



THE FRENCH COSMETICS CONNECTION

HE'S FRENCH, HE'S SUAVE AND HE WORKS IN COSMETICS. MEET MONSIEUR JACQUES GOULLOU, GENERAL MANAGER OF L'ORÉAL LUXURY PRODUCTS. WE JUST MIGHT HAVE STUMBLED UPON THE ULTIMATE METROSEXUAL MAN...

From his corner office on the 7th floor of a stylish office building in Silom, Jacques Gouallou oversees a portfolio of eight illustrious international brands, each of them famous in their own right: Lancôme, Biotherm, Helena Rubinstein, Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, Cacharel, Guy Laroche and Shu Uemura. The General Manager of L'Oréal Thailand has been at his new post only since July this year.

Mr. Gouallou may have only recently arrived here, but the L'Oréal Group's activities in Thailand began some 14 years ago. Today, the company distributes 12 cosmetic brands via four different distribution channels and employs more than 400 staff members. The Luxury Goods division which he heads up is the second largest

within the French cosmetics giant, consumer goods being the largest, both in Europe as well as in Thailand.

Headquartered in Clichy, France, The L'Oréal Group got its start nearly a century ago in the hair-color business, and soon branched out into skin-cleansing and beauty products. Today the conglomerate is one of the world's leading cosmetics and beauty companies, marketing over 50 brands, as well as many thousands of individual products in all sectors of the beauty business.

Although Mr. Gouallou is a Frenchman working for a French company, it's not surprising that his career path would ultimately lead him to Asia.



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“16 years ago, I first became acquainted with Thailand by learning the language in Paris. I wanted to study an Asian language which wasn’t as common as Chinese or Japanese.” He subsequently went to Lampang for the summer to practice what he learned and to teach French. “That’s how my love for this country first started,” he explains.

The road to mastering Thai wasn’t easy and he is still learning. “I was awful with tones at first. As a student I tried to cover this up by speaking quickly, but the best way is to take your time and speak slowly.” His proficiency in the language allows him to comfortably converse in Thai – not a bad thing considering he is the only westerner among the 50 Thai office staff and 200 employees in the field.

The multi-linguistic 35-year-old has been with L’Oréal for seven years now. The first two years he spent in Paris as Product Manager for Biotherm Homme, marketing and developing two different men’s product lines. “That’s really where I learned the value of brand identity and luxury goods,” he says.

Jacques Gouallou was soon dispatched to Hong Kong where he spent the next five years in a regional role, responsible for every aspect of duty-free goods, from distribution via airports and duty free stores in downtown Hong Kong, to in-flight duty free sales.

What he treasures most about working for L’Oréal is that “it’s always on the move, always challenging. I’m constantly learning and meeting interesting people. Plus L’Oréal is a rare breed of internationalized French companies.”

Then there’s the added challenge of being able to thrive in the often political environment of a multinational conglomerate. This General Manager feels amply equipped for the ‘corporate jungle’ since he started his career in politics, working as Chief of Staff for French politicians.

“My studies – Political Science, Communication and History of International Relations – drove me into

political life and away from Asia. After five years I had a ‘change of life’ – a bit of a dramatic expression – but I didn’t really see myself in a political career long-term.” After five years in the public sector, the international environment of the private sector beckoned and Mr. Gouallou made the switch.

It’s certainly not a transition which he has regretted. The world of luxury goods is an exciting, albeit highly competitive one. “L’Oréal makes a strong commitment to always provide more efficient and better formulas in our products,” Jacques Gouallou says, adding that “We are continuously upgrading our products, adding new active ingredients, and all brands are thoroughly scientifically tested before they are launched.”

A prime example of a well-researched product and one of L’Oréal’s most successful brands is Biotherm. First created in Monaco in 1950, the Biotherm range draws on the unique powers of a concentrate from thermal activity discovered by Biotherm biologists in the thermal springs deep below the rocks of the French mountains. Mr. Gouallou describes Biotherm as “an entry brand, a brand young professionals buy when they first start earning money and can afford to be more selective.”

It is coincidentally also the brand most favored by the fresh-faced manager himself. Naturally, we have to grill him about his personal beauty regimen. “I like a good scrub and good cleanser... and on occasion a moisturizer, an under-eye cream and a body lotion.” Like most typical men he used to make do with a quick shave and a splash of water, but now he’s gone ‘metrosexual’. He claims the difference is especially noticeable in his cheeks – they are much smoother.

With such a varied range of great international products I can’t help thinking that his girlfriend must be very lucky – never worrying whether she’ll get something decent for her birthday or Christmas...

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