



Rodan + Fields consultants
at a Lexus event in
Durham, North Carolina

The Social Networkers

She's the friendliest neighbor on the block, the chicest mom at school, the Spin-class regular with glowing skin. The Rodan + Fields consultant has something she wants to sell you—and it's not just a face cream. **By Lauren Lipton**

You can't miss the row of matching white Lexus sedans and SUVs parked in the soft shadows outside the Terrace, a banquet hall in Paramus, New Jersey. The sun is setting behind the dozen or so vehicles, which have been arranged side by side, facing out, gleaming and glamorous in the twilight. In front of them, about the same number of women—many blonde, most in short dresses—pose with their arms around each other. It's like every wealth-building tableau you've ever seen in which some self-made mogul shows off his toys.

Except that in this version, there's no man at the center. The women are the success stories here. They have gathered on this warm evening for a business dinner, in their chic little dresses, YSL handbags, and Louboutin stilettos and driving their luxury cars. They make their living as saleswomen for Rodan + Fields, the San Francisco-based skin-care company whose 100,000 independent consultants, including this super-high-performing group, sell products from home on commission to their friends and acquaintances. Including, possibly, you.

JAMES BARRETT

A Rodan + Fields consultant is the highly educated, digitally savvy update of the cosmetics saleslady who used to ring your mom's doorbell bearing frosted lip gloss and soap-on-a-rope. Like many of her predecessors from Avon or Mary Kay, the Rodan + Fields consultant is probably a mother in her 30s or 40s who needs a flexible job. But the resemblance ends there. Instead of making sales calls in person, the Rodan + Fields consultant is more likely to use Facebook and Instagram, posting before-and-after skin selfies and offers for free products. She doesn't fulfill your order out of the back of her station wagon but refers you to her personal Rodan + Fields website, where you choose what you want so the company can ship it to you. She doesn't generally throw house parties, either. But if you belong to a certain tony suburban demographic, she might sidle up to you at barre class or at elementary-school drop-off. She'll start chitchatting about nothing in particular, segue nimbly into a sales pitch, and before you realize what's happening, you've agreed to buy \$500 worth of cleansers, toners, exfoliators, and serums you didn't even know you needed.

But the Rodan + Fields consultant's goal isn't only to hook you up with products. She also wants you to join her team, selling skin care to everyone you know, making fistfuls of cash, and perhaps even scoring the most coveted bonus incentive reserved for the brand's top salespeople: that shiny new Lexus. You can choose any model you'd like, as long as it's white.

This has all actually happened to Lore Cardella. "I went out and introduced the products to about 50 people, and they went out and introduced the products, and it grew exponentially," says the Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, 36-year-old, who in less than five years has become one of the most successful Rodan + Fields consultants in the United States. It's easy to see why. With a lambent complexion, meticulously highlighted hair, lashes out to there, a truly colossal diamond, and a Birkin, Cardella is a woman you could easily resent, until you realize her intention isn't to make you jealous; it's to make you just as fabulous—on every level. Her message: You can have all of this, too.

Cardella is the unofficial hostess of this evening's event at the Terrace, which includes a private dinner for the highest earners of the sales team to which she belongs and what Rodan + Fields consultants refer to as a Biz Opp—a public presentation about the company designed to share product information and recruit new salespeople. But Cardella's day began much earlier. After settling her toddler with her parents and dropping her older two at school, she pitched camp at a Starbucks to catch up with orders and train a new team member. Then it was on to a party at her middle child's preschool, a wardrobe change, and this meeting, which will last past 10. "I work my tush off," she says.

Every consultant is encouraged to hone the narrative of her own Rodan + Fields story. Here is Cardella's: In 2011, she was a pharmaceutical saleswoman turned stay-at-home mother with an entrepreneurial longing she had decided would remain unfulfilled because she didn't want to sacrifice her family life. "My dad had his own business, and it came at a cost—he worked around the clock," she explained

earlier at Starbucks, between tippity-tapping customer orders into her iPad. "He was never home."

