAINLY** have varying skincare needs and issues. Beyond blemishes, dry skin and fine lines, some women such as Suki Kramer, founder of suki skincare, have to contend with common but devastating conditions such as eczema. These issues can really impact a woman's self-esteem—especially during her teenage years.

In search of a solution to her own skincare needs, Kramer founded suki skincare—a pure skincare line with no synthetics that Kramer formulates herself in her lab in Massachusetts. Here Kramer, president and formulator, shares her vision and the journey that has led her to suki.

Photography by Amanda Sturtevant



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using exfoliate foaming cleanser, concentrated balancing toner, healthy aging serum plus vitamin peptide complex and pure facial moisture. Then I use eye lift radiance renewal eye cream, lip repair butter and butter cream salve. I use these every single day.

### Please share with us some fall/winter skincare tips.

Fall is all about preparing the skin for the long winter ahead; particularly when you live on the East Coast, as I do. Winters are hard on the skin. Exfoliation is always important to me. But in the winter, it's because of the dryness and indoor heat, and also because we don't get a lot of fresh air.

I suggest exfoliating regularly to keep the skin dewy and fresh, and to remove all of those dry, dead skin cells. I use a heavier eye cream at night, but I don't recommend using a heavy overnight cream all over the face. Use a facial oil instead because the skin is meant to breathe and expel toxins overnight. I highly recommend using a body oil or lotion right after bathing, while still damp, so that it absorbs well. All moisturizers absorb best while skin is slightly damp. I also suggest trying not to be exposed to too much heat, even though it can feel good when it's so cold out.

### What advice can you provide to beauty stores to enable them to sell more skin care or sell it better?

Consumers need help understanding their skin types; so don't be afraid to point out their specific issues and let them know which products will help balance their skin conditions. People want solutions, and with some help, they certainly can have much better skin—which I find many people don't really believe. I'd also suggest helping to simplify regimens and the entire process for them; and try not to overwhelm them with too many product suggestions.

Kits are also a great way for women to enter a brand. We have complete care kits for youthful or clear skin, which contain all a woman needs to try our line before investing in it. All she needs to start a simple skincare regimen is a cleanser and moisturizer. But retailers

should definitely give her a few samples as well. Especially with suki, if consumers try it, they'll like it and purchase it.

In a spa, it's much easier for estheticians to sell the line because they have the time to educate their customers and gain their trust while performing a facial. At the shelf, you only have a moment or two with your customer.

Also, suki doesn't believe in competing with our stores by discounting online. We've been the one hold-out brand in that way. So we help our retail partners there. But salespeople still have to know a few key points about skin types and products to recommend products quickly.

### Please tell us about the iPhone app launch that was designed to assist retailers in determining the appropriate products for customers. What has been the response?

We decided to go in a different direction with that and will probably revisit that concept next year. We really aren't sure if the numbers are in for mobile sales anyway and feel it's more important to put our resources into the website, making the brand easier to shop, and expanding the line into our reps and trainers.

### Please tell us about your ambassador program.

The suki ambassador program, which launched about nine months ago, is really about helping women become independent. Fans of the line can spread their love and belief in suki from home, through suki spa parties, networking and talking about it with their friends—essentially in the same way our home-based business works, with very little investment other than time and energy.

I love this program because that is really how suki has always grown—through individuals and their experiences. It's amazing how one person being an advocate and believing in something can so strongly impact a brand. What we do here, and what we believe, and how we have been uncompromising—these are the reasons why we've grown so much, and people can feel that. The brand ambassador program is essentially just a formal version of how we've grown organically.

We currently have between 1,500 and 2,000 ambassador respondents. People really believe in what we're doing.

### Please tell us about your product packaging.

Our goal is always to do everything responsibly. As an example, we use post-consumer-use recycled paper, responsible coatings and glass packaging. We don't believe in using plastic; so we use as little of it as possible. [Our use of glass packaging] is not only sensual, but part of my idea of a great skincare experience along with efficacy.

We do everything as purely and responsibly as we can—from how we manufacture, label and fill, to how we package our products. We also work with responsible partners for our sourcing and printing.

