



Facing the Nail Business

From lack of training to sanitation lapses to treating medical conditions, it's time for nail techs to come together and raise standards in these all-important areas. Industry chemist Doug Schoon discusses what he sees as the three greatest challenges facing our business and what we can do — as an industry — to face them. BY DOUG SCHOON

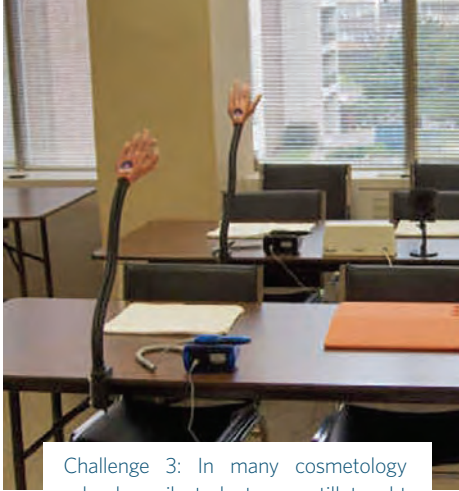
The nail salon industry grew quickly in the late 1970s and flourished during the '80s and early '90s, with business leveling off by the late '90s. Today the nail business is besieged by a series of concerns that threaten future growth. This article explores three important issues I see that face the nail industry and offers solutions that will benefit everyone.



There is a general lack of proper information and/or advanced training. Forty-nine out of 50 American states require nail technicians to receive a formal nail school education and pass an examination to earn a

license to perform professional services. States typically require between 300 to 750 hours of specialized education before students can take the licensing exam. Nail technicians are trained and skilled professionals, but there is a problem. In many schools, incorrect or outdated information and myths are often taught as facts, and this has led to confusion and misunderstanding. To make matters worse, some of this misinformation is repeated on state exams, forcing school instructors to teach students to answer certain questions with the incorrect answers in order for the student to pass the exam. I have a high regard for all educators in the nail industry, especially school instructors, but they can only teach the information they have. Misinformation and myths have proven very difficult to eliminate.

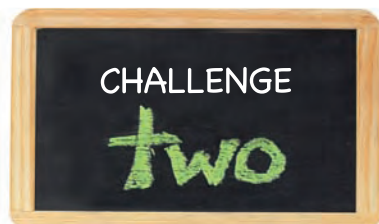
For example, a commonly taught myth is “You’ve got to rough up the



Challenge 3: In many cosmetology schools, nail students are still taught incorrect information or old practices.

nail plate or the product won't stick." The fact is this unnecessary practice weakens the natural nail plate. Nail enhancement products in the '80s had poor adhesion to the natural nail plate and required more aggressive filing to prevent product lifting. Luckily, the improved technology in today's products require only a very light touch with a 180-grit file, removing almost nothing from a properly cleaned nail plate. There is no longer any need to "etch" the nail if quality products are correctly applied.

The Nail Manufacturer's Council (NMC) and the International Nail Technicians Association (INTA) are working to address many such myths and have published several short brochures that can be found at www.probeauty.org/nmc and at www.nailsmag.com/resources/handouts.aspx. The brochures have been translated into several languages, including Spanish and Vietnamese. Also, the leading textbook manufacturers are working with the top experts to correct misinformation found in the books used in nail schools.



Some nail technicians disregard regulations that prohibit them from cutting or penetrating the living skin or diagnosing and treating medical problems on a

client's feet or hands. Nail technicians are licensed to perform services only on healthy nails and skin with no visible signs of injury or disease. Services are prohibited if clients have visible and abnormal skin or nail conditions on the feet or hands. Why? These conditions may be transmitted or might require medical treatment. Not only does this make good sense, it's the nail technician's responsibility and certainly the client's expectation.

Prescribing remedies or treating medical conditions is strictly prohibited by U.S. federal regulations. Only qualified medical doctors can diagnose or treat abnormal disorders or diseases of the hands or feet. For instance, if a client's fingernail has a dark green discoloration, some nail technicians may tell the client, "you have a fungus," which is a medical diagnosis. If a nail technician advises the client to soak in vinegar or use product XYZ, they've prescribed a treatment for an existing medical condition — which is against federal law and could lead to a lawsuit against the nail technician, salon, or school. Nail technicians should only perform their services on healthy clients and send "patients" to see a qualified medical professional.

Broken skin can become a source of infectious organisms that spread to other clients. The reverse is also true. When the skin is broken by dirty files or implements, infections become much more likely. Some nail technicians perform their services with dirty files and implements, failing to follow proper cleaning and disinfection procedures and potentially jeopardizing their client's health.

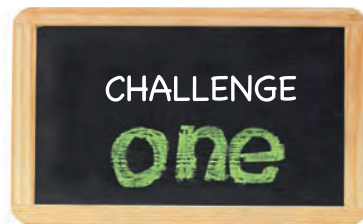
Nail technicians should avoid sharp implements and aggressive techniques that may cut or injure the skin. Cutting calluses with sharp blades or metal implements is very risky because it can easily cut into living skin and lead to infection. Calluses should never be completely removed from a foot. The body creates them for protection. When it comes to calluses, "smooth, don't remove" should be every nail technician's motto, and it's the law!