Then fate intervened. Cardella's second pregnancy left her with a hormone-related patch of darkened skin, known as melasma, on her upper lip that had an unfortunate resemblance to facial hair. A girlfriend who had just started selling Rodan + Fields invited Cardella to get into the business and recommended some products formulated to fade discoloration. Cardella promptly joined her friend's team, started using the products, and her melasma vanished. Now Cardella makes a six-figure income. She and her husband are building their dream house on the street where her parents live, and she regularly enjoys company-sponsored trips to Hawaii and Thailand—all with plenty of time left for her children. "I thought I'd get rid of my mustache and make preschool money," she says. It turns out she is living every working woman's fantasy.

If you've watched TV in the last 20 years, you've likely heard of dermatologists Katie Rodan and Kathy Fields and their anti-acne regimen, Proactiv, which is notable for two things: It's sold through infomercials, and despite this fact, it works. The doctors met in the 1980s during their Stanford University Medical Center residencies and set up separate practices in the Bay Area, which they maintain to this day. They came together to develop Proactiv

after realizing how many of their patients had acne and how deeply they suffered. "Acne cuts to your soul," Fields says, and then echoes an oft-repeated company slogan: "We want to change skin, and we want to touch lives."

The doctors scraped together about \$30,000 and developed a cleanser, toner, and treatment cream meant to be used together. They offered the three-part system to a mass-market skin-care company but were turned down: It was relatively costly and hard to explain—not ideal for a drugstore product. Then, in 1995, the doctors decided to do a long-form infomercial to pitch Proactiv directly to consumers. It was a flash of entrepreneurial genius. In a medium of low-rent production values and hilariously cheesy merchandise, Proactiv stands out, thanks to compelling before-and-after photos, endorsements from celebrities including Katy Perry, Justin Bieber, and Julianne Hough, and generally positive reviews from users. Proactiv could have turned out to be a punch line, like the Bumpit. Instead, it is an \$850-million-a-year business.

In 2002, the doctors established Rodan + Fields, a more upscale brand for aging skin with four distinct product lines. The Redefine regimen includes a cleanser, a daily sunscreen, and two other products that tackle fine lines and wrinkles. The exfoliating cleanser and brightening creams in Reverse—the line Cardella used—fight hyperpigmentation.

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Unblemish is for adult acne; Soothe handles sensitive skin. The products are expensive—a starter kit of any of these lines is about \$175, and that's before you start adding on other items, like the \$220 anti-wrinkle patches.

The regimens are also, by most accounts, effective. "It's a very high-quality line," says cosmetic chemist Jim Hammer. He commends several of the products for their skillful formulation and use of novel ingredients, such as the Reverse Skin Lightening Toner, which has components that help its active ingredient, hydroquinone, penetrate the skin better. But he also notes that some of the offerings, such as the Essentials Daily Body Moisturizer and Essentials Foaming Sunless Tan, have less expensive equivalents. "Not to say that they aren't good products," Hammer says, "but they're not unlike similar products that can be found at the drugstore."

Early in Rodan + Fields's history, Estée Lauder bought the brand and sold it in department stores. But it didn't exactly fly off of the backlit shelves. As with Proactiv, Rodan + Fields regimens require some explanation and must be used for a while before they yield results. Customers who bought Rodan + Fields often did so not because they'd been convinced at the beauty counter but because they'd heard about it from friends. The doctors thought, Why not skip the department store and just pay the friends?

In 2007, Rodan and Fields took the unusual step of buying back their company and switched to their current business model, yet again making exactly the right move at exactly the right time. The economy was tanking, "people were losing their jobs like crazy," says Fields, and everyone needed a new way to make money. At the same time, social media was taking off. The doctors couldn't possibly have known how profoundly this would change the sales landscape, let alone their skin-care business. In 2008, smartphones—and their selfie-ready cameras—were still relatively new, as were Twitter and Facebook, and Instagram didn't exist. Rodan + Fields grew right along with all of these new technologies, which let would-be consultants sell not just to a few ladies in their neighborhoods but to hundreds, even thousands, of virtual friends and acquaintances.

