



Are you man enough for make-up?

All signs point to an explosion in male-targeted cosmetics as big-name and indie brands get in on the blokes' beauty game. But will Australian men be won over?



Photographer Ryan Stuart takes up the cosmetics challenge. **Photo: Louie Douvis; make-up: Miriana Krimizis**

Dan F. Stapleton *Journalist*

Aug 27, 2021 – 12.00am

When undergraduate Alex Dalley moved into the residence halls at Sussex University in Britain in 2008, he tried to keep secret the cosmetics he'd brought with him to cover his severe acne.

Inevitably, though, one of his room-mates discovered his stash, and word spread through the halls. The 18-year-old braced himself for mockery, or worse.

What happened next surprised him. "Guys started coming to me and saying, 'Can I borrow a little bit of concealer because I've got a spot here? Can I borrow a foundation because my skin's red?' That kind of thing."



Alex Dalley founded MMUK MAN after the cosmetics he used at university to cover his acne proved popular with his room-mates.

Dalley, who was studying economics, sensed an opportunity. “When I saw that my friends were intrigued, it made me think, ‘Hang on a minute, there’s something here that needs to happen.’ There was no brand catering to that market yet.”

Straight out of university, Dalley founded MMUK MAN and began developing make-up specifically for men. The brand now offers 35 cosmetic products, including four mascaras (one for beards) and a Liquid Velvet Lipstick range in shades including “Rum-cake” and “Unbutton”.



MMUK MAN has been approached by Goldman Sachs but the brand prefers to grow organically.

MMUK MAN grew slowly at first, but its sales have recently taken off. In 2016, it reported turnover of £780,000. Projected turnover for 2021 will be just shy of £2 million (\$3.8 million), Dalley says.

“We were approached by Goldman Sachs earlier this year, but with the growth curve we’re on and our positioning in the market, we’d prefer to grow organically over the next few years, as we have always done,” he says.

Fair enough, too: all signs point towards an explosion in the popularity of men’s make-up in the near future.

While data on men’s make-up purchases remains scarce, [a recent global study by Grand View Research](#) found the value of the broader men’s skincare market will reach \$US18.92 billion by 2027, a compound annual growth rate of about 6 per cent a year.

Shaving foams and creams, once the only grooming products marketed specifically to men, accounted for just 32.7 per cent of overall revenue in 2019, suggesting the male consumer is becoming more adventurous.



The Boy de Chanel line started in 2018 with a foundation and a brow pencil, and this year will add products that create a bolder look, including eyeliner and nail polish.

And MMUK MAN is no longer the sole player. Big-name brands and indie upstarts are flooding the market with men’s make-up in the hope of stealing a slice of Dalley’s pie.

Estée Lauder was an early mover in 2013, adding a concealer and a brow definer to its upmarket [Tom Ford skincare range for men](#).

Chanel followed in 2018 with its [Boy de Chanel](#) line, featuring a foundation and a brow pencil. This year, the line expanded to include products that create a bolder look, including eyeliner and nail polish.



Rapper Machine Gun Kelly is putting his name to a nail polish line. **Getty**

Now everyone is getting in on the act. So far this year, baseball legend Alex Rodriguez has teamed up with Hims & Hers to launch the [Blur Stick](#) concealer for men (in eight skin shades); pop star Harry Styles has registered a new “perfume and cosmetics” business called Pleased As Holdings; and rappers Machine Gun Kelly and [Lil Yachty](#) are putting their names to nail polish lines.

Australian brands are entering the market, too – albeit with less fanfare.

When corporate marketing executives Ewan Munro Belsey and Tony Tsianakas launched their men’s line [Tony & Munro](#) in Australia in 2019, market research told them to take baby steps.

“Adoption was very low, but we could see what was coming,” says Belsey. “What we decided to do, as an easy entry point for our customers, was develop this new concept called fusion cosmetics, which is a blend of skincare and cosmetics.”



Tony Tsianakas and Ewan Munro Belsey wave the flag for Australian male cosmetics with their Tony & Munro brand.

These include a Shine Control Moisturiser & Primer and a Nourishing BB Cream, which moisturises, conceals and provides sun protection.

Of course, women have been using such products for ages, but Belsey says men's make-up and skincare has to be formulated differently. "Men's skin is 25 per cent thicker, it's oilier and we've got more larger pores. So our formulas are non-greasy, they're more absorbent and they're pore minimising."



Tony & Munro's products include Shine Control Moisturiser & Primer and a Nourishing BB Cream.

MMUK MAN's products address the same male-specific characteristics, says Dalley. "They're designed to leave a matte finish."

[Aussie blokes from all walks of life are catching on](#), says Besley. "Our customers are anyone from tradies to stay-at-home dads to gym junkies who are really conscious about their bodies."

The common denominator seems to be age. "The majority of our customers do sit in the Millennial and Gen Y groups."



A 'natural' look from Boy de Chanel.

It's the same for MMUK MAN, says Dalley. "Younger people are more than happy to talk about the products and they don't mind sharing selfies on social media or writing reviews," he says. "That sort of thing just didn't happen 10 years ago."

He is quick to dispel the oft-heard notion that the rise of make-up for men is being fuelled by the gay community. "When we first set out, we had this idea that our biggest market must be gay guys, and we did a lot of advertising in the likes of *Gay Times* and *Attitude*," he says.

"But it wasn't really hitting the spot. It wasn't until we started [appearing] in the likes of *Men's Health* and *GQ* that we really started to grow.

"Among the younger generation, whether you're gay, straight or anything in between, it's just accepted."



Alex Rodriguez has teamed up with Hims & Hers to launch the Blur Stick concealer for men.

Now, older blokes are coming on board, too, says Belsey. “The over-50s bracket is starting to take off for us, especially with the rise of Zoom. All of a sudden they are realising they need to keep up with the youngsters.”

Life’s challenges are prompting these older men to explore cosmetics, he says. “It could be that you’re looking for the next step in your career and you’re competing with people younger than you. Or you could be going through a divorce and getting into your second long-term relationship – or going through a mid-life crisis.”

So, how should curious men approach using make-up?

Australian celebrity make-up artist Max May says men of all ages favour a natural look, which can be achieved in four steps.



“It’s important to moisturise the skin first, to get an even skin tone and to make the cosmetics easier to apply,” he says. “Then, I’m generally using a liquid or cream foundation to further even out the skin tone. A little trick there is to go a shade or two darker than your natural skin tone so it doesn’t look make-up-y or ashy. It just blends better with the skin.”

Next up: the brows. “I’ll brush up the brows with a little comb so they look nice and neat,” May says. “And I’m probably finishing with a little bit of lip balm.”

These simple steps, he says, can make a world of difference. “And it doesn’t look like you’re wearing anything at all.”