### Will you be exhibiting at Natural Products Expo East or Natural Products Expo West next March?

We'll be at both shows; but we have a booth at Natural Products Expo West. We'll host some events at Natural Products Expo East such as meetings and a cocktail party.

### What goals do you have for suki?

Of course, we have an infinite amount of products we'd love to launch. This year is all about reshaping the packaging to help people realize how easy it is to shop and sell the line. We're also expanding the sukispa line. And, we'll be launching products like the [sought-after] body oil in a lighter aroma that is reminiscent of our unique lemongrass blend that people love so much. We'll be launching a high-end point-of-sale display for our lip repair butter. We're formulating an SPF—but this will take quite some time with regulatory changes. It is a proprietary, nongreasy blend that I've been working on for a long time. Every type of formulation is an exciting, new challenge for me. It offers the opportunity for new discoveries and to know that we are helping women realize their true beauty.

Although I am the founder and president, I still formulate and check every product myself for quality and consistency. And suki skincare is made, labeled and filled by our amazing staff here. This ensures

batch freshness but, more importantly, it ensures that our standards are always high and true to my original ideals.

### Which charities and causes does suki support?

The most rewarding and unexpected benefit from starting my company has been the letters from survivors and people in treatment. Learning that my products were the only ones that many people found they could use on their skin while going through radiation treatment, for instance, was moving and sad.

I started working with cancer centers and organizations such as The Farber Center a few years ago as they provide [special] care and attention to everything. It's such a special place. I love Breast Cancer Action because it, like my company, is all about exposing the truth. I highly recommend its website [bcaction.org] for information on alternative and mainstream treatments, pink-ribbon campaigns and more. I've been working with it for quite some time, trying to turn more people onto it.

I'm also looking for more ways to work with programs that help empower young women. I'm on the board of Bay Path College in Massachusetts. It's doing wonderful things for women of all ages who are looking to further their educations. The energy there is incredible, and the president, Carol Leary, has led incredible growth and change. I really can't say enough about the entire staff and every student I've met there. They're all so inspiring, and I'm really proud to even be a part of that place.

One other program I participate in is a ballroom-dance competition to support the International Rett Syndrome Foundation. Rett is a debilitating condition affecting one in every 10,000 girls. My first love in life has always been dance, but ever since I was a child, of course, my insecurities held me back. I started ballroom dancing about five years ago. Today, I dance in eight to 10 national competitions a year. I am lucky enough to find the time to dance—fulfilling that childhood dream. Each time I practice and compete, I grow and change, and discover something new about myself. It's like hard-core therapy, but more challenging and fun! ■

*Regina Molaro is a freelance journalist based in New York City.*

### Beauty Store Business: Please tell us about your previous work experience prior to launching suki.

**KRAMER:** Like many entrepreneurs, I explored multiple ventures looking for what would eventually become my calling—to launch suki skincare. Prior to starting suki, I started a company servicing tennis equipment. At the time, I was pursuing competitive tennis.

I also realized through taking classes that I am really a writer—non-fiction being my true interest. Being a writer means that there are traits innate to my character, which I could not deny: the need to know the reason behind things, to always dig deeper and cut to the heart of things, such as by asking the difficult questions to get to the truth. So I pursued a degree in journalism with a minor in psychology from University of Massachusetts Amherst, which led me to a career in freelance writing that honed my research skills and developed the discipline of validating my facts.

This is all part of my personal path of self-discovery. I always felt the need to be independent, self-employed and not beholden to anyone for my welfare. And I think in many ways this was born out of a deep insecurity that colored how I saw the world.

## “Consumers need help understanding their skin types. Don't be afraid to point out their specific issues and [suggest compatible] products.”

From my earliest memories, I suffered from skin issues, specifically extreme eczema all over my body. My skin sensitivities created a self-critical dialogue [that's] all too common in young women. This caused me to disassociate and to wear baggy clothes to hide my body. It made me feel bad about myself, and it actually drove me into this industry.

