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A head for business

Being bald can mean that a man loses his confidence and self-respect. It has even brought young men to the brink of suicide. Luckily, there is an answer, as

Sally-Ann Jones discovered.



■ Carl Howell

HAIR is a multi-million dollar industry. Naturally blond hair as a commodity is worth more per gram than gold, as Carl Howell well knows. At 46, Carl is an Australian businessman who deals in hair. The blonder and longer, the more his company, Advanced Hair Studios, will pay. Black hair, because it is more common, is cheaper.

Carl buys human hair from Russia from where it ultimately finds its way to his 60 outlets throughout the world and on to the heads of balding men (and more rarely, women), having been carefully graded strand by strand according to colour, thickness and length.

Most of Advanced Hair Studios' clients are men aged between 22 and 30 whose lives have been made miserable by hair loss. About 40 percent of men over 21 are affected by male pattern baldness. Techniques invented and patented by the company mean that men can swim, dive, bungee-jump, shower, surf, ski and even wrestle without fear of their replacement hair coming off.

Carl's \$40 million business came about accidentally when he dropped out of an accounting course and travelled to the U.S.

He was selling account packages to make some money when a man whose family had been in the hair industry for three generations arranged to speak to him about accounting. This man had owned a hair piece salon. The two teamed up and soon had 30 salons in the U.S., pioneering non surgical hair replacement techniques. Carl and the partner have since separated. Carl never did finish his accounting studies, but there are no regrets.

"It's been very exciting to be trendsetters in this area" he said. "Right from the beginning we were the innovators. The rest of the world has been following us. Our terminology is now used world-wide and we're rapidly expanding into Asia." Part of the price one pays for making new ground is that millions of dollars must be spent on legal action to protect intellectual property rights.

AHS have research laboratories in several countries as well as Australia. None of their products is tested on animals.

The company also supplies hair for theatre and the team occasionally has to really stretch its imagination to come up with the right effect. When actor Norm Yemm (*Homicide*, *The Sullivans*) had to appear as a tramp with long, grey locks yak hair was flown in from Tibet. "The yak hair made him look yukky enough," Carl quipped. More drama occurred in the London studio, where Scotland Yard detectives turned up to arrest a criminal having found an AHS appointment card in his digs. Wanted for questioning

The cost ranges between \$2,000 and \$10,000 and there is a choice of different procedures available.

While many women would probably wonder what all the fuss is about when it comes to male baldness, for a man it can mean the difference between getting a job or not. A bare pate never bothered Sean Connery or Yul Brynner but it might upset promotional chances for a business executive who at 28 looks 36. "First impressions are very important," Carl said. "If the firm is looking for someone aged between 25 and 35 they're unlikely to take someone who looks older."

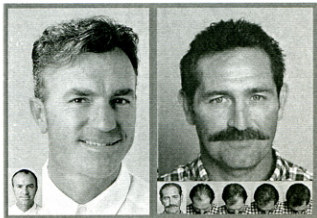
Ironically, Carl is the only man in his company sporting his own hair - a golden brown thatch fading to silver at the temples. The other male employees are all walking, talking, swimming, showering, windsurfing proof that the Russian hair woven into their own thinning locks looks exactly like their own. It's company policy for the employees to be able to empathise with baldness and show that there is a viable alternative.

AHS has several sports stars who are proud to tell the world that they are very satisfied customers. NSW cricket captain Greg Matthews and former English cricket captain Graham Gooch head up the company's publicity campaigns

in Australia and England. George and Mildred actor Brian Murphy is another who doesn't mind saying that his hair is not all his own.

But these men are in the minority. AHS goes to great lengths to protect the identity of some of its famous clients, even flying one major British TV personality by private plane to their Brussels studio where he is not known.

Apart from a massive expansion into Asia planned for the near future, Carl says the next exciting development on the horizon is a revolutionary type of hair extension for women, made possible by a technique recently developed by AHS researchers. "But we'll be keeping the women separate from the balding men, in totally different studios", Carl said. Image is what it's all about.



■ Satisfied sports stars Matthews and Gooch

about several misdeeds, the man made a habit of committing his crimes just before a visit to AHS. He would then emerge from the studio looking much younger. Scotland Yard asked Carl when the man's next appointment was - and were waiting to arrest him.

Carl has had other unusual requests. Men sometimes want hairy chests or armpits, beards or moustaches. But common-or-garden baldness gives him more than enough work for his expertise.

AHS has patented a technique which involves fusing a skin-like membrane, which is impossible to detect on a person's scalp, with the client's existing hair. Other human hair that matches the clients own is injected strand by strand into the membrane over a period of weeks so that the client is not taking one minute and bushy-haired the next.