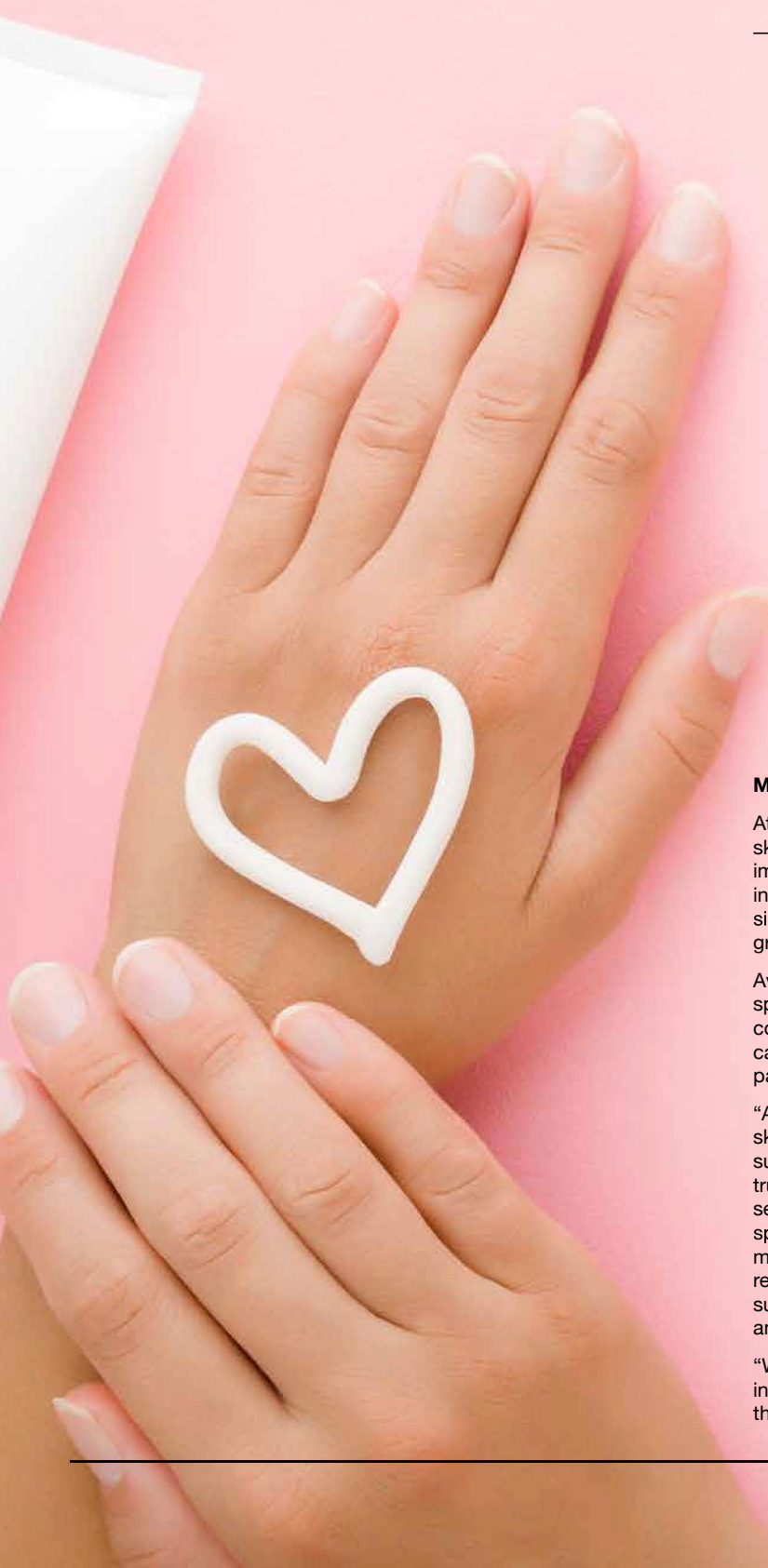




Surges in Growth for Specialist Skincare

Irish Pharmacy News spoke to Avril Farrell, Healthcare Buying Manager with Boots Ireland about the emergence of the specialist skincare market and where the sector lies within the OTC landscape.

Avril Farrell, Healthcare Buying
Manager with Boots Ireland



Market Performance

At Boots Ireland, specialist skincare has always been an important part of our OTC offering in pharmacies, commanding a significant share of business and growing consistently, annually.

Avril explains further, "Whilst specialist skincare is considered core business, it has become a category of increased interest and particularly during Covid-19.

"All sub categories within specialist skincare have experienced a surge in growth. Our customers trust Boots as they continue to seek out the latest condition specific and efficacious cleansers, moisturisers and balms, to aid relief and treat topical conditions such as; rosacea, psoriasis, acne and eczema.

"Whilst the level of product innovation to category over the past 12 months has been

slower than we would like, we understand this is largely due to the pandemic and for some suppliers, BREXIT related. In order to drive performance, we have ensured that our range on offer is comprehensive, inclusive and of the upmost standard with regards quality and manufacturing processes.

