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# ABOUT ME

I've built my career at the intersection of practitioner experience, consumer psychology, and product strategy, working with beauty and wellness brands that need clearer information to make confident product decisions.

- 15 years (and counting!) in the Beauty Industry
- Licensed cosmetologist, stylist educator, curly hair specialist, and former makeup artist with hands-on experience testing thousands of products on diverse clients
- Dual bachelors degrees in psychology and sociology with an emphasis on consumer behavior and decision-making
- MBA candidate with marketing concentration, bringing strategic rigor to consumer insights and research
- Brands I've supported have been featured in Essence, Allure, Byrdie, The Tease, and Refinery29.



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**Mission:** This work exists to help brands make the product decisions that matter before development resources are committed with evidence, not assumptions.

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**Vision:** An industry shaped by thoughtful founders, meaningful products, and lasting connection between brands and the people they serve.

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# THE DECISIONS THAT SHAPE SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTS

Before a formula is created, brands must determine whether a product should exist, what role it plays in a consumer routine, and what performance it must deliver to be credible in its category. These decisions shape everything that follows, from ingredient architecture and claims territory to how the product is evaluated once prototypes exist.

## **Does this product have a meaningful place in the market?**

Every product is built within a category that already contains established routines, expectations, and competitive benchmarks. Before development begins, brands must decide whether the concept addresses a meaningful gap in the market and whether their target consumer will actually choose it. Understanding consumer behavior, competitive positioning, and whitespace determines whether the product has a credible role to play.

## **What should this product be and for whom?**

Before formulation begins, the product itself must be clearly defined. Brands must determine who the product is for, what problem it solves, how it fits into a consumer's routine, and what performance it must deliver to earn repeat use. These decisions establish the requirements that guide formulation, claims, and positioning.

## **Does it perform as expected and earn its place in someone's routine?**

Once a prototype exists, the question shifts from concept to performance. Brands must determine whether the product actually delivers on its intended promise in real routines, across diverse users and environments. Evaluating performance outside controlled conditions reveals whether the formula meets expectations, how it compares to existing products, and whether it is ready for launch or requires refinement.

# HOW I WORK

## The Kulima Product Development Methodology

Most product development decisions ultimately come down to three questions: should this product exist, what exactly should it be, and will it deliver on its promise in real-world conditions. My work is organized around three core capabilities that address these decisions at different stages of development. Kulima operates between founder vision and formulation, ensuring the right product strategy is in place before lab and manufacturing resources are committed.

### Product Insight

Product Insight focuses on understanding the market before development resources are committed. This work examines category dynamics, consumer behavior, and the competitive landscape to determine whether an idea solves a meaningful problem and where it fits within the market. Through category analysis, consumer segmentation, social listening, competitive intelligence, and concept testing with real users, this phase clarifies demand, identifies opportunity, and reduces the risk of building a product that lacks relevance.

### Product Definition

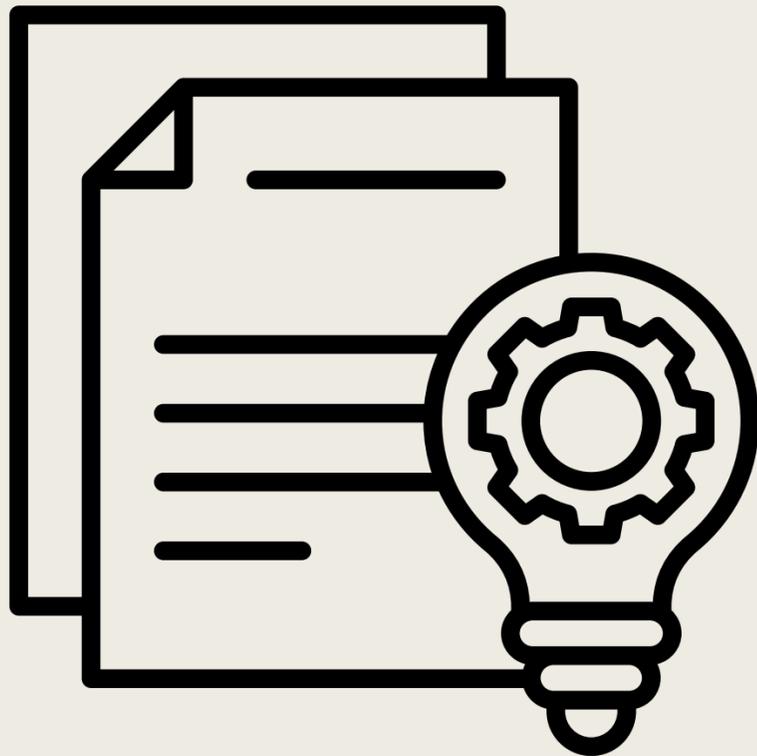
Product Definition translates insight into a clear product strategy built for a specific consumer and use case. This work refines the concept, defines the product's role within a routine, and establishes the requirements that guide formulation and development. The outcome is a structured product development brief supported by functional ingredient direction, claims territory, and defined performance expectations so formulation partners can build toward a clear and intentional target.

