

BETTER BIOLOGY

Consumers are ditching vanity when it comes to cosmetics, but what about hair care? Innovators of the now-iconic hair towel, AQUIS co-founders Britta Cox and Suveen Sahib share why the industry lags behind and how their company's thirst for knowledge led to better hair biology.

Instead of caking on surface level solutions, consumers opt to bolster beauty from within by promoting healthy skin. The cosmetics industry took note. But what's changed for the hair care industry? Not much, according to AQUIS co-founders Britta Cox and Suveen Sahib, chief executive officer, "the dial has not moved much within the hair care industry over the past 75 years." The broader industry narrative continues to focus on superficial solutions that provide temporary outcomes, masking hair damage instead of addressing hair health. Language such as "fix," "control" or "tame" still dominate the hair care conversation in a world that is fighting to embrace positivity, whereas even the cosmetics industry has shifted consumers towards an emphasis on creating great skin through intrinsic skin care regimens. The hair care industry is still dragging its strands, and consumers, through damaging products that fail to support the biology of hair.

Selling over 2 million units of its gateway product, AQUIS' now-iconic hair towel, between 2016 and 2018 with more than 10,000 ratings and consumer stories, AQUIS experienced an astute 100 percent growth last year. With growth coming solely through pure product love by fans, including its micro-influencer communities, AQUIS looks to continue this momentum throughout 2019 and beyond. But not without reconstructing and reformulating the entire hair care routine, and thought pattern, of an industry poised for rebirth.

While the prestige hair care category is experiencing double-digit growth, the mass level sees the daily use of hair products in decline. Mintel, an award-winning market research firm, showed a decline in product usage across categories (shampoos, conditioners, texturizers and serums) in its March 2019 reports. Consumers are steering away from frequent hair washing routines because of damage concerns, especially wherein colored and chemically-treated hair is in fashion. This is particularly true of consumers in North America, where there is greater diversity in hair type, coloring and treatments used, more so than any other region. "Adding to this concern is the sobering fact that 85 percent of the U.S. geography is exposed to hard water which is known to have a strong correlation with hair damage," they said. AQUIS believes it's the combination of these factors that has led to this sharp reduction in hair washing, "leaving a cascading effect on styling and other hair categories, too." Environmental damage and pollution aside, hair's three biggest aggressors are driven by the consumer's own habits: washing, drying and chemical processing.

Consumer Outcry

The solution isn't in launching more "me too" products or dry shampoos. Rather, AQUIS believes a transformative refocus must occur to undo past damage. "Tackling



Suveen Sahib and Britta Cox, co-founders of AQUIS

threats to hair health means creating strategic solutions that help prevent damage from occurring in the first place and mapping out this nation's unique hair care landscape (and needs).

"Skin care for hair" is becoming the norm as consumers seek formulation choices and simplified approaches to hair care. "Scalp health is in the spotlight now but we believe there is an opportunity to position scalp and hair health in a more comprehensive way," according to Cox and Sahib. By developing non-irritating hair care products that go beyond the usual hair types and focus on lifestyle and location triggers that negatively affect hair, the consumer is better served. When asked of the biggest frustration from consumers, the duo cited "a lack of satisfaction with results" and "hair care continuing to be a daily struggle." Consumers are investing more time and money on hair care and styling products than ever before only to be let down by performances that fall flat with temporary results that often lead to more damage. "We also find consumers are listening to and acting on the smart advice to protect hair from over washing and heat styling," they added, "yet even with this adjustment to their routines, they are unsatisfied with how their hair looks, feels and behaves."

Lightbulb Moment

It all started with AQUIS' iconic hair towel. Redefining convenience by cutting hair drying time in half, users started noticing their hair felt stronger and healthier and looked its best with less effort. This revelation spurred a deeper dive. After more than three years of research and countless clinical tests, AQUIS discovered a little-known phenomenon called "hygral fatigue," otherwise known as water damage—the state in which hair becomes saturated with water, weakening it by up to 56 percent. By studying the biology of hair, AQUIS discovered its hydrophobic tendencies—it naturally fights to keep water out to prevent swelling, weakness and breakage. "The solution to water damage became

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apparent to us: minimize hair's exposure to water and you minimize damage. Hair becomes healthier, stronger and easier to manage and style," they said. Prevent damage before it starts, or before hair gets wet. Afterwards, the elements of further innovation at AQUIS quickly fell into place. To respect the consumer's need for styling and chemical treatments (such as hair coloring, straightening and perming) as a means of self-expression, the AQUIS Prime Hair Care System was developed. Consumers can experiment regardless of the damage it inevitably causes, when they bolster hair's strength from within to withstand common stressors. "Instead of lather, rinse, repeat, the AQUIS Prime regimen not only protects hair from water, it also reduces its exposure," Cox and Sahib reiterated.

