

Smart Step offers Premium Standing Solutions

Mats are so important to the daily comfort and health of stylists, barbers, estheticians, massage therapists and even beauty store associates, who are on their feet all day. Unfortunately, traditional mats are often unsightly, tattered and stained, with little anti-fatigue value. Luckily, that's starting to change. With a greater focus on ergonomics than ever before, beauty professionals are realizing that cheap mats won't keep them comfortable all day and are seeking Premium Standing Solutions.

Enter **Smart Step Salon and Spa**, the company that is re-defining how the beauty industry looks at the standard black mat. Smart Step has turned mats into fashionable solutions that not only are critical to the health and comfort of the service provider, but are an integral part of salons' decor.

Beauty Industry Report recently checked in with **Daniel Bouzide**, founder and CEO, to learn how Smart Step is redefining how salons think of beauty mats.

BIR: Welcome, Daniel. Why is the mat so important to today's salon environment?

DB: Healthy standing has always been important to salons, spas and barbershops. Today, the awareness is much more prevalent. Beauty professionals are on their feet all day caring for others. Smart Step helps them care for themselves—and we make it fashionable!

Since 1996, we have engineered, designed and produced premium, anti-fatigue mats for a variety of industries, including housewares, hospitality and industrial, as well in the medical, chiropractic, veterinary and fitness categories. Smart Step has also been very active in the beauty industry for 12 years, working primarily through a master distributor.



"Healthy living and healthy standing can often dictate the length of a stylist's or barber's career," says Daniel Bouzide, founder and CEO of Smart Step.

No, we did not invent mats, but we certainly have perfected the premium mat category. We have tremendous experience with polyurethanes, densities and compositions. Our Smart Step Mats interact with the body, suspending body weight and effectively taking impact off the back, hips, knees and feet. At the end of the day, our mats provide preventative injury remedies and healing qualities for the industry.

BIR: How have you turned the plain black mat into a fashionable salon accessory?

DB: Great question! About two years ago, we reviewed our eight different divisions. While the beauty industry has always been close to my heart, after looking at the gorgeous mats we produce for the Housewares and Hospitality industries with tremendous success, I simply shook my head and asked, "Why does the most creative industry—beauty—have the ugliest mats?"

Over the next year, we took our most popular mat patterns and colors sold through high-end retailers, such as Frontgate and Williams-Sonoma, and created the beauty shapes and designs in these decorative styles. Those became the **Smart Step Designer Series**.

To accompany our Elite Series—our version of the black mat—we offer the attractive Belle pattern in four colors—silver leaf, copper leaf, light antique and black onyx. For more contemporary salons, granite copper and granite steel are also available.

All Smart Step Mats are three-quarter inches of pure, one-piece polyurethane with a protective clear coat finish. Of course, the granites are available in the increasingly popular Infinity PuzzlePiece, as well.

All in all, we have produced an effective standing solution that can accent and work with salon, spa and barbershop decors.

BIR: That's a great fashion story. What about functionality?

DB: For the record, we never sell our mats based on appearance. The No. 1 vision of all brands is "A Healthy Work Environment." Our mats must function and last. Oh, and by the way, they're gorgeous.

By having 100% control of our manufacturing here in the United States, we touch every mat produced. That means we never compromise comfort, quality or durability. By using expensive, extremely effective, pure polyurethane, we can guarantee in writing, for at least five years the five biggest concerns of the salon industry:

1. Smart Step Mats will never compress or squish down. They stay comfortable from day one to many years after the purchase.

2. Smart Step Mats always lie completely flat. The edges will never roll up or curl, which can create dangerous trip hazards.

3. Because of the one-piece technology, the polyurethane molecules are cross-linked and thermoset, so the mats will never separate, bubble or delaminate.

4. With the sealed polyurethane gripper bottom, mats will not slide or travel.

Furthermore, Smart Step Mats do not contain plasticizers or fillers that often

interact with salon floors, creating a chemical reaction that adheres the mat to the floor.

5. Smart Step Mats have a polyurethane protective clear coat. As a result, hair is easy to sweep, foot traffic is minimal and the clear coat acts as a barrier to hair color.



Smart Step Mats interact with the body, suspending body weight and effectively taking impact off the back, hips, knees and feet.

