

BTS NRC MUC – NRC - TC

THE PRACTICAL JOKER WHO TURNED BUSINESS GREEN

Dame Anita Roddick, who died suddenly this week [...], aged 64, was founder of the cosmetics chain The Body Shop, and one of the country's most successful entrepreneurs, said The Independent. By adopting an "ethical approach to cosmetics", she pioneered a new industry and "made saving the planet fashionable". At its height, The Body Shop empire had more than 2,100 branches in 55 countries, making Roddick one of the richest women in Britain. Yet, despite her financial success, she continued to consider herself more an activist than a businesswoman, and campaigned for a diverse number of causes from children's charities to Greenpeace. [...]

The first shop opened in 1976 in Brighton, selling 25 ethically sourced skin and hair care products, based partly on Bedouin recipes gathered on Roddick's travel, and partly on her mother's beauty habits. [...] But from modest beginnings, the enterprise soon proved so popular that she opened a second outlet and, by the mid-eighties, The Body Shop had become a leading retailer, with a presence on almost every high street. [...] The company's flotation in 1985 was a huge success. [...]

Two decades later, in 2006, her values were compromised when The Body Shop was bought by French cosmetics giant L'Oréal, a company with a record of animal testing. The transfer, worth £652, prompted critics to accuse Roddick of selling out to an industry she had previously described as "a monster selling unobtainable dreams, one that lies cheats and exploits women". Roddick argued that The Body Shop would act as a "Trojan Horse", subverting the industry's unethical practices from the inside.

Roddick made almost £130m from the sale, £30m of which was channelled straight into her foundation. Having always described it as a disgrace to die rich, she dedicated her remaining time, money and energy to various charitable commitments. But Roddick's lasting legacy will be her blending of activism and business, said John Sauven, director of Greenpeace. "She was the one to put green and environmental issues on the business agenda. Thanks to her, this idea is now mainstream."

THE WEEK
15 September 2007