### Product Performance

Product Performance evaluates whether a product delivers on its intended promise once prototypes exist. Through hands-on testing in real-world conditions, competitive benchmarking, and structured consumer perception evaluation, this phase examines how a product performs across diverse users and routines. The goal is to understand what the formula actually delivers, what claims are defensible, and whether the product is ready for launch or requires refinement.

# PRODUCT OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT

A structured engagement to evaluate market demand and consumer fit before formulation.



## **Understand the market before you build for it.**

Before committing to formulation, brands need to understand whether a product concept addresses a meaningful consumer need, where it sits within the competitive landscape, and whether the intended customer will actually choose it. This engagement examines the category, the consumer, and the concept to determine whether the idea deserves further investment. The work includes problem definition and use-case clarification, category and competitive analysis, consumer segmentation, and concept testing with real users. The result is a clear recommendation: advance, refine, or pause, supported by evidence about market demand and consumer fit.

Brands receive a structured category intelligence report outlining the competitive landscape and areas of opportunity, along with a consumer segmentation analysis and a detailed portrait of the primary target user. Concept testing findings are synthesized into a strategic interpretation that clarifies how the product resonates with potential customers and what adjustments may be required before development proceeds.

**Essential for:** Founders evaluating whether a product concept deserves investment before formulation begins.

# PRODUCT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

A structured engagement to evaluate product performance in real-world conditions prior to launch.



**Evaluate whether the product delivers on its promise in real-world conditions.**

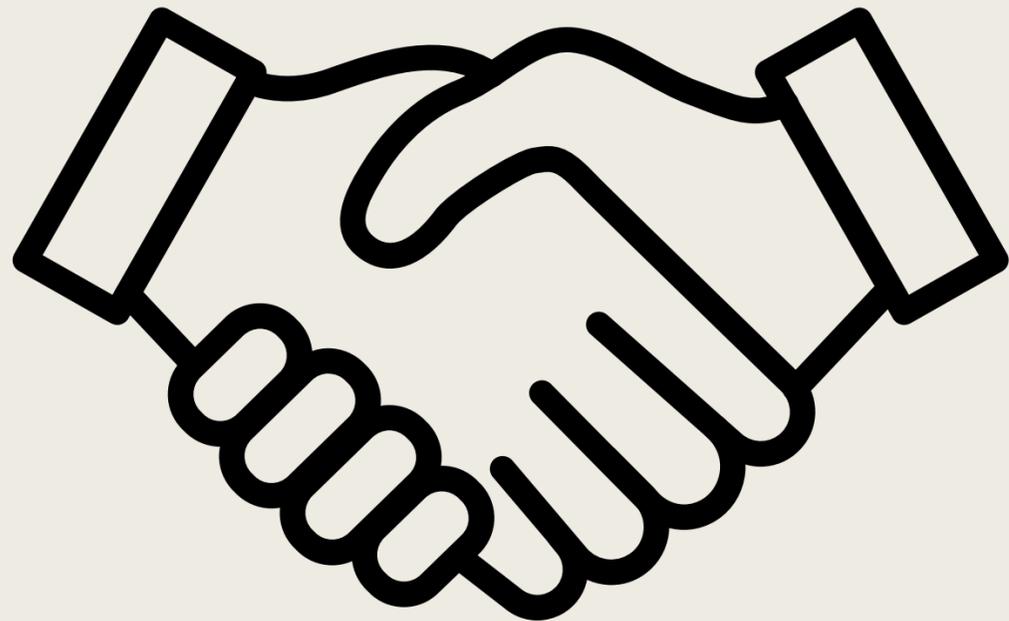
Laboratory testing alone cannot predict how a product behaves in real routines, across diverse users, or in uncontrolled environments. This engagement evaluates prototypes in the conditions where they will actually be used, examining how performance holds up across hair types, routines, and expectations. Through structured real-world testing, competitive benchmarking against leading products in the category, consumer perception analysis, and claims credibility review, the work determines whether the formula delivers what it promises.

Brands receive a detailed performance evaluation report that documents how the product behaves across different users and conditions, alongside a benchmarking scorecard comparing the formula to category leaders. Consumer perception testing clarifies how people experience the product's sensory and functional qualities, while a structured claims analysis establishes which claims are substantiated, which require further evidence, and which should be avoided. The engagement concludes with a clear recommendation: proceed, refine, or reconsider.