Growing up, I can't remember whether the teasing started because of my skin problems or my skin problems caused my wallflower behavior that, in fact, motivated the teasing. Either way I know

that skin problems aren't all about vanity and the scars can go far deeper than the skin's surface.

Prior to starting my namesake company, suki skincare, I had tried literally everything for my skin issues—from pharmaceuticals to department-store brands to so-called naturals. While some provided temporary relief, none provided long-term relief without side effects.

As a result, I set out to discover why there were no effective skincare solutions for people like me and what it would take to create them. Like a scientist, a good journalist is trained to seek out the answers to hard questions—answers that must be triply verified. Also, a journalist must be willing to persevere when people aren't willing to talk or help.

After my own diligent investigation, I realized that the active agents in skincare products consisted of synthetic chemicals, irritants and worse—toxic ingredients that can do long-term harm, such as phthalates and artificial, cancer-causing fragrances, as well as dyes and preservatives. They even contain short-term cortisones that actually never cure anything—such as dermatitis, eczema or the like—but are prescribed almost exclusively. A simple, nongreasy salve and a good exfoliate actually heal the skin without causing long-term damage.



effect [over time], slowly denigrating the body's inherent regenerative abilities to provide vibrant, healthy skin.

I decided that I'd find a way to create my own skincare solutions that would enable, complement and support the body's ability to achieve balance. [Furthermore, I would] use only 100% pure ingredients that the human body would respond to in a healthy way, achieving far better results than anything I could purchase in a department store or a pharmacy. This meant two things: using absolutely no synthetic chemicals ever, and that my products must be proven to work equal to, if not far better than, anything one would expect from a conventional skincare product. It was not enough to develop a product that appeared to work. I wouldn't settle for anything less than the full verification necessary to back up any claim, thus the need for clinical trials and validation.

I reached out to cosmetic chemists in the industry, first hearing only that my goal was impossible. I didn't really know anything about how to create what I was trying to do. I remember telling a chemist my goal—to create a 100% synthetic-free emulsion [lotion] that contained actives equal to the actives found in a highly active acne-care or antiaging product, and with the same sophistication level in texture, and a scent-blend made only of essential oils blended with perfumery techniques. It would be clean, so that it wasn't synthetic or allergenic. I was laughed at and told it was completely impossible unless I was willing to use at least some synthetics. I take remarks like that as challenges so I continued on.

Through two years of a roller-coaster ride of self-doubt, experimentation and daily study on my own and with the invaluable help of, let's say, more progressive-minded industry chemists

who mentored me—including traditional herbalists and dermatologists—I became a cosmetic chemist and went through rounds of trial and error before finally hitting on my unique exfoliate and ideal emulsion.

I continued from my earlier days of helping to heal my body with herbs, learning from a local herbalist, and then, for each roadblock I hit in terms of working with natural chemistry, I would study with my mentors. I can't possibly remember all of the things I didn't know that long ago. But I finally figured it out, as well as began to get deep into the cosmetic industry, uncovering and learning about the truth beyond what is read on a label or bottle—information that mostly horrified me and solidified [my determination to] stay true to my ideals and share my knowledge.

I launched four products, among them, still the most popular today—the exfoliate foaming cleanser along with my first emulsion now known as velvet hand & body cream.

### When was suki founded and what is its mission?

suki was founded in 2002. My goal has always been to solve my skin problems, knowing there must be other people like me seeking solutions. I wanted to create a skincare brand that actually does what it says, is actually effective and truly pure. Along this journey, my confidence has grown, not only because I solved my own skin problems, but because I've gone through the struggles of growing and maintaining a business on my own, which has changed me greatly from that insecure girl.

My story is the same as millions of other women. This is why my tagline "Know Your Beauty" is so important to me. It's about being educated and informed, empowered and confident—in exactly who we are—embracing our ages, our histories, and all the struggles we've endured and overcome to become the people we are. We're not perfect or a fabricated facade perpetuated by people who capitalize on our insecurities; but we embrace ourselves for the individuals we truly are—accepting ourselves and defining what beauty means on our own terms. suki skincare's mission is to empower

women to feel beautiful and strong in their own skin, and to provide real, effective and healthy solutions so that true beauty can radiate without inhibition.

