

HAIRSATIONS

Beauty Supply & Salon



As Alicia Monroe eyes expansion, she tells how she successfully started a salon store in the middle of this recession.

by **Heather Larson**

Photography by Hannah Ross

A relatively new, thriving salon store in an upscale suburb of Southern California is planning an even bigger future. Alicia Monroe's goal from the very beginning was to fill a niche and to do so better than any other beauty store in the same market. When she opened Hairsations Beauty Supply & Salon in the Santa Clarita Valley just 45 minutes north of Los Angeles a year ago, her store was the only one catering to the ever-increasing number of multicultural customers in the area.

In her quest to be as helpful as possible to customers, Monroe insists that her employees be knowledgeable and educated about the salon store's products. The best way to get to know those products is to use them. So Hairsations employees sample the salon store's products at home. And even when they haven't actually sampled a product, they've been trained on its features.

"I found that it was almost impossible to find stores like this," says Monroe. "Most of the time you're not even greeted when you walk into a beauty store. And it can be so overwhelming when you enter a store for the first time."

Monroe's staff greets every customer who comes through the door with a smile and an offer to help. "Hi. How are you? What can I help you find today?"

Having a neat, clean environment for customers is also paramount. Monroe quickly discovered that a number of other beauty stores were dirty, and she didn't like getting dirt all over her hands whenever she picked up a dusty product. Cleanliness wasn't valued in the other beauty stores she visited. "Here we dust our products and shelves every week," comments Monroe. "I want a clean store without dusty products and a clean environment. I spent money on custom shelving and gondolas to utilize our space well—and I don't want a dirty store."

Monroe's background in the beauty industry includes selling Virgin Indian Remy Hair wholesale for 10 years and lace wigs for three years, even though her formal training is in information technology. Her IT knowledge turned out to be helpful when she selected the software system she uses in her business. She went with Retail Pro point-of-sale software because she wants to expand the store later and that software, she notes, is designed to grow with her business.



Alicia Monroe (right) and Hairsations' Terra Blades

SERVICES & GOODS

The salon store is located in the CentrePointe Marketplace, a newly developed strip mall. It has dedicated two-thirds of its space to retail-product sales and one-third to hair-salon services, which include haircuts, color, extensions and custom-lace wigs.

Monroe has chosen to focus mainly on hair extensions and wigs. "Our No. 1 focus is high-quality human-hair extensions and wigs, but we also carry a wide variety of products that address curly or ethnic hair textures, such as Mixed Chicks, Curls, Miss Jessie's and Kinky-Curly," says Monroe. "We also carry all the mainstream products like Redken 5th Avenue NYC, Biolage, PureOlogy, Moroccanoil, and a variety of alternative products for all hair textures and types. Mainstream doesn't always work for everyone."

Hairsations also offers custom-lace wigs made of Swiss lace that cater to preference and individual head size. Every hair is individually implanted and it takes 90 hours to complete one wig. "They're the most natural-looking wigs out there," says Monroe. "Celebrities like Tyra [Banks], Fergie and Beyoncé wear them."

"My employees are certified in wig alteration and restoration," states Monroe. "They've completed several hours of hands-on training in how to alter a wig to suit the [wearer]. If the ear tabs come down too far, we can



Hairsations focuses on wigs and extensions.

pull them back so it fits comfortably. We know how to take out sections and readjust a wig so it still fits properly." Hairsations' staff members are constantly attending training seminars to keep their skills updated and to learn new techniques.

All wig customers at Hairsations receive a free cut or trim when they purchase a wig, regardless of its price point. "If they can't afford a \$250 wig, they still need a wig so we offer the cut or trim to everyone," adds Monroe.

CUSTOMERS SPREAD THE WORD

Monroe is proud to say she's created a store where after every visit customers feel like they've learned something new or been made aware of a new product. "It feels good when people come back and say, 'Thank you so much for recommending that product. I loved it and told everyone about your store,'" relates Monroe.



The store also offers other products, including those that address curly/ethnic hair textures.

While Hairsations caters to many multicultural customers, it also crosses over into the general market. "We cater to such a wide demographic," she points out. "Our customers are primarily women, but because we carry a wide and diverse group of products we attract customers of all ages and races."