**Essential for:** Brands with products in development or existing SKUs who need unbiased performance feedback before launch or reformulation.

# FULL PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

An end-to-end engagement supporting product development from concept validation through launch readiness.



## **One strategic partner across the full product lifecycle**

This engagement provides a single strategic partner from early concept through launch readiness, eliminating the gaps that often appear when multiple advisors work in isolation. The work integrates market intelligence, consumer insight, product definition, and performance evaluation into one continuous development process.

Optional brand DNA work can establish the strategic filters that guide product decisions before development begins. From there, the engagement moves through concept validation, product development brief creation, prototype testing, competitive benchmarking, and final launch readiness planning.

Brands receive the full body of work produced through both the Product Opportunity Assessment and Product Performance Evaluation engagements, along with a completed product development brief that translates research into formulation direction. The partnership concludes with a launch readiness assessment, positioning framework, go-to-market strategy, and defined success metrics. A final executive memo summarizes the findings and outlines the recommended path forward.

**Essential for:** Brands building products from concept through launch who want a single strategic partner across the full lifecycle.

# CUSTOM ENGAGEMENTS

Targeted engagements built from the Kulima methodology. For brands with a specific question or development challenge, engagements can be structured by selecting capabilities from the Kulima methodology rather than following a predefined package.

## Capabilities Available for Custom Engagements

### Product Insight

- Social listening and sentiment analysis
- Category landscape and competitive mapping
- White space and opportunity analysis
- Consumer segmentation
- Target consumer profiling
- Concept validation surveys
- Consumer interviews or focus groups
- Market research interpretation

### Product Definition

- Brand DNA working session (RISE Framework)
- Product use-case definition
- Product development brief
- Functional ingredient strategy direction
- Performance requirements and success criteria
- Claims territory definition
- Concept refinement and positioning strategy

### Product Performance

- Hands-on prototype performance testing
- Competitive benchmarking against category leaders
- Real-world consumer testing cohort coordination
- Real-world consumer testing cohort findings analysis
- Consumer perception testing
- Sensory and functional perception analysis
- Claims credibility and substantiation review
- Claims hierarchy and defensibility scoring
- Launch readiness assessment

### Product Narrative & Education

- Education framework development
- Professional training materials
- Consumer-facing product narrative
- Packaging and website content architecture
- Retail partner education materials

# EXTENDED PARTNERSHIPS

For brands building a portfolio or navigating complex product development cycles, retainer partnerships provide consistent senior product support without adding full-time headcount.

## Strategic Advisor

Some brands benefit from ongoing guidance as they make product and category decisions. In this role, I serve as a strategic advisor who can evaluate new opportunities, review product concepts, and provide perspective on competitive dynamics and development priorities.

Engagements typically include recurring strategy sessions, review of product development decisions, and ongoing competitive and category intelligence relevant to the brand's products and development direction.

## Embedded Product Lead

Senior product leadership integrated directly into your business, functioning as a fractional head of product and consumer insights.

For brands managing active development pipelines, I can function as an embedded product strategy partner working alongside founders, labs, and internal teams. In this role I support decision-making across multiple products simultaneously, providing guidance on product briefs, testing strategies, competitive positioning, and launch readiness while ensuring each product aligns with the brand's overall strategy.

# ALIGNED PARTNERS

I work with beauty and wellness brands that need clearer information in order to make confident product decisions. The work supports founders and teams at several stages of growth, from early product concepts to established brands expanding their portfolios.

Early-stage founders often engage this work to reduce uncertainty around market demand, consumer fit, and performance expectations before committing to formulation.

Some founders arrive just before working with cosmetic chemists, needing a clear product development brief and defined performance criteria so the first formulation conversation is grounded in strategy rather than guesswork.

Growing indie brands typically seek real-world performance insight on prototypes or existing products before scaling distribution, while established brands often use this work to evaluate reformulations or new product extensions within an existing line. Product development teams and agencies may also engage me for unbiased evaluation of how products perform compared with competitive alternatives.

# IS THIS RIGHT FOR YOUR BRAND?

## **This work is a fit when you need answers to questions like:**

- Who is my target consumer and what do they need?
- Will my target consumer actually buy this?
- How does my product compare to what's already on shelf?
- What must this product do to earn repeat use?

## **You'll get the most value if you:**

- Are committed to making data-informed product decisions
- Have time to invest in structured decision-making work
- Are willing to act on insights, even when they challenge your assumptions
- Need beauty industry expertise you don't have in-house

## **This probably isn't the right fit if:**

- You've already made final decisions and just need confirmation
- You need immediate answers (meaningful research takes time)
- You have an experienced consumer insights team with beauty industry fluency already on staff

# WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

The work is only valuable if it leads to better outcomes for your brand and your intended audience. Here's what that looks like:

## **Confident Product Decisions**

You move forward with clarity on what to build, how to refine it, and why it matters to your target consumer, backed by evidence, not assumptions.

