



# Marissa Carter

## Cocoa Brown Tan

### GOING FOR GROWTH PROFILE

**NAME:**  
Marissa Carter

**BUSINESS**  
Cocoa Brown Tan

**POSITION**  
Founder & Owner

**WHAT WE DO**  
Skincare & Fake Tanning Products

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Independent from a young age, and with a determination to be successful, Marissa Carter trained as a beauty therapist, while working part time. Before long she opened her own beauty salon and quickly built her reputation. Within a few years *Carter Beauty* in Blackrock, Co. Dublin, was a well-established and thriving business. *"I am extremely passionate about the beauty industry. I have always been ambitious and driven and being an entrepreneur allows me to challenge myself in ways that wouldn't be possible if I were an employee."*

After winning the Irish Beauty Professionals Association Facial Therapist of the Year Award in 2007, Marissa went to Philadelphia in the USA to complete her studies in Cosmetic Chemistry and Skin Histology. In the back of her mind, Marissa knew she wanted to create her own beauty product range, but it wasn't until she was on maternity leave in 2012 that she began planning Cocoa Brown. Marissa explains that it was a culmination of factors which saw her concentrate on developing the fake tan products. *"Apart from my own passion for tan, my customers in Carter Beauty inspired me to create Cocoa Brown. I could see how the recession changed women's spending habits. They stopped having €100 facials, but still wanted the feel-good factor so went for cheaper alternatives. Spray tanning was the most popular treatment in the salon so I had first-hand feedback about what the customers liked and disliked about fake tanning products."*

Marissa wanted to bring a tanning product to the market that was unique. She concentrated on the vital cocoa brown colour, the smell and packaging of the product. The most difficult challenge Marissa faced was competing with big brands that had large advertising and PR budgets. *"I decided to do my own PR and reached out to the beauty bloggers of Ireland, sending them my first product - Cocoa Brown 1 Hour Tan. The response was phenomenal and positive reviews started coming in thick and fast."*

Entering a market that was already saturated with competitors, Marissa priced her products strategically, keeping the price affordable for customers but successfully achieving credibility as a quality brand. The first Cocoa Brown products hit the Irish pharmacy shelves in November 2012. By March 2013, approximately 97% of Irish pharmacies and over 300 beauty salons stocked the brand. In April, Cocoa Brown became available in Penneys Ireland. By July, the products had entered the UK Market. *"Given the high volume of sales in Penneys Ireland, I think Primark were eager to take us into the UK. The UK market has completely snowballed since. We are now stocked in all Superdrug stores and Lloyds pharmacies."*

In autumn 2013, Marissa received the IMAGE Start-up of the Year Award. The following January, she successfully applied to participate on the 6<sup>th</sup> cycle of Going for Growth. Delighted to have been part of Fidelma McGuirk's group along with seven other female entrepreneurs, Marissa felt the programme had an extremely positive impact on her business in 2014. *"Going for Growth helped me grow my business by 366% year on year and employ two new full time staff members. I was driven by the competitiveness in our group but also the will of seven other women to see me succeed. I was inspired by how successful the other entrepreneurs were and even though our businesses were in completely different industries, I learned so much from them. I feel very lucky that I had the Lead and group members I did - they were the best!"*

In February 2014, Cocoa Brown was the exclusive tanning partner for the Pre-Oscars Luxury Suite in the Beverly Hills Hilton Hotel. *"We were thrilled! It was a wonderful opportunity for us to get Cocoa Brown noticed in the US. Getting our products on the shelves there is our next challenge."*

The salon, *Carter Beauty* was sold in 2014 allowing Marissa to concentrate solely on her Cocoa Brown Tan product range. Now employing a team of five, Cocoa Brown has seen a large increase in export sales, now contributing over a third of the company's turnover. With eight products firmly on the shelves in the UK and Ireland, Marissa has now set her sights for further expansion across Europe and hopes to turn her attention to the US market in the coming months.



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