Monroe advertises in local magazines and other publications. She's

also joined the local chamber of commerce and attends its business-networking events.

In addition, Hairsations has a website (www.hairsations.com) that's in the process of being updated. Monroe works hard to make sure that it's registered in many different places and she uses search engine optimization to make sure that keyword searches lead customers to her business. Her vendors also list her store on their websites, but the majority of her business comes from word of mouth.

"Truthfully, our marketing and advertising budget hasn't brought in much business," she states. "It's the customers who are excited about the products we offer and tell everyone they know. We've even had customers drive from Bakersfield—which is two hours away—to get our products."

Another benefit to shoppers is that customers who want to try on wigs are shown to a private area and are encouraged to take as long as they want. "We truly want people to feel good about their purchase," says Monroe.

To keep customers coming back, Hairsations offers them a customer-loyalty card. When they've spent \$200 or have 10 \$20 stamps on their card, they're entitled to \$20 off anything in the store. Monroe says consumers seem to like the cash-off incentive better than a percentage off. Licensed stylists are given a 20% discount on store products.

TOWARD THE FUTURE

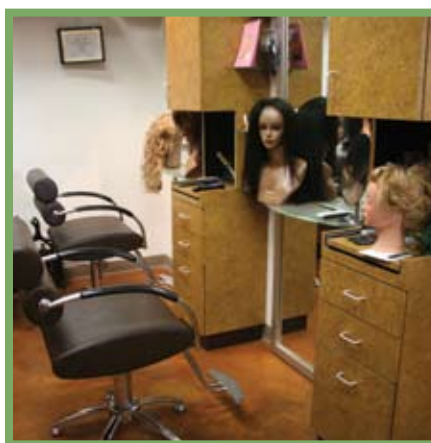
Monroe wants to continue to increase her business and strives for Hairsations to be the No. 1 source for all wigs and hair extensions in Santa Clarita and the surrounding areas. "I want my store to be known as the store where anyone of any race can come and find haircare products that suit their needs, and buy them from a knowledgeable and pleasant sales staff," says Monroe.

"We [Monroe has a silent partner] hope to expand the store and increase

HAIRSATIONS OFFERS
CONSUMERS A **customer-loyalty card with \$20 off anything** AFTER SPENDING
\$200; **stylists are given a 20% discount.**



Hairsations merchandises beautifully using custom shelving and gondolas.



Customers have a private area to try on wigs.

organizations to support. Right now her eyes are on organizations for kids or teens going through cancer treatment. “Our custom wigs can be made for children,” she notes.

Reflecting on her first year as a salon-store owner, Monroe says it never gets old to hear her customers say, “I’m so happy you’re here. I’m going to tell everyone I know about your store.” To honor her customers and let prospects know about the store, Monroe has planned a one-year anniversary party this summer.

“WE HOPE TO EXPAND THE STORE AND INCREASE THE HAIR AND WIG SELECTIONS SOON.”

the hair and wig selections soon,” she adds. Monroe is considering the store next door, which is available, to expand. “Right now our store is cozy and cute and the space is well-utilized,” she says, “but there’s room for growth in the wig and human-hair area.”

Another goal Monroe wants to accomplish is to increase the number of customers who are shopping for wigs due to chemotherapy. So far she says her staff has helped about 60 such people. “There’s a huge need for [businesses that] specialize in that,” she says. “When those patients go into most stores, there’s no one to style, cut or adjust their wig. They just have to buy one off the rack, and most people say the wigs they’re offered are horrible. We have a huge variety, and our customers are excited by that.” Monroe is also looking for charitable

Hairsations Beauty Supply & Salon

Owner: Alicia Monroe

Years in Business: One

Location: Santa Clarita, California

Square footage: 1,000 square feet

Services: Haircuts, hair color, extensions and wigs

Leading lines:

Shampoos and conditioners: Miss Jessie’s, Moroccanoil, ENJOY, Redken 5th Avenue NYC, Dermorganic Argan Oil
Appliances: Gold ‘N Hot, BaBylissPRO

Average sale per customer: \$45 ■

Heather Larson is a Tacoma, WA-based freelance writer. Her writing has appeared in *DAYS SPA* and *MyBusiness*.