

**Q** When did you become interested in the nail and beauty industry?

I always wanted to work in a salon – my mum, aunt and cousins all did – but I couldn't afford to go to college. I worked as a forklift truck driver but started taking evening courses in massage, aromatherapy, and nail and beauty treatments, funded by a government incentive scheme.

**Q** Talk us through your early days in the nail business.

I became a mobile nail technician before working with Steiner cruise ships – I'd still say today the best training I had in my career was with Steiner. After a year, I opened my first salon in Bradford before moving to London three years later.

Although I specialised in nails, every course turned out to be worthwhile, for example, understanding essential oils and aromatherapy when developing my fragrance. Even the forklift driving proved useful; years later, a driver had to leave and I ended up loading a wagon at the warehouse myself. No training is a waste of time.

**Q** Now, with your name in more than 1,000 appointed salons worldwide and your own product line, how did you first get involved in product development?

After winning Nail Technician of the Year for 14 consecutive years, Cutex, M&S and Max Factor asked me to help develop their brands, and I also worked with Chanel, Dior and Revlon. Although I enjoyed providing nail treatments on photoshoots, my passion shifted – I loved the research, competitor analysis and development involved in bringing a concept to a number-one selling product. This experience gave me the confidence to launch Leighton Denny Expert Nails in 2005. The product line was a success, which was replicated in tanning and lip products.



# Nailed it

Leighton Denny talks about his contributions to and success in the nail and beauty industry, which led to a recent MBE

**Q** What challenges have you faced?

There have been lots but to pick a single one – when the landlord served notice on my successful Marylebone High Street salon, which I had ploughed every penny into. I thought it was the end of my career and I had lost everything I worked so hard for, but looking back, that was the best thing to happen. It forced me to look outside the salon environment and I got into product development.

**Q** How did you establish yourself as a leader in the beauty industry?

You don't get what you wish for in life; you get what you work for. I never let my projects out of my sight until I am happy and I sign off everything. I've never had a manager – everything stops with me. I only bring

stuff to market or to the media that my heart is 100 per cent in. I turn down endorsement or product development opportunities I don't believe in – it's not just about money, I have to protect my name and brand. It's easier to get to the top than stay there – you have to keep your finger on the pulse so I keep up to date with training, trade magazines and industry shows.

**Q** How did you build up such an exclusive client base, which includes Kate Moss, Penélope Cruz and Adele?

I meet a lot of celebrities on photoshoots and film sets but you only get one chance to impress; if they like, they rebook. I offer the best service by maintaining the same professional therapist/client relationship regardless of

whether I am working on a celebrity, movie star, wealthy client, princess or member of the public.

**Q** Are there benefits for your brand having support from celebrities?

It is not only the celebrity but also their fans who are exposed to your brand and who buy your products. I became known for working with celebrities before the bubble burst and it became commercialised – you can pay an agent for celebrity clients now. Business longevity is more important and while celebrities can help your business, committing to a film or music tour takes a lot of time that may mean missing other opportunities.

**Q** Tell us about your charity work...

It's rewarding to be in a position to give back to others who are less fortunate. The Breast Cancer Care t-shirt I designed sold out so fast, I now donate products for event goody bags, and 25 per cent of all growth sales across my brands for breast cancer awareness month (£5,000 last year). I was also a Jeans for Genes ambassador and when I am in my LA home, I support Karma Rescue animal charity, where I adopted my pitbull Rhino.

**Q** What advice would you give to other therapists/entrepreneurs?

Believe in yourself. Listen to your clients. Try to do things differently than the next person but there's no need to reinvent or revolutionise the industry – gimmicks lack longevity.

**Q** Do you have any treatments yourself?

Reflexology is my favourite treatment. I also enjoy pedicures and have fake tans. When I'm in LA, I have regular massage, reflexology and facials.

**Q** Do you have a favourite quote or saying?

You never fail until you stop trying.

**Leighton Denny** has his own nail, tanning and lip product range, and has recently launched his Light and Dark fragrance. For a chance to win a copy of Leighton's autobiography, *How I Nailed It*, email [kyoung@fht.org.uk](mailto:kyoung@fht.org.uk) by 18 November typing Leighton in the subject box. Standard FHT competition T&Cs apply (see page 51).

