**Industry Analysis: Herbal Essences**

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Many young women in the world today are unaware of how the hair care industry began. However, it may be surprising that the first hair care products to be used in the past are actually still in use today: the brush and comb. The first hairbrush was invented by Lydia O. Newman in 1865 and was designed to neaten and organize hair (Scheinman, 2008). From then on, the hair care industry grew around female hairstyling techniques and preferences including products such as hairspray, conditioner, and hair dye (Scheinman, 2008). Brands began to emerge in the market, which led to the emergence of the top competing hair care companies which include: Herbal Essences, Garnier Fructis, Pantene, L’Oreal, Pantene and Aussie.

Herbal Essences is a hair care brand known for their sensual advertising and colorful product collections that brighten the personal care shelves in stores all over. However, Herbal Essences was not introduced in this way, as their brand was originally marketed with its all-natural botanical formula (Wong, 2008). Their rejuvenation of the brand name was done mostly after a change in ownership occurred. Although Herbal Essences is a Clairol product, that is not their parent industry. Bristol-Myers Squibb owned Clairol’s Herbal Essences line until 2001, when The Procter & Gamble Company (P&G) purchased the brand (Wong, 2008).

The brand has become such a large part of the female hair care industry as a result of their availability to consumers. The products are sold in mass department stores like Wal-Mart and Target and in convenient stores/pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens, which can be found in almost all populated areas in the United States. Additionally, according to the company’s revenue analysis, Herbal Essences brought in the majority of the $20 billion in sales for the financial year of 2012 for the beauty segment of P&G (The Procter & Gamble Company, 2012). This only goes to show how huge the brand has become. Herbal Essences now markets towards young women by focusing on offering decadent scents with clever and humorous names, such as ‘drama clean’ and ‘long term relationship’ to women of various hairstyles. It is this attitude towards the target audience that has helped the brand name grow to be such a well-recognized product line.

Nevertheless, the hair care industry, including Herbal Essences, faces the issue of deciding the best way to conduct research for their products. It becomes an ethical concern when a company decides to engage in animal testing. Animal experimentation is a brutal procedure that is performed by scientists in product forming laboratories throughout the United States. In this type of testing, harmful doses of chemical substances that are used to create hair care products are administered to live animals. This is done in order to test the safety of a product for human use. Even though animal testing has prevented various hazardous substances from being sold to the public, it is extremely damaging to the animals used in the process. For instance, as Ethan Huff describes in his article, “Procter & Gamble steeped in cruel animal testing of its consumer products, charge activist websites,”

animal torture protocols have included forcing hamsters to inhale large amounts of "nano-sized" particles; forcing mice to consume synthetic musk and other fragrances; and even forcing dogs to eat large amounts of a cleaning chemical by pumping it directly into their stomachs (2012).

Accordingly, this description introduces the question of: if animal testing is viewed as such an awful practice, why was it ever even done in the first place? Well, when the hair care industry started to increase in popularity, no companies wanted to test chemicals on actual humans for fear of side effects or harm to life. Therefore, many companies settle for animals that have similar characteristics to humans, such as the eyes of rabbits, intestinal organs of mice and rats, and brains of chimpanzees. Once animal testing became a regular practice, companies didn’t want to change their method of conducting research. Even when valid alternatives were achieved, animal experimentation was a habit that not too many companies were willing to break. Their view is that if it gives them the results they needed, why should they need to change how they attain those results? The main reason why some companies did convert to alternative practices is to avoid negative connotation of their products with their customers because of the ethical issue at hand. However, it was also the consumer’s rebellious efforts which compelled numerous companies to change their procedures.

For example, Paul Mitchell and PureOlogy are both companies that have either stopped use of animal testing or never engaged in this type of research in the first place (Oparnica, 2012). They have utilized the proven alternatives to animal experimentation, such as the computer data base and the use of human cell cultures instead of live animals, which has most certainly worked well for them (Oparnica, 2012). This only goes to show that other companies can benefit from switching over to non-animal methods of conducting research.

