

Nordic HairContrast puts 'fashion' into extensions

Hair extensions are a hot business category and can generate significant new service revenues for salons. Plus, because maintenance is required, hair extensions result in an ongoing revenue stream. The **Nordic Hair Fashion System**, an imported line from Denmark, is a relatively new player that is quietly making inroads into the salon marketplace.

Nordic HairContrast U.S., the exclusive importer and distributor of Nordic Hair, is headquartered in Los Angeles. Recently, *Beauty Industry Report* (BIR) met with **Rich Ginsburg**, company president, to learn more.

BIR: What are your vision and mission for Nordic HairContrast US?

Rich Ginsburg (RG): The mission of Nordic HairContrast is simple, but certainly not modest. We want to reinvent the art of hair enhancement throughout the professional salon industry, and we intend to do that by teaching stylists and their clients that Nordic Hair is not a "hair extension" at all, but a creative tool that stylists can use to make their clients' desires a reality. By educating professional stylists about the high-level, Scandinavian quality and artistic flexibility offered by the Nordic Hair Fashion System, stylists will truly understand that Nordic Hair is fashion care for hair.

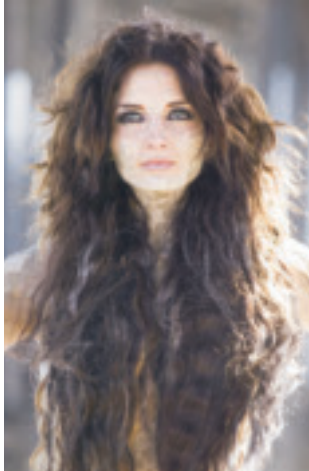
BIR: I understand that your Danish parent company launched its product line many years ago. Give me a brief history.

RG: Nordic HairContrast was founded in Denmark by **Michael** and **Peter Andersen** in 1999 as a distributor of several wet products, as well as the **Pivot Point** education system. Soon after, the company started developing new systems of hair extensions, because traditional methods of attaching hair—bonding, sewing and weaving—tended to damage the fine hair commonly found throughout Scandinavia. Seven years after inventing Nordic Hair, Nordic HairContrast is proud to be one of the market leaders throughout Europe in the hair extension category and, with more than 30

sales offices throughout the world, we expect to be in more than 50 countries in 2010.

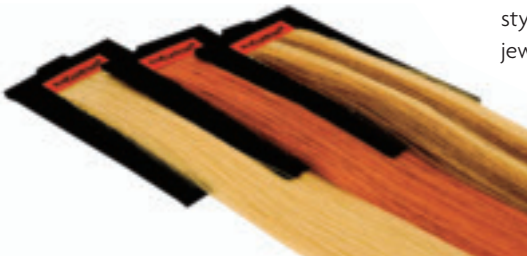
BIR: With a multitude of hair extension companies and product lines, what separates Nordic Hair from the rest?

RG: We consider Nordic Hair an alternative to traditional hair extensions for several reasons. First, our proprietary adhesive system allows a stylist to attach a full set of Nordic Hair in less than an hour; hair extensions usually require 3 to 5 hours to install. So right away, our system provides a huge financial benefit to stylists, since they can service three or four Nordic Hair clients in the same amount of time it would take them to complete one traditional hair extension service. Also,



Nordic Hair will never damage the client's hair (a common occurrence with hair extensions), because we evenly distribute the weight of the Nordic Hair onto the client's hair. Finally, we developed our own line of care products to maintain the health and beauty of Nordic Hair, so we have many clients who have re-used the same hair for more than a year.

BIR: In an earlier conversation, you mentioned four key attributes of Nordic HairContrast: innovation, dedication to quality, education and product distinction. Please elaborate.



RG: We strive to be innovators. For instance, we did not enter the market by re-branding the same product sold by a dozen other companies with a fancy marketing plan or celebrity spokesperson. Instead, we invented a new system that's so unique, you can't refer to Nordic Hair as a "hair extension," it's a fashion

tool that stylists can use to create new styles or add color, texture and volume (and, yes, length) in less than one hour.

We've heard from stylists that some companies are not providing the same quality of hair from order to order. We do. And to prove it, every shipment of Nordic Hair is randomly tested by the Danish Technological Institute to assure our stylists and their clients that the quality of Nordic Hair will not change.

Education is also critical to us. In order to maintain the integrity of our product, only stylists who have completed a Nordic Hair Certification Class may purchase Nordic Hair. We have turned away dozens of stylists who refused to take our Certification Class because they insisted that they have worked with "hair extensions" for years. Nordic Hair, however, is not a hair extension, and we believe that education is the key to unlocking its potential.

With regard to product distinction, we need to educate the industry as to why Nordic Hair is not a "hair extension" but an alternative to hair extensions. Nordic Hair is available in 40 colors, as well as a variety of lengths (8", 18" and 24") and textures, including naturally straight and the pre-permed Body Wave for an energetic and sexy style!

