

The strip wax evolution

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By **Patrick Hall**

A depilatory wax evolution has been quietly gaining momentum in recent years and salon owners are beginning to notice. Advances in technology and a far greater focus on the production of better quality formulations have contributed to a significant shift in the global wax market from hot (hard) wax to strip (soft) wax. In Australia, now more than ever, many salons and salon groups are choosing to use strip wax over hot wax for all of their waxing needs including the face, bikini and underarm.

The reasoning behind the shift is entirely understandable. Until very recently, the strip wax choice was generally restricted to a number of traditional honey, pine or azulene formulations that were generally considered to be too harsh for use on the face and bikini. Whilst these waxes gripped even the shortest hair and a single application of the wax left the skin essentially clean, the aggressive efficiency of the wax made its use on sensitive areas of the body impractical. In particular, the paper-thin skin around the eyes was considered far too fragile for the application of these strip waxes. For a variety of reasons, not least of which was the gentleness of the product, 'hot' wax was therefore considered to be the only choice for waxing these more delicate areas of the body.

My how things have changed...

From a global perspective

From a global perspective, major depilatory companies, particularly European firms, have recognised the distinct advantages of strip wax over hot wax and turned their attention to an unprecedented level of research and development. The results have been astounding. Australian companies have also joined the 'strip wax evolution' and a number of outstanding strip wax products are now being produced in this country.

The quality, effectiveness and gentleness of many of these current strip waxes seriously rival the performance of even the best traditional hot waxes. Modern, high-quality strip wax blends have a rich, creamy, opaque consistency, not dissimilar in appearance to hot wax, and characteristically are as gentle, in my opinion, as any hot wax. In many cases they are gentler.

Find all of this hard to believe? You see, many of these new strip waxes have actually been specifically produced for use on the face and bikini. They contain an array of natural extracts, pure essential oils, high-grade resins and titanium dioxide specifically to reduce redness, restore the skin and ensure that your clients' waxing experience is as pleasant as possible. The 'look and feel' of these new strip wax products is so diametrically different from their inferior predecessors that it is difficult to make comparisons.

A recent visit to [HYPERLINK "http://www.cosmoprof.com/en/index.asp"](http://www.cosmoprof.com/en/index.asp) \t "_blank" **Cosmoprof** in Bologna, Italy, served to reinforce the notion that strip wax was quickly gaining unprecedented market share. In comparison to strip wax, there was actually very little hot wax on display even though some of the world's largest depilatory companies were in attendance. While countries such as Australia, Spain, North America and much of the UK continue to use large volumes of hot wax, European nations in particular have moved strongly in favour of the new breed of gentle strip wax formulations. In Italy, for instance, an overwhelming proportion of the beauty salon market is totally dedicated to strip wax. While leading Italian wax manufacturers (for example, [HYPERLINK "http://www.ricagroup.com"](http://www.ricagroup.com) \t "_blank" **Ricci Products**) continue to produce hot wax, the production is essentially intended for overseas markets. The fact that Italians, known for their generally strong, dark hair growth, have wholeheartedly embraced the

strip wax phenomenon provides anecdotal evidence that these new strip wax formulations possess the characteristics previously found only in hot wax.

More importantly, the Italian experience is a clear indication that beauty therapists the world over are recognising the intrinsic benefits that a change to strip wax can bring. I am certainly not advocating that salons discontinue the use of hot wax. There are a number of sensational hot wax products in the market and hot wax is still as effective as it ever has been. What I am saying is that beauty therapists now, for the first time, have a choice and can confidently choose either a hot wax or quality strip wax for all of their waxing requirements.

So what are the main benefits of using more strip wax in your salon?

Firstly, cost. Per kilo, hot wax is, on average, more expensive than strip wax. This becomes particularly important to salon owners when you consider the amount of hot wax that you would use for a wax service in comparison to the use of strip wax. Hot wax is applied in a far thicker layer than strip wax. In fact, hot wax is applied in a layer up to six times thicker than strip wax, leading to the inference that your treatment costs would be significantly reduced by the increased use of strip wax in your salon. It then follows that your profit margin, per treatment, will increase at a similar rate.

As an example, consider just how much hot wax is 'packed on' during a normal Brazilian wax service, estimate the cost of the hot wax used, then consider how different the profitability of the service would be if your salon was using up to one sixth the amount of product by switching to strip wax. Now multiply that cost saving by the number of Brazilian wax services that your salon performs over a year. Food for thought?

Perhaps the greatest single advantage of strip wax over hot wax is productivity. This is especially true of the roll-on strip wax phenomenon, where covering larger surface areas of the skin with depilatory wax has become almost frighteningly fast. The use of a spatula for full-leg waxing is becoming less frequent as therapists recognise the time-saving benefits of using a roll-on system.

Though hot wax is gentle by nature and provides the ability to reapply the wax over the waxed area, even after a second application of hot wax there often remains the need to use tweezers to remove remaining fine hairs. Strip wax on the other hand provides amazingly clean results. Unlike hot wax, there is no need of course to wait for the wax to set. Not only are you using less wax but also the effectiveness of the strip wax allows the therapist to work faster without the need to reapply the wax, and often without the need for tweezers. Now, all this talk of product costs, profit and productivity are one thing, but the cornerstone of the beauty industry has, and always will be, client care. Client care is absolutely paramount, and you should not even entertain the thought of performing facial or bikini wax service using any other strip wax than a high-quality, non-sticky, premium grade strip wax. Not all waxes are the same.