When it comes to alternatives, a company must understand “The Three R’s,” which are “replacement, reduction and refinement” (Howard, 2009, p. 14). Replacement simply means to substitute other things for the animals in the tests (Howard, 2009, p. 14). Additionally, reduction refers to a lessening in the number of animals required for a study, while refinement is the diminishing of the torture posed to animals (Howard , 2009, p. 14). The Three R’s determine how alternative methods to animal testing were developed and how they are categorized.

One example of an alternative is the use of in vitro techniques, which is a type of replacement. This includes the use of cell and tissue cultures to determine the safety of a product, which would avoid the use of whole animals (Welsh, 1990, p. 61). Furthermore, computers can be used as an alternative to animal testing techniques. One procedure for this alternative is to create a computer simulation (Welsh, 1990, p.63). There are certain programs that have been developed which analyze scientific data about different chemicals and substances in order to predict an outcome of the safeness of a product containing those specific ingredients for human use (Welsh, 1990, p. 63). This could be helpful because it requires no tests and “predict[s] the probable biological response” as a real-life experiment would (Welsh, 1990, p. 63). Another procedure would be to use computers to generate a data base source of already conducted animal tests. This could provide companies with the same information as a direct animal test would, only the data was taken from a past test so no new animals would be harmed.

As for Herbal Essences, they claim that none of their products are made by use of animal testing; however, P&G, their parent company does still utilize animal experimentation for their other product lines (Oparnica, 2012). This causes a problem of buyer to seller trust because there is not a congruency of practices within the company. Customers may ask: if Herbal Essences doesn’t need animal testing why should other P&G products still need it? Therefore, it is a threat to the brand loyalty, mostly because some customers want nothing to do with companies that cause harm to innocent animals. This gives a competitive advantage to products such as Paul Mitchell and PureOlogy that do not use animal experimentation in order to deem their products safe enough to be sold to consumers. After all, there’s a certain respect that consumers hold for companies that are willing to make the change to animal testing alternatives.

Correspondingly, P&G is now launching non-animal testing systems to conduct product research in all of their brand’s department labs. Specifically, they have begun to use keratinous (skin) tissues instead of applying chemicals directly to the skin of a live animal as they have done in the past (Henderson, 2012, p. 709). The keratinous tissues can be gathered as cultures from living humans and animals or it can be taken from cadavers. P&G has also started to use skin models, called artificial substrates, which are developed to have the same texture, appearance and reaction to substances as an individual’s own skin would (Henderson, 2012, p. 709) Therefore, the company is leaning towards a more animal friendly facility. This is good news for Herbal Essences, because it will provide a stronger link of trust between the brand name and customers. Herbal Essences claims to create products without the use of animals, while their owner, P&G, is a known animal testing company. Therefore, with this change in P&G’s procedure, which is congruent with Herbal Essences’ practices, the brand becomes more trustworthy to the consumers.

Personally, I suggest that P&G implement other non-animal testing research techniques, such as utilizing computer data bases. With P&G making up such a large sector of the hair care industry, it seems ridiculous for them to prolong the use of older procedures using animals, when alternatives can be used. Not only does it not make sense to continue such abusive and violent acts when even more useful alternatives can be used, but many of these replacement tests can be cheaper and less wasteful for the company. Therefore, it is crucial that the companies involved in the hair care industry further investigate these other options. By using alternatives, companies could save money, gain more customer support, build an eco-friendly name for their products and receive equally accurate data as they would from animal experimentation. The benefits that result from ceasing the use of animal experimentation are hard to ignore, which is what P&G is only now beginning to understand. Maybe one day they will rebuild their research labs in order to completely rid themselves of the unnecessary violence that they have forced so many innocent animals to endure. Additionally, the hair care industry must continue to support the conversion to alternatives in order to accomplish the goal of completely removing animal testing from the system, however, as the P&G example shows, more companies are participating in the shift over to more honorable techniques.

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