

## Mary Kay Ash, 1918-2001: She Started a Skin Care Company That Has Sales of More Than \$2 Billion a Year

Independent representatives sell products in peoples' homes in more than 30 countries. *Transcript of radio*

*broadcast:*

*22 March 2008*

VOICE ONE:

I'm Mary Tillotson.

VOICE TWO:



**Mary Kay Ash**

And I'm Steve Ember with the VOA Special English program PEOPLE IN AMERICA. This week, we tell about one of the most successful American businesswomen. Mary Kay started a company in nineteen sixty-three with a five thousand dollar investment. Today, Mary Kay Cosmetics is an international company worth thousands of millions of dollars.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Mary Kathlyn Wagner was born in the state of Texas in nineteen eighteen. For much of her childhood, she cared for her sick father while her mother worked long hours at a public eating place. Mary Kay married Ben Rogers when she was seventeen years old. They had three children before he left home to serve in World War Two. When he returned, their marriage ended. Mary Kay looked for a job so she could support her children.

Mary Kay began selling different kinds of products. At first, she sold books. Later, she visited peoples' homes to show how home care products such as cleaning fluids and equipment helped ease housework.

One night, Mary Kay was showing these products at the home of Ova Heath Spoonemore. Later in the evening, Missus Spoonemore began giving her guests some home made skin care products. The products were developed by her father, J.W. Heath, in Arkansas. Mary Kay tried the skin care products and found they made her skin smooth.

VOICE TWO:

Mary Kay was successful selling home care products. Her supervisors praised her work. But they never increased her earnings. She left the company after a man she trained was given a more important job than she had.

Mary Kay said later that she learned from this experience. It taught her that men did not believe that a woman could succeed in business. She decided to prove them wrong. So she bought the rights to Mister Heath's skin care products and started her own company. She paid five hundred dollars for the legal rights to the products.

VOICE ONE:

The Mary Kay Cosmetics company began operating in Dallas, Texas, in nineteen sixty-three. Mary Kay's twenty-year-old son Richard was the company's financial official. The idea was to sell skin care products through demonstrations in homes and offices. Nine sales representatives were chosen to sell the products.

The sales representatives were independent workers. They bought products like soaps and skin softening liquids from the company and sold them at higher prices to friends, family members and other individuals. Mary Kay decided that each representative who brought other sales women into the company would receive part of the new person's earnings. That way, experienced sales representatives would be willing to help train new ones.

Mary Kay told the women who worked for her that to be successful in life a person should put God first, family second and work third. She said women must discover how to be good wives and mothers while at the same time learning how to succeed in work.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Two years later, in nineteen sixty-five, the company was selling almost one million dollars worth of products. Mary Kay once said that success came fast because she did not have any time to waste. She was already forty-five years old when she started the company. She said a woman needs money fast as she gets older.

Now Mary Kay Cosmetics is one of the largest direct sellers of skin care products in the world. It develops and tests skin care and beauty products for the face, body, hair and nails -- many more than it started selling in nineteen sixty-three. Today, Mary Kay Cosmetics has sales of more than two billion dollars a year. It has more than one million sales representatives in more than thirty countries around the world. You can find Mary Kay products and sales representatives in Argentina, India, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, and China, to name a few.

VOICE ONE:

Every year since nineteen sixty-five, Mary Kay Cosmetics has held a yearly conference in Dallas for its sales representatives. The first one took place in one large room. Mary Kay cooked food for two hundred people and served it on paper plates.

As the company grew, so did the conference. Now, more than thirty-five thousand sales representatives and company officials pay to attend education meetings at the yearly conference. A special event at the three-day conference is Awards Night. That is when prizes are given to those representatives with the most sales for the year. Awards Night also includes a show in which famous singers and dancers perform.

The Awards Night winners receive special paid holidays, jewels, furs, and pink Cadillac automobiles. In Germany, winners receive a pink Mercedes Benz, and in Taiwan they are given a pink Toyota. By nineteen ninety-four, seven thousand cars had been given to sales representatives. The cars are pink because Mary Kay products come in pink containers. Mary Kay liked that color.

VOICE TWO:

Mary Kay believed that recognizing good work is the best way to increase a company's sales. She said her company tried to have competitions in which everyone has a chance to win. She did not want to organize the kind of competition where someone has to hurt another person in order to win.

So the Mary Kay competitions are designed around the idea that it is best to compete with yourself. That means every individual is trying to do better than she did last week or last year.

Competition winners are rewarded well. For example, winners of one of the competitions get a gold pin called the Ladder of Success. Sales representatives earn a pin by selling a large number of products. Then they earn jewels for the pin as they increase their sales. Each jewel is placed higher on the ladder than the others. The pin of a top sales representative is covered with diamonds.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Mary Kay's third husband, Mel Ash, died of cancer in nineteen eighty. She wanted to help find a cure for the disease. At first, she helped organizations raise money for research. Later, she started the Mary Kay Ash Charitable Foundation, a non-profit group that provides money to support research about cancers affecting women. In two thousand one, the company and foundation expanded their goals in an effort to help stop violence against women.

Through the years, Mary Kay Ash received many business awards. She was named one of America's twenty-five most influential women in nineteen eighty-five. She became a member of the National Business Hall of Fame in nineteen ninety-six.

VOICE TWO:

Mary Kay Ash wrote three books. The first book, "Mary Kay," told the story of her life. More than one million copies in several languages have been sold. She described her business ideas in the book "Mary Kay on People Management." Her third book was released in nineteen ninety-five. It is called "Mary Kay--You Can Have It All." The money earned from its sales went to help fight cancer.

Mary Kay Ash continued her involvement in her business until she suffered a stroke in nineteen ninety-six. She died in November, two thousand one.

Business experts say she was an important business leader who cared about people. Mary Kay sales representatives say she developed a way for women to earn money and still spend time with their families.

VOICE ONE:

One example is Valerie Yokie. She started selling Mary Kay products twenty years ago. She was an official at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., but left her job to stay home with her two small children. She became interested in the Mary Kay Cosmetics company because it was a way to get started in a business for a small amount of money. She paid less than one hundred dollars for her supplies.

After one year and one half, Missus Yokie became a director of the company and started helping other women become successful Mary Kay representatives. Soon after this, her husband lost his job. Then he developed cancer. Valerie Yokie has supported her family for twenty years through Mary Kay Cosmetics. She is an extremely successful businesswoman. She has won many prizes in Mary Kay competitions, and receives a new pink Cadillac every two years.

Valerie Yokie's story is similar to those of other Mary Kay representatives. They agree that Mary Kay Ash changed the business world. They say she opened a door for women by providing them with a way to earn money that balances work and family.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

This Special English program was written by Nancy Steinbach and produced by Caty Weaver. I'm Mary Tillotson.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Steve Ember. Listen again next week for another PEOPLE IN AMERICA program on the Voice of America.