

Alibaba Powers US Businesses

Honey Girl Organics

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Anthony Maxfield, Co-Founder



Hawaii Skincare Brand Honey Girl Organics Looks to Build Momentum in China Through Alibaba’s Pitch Fest

When Anthony and Gwen Maxfield moved to Hawaii in 1988, they were faced with a pressing question: What to do about all the bees on their property? The previous owner had been a beekeeper and Anthony decided that rather than having the insects removed, he might try beekeeping himself.

Anthony’s wife, Gwen, soon noticed how soft and smooth Anthony’s hands were from harvesting the bees’ honey. She suffered from skin sensitivity and asked him to see if he could create a paste using honey and beeswax that would alleviate her symptoms. The cuticle and nail treatment he developed in their kitchen—now known as Honey Girl Organics’ Cuticle & Nail Crème—worked wonders and the couple began sharing it with family and friends in the neighborhood.

Accidental Entrepreneurs

Anthony, Gwen and their friend and business partner, Christina Sirlin, Doctor of Chiropractic, soon decided to create a clean skincare brand, which they named Honey Girl Organics, adopting a term of endearment, “honey girl,” often used in Hawaii. The team of founders decided to take their cuticle cream to a buyer they knew at a Whole Foods Market in California and, in 2008, Whole Foods became the brand’s first wholesale account.

After that, the trio quickly started developing additional honey-based products, including a face and eye cream, a body cream, a lip balm and a foot balm, all free of parabens, hormones, silicones, petroleum products and preservatives. In the 15 years since that humble start, Honey Girl Organics has expanded its distribution to include retailers across Hawaii and Whole Foods stores in five regions across the US. The non-GMO, cruelty-free brand also sells globally via its e-commerce site. The founding team now lives above their production floor, where they still manufacture in small batches daily to ensure product quality, and the company’s offices are just across the way, all within view of the apiary.

Growing Brand Awareness in China

The Honey Girl founders have long been interested in growing their business internationally, including in China, where they hoped their brand heritage and clean, natural products would find a receptive consumer audience. Their product line has proven popular among the Chinese American community in Honolulu and the company recently saw a spike in online orders from China after a well-known Chinese influencer found their products while visiting the US and posted about them on social media.

Honey Girl began working with Tmall Global through a partner company a few years ago and is now looking to build on its momentum in China by participating in Alibaba’s Go Global 11.11 Pitch Fest. “Tmall Global’s Pitch Fest is an opportunity to gain traction in China, something we’ve always been interested in, but have never found the right fit for before,” says Anthony. “People in China are looking for clean and natural products as well as good value, and a little bit of our product goes a long way.”

Sharing the Honey Girl Story and the Benefits of Clean, Organic Ingredients

The founders’ goal is to grow Honey Girl’s brand awareness in China and to use social media and other channels to educate Chinese consumers about the products in order to turn them into long-term, repeat customers. They see 11.11 as an opportunity to share why Hawaii, surrounded by thousands of miles of Pacific Ocean on all sides, is an ideal spot for an organic apiary and why Honey Girl’s all-natural ingredients are superior. As Anthony explains, “Our main philosophy is ‘If you wouldn’t ingest an ingredient, why would you put it on your skin?’”