This explains the appeal of a Rodan + Fields sales job to women who already have relatively high profiles. There are some very successful celebrity consultants, including Lynne Spears—mother of Britney—a skin-care connoisseur recruited by a friend a few years ago, and Rachel Cannon, an actress with a recurring role on the ABC sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat*. Cannon talks up her side venture to fellow castmates and crew members, and to her social-media followers. The money she makes in sales helps her feel more secure in her acting career.

Cannon's social-media posts are pretty typical of the kind of hashtag-heavy pitches likely to pop up in your feed if you know a Rodan + Fields consultant (or two, or two dozen). On a vacation earlier this year, Cannon posted an Instagram tableau of products against an ocean backdrop and wrote, "All I've been wearing in Hawaii!! #naked4Summer #RFpaid4Hawaii." On Facebook, she has posted, among

Top Products

If you have a friend (or cousin or dog walker) who sells Rodan + Fields, there's a good chance you've already seen these products on your Instagram or Facebook feed. We look inside the most buzzed-about boxes.



Redefine Acute Care patches

You feel a little prick when you stick on one of these Band-Aid-size patches. The active ingredients—hyaluronic acid and peptides—are suspended in stiff cones that push them into skin. The stickers help plump crow's-feet, frown lines, or smile lines after two treatments, says dermatologist Francesca Fusco. But don't expect lines to vanish altogether; our tester saw only minor improvements.

Reverse Skin Lightening Accelerator Pack

The name sounds like sci-fi, but this is really a toner-and-lotion duo that reduces sun spots and melasma in about three months. It's powered by a battery pack—jk, it's hydroquinone, an ingredient proven to erase discoloration but hard to find in over-the-counter products. That's partly because it can lighten skin indiscriminately, so dot these products precisely on dark spots with a cotton swab (especially if your skin is dark).



Unblemish Regimen

This acne kit could be considered Proactiv's glamorous older sister. The products absorb excess oil from skin with sulfur (in the cleanser) and decongest pores with alpha hydroxy acid (in the toner). The spot treatment shrinks zits with benzoyl peroxide, which "is very effective but can be irritating and drying, so this product is loaded with ceramides, niacinamide, and other moisturizing ingredients," says Hammer.

Amp MD Roller

This skin-needling tool looks like a medieval torture device. Its rollerball head is covered with 200 tiny needles that poke without drawing blood, in theory causing just enough injury to encourage your skin to produce more collagen as a defense mechanism. The tool is sold with a peptide-and-retinol serum, which penetrates quickly through the shallow channels the needles make in your skin.



Redefine Multi-Function Eye Cream

Before you think Rodan + Fields makes only out-there, needle-studded products, consider that this eye cream is...an eye cream. But it's an eye cream made of well-chosen ingredients, says Hammer. There's something called tranexamic acid for fading dark circles and an assortment of peptides thought to trigger collagen production without irritating the delicate skin under the eyes.

other things, a Rodan + Fields video ad she made with jazzy music and the title “Wanna be your own boss??”

But there's a fine line between inspiring and annoying, and not all Rodan + Fields consultants tread it well. In fact, if you sell Rodan + Fields and think your friends might be dodging you, they probably are. “This is the suburban scourge,” says Rachael Pavlik, a Houston mother and the blogger behind rachriot.com, who says she goes out of her way to avoid anyone trying to sell her anything. “At first I would buy all of their stuff because I was kind of guilted into it.... What is that? That's not friendship.”

Pavlik is more outspoken than most. Most women we spoke to can't bring themselves to hurt their friends' feelings, so they roll their eyes privately, secretly blocking Rodan + Fields consultants who clutter their Facebook feeds and deftly fending off clumsy come-ons. One East Coast mother says she's been approached multiple times by everyone from the woman who does her brows to childhood acquaintances she hasn't seen for decades. Last year, an old high-school friend asked her to lunch—for reasons that soon became all too clear: “It wasn't long into the conversation before I realized that this was a thinly veiled attempt to make me join her team,” she says. “She's not trying to be friends with me; she's trying to build her empire.”

