

Grooming Boom

Increased traffic is just one reason to bring skin care products into your store.

By John Jones



PHOTOGRAPHED BY VINCENT DILIO. MODELS: JEFF TOMISIK, MAJOR; ZEB RINGLE, SOUL. SEE FASHION PAGE 53

Celeste Hilling sounds like any number of vendors discussing the importance of product that appeals to men: “Today’s consumer thinks a lot more about what he’s spending. He’s a more savvy, demanding consumer.” So, too, does Jennifer Porchey, who talks about product being multi-functional—the difference is they aren’t talking about the latest opening pricepoint luxury collection or hybrid shirts that go from office to evening. Rather Hilling, CEO of Skin Authority and Porchey, of J. Paul, are addressing men’s skin care. This potentially explosive category seems poised to sweep in on the heels of the post-metropolitan generation, as a recent *Allure* magazine survey showed that 86 percent of men recognize that they have to take care of their skin in order to remain competitive.

“It’s sort of like when we started carrying expensive shoes,” says Syd Jerome’s Scott Shapiro. “It took the customer a long time to appreciate spending that kind of money... Chicago used to be a \$99 shoe town. Now we’re educating men who are so used to buying cheap products that are alcohol based and not good for their skin. It’s only recently that men realized they have to take care of their exterior. They go to the health club, eat right and dress well, but neglect their face. So is the product jumping off the shelves? No. But it’s a new arena and an education process. Let’s face it—we’ve got socks that are more expensive.”

“The luxury customer tends to extend luxury into all areas of his life,” concurs Mitchell’s Dan Farrington. “It’s a small business for us, but it helps create a one-stop shopping environment. We only carry Art of Shaving and eShave, which our customer may have originally picked up somewhere in the city, but now he’ll come to us to stock up and hopefully buy some other things. A couple of resources is enough for us. You need a lot of traffic to support more.”

“Sometimes this department gets treated as an afterthought,” says Mark Shale’s Phil Borntrager. “After all, our specialty is selling clothes. Some of our guys are more attuned and want to know about the product and some aren’t. We keep all the product in one region of the store where a guy can look at it and make choices. We carry Jack Black, John Allen’s, J. Paul, eShave and Menu—a local Chicago brand. We have shampoos and other product, but it’s mostly about shaving and skin care.”

Hilling points out that the focus has to be on the results a guy sees in the mirror. “Guys need to see change right away, and they’re not

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going to change their behavior that much. We look to combine steps, like shaving with anti-aging treatments.”

“We’re seeing that men are much more willing to cross over from the drug store market and away from the product their dads always used,” says Porchey. “Once they see and feel a difference, like using a product that prevents razor burn, for instance, they’ll come back. We stay very ‘shave-centric,’ because it allows the guy to have a skin care regime without thinking that he does. They don’t want to take a lot of time, so products have to be multifunctional.”

“We made a conscious decision to pursue specialty stores,” says Porchey. “Part of it was because we didn’t start with unlimited funds. We knew that high-end specialty retailers already have developed relationships and are very personal.”

“Coaching [on product use] is indispensable, so we encourage an e-mail exchange or a Tweet or whatever it takes to help the guy understand the product and how to use it,” says Hiller. “We’re on Facebook and we have even used Skype. We’re implementing QR codes so a customer can watch a video about the product and its benefits right in the store! If we offer a lot of sell-through support, men are fiercely loyal, so we want to help the retailer sell more than just one thing. As retailers know best, people respond when you talk to them one-on-one.”

“I sell mostly J. Paul shaving cream,” says Greg Eveloff at The Clothier. “We’ll just say ‘Do me a favor, try this product. I promise you’ll never use anything else.’ Our customers have a confidence factor with us. I have one customer who shaves his head, and he’s bought five tubes already!”

The men’s skin care market also seems particularly attuned to the psychology of their customer. Jonathan Dubuque of Level Naturals points out that although his product is currently unisex in appeal, their emphasis on bar soap is inherently masculine. “You don’t need to put it on a loofah or a sponge. It’s got sharp edges. And most importantly, a lot of these liquid soaps contain materials that aren’t good for your skin and most of it gets washed down the drain, anyway. Let’s face it—we’re men—our most important parts are on the outside, so you’d better be using a cleaning product that’s good for you.”

Level Naturals plans to launch its Blue Collar line early next year, featuring industrially-inspired packaging. The metrosexual thing backfired for a lot of people,” says Dubuque. “We want to give men something that’s hyper-masculine that feels heavy in your hand. I grew up in a military family—people who work with their hands. I want to translate that to body care.” ■



COVER BAND

In what might seem to be the antithetical extreme, Michele Probst is taking men’s grooming in a different direction with Mënaji, a collection of “color” for men. Probst’s clients have included Barack Obama, Tom Brokaw, Kid Rock, Enrique Iglesias and Jay Leno. “This all started when I did makeup for a lawyer’s commercial. He realized he looked so great, he wondered if he could hire me to do his face for an important court case,” says Probst. “Then he got wind of my day rate... So I develop a collection of skin care and color targeted to men. We don’t use the word ‘makeup.’ It’s got to be undetectable skin care.” The collection includes products that cleanse, “correct” (eye gel and wrinkle-reduction), protect and conceal. Currently available online, Mënaji is also sold at The Plaza and Jamie’s in Nashville, Tenn.