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the creative

TAKE A BOW

Spring's new super-sized essentials

GROWTH INDUSTRY

FROM A-LIST ADDICTION TO CLIENT COPYCATS, EXTENSIONS ARE BIG BUSINESS. MAKE SURE YOUR SALON ISN'T LEFT BEHIND IN AN INDUSTRY THAT LOOKS SET TO KEEP ON GROWING...



CINDERELLA HAIR

In addition to wowing on the runway and the red carpet, extensions are extremely lucrative for salons, with profits rising even in the current economic climate. Celebrities are definitely a factor. "The demand for extensions among celebrities seems unstoppable," says Jason Posner, director of Cinderella Hair. "There's barely a celebrity out there who doesn't wear some form of extensions." No wonder then, that this A-list addiction drives the demand from clients. Award-winning hair extensionist Michelle Griffin reports that on average a quarter of her salon service is taken up with the business of extensions, accounting for 20 per cent of the yearly profits. Meanwhile, Rapture Rapid Extensions has reported a 40 per cent growth in its extensions business in the past two years.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Clients now expect a seamless finish and professional service, and the consultation is of the utmost importance. "Offer clients as much advice as possible, show them examples of previous work and advise on alternatives," says Michelle Griffin. Branch Emir also says it's essential to obtain as much information as possible. "Everything from the client's hair-growth pattern down to the time they're willing to spend styling their hair every day should be a factor in choosing extensions," she notes.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Training has never been more important, as highly skilled stylists make all the difference. "Training is paramount, whether you're using extensions to add thickness or length," says industry stalwart Herbert Howe, owner of Herbert of Liverpool. "Otherwise there's the risk that damage can occur to the natural hair." Rapture's managing director, Eva Proudman, confirms that despite the credit crunch, more salons than ever are signing up for hair extensions courses. "From a business and creative perspective, an extensions stylist is an essential for all salon teams," she says. "As for the business development potential – just one extensions client per week can equate to

an annual salon profit of £15,000 – so training makes sound business sense.

A QUESTION OF ETHICS

Salons are also having to wise up to the ethical concerns in this sector of the industry. With rumours of hair coming from prison inmates in India, or girls as young as six in Russia, many extension manufacturers are keen to stress the credentials of their products. Great Lengths recently introduced a Setting Fair Stamp, designed to prove the brand's longstanding ethicality policy, and detail the origin of every strand of hair. Dobby Zottie, the company's managing director, states, "I'd like to see a UK standard created, which could be likened to the Association's nationally recognised organic standard. My hope is that one day, all extensions companies trading in the UK agree on a common ethical stance."

In the meantime, brands such as Holo and Raccoon guarantee that their hair is ethically sourced, with Raccoon boasting the British Standards Institute ISO 9000 accreditation for the past five years.

Ethically sourced hair is generally of better quality, too, with virgin hair being gently processed rather than bleached. Extensions seem to be having an image makeover, with a focus on luxury and exclusivity.

FIX ME QUICK

At the other end of the scale, clients are looking for quick-fix, instant updates. "We don't always have the time for a full set of bonded extensions, so we predict there will be an increase in instant ranges," says Pink and Blue Label by Hairraisers. Hairraisers artistic directors Gary Hill and Michael Young, of Hooker & Young, agree.

And for more instant updates, Rapture has teamed up with American Hair to create the American Dream Quick Fix Extensions, while the new Heat Activated Blow Dry Bar, in Westfield, London, offers Hershenson's Clip-In Extensions. The ones used by session stylists last up to three days, transform your look for a party or weekend.