

Asia next step for local diva

By TONY RAGGATT

LARISSA Bright has come a long way since working as a sales girl for cosmetics giant Estee Lauder in Sydney.

She took the job to help pay her way through university studies in international politics about 10 years ago.

Now she is queen of her own cosmetics company, Diva Cosmetics, based in Townsville, which is gearing up to venture into the lucrative markets of Asia where she will finally get to use some of those diplomacy skills.

"I never thought I'd use what I learned at university but good things have come out of it," she said.

Diva Cosmetics is a classic rags to riches story which has been recognised in the 2007 Townsville region export awards.

The company clinched the emerging business category in the awards last week.

The business began very much as a hobby.

Living in Townsville in 1997, a young Larissa Bright found she no longer had access to the discount section of the Estee Lauder stores in Sydney and decided to try to make her own skin products for herself and her family.

Her friends liked what she produced and the hobby expanded into the garage where she produced skin creams and soaps for sale at the showground markets.

Ms Bright said she got serious when she bought a property in the Aitkenvale commercial district about six years ago — a base which is now the headquarters for her international operations.

The company employs 13 people and four consultant chemists and contracts factories in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane to produce scores of skin and body care products made from fruits, vegetables, herbs and oils.

As the company's marketing manager, former L'Oreal international marketing manager Claudia Brumme, likes to say: "They are so good you can eat them."

Ms Bright said the company now had a multimillion-dollar turnover, producing hundreds of thousands of units a year and was selling products in Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Brunel and soon South Korea and Japan.

Korea's third largest cosmetics company, Skincare 5000, has contracted to sell Diva Cosmetics' products in 160 stores throughout the country and is set to launch a marketing campaign which will see Larissa Bright become a household name.

"They are doing a huge marketing campaign with posters on the sides of buses," she said.

Negotiations are also under way with importers in Japan, the world's second largest cosmetics market.



DIVINE . . . Larissa Bright and Claudia Brumme Photo: SCOTT RADFORD-CHISHOLM

Sometimes, Ms Bright has to pinch herself to make sure it's real.

"I used to make my own soaps," she said.

"I did it for fun.

"I had no idea something I enjoyed so much would become a business."

But the business has grown exponentially as more people seek out cosmetics which are environmentally benign.

The people of Asia and the Middle East, in particular, are keen to buy cosmetics

which contain no animal products.

Ms Bright learned her business skills along the way, re-investing any profits back into the business and developing more products.

The launch into Korea starts in October with a launch into Japan hopefully in February next year.

Entry into the United Arabs Emirates in the Middle East is planned.

It seems those diplomacy skills will come in mighty handy.