BIR: Speaking of innovation, I understand Nordic Hair will be introducing its Wedding Collection at Cosmoprof North America. Please give BIR readers a preview.

RG: This is a great example of the innovation I was speaking about earlier. For years now, stylists have been forced to shop for hairpieces, jewelry and accents at various hair shops and stores to find the products they need to create updos for their bridal clients. Our new Wedding Collection will be a one-stop resource for beautiful clip-in hairpieces stylists can use to create bridal updos, accented by hand-designed hair jewelry, to give the entire wedding party an elegant and cohesive look. Each collection will include clip-in hairpieces in a variety of shades and colors, as well as a selection of gorgeous hair jewelry designed specifically for Nordic HairContrast by renowned Danish designer **Joakim Roos**.

BIR: Rich, you stressed that education is one of the key success factors in your line. Tell me more about your program.

RG: We are blessed to have one of the most talented stylists in the country as our artistic director. **Malin Miramontes** is a brilliant hairstylist and makeup artist from Sweden and since arriving in the United States, she has been the subject of feature articles back home in top fashion magazines, such as *Swedish Elle* and *Swedish Vogue*. Prior to arriving here 10 years ago, Malin was a member of **Schwarzkopf's** artistic team and traveled the world performing at hair shows and other fashion-related events.

As mentioned, we consider product education vital to future success. For that reason, every stylist must attend one 5-hour certification class at no charge, prior to using Nordic Hair. Despite the occasional objection, most stylists understand that we are protecting both the Nordic Hair brand, as well as their own professional reputation, by treating all stylists equally.

BIR: What is your long-term vision for education?

RG: Actually, Malin and I were just discussing that. With more than 150 certified stylists around the country and more being certified each month, our next challenge is to implement a strategy that will allow us both to reconnect with our current stylists and continue to inspire them. One of the concepts under consideration is the creation of a master stylist certificate program, where our certified stylists can come to Los Angeles and attend advanced Nordic Hair classes on color, cutting, blending and fashion styling. Stay tuned.

BIR: Who is your target market?

RG: You just asked my favorite question! One of the limitations of traditional hair extensions is that most consumers have at least medium-length hair and simply want longer hair, hence the term "extensions." In addition, hair extensions traditionally take 3 to 5 hours to attach. As a result, stylists and their customers understandably have a narrow view of when hair extensions are appropriate.

Nordic Hair, on the other hand, is appropriate for almost anyone and that is why we have taken on the challenge of educating stylists that it is a fashion tool, not a hair extension. For example, our 8-inch length

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product is perfect for clients with short hair who want to alter their hairstyle or add some volume or color. We also offer a standard 18-inch length that can be used for adding volume, highlights/lowlights and—of course—length in less than an hour. And for clients who desire nothing less than dramatic and gorgeous long hair, Nordic Hair can be purchased in an extra-long, 24-inch length.

BIR: I understand you are using a classic distributor model marketing strategy. What are the key success factors you look for in selecting a distributor partner?

RG: Independent regional distributors will always understand their local market better than we do, so we believe they will play a vital role in the growth of our company. Their DSCs are in the field every day and can therefore make more accurate assessments of the current trends and buying tendencies in their area. A great distributor partner for us will be one with

a proven track record, who appreciates the enormous potential created by our products.

BIR: Please describe your product ranges.

RG: We have three basic lines: **Nordic Hair Professional, Nordic Hair Economy Class and Flex Extension.** Nordic Hair Professional is our most popular line and features 100% Grade A all-natural Remy Hair that can be re-used for up to 18 months. Nordic Hair Economy Class is something we developed in 2009—it's the same system as Nordic Hair but the cost is 30% less, since we use 50% Remy hair and 50% high-heat fiber, which will take the heat of a flat iron or curling iron (up to 356°F). Both the Nordic Hair Professional and Economy Class lines require certification. The Nordic Hair Contrast Flex Extension system, however, does not require certification and also is about one-third less than the cost of the Nordic Hair Professional line. Although the Flex Extension line consists of 100% human Remy hair, it is not made to be reusable and is usually replaced after about 12 weeks of normal wear.

BIR: What role do shows play in your marketing strategy?

RG: The importance of brand recognition cannot be overstated, and shows are terrific vehicles for introducing new products to both distributors and stylists. When used in conjunction with other marketing efforts and with realistic objectives, trade shows are a great way to advance your brand.

BIR: What fashion trends can you predict will have a favorable impact on the hair extension category?

RG: Like all mediums that both inform and reflect popular culture, the evolution of fashion requires hairstylists to continuously stretch their skills both creatively and technically in order to stay relevant. With few limitations, stylists can use Nordic Hair to create nearly any hairstyle in less than an hour, regardless of their client's hair length, color or cut. For that reason, no matter what fashion trends emerge, stylists who use Nordic Hair will always be able to keep their clients ahead of the fashion curve. As a result, they will always stay relevant.

To learn more about Nordic Hair Contrast, reach Rich Ginsburg at 310-292-8848 or richard@nordichaircontrast.com, and visit www.nordichaircontrast.com.