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I've lived in Taos, New Mexico since 1989. I am a life-long professional fine artist, (kristinekeheley.com), but in 2001, I discovered I had a gift for creating organic skincare products and began creating products for national brands. Over the past decade I have developed and formulated award-winning products for major natural skin care and cosmetics brands selling in Whole Foods, destination spas, and department stores.

Vapour launched in 2009, at a peak in the recession. Every major retail buyer we had connections with was laid off by October 2009. Brick & mortar retail was a bloodbath. We instead went the international television sales route in the US, Canada, and Australia to survive from August 2009, to the end of 2010. The positives of that first year on TV were that as a fledgling brand, at a time when "normal" retail was receiving death blows, we got our

line launched internationally and were able to grow and evolve without having any of our "mistakes" haunt us too badly. TV proved to be too expensive and not the best choice for us on an ongoing basis, but we would explore that route again in the future if the opportunity was right.

The world seems primed for us now in 2012. We sell mainly through our website, but we are about to register Vapour in the EU, thanks to a grant from a venture acceleration fund in New Mexico. Vapour will launch in an exclusive department store in Japan in September 2012. I joke about my plan for Vapour World Domination, but it's rapidly becoming our reality.

We launched in brick and mortar retail in earnest only last August, when our point of sale displays were complete. Since September of 2011, we have added 60 boutique retailers in the US and Canada. Thus far, 2012 has been absolutely extraordinary in terms of sales, press, and international retail interest. We are trying many new sales channels including affiliate links to our website.

After two years, Vapour has just hit "break even." Vapour has not raised any equity capital outside of casual investors (friends & family). We run our own wind powered manufacturing facility and control ingredients and quality from source to finished product. This control of production is almost unique in the cosmetics industry - virtually every brand outsources their manufacturing. Owning our own manufacturing also means that we can be very nimble and responsive to demand. Scale up is not an issue as Vapour grows, as we regularly run hundreds of thousand of products monthly through our facility as a private label manufacturer.

Our smartest first move, even though it broke the bank at the time, was to hire a great Manhattan PR firm, BOLD PR. They have been with us since our launch and their results have been extraordinary. They really understand the concept of the brand. The combination of BOLD's editorial connections and the quality of Vapour's products has given Vapour stellar editorial placement in Allure, New Beauty, Marie Claire, In Style etc etc. Our first piece of press at launch was in WWD.

We are in an extremely rapid growth spurt and the challenges are intense. Through my exhaustion I can also say that it is the most gratifying, thrilling, and creative experience of my eventful life. We are emerging very strongly this year. Certainly we are breaking through.

More about Vapour products:

Our products have a minimum of 70% certified organic food grade ingredients (the other 30% is vitamins and mineral pigments which are not crops and so they cannot be certified as organic). Vapour is chemical and gluten free. We are possibly the only line that refuses to use irradiated mineral pigments.

Along with uncompromising purity, we refuse to compromise performance or quality. Vapour can go head to head with brands like Chanel, Dior, NARS, and Bobbi Brown. These brands, rather than other natural or organic brands, are Vapour's benchmarks.

The critical response to Vapour from the cosmetics industry and consumers has been amazing from the very start. We received a prestigious Allure best of Beauty Award in 2010, and in 2011 and now again in 2012, Vapour was selected as a finalist in CEW's (Cosmetic Executive Women) Eco Beauty Award.