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Style-conscious men help UK salons regain their stride

Male customers now make up fifth of market, inspired by celebrities such as David Beckham

By Elizabeth Anderson

WHETHER it's popping in for a fake tan or booking an ambitious waxing job, more and more men are tentatively braving the beautician's chair.

A rise in male customers has led to a hiring surge within UK beauty salons to cope with demand, claims an in-depth report by self-tanning specialists Aura, which surveyed 1,008 salon owners, managers and beauty consultants about trends in the industry.

Salons have taken on an average of five new employees in the past five years, as consumer spend on beauty treatments recovers after a tough recession. A fifth of customers are now men, seeking a wide range of services from manicures to facials, as well as increasingly intricate hairstyles.

The biggest rise has been in spray tanning, which has become a popular alternative to sun beds, as people become more aware of the risks associated with UV rays.

"Spray tans have definitely become more popular among men because of reality TV shows like *The Only Way Is Essex*," says Dean Brown, a 35-year-old beautician who works from his home in Todmorden, West Yorkshire. "Some are regulars and will come a couple of times a month, while others might get one before going on holiday."

The most popular reasons for having a spray tan are to look good on holiday, or to prepare for a special occasion such as a wedding or formal dinner. The maximum amount charged by a salon for a spray tan was £150, with the

cheapest costing £5, according to the data from Aura.

David Beckham and reality TV star Joey Essex are often hailed as style icons by British men frequenting these salons. The North West has been the biggest growth area for male grooming, particularly manicures, while Welshmen are the most enthusiastic about tanning treatments, opting for fortnightly visits, according to separate recent research by Salon Services.

While spray tans have increased in popularity, other requests are also becoming mainstream. Nina Munday, owner of Essentials Hair and Beauty in St Neots, Cambridge, says there has been a spike in male customers having facials and pedicures. Waxing is also becoming a popular request – and not just to tidy up eyebrows and chest hair.

"If I ever open a new salon, it would definitely be one that just caters to male customers," says Ms Munday. She adds that a few years ago, 10pc of her customers were male but now that's risen to 20pc.

"Recently, there were more men in the salon waiting to get their eyebrows done than women. But men still need a lot of courage to come in, and if it was a male-only salon they would be less intimidated."

Although there has been a rise in artificial bronzing, self-tanning products are still a relatively niche. St Tropez, a leading self-tanning brand in the UK, estimates that 80pc of people in the UK do not use self-tanning products at home or in a salon. People are put off by the fiddly nature of applying the lotion



David Beckham, left, and Joey Essex have driven the popularity of spray tans and sunbeds for men

and the fear of overdoing the colour, while weekly trips to the salon are too expensive for many.

In fact, sunbeds remain popular despite the health warnings. Almost 60pc of the salons surveyed by Aura recorded a rise in sales from sun bed and sun booth UV tanning. This is despite growing awareness of the risks of using sunbeds, which have contributed to a fourfold rise in cases of skin cancer in the UK over the past 30 years.

"There are people that still believe getting a tan from sunbeds is healthy,"

'Spray tans have become more popular among men because of TV shows like The Only Way Is Essex'

said Dr Waiyat Hussain, consultant dermatologist at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust. "Yet the risk for the development of melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, is highest for those who had used a sunbed before the

age of 35." The hair and beauty industry is worth £7.1bn to the UK economy annually, and is a key contributor to the UK's dominant services sector, which overall accounts for more than three quarters of GDP growth.

While the industry is still recovering from the recession, when many salons were forced to lower prices in order to compete for business, owners are now feeling more upbeat about their firms' futures. More than 95pc of the 1,000 salons questioned said they were more optimistic about their prospects than they were five years ago.