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20 TO KNOW

It takes a lot of creative, capable people to build and power the exciting and dynamic beauty industry. Presented here are 20 who captured our imaginations in 2009.

BY BRIAN BUDZYNSKI AND JEFF FALK

ADA POLLA

Co-creator, President and CEO
Alchimie Forever

Ada Polla—the Swiss-born president and CEO of Alchimie Forever, a global cosmeceutical skin care brand—has called Estée Lauder one of her business role models, noting that Lauder involved herself in all aspects of the business (including selling creams to women in department stores). “She was a huge believer in putting herself out there, and she never worried if she had gotten in over her head.”

Since launching her brand as a 17-SKU line, she has been the driving force behind the business’s development and expansion—establishing international distribution and driving the company’s double-digit annual revenue growth—and is doing a fair impression of Lauder by “putting herself out there.”

In addition to growing the brand designed to be at the “intersection of science and nature”—dermatologist-formulated products with active ingredients derived from vegetation—Polla strives to remain the lynchpin between the brand and its customers, filtering and answering, for example, all consumer generated e-mail. “I feel so strongly in being involved with our clients and consumers,”

the Harvard and Georgetown grad told *GCI* magazine. “I think in today’s impersonal world, consumers are looking for that personal connection. In particular, as we are a family business, this personal connection is at the core of our values and brand personality.”

The “family” in family business has been critical in both the development of the business and in how it approaches consumer needs. Polla told *GCI* magazine that one of the milestones she was most proud of achieving was building a team, and cites her parents’ influence for her personal business acumen.

“My father really instilled a sense of hard work and passion in me. He loves to help others feel good, and I think that is one of the rewards for our business. He has also taught me about vision and creative force—thinking outside the box, not doing things the way everyone has always done them. My mother has taught me that in reality there is no such thing as work-life balance; work is life and life is work when you own your business.”

Featured on the cover of *Business Week Small Biz* and recently named one of five finalists for the Entrepreneur of 2009 contest presented by The UPS Store, Polla is also the founder of the Network of Entrepreneurial Women, an association for women entrepreneurs in the Mid-Atlantic region; is on the boards of the Washington D.C. Chapter of the Fashion Group International and of the Washington D.C. Coalition for Capital; and is a committee member of the International Spa Association.

