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Salon Testing: Art or Science?

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It's 5:30 p.m. and the weary working woman wheels her cart down the aisles trying to remember what it is she's out of. Oh, right. Shampoo. She needs some shampoo. A new one perhaps, but which one? As she scans a brightly colored bottle, two words catch her eye: *Salon Tested*. Instant mental picture of a famous fastidious beautician peering at a model's luxuriant locks through a magnifying glass. "Thunk" goes the bottle into the cart.

This example may explain why the phrase "Salon Tested" is popping up on more and more hair care products—even skin care products and hair care appliances. While sometimes it's just "hype," true salon testing can play a vital role in the formulation and ultimate success of a new product.

Classic Salon Testing

Basically, two types of salon testing are in operation today. We'll call them classic and technical testing. Classic testing is the concept as originally developed by hair stylists and cosmetologists in the 1950s. In classic testing, experts of the trade critique a product by using it in their own salons. The experts, like artists, rely on their creative instinct to assess a product's value. Of course, they have their own approach to not only styling and cutting but to the type of products they recommend for each client. Thus, classic testing is based on the preferences of a certain salon under the direction of a particular individual.

This mode of testing works well for products generated by salons and institutions with prestigious reputations and devoted clientele. Vidal Sasson, Paul Mitchell and Jeri Rhedding are prime examples of artiste/entrepreneurs who have built successful product lines staked on classic testing. The methodology for this testing varies as widely as the types of salons in the U.S. today.

Classic salon testing, although a vital tool for artiste/entrepreneurs heading small creative companies, is not used much today by large corporations. Major producers of cosmetics and toiletries with their large product formulating labs and market research departments need standard testing protocol with precise parameters. The results must be reproducible.

Technical Salon Testing

Technical salon testing combines many of the advantages of classic testing with the scientific precision needed by large corporations. It plays a major role for comparing, developing and optimizing the formulation of products on the market. To the product development formulator, it represents a true microcosm where an assessment of how a product is performing is made in a very short period of time, often in less than one day.

It is true that in such testing, a given bias based on the small group of evaluators may be as small as one or as large as 10-12. If any one area is often overlooked by the product development formu-

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Table I. Shampoo/Conditioner Control and Evaluation Parameters

Subject	Evaluation Parameters
Hair texture	<u>Shampoo</u> Ease of application Flash lathering Lather volume Rinseability Wet combing ease Ease of styling Dry combing ease Hold Body - initial Body - post Manageability
Hair length	
Permed hair status	
Bleach/color treated status	
<u>Control Parameters</u>	
Water temperature	<u>Conditioners</u> Ease of application Perceived appearance Ease of rinseability Wet combing ease Dry combing ease Hold Body - initial Body - post Manageability
Pre-soak period (time)	
Water flow rate	
Amount of product used	
Application and massage	
Rinse period	
Number of lathering/rinse	
Amount of post conditioner	
Application time	
Rinse period	
Drying time (open)	

lator, it is in the choosing of the salon evaluators and what they represent in terms of the consumer. It may very well be that the evaluator is considered the expert in the field whose individual judgment is also the one described above in the classic concept of salon testing. On the other hand, most product formulators today would like to have their evaluators represent some type of public consensus: ultimately, markets in tune with the research data. Generally speaking, while the types of technical salon testing programs are unlimited, three objective programs will be commented on here: screening, prototype and long-term testing.

Screening

The salon is used as a benchmark to compare the numerous hair care products on the market. A standardized testing procedure using split or half head evaluations is utilized in direct comparison of a control product. In other cases where there is a data bank of past comparisons, qualitative whole head evaluations are performed in which a number of attributes are rated by the evaluator and subjects. The results are tabulated in a convenient form for comparison. The objective of this testing is to evaluate performance of new products and determine if a product really lives up to the claims it may profess. At that point, laboratory analysis and/or further in vivo studies may be warranted.

Prototype Program

Another need of the formulator is to obtain quantitative aspects of product performance.

Usually laboratory tests on tresses are conducted first, then the need for some consumer in vivo testing is required. Safety clearance of prototypes should be completed before salon evaluations can begin. The salon becomes the first phase of this in vivo testing program.

The study design usually utilizes more than one evaluator to eliminate operator bias. Formalized procedures are used which control water temperature, water hardness, length of wetting time, lathering time, rinse methods, amount of product applied, drying time, and style criteria. The formulator should be present during the evaluation to get hands-on comparison of how well the product performs and if the experimental design chosen adequately evaluates the key areas of concern. An example of this protocol is provided in Table I.

Long-Term Testing

In the final stages of new product development, it is important to obtain some estimate of extended product usage. The salon can be used as a control environment for obtaining data prior to home use testing. Examples of such parameters to evaluate are fragrance impact, fragrance fatigue, product appeal, "sebum rebound," buildup of shampoo/conditioner deposits. Such testing should be run for one to four weeks de-

pending on the subjects' normal habits and practices.

Conclusions

In either classic or technical salon testing, a delineated approach can provide a formulator with a valid assessment of the product's performance. But even under the best of science protocols, salon testing does not replace extended market data or use by the consumer. The formulator should not expect to replace the valuable word of the consumer but rather provide some very valuable evaluation criteria for product performance in a short period of time to design a specific product.

When used correctly, salon testing provides the formulator with a true perspective, quantitatively compares performance in a controlled environment, and thus, allows one to determine if the initial objectives of a product design are being followed. This type of testing, in combination with various in vitro laboratory analysis and tress assessments, can provide the experienced formulator with the comfort and support data to optimize a product for market research studies or consumer trial.

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