



BY STEVE HERMAN

A Tale of Two Products

Soap and fragrance, in their modern union, will continue to occupy a key position in personal care.

"Any fool can make soap. It takes a clever man to sell it."
—Thomas J. Barratt, Pears Soap

Two of the oldest products in our industry, soap and perfume, led independent existences for most of their 4,000-year histories. Slightly more than two centuries ago, in separate developments, they merged in Pears and Yardley soaps to create the fragranced soap category. A recent ad for Yardley Lavender Soap describes it as, "The soap that's kept women in hot water for 200 years—and they've loved every minute." The fruit of their union has grown over the years, with shelves of distinctively scented cleansing products forming a cornerstone of the modern personal care market.

A Bit of History

Soap allegedly got its name from Mount Sapo outside ancient Rome, where animals were sacrificed. When rain fell on a mixture of melted animal fat and wood ashes, the product flowed down into the clay soil along the Tiber River. Women found that this clay mixture made their wash cleaner with much less effort. The Romans had taken advantage of the hydrolysis of glycerides: fats or oils reacting with an alkali to produce glycerol and soap, RCOO-Na^+ .

For 1,500 years, soap remained a primitive, foul-smelling substance. Yet, through slow but promising progress, good, quality soap came to fruition. For example, Yardley introduced its lavender soap in 1780, and Andrew Pears began his production of transparent soap just nine years later. With Pears and Yardley soaps, the industry arrived at products that maintain their unique market appeal.

Soap has since diversified from the basic hard white bar to include many variations, such as transparent and translucent, and cleansing and moisturizing bars. Synthetic detergents (syndets), which produced milder soap, became available after World War II. Combinations of synthetic and fatty derived soaps also appeared (combos). Some salient features of traditional soaps, syndets and combos are shown in Table 1.

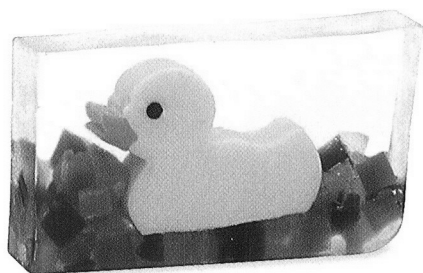
While cleansing, moisturizing and, sometimes, exfoliating are key soap attributes, antibacterial action has long been important. Antibacterials were first added around 1950 and are a major market segment today both in bars and liquids. For labeling purposes,

the traditional soap made from the salt of a fatty acid is not considered a cosmetic and needs no ingredient listing. Syndets, combos and transparent bars are cosmetics and should have an ingredient label. Antibacterials are an OTC product and the active ingredient must be listed first.

Most recently, Colgate-Palmolive developed Microbial Anti-attachment Technology (MAT) to reduce the adherence of bacteria to the skin. MAT is based on a mixture of petrolatum, dimethicone and polyquaternium. Soaps based on MAT are currently available in Protexa bar soap in Latin America.

Functional Fragrance

Many fragrances start life as hydroalcohols, which used to be sprayed on unwary customers at the mall. To make these fragrances appropriate for soap, changes must be made. Perfumes must be modified for soap or other functional products because of price, stability and aesthetic translation. The price of a functional fragrance is invariably lower than its fine fragrance counterpart, so expensive nuances are sacrificed and economical replacements



Primal Elements caters to a niche market with hundreds of specialty soaps such as "Rubber Duckie," part of the Spring 2004 line.

used. The aesthetic translation of fragrance into any functional base is needed to create the same impression out of a new carrier, and requires the attention of a trained perfumer.

Stability is an absolute necessity, and the specific requirements vary with product types and the specifics of the formulation. Regular fatty acid soap has a high pH, which eliminates some aroma chemicals. Many materials discolor, vanillin being a famous example, turning soap black in dramatic fashion. Soap is whitened with titanium dioxide and colors are frequently added. These factors may alleviate some of the color changes caused by aroma chemicals.

Transparent soaps have lower pH levels but the perfume must not create haze, and slight color changes can be very noticeable. Oxidation also can create a serious color change, especially near the surface. Syndet and combo bars are less hostile to fragrances than traditional soap, and clarity is not a factor, but the bases often subdue the fragrance impact and thus offer their own creative problems. Liquid soaps are essentially like shampoos, and fragrances can adversely affect viscosity.

Diversified Marketing

The leading brands have diversified marketing of ingredients and fragrances. Fresh and clean fragrances dominate the new entries: Zest has Aqua Rare, Energy Rush, Fiesta Splash and Refreshing Mint; Caress has Berry Fusion; Tone augments its original scent with Island Mist; and Dial has Herbal Springs. Aloe and cocoa butter are common additives. Cool and water are common fragrance themes in liquid soaps:

Crystal Breeze, Spring Water, Herbal Springs, for example. The variety of fragrances used in soaps will surely increase in the future and change more frequently, while the "original fragrance" product will still anchor the line, like Classic Coke.

One of the enjoyable aspects of the soap business is that not only the corporate giants can play. Of course Procter & Gamble, Dial and Unilever dominate, but anybody can start up a craft business in a barn, make a little money and have fun. On another level, companies such as Primal Elements can satisfy a niche demand for specialty

soaps. Primal Elements combines colored clear and opaque soap to create hundreds of unique designs. The bars can be sliced off a loaf at the store, putting the customer close to the action.

Soap and fragrance, in their modern union, will continue to occupy a key position in personal care. From a primitive mix of fat and ashes to hard white bars, the product became fully functional. A steady progression led to clear bars, syndets and combos, antibacterials and liquid cleansers. Current trends toward natural bases, mildness, improved sanitizing and an ever-

Current trends include natural bases, mildness, improved sanitizing and an ever-increasing diversity of fragrance types.

TABLE 1. BAR SOAP PROPERTIES

	Soap	Combo	Syndet
Primary cleanser	Fatty acid salt	Combination	Synthetic detergent
pH	9-11	7-8	5.5-6.5
Lather	Rich, creamy	Intermediate	Poor foam, dry
Hard water	Insoluble	Intermediate	Soluble
Irritation	Irritating	Intermediate	Mild
Processing	Easy	Intermediate	Difficult

increasing diversity of fragrance types are contributing to a dynamic market that will reward further innovations in technology and marketing. ■ GCI

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