There's no question that consultants are motivated to sign up new recruits. In the multilevel-marketing business model, a salesperson makes a commission from every product she sells. But if she gets a friend to sign on as a salesperson, she also makes a commission from every product her friend sells. And if Friend Number Two gets one of her friends to sign on, she and Friend Number One both get commissions from every product Friend Number Three sells, and so on—up to six recruits out in Rodan + Fields's case. The more consultants you pull in, the more you make, so it's not surprising that the most successful Rodan + Fields reps focus mainly on recruiting. Cannon says when she introduces Rodan + Fields to new people, “I always lead with the business,” not with the products. Cardella, who has thousands of people on her team, says 95 percent of her income comes from commissions on their sales and only about 5 percent from her own.

Multilevel marketing has been around for decades. Avon and Mary Kay use it, and so do outfits like Amway and Herbalife. But financial experts warn that multilevel marketing can disguise a pyramid scheme, which, among other things, can require that prospective salespeople buy a lot of products in advance. If he or she isn't able to sell the stuff, the company doesn't care; it has made its money already. Experts say if a company makes most of its revenue from selling merchandise to its own representatives, and/or if it promises its salespeople huge profits or unlimited growth, those are all pyramid-scheme warning signs.

Rodan + Fields doesn't do any of these things. The company says 65 percent of its profits come from sales of its products directly to customers who aren't also consultants. Its website clearly states that high earners, like Cardella, are the exception and that the vast majority of its consultants might make a few thousand dollars a year. It posts its

compensation plan for anyone to see, and its executives constantly tell prospective consultants that it is not a get-rich-quick scheme. In fact, only 400 consultants out of that 100,000 have reached the Lexus-driving level of success.

Still, if the success of top salespeople, like Cardella, Spears, and Cannon, depends mainly on recruiting hundreds of other salespeople, there are inherent sustainability issues in play. Think about it: If the recruiting continues indefinitely, so many women will eventually become Rodan + Fields consultants that there will be fewer and fewer women left to be Rodan + Fields customers. The consultants who got in last would have virtually no one to recruit or to sell to. They'd end up losing at least the money they paid to get into the business. (It costs a minimum of \$45 to buy the DVD and instructions to start distributing Rodan + Fields, but most new recruits opt for the \$695 Big Business Launch Kit, which includes samples and worksheets.) Meanwhile, the consultants who got in earlier, recruited the most people, and ended up on top will have made tons of money before the business plateaus.

But it's easy for even the biggest skeptic to get swept away in wealth-building fantasies, especially when bathed in the dazzling charisma of Katie Rodan and Kathy Fields. Indeed, the doctors, as well as their most successful saleswomen, are so kind and supportive that even consultants who don't do that well remain loyal. A West Coast consultant who didn't want to be identified signed on with Rodan + Fields several years ago after she was laid off from her job in finance. After three years, she decided she couldn't advance any further because most of the women she tried to get to join her team turned her down. “Everyone was jumping on the products, but nobody wanted to talk about the business anymore,” she says.

Back at the Terrace, Cardella and her teammates are still hammering home the theme of opportunity for women in their presentation. The gleaming ballroom is now packed with 200 prospective recruits, who listen raptly as the consultants take turns at the mic sharing Rodan + Fields stories. Cardella returns to her theme of balancing work and family. Another teammate, Miriam Steketee, says she's been able to “break free of corporate America.” Several consultants say they've “retired” their husbands, Rodan + Fields-speak for “I make so much bank that my husband quit his miserable job,” a decidedly twenty-first-century victory.

After the presentation winds down, audience members queue up for glasses of wine at the bar or step out into the Terrace's lobby to add their names to a sign-up list. The following day, Cardella and her teammates will get to work doing what they do best. They'll reach out to the new recruits. And they'll post snapshots of the row of Lexuses on their Facebook feeds, hashtagged #changingskinchanginglives. “Love these ladies, their stories and their hustle!” Cardella will write. “RF is truly a vehicle for change.” ♦

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SPECIAL ISSUE

THE BEAUTY EXPERT

OCTOBER 2015

260
WINNING

Lipsticks,
Shampoos,
Mascaras,
Wrinkle
Fighters,
And More

Julia
Roberts
Oscar Winner.
Mother.
Manicurist.



BEST OF BEAUTY



- Major Breakthroughs
- All-Natural Products That Really Work
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