The profitability of waxing

Dollar for dollar, wax services are, without doubt, the most profitable of all in-salon treatments. Compare a Brazilian waxing client to a nail client and you will agree that both would visit your salon every three to four weeks for maintenance and that, depending on the geographic location of your salon, both will spend between \$50 to \$70 (Brazilian wax versus acrylic refills). This is where the similarities end.

On average, a skilled nail technician may take one hour to complete a set of acrylic refills. The cost of the refills include the therapist's wages for a full hour, the cost of the files, polish, topcoat, other sundries and the general running costs of the salon. It is a labour-intensive process and the profit margin does not adequately reward the salon owner for the effort and costs involved.

On the other hand, a skilled waxing therapist will easily perform a Brazilian wax in 20 minutes – some are even faster. It is entirely possible that she may be capable of performing two or more Brazilian waxes at \$50 each in the same time taken by a single set of nail refills.

The cost of the Brazilian wax includes just a one third proportion of her hourly wage, the low cost of the strip wax used, disposable spatulas, non-woven strips and the general running costs of the salon. The cost savings and profit comparison between the two treatments is quite remarkable yet, funnily enough, many salons give far greater attention to their nail treatments than their waxing treatments.

Convincing your clients

Worried that your clients will revolt if you began using strip wax on the face and bikini? Don't be. Your clients are incredibly clever people, and have learnt to trust your judgement and rely on your professional advice. They respect you and will generally, without exception, follow your recommendation.

There is absolutely no disadvantage to the client by the use of a premium strip wax over hot wax. In fact, many will not notice the change at all. Your client may, however, notice that you are no longer 'picking an edge' on her face, underarm or bikini area with your fingernail. She might also notice that your treatment times are a little faster.

Remember that waxing is not a soothing, relaxing, enjoyable treatment and so any move that would reduce wax treatment times would be of obvious benefit to the client.

Do you know your wax?

Salon owners take an enormous amount of pride in their establishments. They cherish their clients and spend a great deal of time and money developing the business and building a reputation. As a general rule these salon owners choose to stock the best quality skincare brand that they can afford, opt for a high quality nail brand to compliment the skincare range, source outstanding therapists, and select a premium makeup brand. Sound like your salon?

Then, in many cases, inexplicably, these same, high quality salons choose to work with a cheap, no frills and often-sticky depilatory wax. One wonders why? Sometimes beauty therapists can be something of a contradiction. A fully qualified beauty therapist would never apply any skincare product on a client without first closely examining the contents, studying the key ingredients and considering any contraindications. Yet many therapists seem quite comfortable applying hot or strip wax to the most private, delicate areas of a woman's body without the same degree of diligence.

Do you know what grade of resin is used in your wax? Are there additives that may irritate sensitive skin types, or delicate areas of the body? Does your wax contain pure bees wax, or titanium dioxide to assist the waxing process? It's often the case that excessive post-wax irritation and reddening of the skin is actually a causal effect of the quality of the wax being used. When you find the time, read the label on your wax product and do a little research.

Beauty therapists are resourceful people and you might be surprised by what you find. There are so many high-performance, ultra gentle, non-sticky strip wax formulations available at the moment that if your waxing clients aren't always coming back, you need to ask yourself why? There may be a very good chance that the salon around the corner is offering a very different waxing experience to your own.

Are you promoting your waxing adequately?

Do you know what percentage of your weekly salon income is generated from waxing? A quick glance through your appointment book might surprise you. It is often the case that in-salon waxing

services contribute at least 35 per cent to actual salon turnover (particularly during September to March) yet incredibly, these key services are often banished to the back page of your menu or else crammed into an uninspiring list of abbreviations: does EBW [for Eyebrow Wax] sound familiar? Does your salon menu provide your waxing services with the degree of prominence that they probably deserve? Do your clients even know which depilatory brand your salon has chosen to use? How much information have you provided about your waxing services?

In many respects, waxing clients are no different from skincare clients or nail clients. They want a hygienic environment, a highly trained therapist and they want the very best experience that can be provided. Salons who continue to offer their clients harsh, sticky, 'no frills' waxes do so at their own peril.

The old catchcry of 'it does the job and it's cheap' doesn't add up anymore. Beauty salons are opening at an unprecedented rate and competition for the consumer dollar has never before been this intense. Clients are being offered more salon choice than ever before and so the battle for market share has moved to waxing services. Now, more than ever, it is vitally important to give your client a compelling reason to return to your salon, and salon owners who have recognised the marketability of their waxing services are reaping the rewards.

Successful salons have taken advantage of the 'strip wax evolution' and are using their menu of services to market and promote the quality of their wax services. In fact, many have gone a step further and have turned standard waxing services into waxing 'treatments'. With a little thought, it is very easy to turn a standard wax service into a specialised 'treatment'. Every wax 'treatment' would include the application of a quality pre-wax product, the use of a superior-grade wax, and would finish with a soothing application of premium post-depilatory oil or emulsion massaged gently into the treated area. Now that's a treatment worth talking about!

Revisit your menu of services and use your imagination to describe, in detail, exactly how your salon performs its waxing treatments. By conveying to your clients the level of care that you take, and the quality of the products that you use, you are giving them a reason to come back. Isn't that what we all want?

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