Challenge 2: Nail techs often "diagnose" nail conditions even though that should be left up to a qualified medical professional.

Only medical doctors and podiatrists are allowed to remove calluses, corns, bunions, warts, ingrown toenails, etc. Nail technicians are only allowed to smooth down a callus to make it more cosmetically acceptable to the customer. Yet many go far beyond this and literally cut, file, or dissolve away calluses completely, which in a few cases has led to very serious injuries, infections, and legal actions against salons.

Diabetics and older people are especially prone to these types of infections if their skin is accidentally cut or injured, possibly resulting in the loss of feet or legs from infections.



Many technicians do not properly adhere to regulations designed to ensure clients always receive sanitary services. Regulations require nail technicians to always properly clean and disinfect every "surface" that comes in direct contact with the client's skin. This includes everything used to perform manicures or pedicures. These regulations protect against the spread of contagious diseases. Many



Challenge 1: Many techs don't properly wash and disinfect their implements between clients.

nail technicians take shortcuts in this area and in a few cases this has led to serious infections and several deaths.

Both intact and broken skin can harbor infectious organisms that may infect other clients. This is why it is important to always properly clean and disinfect anything the client touches with her bare skin or nail plates. For example, if a wart on a client's hand touched your tabletop, the next client may touch the same area and could become infected.

Infections are more likely to occur when the skin is dry, irritated, damaged, broken, or cut, especially when files, pedicure basins or bowls, implements, or other equipment are not properly cleaned and disinfected between clients. Never perform services with unclean files and/or implements. If there is any visible debris, the item is not clean and should not be reused. Disposable items, such as wooden sticks, should be thrown away after one use. Both clients and nail technicians should always wash their hands with liquid soap and running water before starting any services involving the hands. Clients should be given a properly cleaned and disinfected, soft bristle scrub brush for scrubbing under their nails. Nail technicians should always wash their hands between each client. Bar soaps should be avoided since they can harbor bacteria. Several scientific studies have concluded that antibacterial soaps do not provide any extra protection and, in fact, can be more irritating to the skin. Any mild liquid soap in a pump bottle or squeeze tube is appropriate for salon use.

Many nail technicians have taken great strides to improve the level of sanitation,

but I think this is the number-one issue in nail salons. Television, radio, and the print media have reported repeatedly on poor sanitation in salons, as well as nail- and pedicure-related skin infections. Some clients have stopped going to nail salons out of fear of infection and the pedicure industry is suffering from repeated waves of bad publicity. Imagine the damage done when Paula Abdul appeared on "American Idol" with her entire hand wrapped in a bandage, telling millions about the serious infection she picked up at a high-end Beverly Hills nail salon!

Client trust is something that we as an industry can't afford to lose. Once the trust is broken, it will be very difficult to regain. Clients that are seriously harmed may never visit another nail salon and could scare all of their friends with their horror stories. Poor cleaning and disinfection practices in any salon can hurt every salon. Improper cleaning and disinfection is too common and is threatening everyone's livelihood; even the best salons that always do things right can be negatively affected. Nail technicians that fail to practice proper cleaning and disinfection are a risk to the entire nail business.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Make sure your clients understand that you strictly adhere to all regulations. Demonstrate this in everything you do. They'll thank you and come back again and again — knowing you will provide the safe haven they're seeking. For example, address their concerns by keeping a logbook, signed by the person who properly cleaned and disinfected the pedicure whirlpool bath, along with a date and time. Proudly show the logbook to customers to give them peace of mind. When customers watch you open packages of clean and disinfected or properly sterilized implements, they know you are serious about your responsibility to protect their health. Tell your clients about the steps you take and assure them they're in safe hands —

then follow up on your commitment. That's an incredibly powerful way to market your business.

Challenge yourself; set high standards and encourage others to follow your lead. It's for the good of all. The strength of the industry is determined by the knowledge of nail technicians and the quality of their services. Be the best you can be and the entire nail industry will benefit from your service excellence.

Old-fashioned practices and yesterday's myths are slowly being replaced by advanced education, superior technical knowledge, and better school textbooks. Product technology and techniques are rapidly advancing, so it is very important to stay up on the latest education or risk being left behind. Nail technicians don't only sell their safe and sanitary services, they also sell their knowledge. The more knowledge you have, the more marketable you will be. My advice is to dive into the information boom and continue your education.

There is no better way to protect yourself and others than to make sure you're doing things right every time, but don't stop there. Share this information with your coworkers and even your competitors. This is something we must help each other with, because we're all in it together. You're not fighting these problems alone. No nail technician or salon is an island. The only way to address these problems and improve our industry is if we work together. The salon down the street isn't just another competitor, they're part of our industry and what they do can affect your business and livelihood. Each of us — manufacturers, salon and school owners, distributors, educators, and nail technicians — must work together to solve these great challenges. That's the only way we'll succeed. ■

An internationally known scientist, educator, and author with over thirty years experience in the beauty and personal care industry, Doug Schoon is chief scientific advisor for CND and founder of Schoon Scientific + Regulatory Consulting, LLC. He is co-chair of the Nail Manufacturers Council and chief scientific advisor for the INTA. His book, *Nail Structure and Product Chemistry, Second Edition* (Thomson Delmar Learning, 2005), is available at BeautyTech.com.