### Please describe the collection in terms of its product range.

Our skincare collection is designed to celebrate the uniqueness of every woman, recognizing that no two people share the same skin—each having a unique set of strengths and challenges. However,

## “We have complete care kits, which contain all a woman needs to try our line before investing in it.”

what many brands fail to realize is that we are not the same people we were several years ago. We change in many ways, and our skin changes with us. This is why we developed the evolutionary skincare systems, advanced 100% pure and clinically proven formulations of essentials. It's balancing and nourishing. So it allows each person to create her own unique skincare regimen, and it can easily be adjusted with a woman's changing needs. The line covers the full range of nourishing (combination to dry and antiaging) and balancing (combination to oily and anti-acne) with products that address every woman in between.

Our ingredients are chosen because they work together in synergy to create harmony and balance. The balancing regimen addresses underlying causes of bacteria, oil-production imbalances and inflammation; while the nourishing line works to strengthen elastin, jump-start collagen and infuse the skin with high percentages of antioxidants. Each regimen, complex or simple, is based on each person's complexion needs. For instance, a woman may suffer from adult acne, dry skin and fine lines or rosacea with acne scars and eczema. There are so many combinations. In fact, I've never met a woman without combination skin of a sort!

### Which common skin issues do the products address?

The question is: What skin issues do our products not address? Furthermore, no

woman that I know really has only one issue. We all have multiple issues that at times seem to contradict one another like having dry and oily skin.

Other products that treat only one specific skin type can aggravate combination skin or frustrate the consumer who believes that she'll solve all her problems with one regimen. Our regimens are designed to address the skin in a harmonizing manner, taking the whole into consideration.

What I'm most proud of is what we've learned from our many clients in treatment, [including those who go] through radiation therapy. The butter cream salve and the velvet hand & body cream provide the skin's essential nutrients, restoring its vitality and minimizing scarring from the burns. I've received so much feedback about how these products are all that clients can stand on their extremely sensitive skin.



### What types of ingredients are used?

Well, it may be clear what we do not use—synthetic chemicals. Not to say it wouldn't be easier to use a synthetic now and again—the fillers possess fantastic flow dynamics and stabilizers, and the coagulators are very consistent, making manufacturing much easier. This is why there are so many different synthetic chemicals that can be legally hidden inside of other ingredients—which consumers don't even know about. And what we don't know can hurt us.

We don't know the effects synthetic chemicals can have on our health and well-being. There are more than 80,000 synthetic chemicals used in production every day. Only a few thousand of them have been tested for toxicity, not including endocrine disruption or immune factors. The tests are factored for toxicity on a 150-pound man, not a woman or a developing child.

suki uses only ingredients that the human body is accustomed to and literally recognizes on a cellular level. For instance, all of our hydrous products begin with the suki proprietary high potency botanic concentrate, a triple-filtered extract of the rosa ciftifolia buds. Sourced from the steep hills of Grasse, France, between the altitudes of

300 meters and 400 meters, these roses are hand selected and harvested for their unrivaled abilities as a toning and astringent agent, as well as a rich source of vitamins and antioxidants, all while optimizing the skin pH and strengthening cells.

As the foundation of the line, the high potency botanic concentrate is the carrier that provides intense efficacy through unrivaled bioavailability. It uniquely matches skin's polarity, lipids and water solubility, providing deep derma penetration and delivery of suki bioactive cosmeceuticals. Since our stringent standards—which are necessary to achieve the efficacy of the

## “We conduct clinical trials—‘suki formulas’ must meet my criteria of being both 100% synthetic-free and efficacious.”

high potency botanic concentrate—are not commercially available, we had to develop the production capability in our Northampton, Massachusetts, facility.

