



EXPERT DIALOGUE

# Five Critical Steps Beacon Awards Winner Kreyol Essence's Yve-Car Momperousse Took To Land Ulta Beauty

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OCTOBER 8, 2020

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**Kreyol Essence's Black Castor Oil is going from cult hit to store staple.**

The natural haircare, skincare and body care brand's retail presence has exploded. In January, it rolled out to Ulta Beauty's nearly 1,300 doors, and followed that accomplishment up with launches at Goop and Urban Outfitters. Later this year, Kreyol Essence, which is also carried by Whole Foods, is slated to make its debut on QVC. After surpassing \$2 million in 2019 sales, it's experiencing triple-digit growth in 2020. Kreyol Essence's sales support a supply chain that stretches to Haiti, where the 6-year-old brand sources its ingredients, is dedicated to paying a living wage to employees and aspires to impact 30,000 families.

Carol's Daughter founder Lisa Price, an expert evaluator for Beauty Independent's [Beacon Awards](#) program, which honored Kreyol Essence as Best Brand, praised it for creating effective products and a thriving community. "I know what it was like to be that new person and that new brand. I know the hustle," says Price. "I know how it feels when you can see who you become." Yve-Car Momperousse, CEO and co-founder of Kreyol Essence, definitely knows the hustle. To help her fellow hustlers, she broke down five lessons she's learned on the way to retail expansion and her big Beauty Independent win.



Kreyol Essence is available at Ulta Beauty, Goop, Urban Outfitters and Whole Foods. Its star product is Haitian Black Castor Oil.

## 1. TELL YOUR STORY—AND TELL IT AGAIN

"Be genuine, and you will attract the right tribe," says Momperousse, noting people are fans of Kreyol Essence's social mission and jump at being a part of it. She has honed in on content pieces that resonate with them, and invested time and money in amplifying them via influencers and Facebook advertising. Since quarantines started in March, Kreyol Essence has crafted Wellness Wednesdays sessions that, for example, spotlight members of its community teaching yoga, dance classes or hairstyling. Partially as a result of its content efforts, Kreyol Essence's online sales have increased 214% from last year.

The brand's website traffic, which skyrocketed 506% this year, got an enormous boost from the appearance of Momperousse and Kreyol Essence co-founder Stéphane Jean-Baptiste on "Shark Tank" in January. The television show energized the brand's base, and it reruns clips from the show and ads featuring it regularly. Momperousse suggests beauty entrepreneurs put fear of failure aside and take risks to get their companies' names recognized by the public, even if the moves they make—like going on television—are outside of their comfort zones.

## 2. FOCUS ON ONE MAJOR RETAILER AT A TIME

Once Momperousse set her mind to placing Kreyol Essence in Ulta Beauty, she was seriously committed to realizing her goal. She put together a list of the decision makers at the retailer, and identified trade shows, events and social media platforms where she could interact with them. She sought out Ulta Beauty's multicultural and prestige haircare buyer at a conference, and the buyer has become Kreyol Essence's champion. Through social media, the brand has kept the retailer's buying team up to date with its growth and potential moves.

"Most people don't know that buyers are watching you on social," says Momperousse, mentioning she connected with an Ulta Beauty buyer in Chicago through social media when she was in the city for a meeting not related to the retailer. "We learned that there were folks who were following us and seeing the activity there, kind of tracking it from their own end." It took two years from the start of her pursuit to Kreyol Essence's Ulta Beauty entrance.



Kreyol Essence co-founders Yve-Car Momperousse and Stéphane Jean-Baptiste

## 3. UNDERSTAND YOUR NON-NEGOTIABLES

Momperousse advises beauty brand founders not to be intimidated when hammering out deals with retailers. She thinks they should approach negotiations with the objective of reaching an agreement best for both sides, and be upfront about the needs of their brand and be ready to explain them. Momperousse adds that brands should go into discussions with key sales and growth metrics that they are confident they can swing and fit with their businesses' desired margins. The aim should be to avoid margins getting whittled down so much that the retail deal is untenable.

"I try to make sure that the person understands how something that's good for the brand is also good for them—and it works," says Momperousse. "As a founder, you know what your customer loves and where you need the most support to keep charting growth."

## 4. KEEP IN CONSTANT CONTACT

Momperousse emphasizes beauty entrepreneurs have to dedicate themselves to growing their brands and figuring out how to make a retail partnership flourish. Especially with the supply chain issues sparked by the pandemic, a good relationship with a retailer is a must. Momperousse says she prioritizes staying on the same page as buyers and keeping them up to date on the latest brand information. She touches base with them at least once a week. If there's a challenge, it's brand founders' jobs to be on top of it and, if a new measure is required to address it, Momperousse is adamant they be open about what they entail with retailers. She says brands shouldn't expect buyers to solve issues for them.

When Kreyol Essence confronted supply chain hiccups this year, it became clear to Momperousse the brand had to assume logistics in-house. It rented a 6,000-square-foot warehouse to do so. "We see the power of owning that part of the supply chain and not being another number," says Momperousse. "I want us to take the lead in supply chain and how we're dealing with poverty, but that all comes from having a strong business foundation that is stable."



Kreyol Essence appeared on the television show "Shark Tank" in January. The appearance helped its website traffic shoot up 506% this year.

## 5. LEARN HOW TO DELEGATE

To build a lasting business, Momperousse says beauty brand founders have to leave behind the idea that they're the sole engine of it, and let employees manage their own responsibilities. She warns that founders who micromanage every detail of their brandings will get burnt out. Kreyol Essence is expanding its marketing, finance and operations workforces from independent contractors to full-time staff. "This is a great year, and to be able to do that 10 times over, we have to have the energy, have to be hungry and have to have the right people," says Momperousse. She stresses that pouncing on every available opportunity isn't a recipe for long-term success. Founders should zero in on productive opportunities for their brands' futures to save them precious time and money. Momperousse concludes, "Focus really is your power."

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