Global Storytelling

Through its gateway hair towel, a global footprint was built within the past three years. Sephora is a global brand partner with AQUIS across North America,

Mexico, Europe and South East Asia. Other select anchor partners include Neiman Marcus and SpaceNK in the U.S.; Selfridges, Hut Group and Space NK in Europe; Douglas in Germany; Mecca in Australia; Joyce in Hong Kong and Lane Crawford in China. Social and editorial commerce is part of its distribution strategy, partnering with communities such as Violet Grey, Goop, Revolve, Mind Body & Green, Fab Fit Fun and other like-minded industry professionals. With the launch of AQUIS Prime, AQUIS will further leverage its D2C and social commerce platforms to lend to brand storytelling, hair education and content sharing across mediums.

Rewriting Hair Care

Leading the charge to modernize hair care, AQUIS aims to protect the natural integrity of hair so it looks, feels and behaves better. "If you walked into a drugstore three years ago, the hair care aisles were brimming with remedies promising to repair damaged hair. The conversation was very much limited to temporarily fixing or masking issues rather than promoting hair health," added Sahib. The most crucial hair truth AQUIS supports is: healthy hair starts from the inside. "Our mission at AQUIS is to help rewrite the rules of how we care for hair and restore its natural strength and vitality. To treat hair better with less water, more love," said Cox. According to AQUIS' philosophy of nurturing hair as nature intended, healthy hair requires less time showering, styling and fussing, meaning reclaimed time with renewed confidence.

Green chemistry, bioengineering solutions and molecules that strengthen hair from the inside without getting washed away like conventional treatments will add to the differentiators for AQUIS. The duo added that the support of hair health is what's driving the company today and serves as "our roadmap for tomorrow."



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BY THE NUMBERS

+55.3%

Beauty Influencer Searches
(Report from Captify and Publicis Media)

+6%

Shampoo Sales at Year End, 2018
(Report from IRI data tracking)

+4%

Conditioner Sales at Year End, 2018
(Report from IRI data tracking)



SPOTLIGHT

THE STATE OF THE HAIR CARE INDUSTRY

While the beauty industry continues to evolve towards a more holistic, “inner beauty” mentality, the hair care industry still experiences disconnect in the products offered on the shelves and the needs professed by the everyday consumer. Locking in on the health of their locks, consumers are diverse, yet carry parallel needs which most hair care brands fail to deliver upon, or rather try to cover up with only surface-level solutions.

Researchers at search intelligence firm Captify and project partner Publicis Media analyzed 491 million hair-care searches over a one-year period, publishing its findings in a report titled “Coming Clean.” While influencers “are one of the biggest trends shaking up the beauty industry, with searches increasing 55.3 percent year-on-year,” the closer messaging is in

bringing “true authenticity” (in both product and promotion) to the hair and beauty consumer.

At the end of 2018, shampoo and conditioner sales were up 6 percent and 4 percent respectively, according to IRI data tracking the 52 weeks ending Dec. 27. Natural, food-based ingredients are on the edge of consumer interest and mass hair care is no longer a commodity category. Shampoo alternatives, customized conditioners and natural ingredients are all springing onto the shelves. The mass hair landscape is ever-changing, with this multi-cultural consumer driving much of the growth in hair, especially in North America. Too, aggressive styling needs, chemical or heat treatments and other consumer habits are trendy and necessary but cause hair damage to pile up.

As a response to the subjected damage, the consumer seeks to nourish and repair. Washing less frequently than ever, even scalp health is in the spotlight, according to today’s consumer. Overall, the consumer is shifting hair care habits, opting to view caring for the scalp and strands as part of an overall wellness routine.

Consumers don’t crave surface-level solutions, they require a transformative refocusing of their hair care routine to undo past damage. “Skin care for hair” is not just a trend mimicking the beauty world’s focus on cultivating inner beauty - it’s about repairing their hair. Seeking to strengthen hair at every step of their routine, without forfeiting an abundance of styling options which cause damage - the consumer wants to have it all.

And they can, with science.

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