Other ingredients fall into our suki bioactive cosmeceuticals, which are derived from highly potent botanicals. We investigate a wide selection of plant-based active ingredients that offer the level of efficacy one would expect of the most premium skincare products. For example, more than seven years ago we were one of the first companies to introduce resveratrol as an antioxidant in skin care. Other ingredients include white willow salicins, acal oil and a natural source of retinol. These are just a few. All of our ingredients must be validated by third-party clinical trials and meet one of the industry's highest purity standards.

### How are your products formulated? How do they differ from other lines?

Simply stated, they are pure and work like none other. Each product is formulated by me. A lot of what I do is based on myself, and the needs of our consumers, who aren't shy about telling us what they want. They range in age from five years old—[as some of our] moms buy some of the more traditional products

for healing baby skin—to 80 years old; but for marketing purposes we say the sweet spot is ages 35 to 58.

We conduct clinical trials on our final regimens and formulas, but to be a “suki formula” it must meet my criteria of being both 100% synthetic-free and efficacious. I've built my company on my ideals and have always had that integrity. I [believe] that [fact] can be felt by our consumers, especially the ones who have been with me since the beginning. And, having gone through these kinds of in-depth skin issues myself, I can empathize with my customers and what they are going through.

### What are some of the recent awards and honors your line has received?

We won the Beauty & Body award from *Delicious Living* for our intensive nourishing cream. It was heralded as a “Best Splurge” item. Our sensitive cleansing bar won the *Self* magazine 2013 Healthy Beauty Award. It was also a finalist for the ICMAD bath and body product innovation award. My renewal bio-resurfacing facial peel won an ICMAD award for best cosmetic innovation of the year.

### Which celebrities embrace suki products?

To name a few: Eva Longoria, Edie Falco, Bethenny Frankel, Jenny Garth, Amber Heard, Elisabeth Röhm and Hayden Panettiere. We were also featured in Jessica Alba's new book, *The Honest Life: Living Naturally and True to You*. She refers to our nourishing formulas, which were designed for dry skin, specifically the moisture-rich cleansing lotion.

### Where are your products sold?

Of course, our products sell via suki skincare.com, as well as through independent spas, boutiques and pharmacies. We also sell at independent natural-foods markets, Whole Foods and other chains,



as well as SaffronRouge.com, among other retailers.

### Does suki sell internationally? If so, where?

We do sell internationally. In fact, our best and largest growth market is Denmark. Other international markets include Japan, Germany, Dubai and the United Kingdom, among others. We've been getting our feet wet in the international market for the past eight years, and suki skincare has been greatly received. We're seeing signs of rapid expansion.

### How else has suki evolved over the years?

We've grown each year; but our core concept has always remained. I have always owned 100% of the company, and because we've never had investors, [there has never been that type of influence] on my ideals.

This has made growth a longer curve; but it's about all of us coming together again, coming back to empowerment. Not just [my own empowerment], but all of ours as a team here, and the individuals that really take ownership in this company.

We are small, but growing fast. We are a bunch of strong, opinionated, thoughtful women—and we've finally added a couple of cool men—who responsibly and creatively contribute, and are dedicated to our work and our growth. We are a team, and because of each of us, we keep going forward. Each of us has had to learn new things and take on new challenges.

As far as new products, we add them based on the feedback from our loyal customers and our own needs. Although we're considered more of a facial-care company, we do have amazing body-care products. We also still make three body products from when we initially launched. Those include the velvet hand & body cream, delicate hydrating body oil and the butter cream salve—which I think is the most undervalued product in my line because it's so incredibly unique in texture and healing.

### How many employees did the company initially launch with and how many are currently on board?

Initially, suki launched with just me doing absolutely everything—from order entry to formulation, mixing, filling, labeling and selling, to public relations, marketing, creating my logo, website and, well, you get the idea. The company remained that way for quite some time. Currently, the company has more than 24 staffed employees and a team of 65 independent representatives.

### What are your best-selling items?

Our best sellers are the exfoliate foaming cleanser, intensive nourishing cream and eye lift radiance renewal cream, as well as the balancing day lotion.

### Do you have a favorite product or products?

I'm 46 years old. Like most people, I have combination skin—oily on the bottom. And I'm beginning to embrace my laugh lines on top. So my regimen involves

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