BIR: Tell me about your company's Midwest heritage.

DB: Our offices are based in Troy, Michigan, just outside of Detroit, and our manufacturing and shipping are out of St. Louis. Including all eight divisions, we have about 100 sales reps across the country.

Our business really exploded during the toughest times here in Michigan. I believe much of that success was because we believed in ourselves, our visions and that a good, Made-in-America product line would prevail. While Detroit is making an amazing comeback, the joke eight years ago was that Smart Step and Kid Rock were the only two businesses in town that were hiring.

BIR: Are your mats non-toxic?

DB: You bet! Smart Step mats meet all stringent U.S. regulations. They do not contain latex, PVC, plasticizers, toxins, BPA or other hazardous fillers often found in imports.

BIR: How much do your mats cost?

DB: Mats in the Elite Series, our premium black mat category, range from \$129.00 to \$219.00. The Designer Series Mats range from \$139.00 to \$279.00. When you consider the quality, longevity, meaningful warranty and fashion attributes, salon owners understand the value from the reduced replacement costs.

BIR: What is your story?

DB: About 25 years ago, I entered the beauty business as a manufacturers' rep and then became a rep principal. When we started representing beauty mats with tremendous success, I believed the premium category could succeed in other industries, as well.

Seeing the opportunity, I formed a partnership with a polyurethane manufacturer that has a successful 50-year history. It was very clear that the beauty industry totally embraced the premium mat category, and Smart Step worked with a master distributor for the next 10 years to answer the call. That allowed us to further develop and perfect the mat products and heavily concentrate on many other industries that also saw the need for Premium Anti-Fatigue Mats.



The Smart Step Designer Series features high quality and functional mats in a variety of decorative patterns and colors.

I could not be happier or more grateful, as we have built an amazing team, and have enjoyed repeated success stories.

BIR: How do you market your mats?

DB: We sell only through authorized distributors. Our goal is to make selling Premium Standing Solutions as exciting and as easy as possible. For example:

- ▶ **We support our distributors with high-quality sales tools.** Every distributor, salon consultant and distributor store receives a mat sample large enough to put a foot on, to demonstrate the one-piece construction and other attributes. We also provide color swatches of every design and pattern, full-color catalogs and more. Stores receive full-size Designer Series demonstration mats that customers can stand on to experience the difference first hand. Counter displays, take-away cards and other tools are also available through our portal.

- ▶ **We provide tremendous customer service and marketing support.** All product and lifestyle images are available in high-resolution formats at <http://www.smartstep-gallery.com/>, making it easy for distributors and reps to view and share the collection.



New Klogs Footwear features a thinner version of the same proprietary polyurethane technology used in Smart Step Mats.

technology that we use in all Smart Step Mats. Klogs Footwear is designed to be funky and cool, and provides comfort, support and longevity. It multiplies the comfort level of our mats, so stylists can stand all day in comfort.

BIR: Any final thoughts?

DB: Everyone on the Smart Step team is exceptionally proud of the Premium Standing Solutions we produce and the services we provide. The "Healthy Way of Life" campaign is not going away, and we are on the forefront of this movement. We get hundreds of reviews, letters and testimonials every month on how we have positively impacted so many lives. Besides taking care of countless people in so many industries, we, as a company, strongly embrace keeping our manufacturing here in America, creating jobs and supporting our U.S. economy. That amazing culture is readily evident and contagious in both of our offices.

We believe that Smart Step Salon and Spa and the Designer Series will have the salon and barber industry rethinking how they see the beauty mat category.

Interested distributors are invited to contact Dro Bush, account manager, at 866-624-5700 or dro@smartstepflooring.com. Visit smartstepsalonandspa.com.

▶ **Our convenient Drop-Ship Program minimizes or eliminates distributor inventory.**

Our mats ship from our distribution center in St. Louis in 7 to 10 business days.

▶ **Our Designer Series Mats are MAP (Minimum Advertised Price) protected.** That means our distribution partners will never be undersold and their customers won't find Smart Step Designer Mats cheaper online.

▶ **We are dabbling with introducing Klogs Footwear to the salon industry in 2018.**

Klogs are manufactured in St. Louis with a thinner version of the same proprietary polyurethane