## **Products That Perform**

You launch knowing how your product performs in real conditions, where it excels, and what trade-offs your customers will accept.

## **Clear, Credible Positioning**

You know exactly how to talk about your product; what language resonates, what claims hold up, and what differentiates you in the market.

## **Reduced Risk**

You avoid costly missteps like reformulation, repositioning, or low market demand because you validated performance and appeal before committing resources.

## **Customer Trust**

Your product solves a real problem and delivers on its promise, building the kind of trust that drives repeat purchase.

# CASE STUDY

**The Barb Shop** is a styling product line built for short hair, a category historically underserved by mainstream haircare brands.

## **The Challenge:**

The Barb Shop needed products that delivered professional-level performance for everyday users — people with short hair who'd been overlooked by an industry built around long, straight styles. The stakes were high: if the formulations didn't work across diverse hair types and styling techniques, the brand risked launching products that couldn't deliver on their promise, damaging credibility in a community that had been let down by mainstream brands before.

## **The Work:**

Through iterative real-world testing with early prototypes, I evaluated the Go-To Styling Cream and Texturizing Sea Salt Spray against competitive alternatives, identifying where they excelled and where refinement was needed. Testing spanned diverse hair types and styling techniques to ensure formulations worked as intended in real conditions, not just in theory.

Beyond performance validation, I developed packaging copy that clearly communicated product benefits and usage, created educational content demonstrating real-world application, and built product-forward video content for social platforms to reduce confusion and increase confidence. I also directed product styling for campaign photography, ensuring visual representation accurately reflected how the products actually performed.

## **The Outcome:**

By the time the brand launched, the products had been pressure-tested in real conditions, claims were backed by evidence, and customers could trust that what they bought would actually work. Clear communication reduced purchase confusion, and real-world validation ensured products delivered on their performance claims. This foundation of performance credibility allowed The Barb Shop to build loyalty from day one, avoiding the costly reformulation and repositioning cycles that plague brands who skip validation.

This collaboration proved the power of hands-on product insight at every stage of brand building — from first prototypes to flagship campaigns. My work ensured that The Barb Shop's products, positioning, and storytelling remained rooted in performance, cultural relevance, and community truth.

Founder Sheena Lister has described our partnership as **"critical to brand growth and innovation."**



# CASESTUDY

**Soft Rows** is a textured haircare line designed for versatile styling, supporting natural texture, heat styling, and protective styles without forcing consumers to choose between performance and hair health.

## **The Challenge:**

Soft Rows was designed to meet a complex need: textured hair products that could support multiple styling approaches without compromise. But even great formulations struggle if consumers don't understand what to buy, how to use it, or why it works. The founder needed to ensure the products would perform as promised in real-world use — and that customers would have the knowledge to get results.

## **The Work:**

Our collaboration began in 2022 during early product ideation, where I identified product gaps and unmet needs in the textured hair market based on professional experience and provided insight on consumer behavior patterns and purchase drivers specific to textured hair products.

In 2024, the focus shifted to performance communication. I created stylist-led product demonstration content that linked formulation science to real-world results, developed educational video showing how products perform across different hair types and styling techniques, and translated technical product benefits into consumer-friendly language that builds confidence and understanding.

By 2025, we'd developed a comprehensive product education strategy: a framework for communicating product performance across all customer touchpoints, content pillars that explain what products do, how to use them, and why they work, and reusable education architecture that now serves packaging, website content, and retail partner training.

## **The Outcome:**

Clear education reduced the friction that causes returns and "didn't work for me" feedback. When customers understand how products work and how to use them correctly, they achieve better results — and return with trust. The education framework now provides scalable infrastructure, ensuring consistent and accurate product communication across internal teams, retail partners, and influencer collaborations. Product-forward content demonstrated real-world use, set accurate expectations, and built the kind of credibility that drives repeat purchase.

This multi-year partnership demonstrates how strategic product communication evolves alongside a brand — from early concept work through scalable education systems that support growth. My work ensured that Soft Rows' products remain grounded in performance truth, that customers can confidently choose and use products, and that the brand has architecture to maintain clarity as it scales.

Founder Quani Burnett described the process as **"one of the most inspiring and aligned strategic efforts in the brand's development."**



# BETTER PRODUCT DECISIONS START BEFORE DEVELOPMENT BEGINS

The most impactful product development decisions are often made before formulation ever begins. Bringing structure to those decisions through market insight, clear product definition, and real-world performance evaluation ensures that development resources are invested in products with real demand, credible positioning, and performance that holds up in practice.

**If your team is preparing to develop or evaluate a product, we can begin with a discovery conversation to determine the right scope.**