"Our team is confident when it comes to specialist skincare advice and finding the right solution for our customers, no matter what the condition is, championing everyone's right to feel good!"

So why does Avril think these surges have come about?

"The level of interest driving the value and volume surge within our specialist skincare category can be attributed, for the majority, to heightened hygiene behaviours due to Covid-19," she reflects.



"For example, the demand for hand sanitizers, body/ hand wash and products produced with infection control in mind. A more intense and frequent hand washing/ sanitising regime could have had an irritating and drying effect on skin, hence customer's need for other products to address these issues, such as hand creams and balms. In addition, the use of mandatory face coverings drove new behaviours with customers opting to leave their skin bare i.e. free from make-up/ tanning product, in favour of focusing on their skin care, hence investing in new products benefiting their overall skin health.

"Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns rendered customers having to spend more time at home, which led to increased engagement online. This in turn prompted in-depth research into skin conditions for which customers may previously have ignored prior or simply being time poor due to long work commutes/ family commitments etc.

"Customers were also more willing to trial NPD aimed at treating sensitive skin conditions without concern of any potential side effects to treatments playing out in public life. In addition, the pandemic, understandably, contributed to increased levels of stress amongst most of the population, which may have contributed to triggering flare ups of acne and other common skin conditions.

"Nonetheless, regardless of the condition, we found our customers quickly identified and embraced their skin care regimes as a way to relax and de-stress, absorbing the product and wellbeing benefits associated with a self-care routine."

Increasing Awareness

When looking at the biggest challenges for healthcare teams in pharmacy stores who are advising on skincare conditions, Avril says awareness is key.

"Customers are sometimes unaware that there are all sorts of skin conditions that a pharmacist can help with. Our awareness efforts focus on the role of our Pharmacists and the services they can offer to the community, being

qualified healthcare professionals with regards to clinical advice and over-the-counter medicine for a variety of skin conditions. Due to Covid-19, restrictions, as we know, did initially impact footfall market wide. This, coupled with social distancing measures implemented in stores to safeguard our colleagues and customers, brought with it new challenges with regards to looking after our customers and being physically close enough to effectively assess the area of concern. In order to overcome such issues, we leveraged our experience and ensured we could offer an unrivalled service through the quality of our conversations.

"In addition, our trained healthcare advisors are readily accessible in store and can offer assistance by recommending product to aid relief on mild to moderate conditions.

"We know there is still a percentage of customers embarrassed to present their condition, who self-diagnose and as a result, sometimes select the wrong product type or formulation to best relieve or treat their condition. We actively engage with our customers through our various platforms to encourage those in need of advice to pop in and have a chat with us."

Avril also says there are opportunities to be had. "NPD and innovation within existing trusted brand portfolios is hugely important to our customers due to the complexities and specific requirements for individuals," she comments.

"Customers are more informed and constantly seeking out the presence of quality, natural ingredients in formulations, all whilst being produced and packaged sustainably. At Boots, sustainability is high on the agenda for 2021 and ongoing. This can be challenging for manufacturers."

Category Merchandising

Avril continues, "Breadth of range, ease of navigation and on shelf availability is

fundamental when merchandising specialist skincare. Whilst the majority of customers that shop this are condition led and typically brand loyal, new customers to this area can often be overwhelmed by the extent of product on shelf and variance in formulations, therefore clear brand and product blocking is key.

"In addition, an aesthetically pleasing build is more attractive and will drive a degree of impulse opportunity alone. Whilst the level of product innovation to category is slower than we would like, we have ensured that our Boots range and brands supplied by key partners are of the upmost quality with regards manufacturing processes. Trust is a huge factor with regards product selection, we always put our customers first by only listing safe, efficacious product supported by continuity of supply.

"We manage our merchandising in house, providing our stores with detailed planograms to execute merchandising on builds in an aesthetically consistent manner. Space in retail pharmacy is always at a premium, therefore we ensure we compile a comprehensive range for our stores, with varied sized product & a mix of brands, customized to scale.

"We also leverage supplier insight and market data to ascertain what

is performing and if we are over-indexed on existing space with a particular sub category or brand that might indeed warrant range rationalisation.

"At Boots Ireland, we pride ourselves on colleague expertise. We have extensive training programmes where all our Healthcare advisors have access to the most up to date and relevant content, specific to a condition. Our team is extremely knowledgeable in areas such as atopic eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, which is a common skin condition in Ireland often running in families.

"Our Healthcare advisors are readily available in stores and equipped to have great conversations with regards treatment by way of emollients, they are also confident in understanding the customers' needs and know when to refer customers to our pharmacists with regards additional options for treatment, such as non-prescription antihistamines and topical corticosteroids.

"We also focus our training programmes to cover adult and teenage acne, which is extremely common. Our team is on hand to help all our customers feel good in their own skin."

