Men’s skincare 2.0

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Glowing skin is more desirable than ever for men, thanks to a new wave of brands and online personalities working to upend the conventional male grooming arsenal and break gendered stereotypes around beauty and skincare.

The global men’s skincare market is set to grow 24% in the next five years to reach $5 billion, according to Euromonitor. Men are already devoting more attention to personal care—Allied Market Research forecasts the men’s grooming industry will reach $166 billion in less than three years—but there are other drivers at play as well. Young male consumers are not only open to looking better, they’re embracing broadening definitions of masculinity and what it means to be “handsome,” challenging long-established beauty norms. For some men, this means exploring the possibilities of makeup, while for others, it simply involves moving beyond a basic shaving regimen into a world of serums and toners.

This new market opportunity is giving rise to gender-free products and packaging designed to be inclusive and help all men achieve an elevated level of selfcare. Brands specifically setting out to target the male consumer are encouraging discovery and fostering a deeper, yet approachable take on skin health.

Direct-to-consumer razor startups have been working this slant in the mainstream space, with Harry’s the latest to get snatched up by a corporate giant—Edgewell Personal Care, which makes Schick razors. In spring 2019, Harry’s moved beyond shaving cream to collaborate on a limited-edition detoxifying face mask with personalized facial expert Heyday. Forbes called it a step towards demystifying men’s skincare. “Solving for guys’ specific skin needs is actually far less challenging than encouraging them to engage in a category they’ve been led to believe is not necessarily for them,” Andy Katz-Mayfield, cofounder and CEO of Harry’s, told Forbes.

Evan Shinn and Emilio Quezada of Dewy Dudes have been shouldering this effort online. The duo
created a “bro-speak” meme account on Instagram towards the end of 2018, to address the remaining stigma around beauty and skincare for a large portion of the male population, peppering their posts with mentions of Hims’ anti-aging kit, the double cleanse, and balanced pH levels—driving home the point that there’s absolutely no shame in consigning that bottle of hypermasculine three-in-one cleanser to the trash can. Shinn and Quezada have also launched a podcast to talk acne, Glossier, and facials, and their recommendations include products that help achieve a natural glow, such as a brightening oil with Vitamin C and rose petals.

“Unfortunately, I think some men have internalized skincare as feminine and are unwilling to embrace and celebrate what essentially is a self-improvement subject where women are the ultimate thought leaders,” Shinn told *i-D*. “What we’ve seen in the Dewy Dudes DMs is that a lot of men have a genuine, earnest interest in addressing their skin issues, but don’t have an IRL person to approach with their questions.”

**Skin barriers**

Cardon

It’s this entry barrier to self-discovery that Cardon founders Jacqueline Oak and Narae Chung are working to dismantle through their new skincare line. Through customer calls, Oak and Chung have found that many clients want to learn why they need products and what will work for them. “Narae and I think a lot about that discovery process and how there really isn’t that space for men to go to,” Oak tells JWT Intelligence. Some high-end boutiques can be “super-intimidating,” she adds, “and if you go to a drugstore it’s also really overwhelming and you don’t have that adviser to help you.”

Oak and Chung launched Cardon in 2019 with just one product: a water-based moisturizer with sun protection factor (SPF), made with cactus extract. They’ve been mindful of every aspect of the brand messaging, from the simple, elegant black packaging to their social media voice. “We wanted to show that this was a premium quality product and, as a brand, we want to be approachable and accessible, in terms of price point and in terms of helping men understand why they need skincare and what is good for them,” says Oak.

The formula is designed to accommodate all skin types and lifestyles—“if you have dark skin, you don’t want that white cast, if you have a beard you don’t want that residue”—as well as the fact that men’s skin tends to produce more oil and “be more sensitive or irritable through shaving or lack of care,” says Oak.
“We have been really thoughtful about the pain points that guys feel.”
More products are set to join the Cardon line-up, which started with a product that emphasizes its SPF credentials to get men talking. Oak notes that the men in her consumer focus group lamented that there was no opportunity to discuss skincare, even though there was plenty of interest. “They were: ‘I’m not in the gym asking my friends, ‘Oh, what moisturizer do you use, bro?’’ So we wanted to build out this brand where there was that space to explore.”

Chung adds: “We thought sunscreen is maybe the only product that a guy will take out of his bathroom to share with his friends outdoors.”

**K-beauty**

Male beauty bloggers have pointed out that the 10-step Korean beauty routine that swept through the cult beauty sceneis not gender-exclusive, despite an overwhelming amount of marketing directed towards females. For men who haven’t reached that level of dedication, brands are finding ways to harness Korean skincare innovation to appeal to male consumers.

Cardon tapped a Korean skincare manufacturer to develop its SPF, and its founders say this is because K-beauty offers the quality ingredients and formulas they’re confident will appeal to their target male market. “You can find the best and most effective products and you don't need to invest a lot of money to
get good quality," Oak tells JWT Intelligence.
Adrian Kim started Celsius Bleu, another 2019 launch, to gather his favorite Korean beauty products on one e-commerce platform and to educate men about their use in a relatable way. Kim describes himself as “your 26-year-old average dude, currently struggling with dry but oily skin and acne.”

Kim tells a story that will sound familiar to many men on his blog. “I was blessed with super-clear skin throughout my teenage years and used bar soap to wash my face in the shower.” He goes on to describe his girlfriend’s clear skin and the “myriad” steps that are part of her routine; while this intrigued him, he still wanted to maintain a simple regimen that mirrored his lifestyle, encompassing cleansing, exfoliation, toner, emulsion and sunscreen. His platform, still in its early stages, so far curates a selection of brands developed by Hankook Cosmetics, including Ossion and Sansim.

**Diversification**

Women have a vast range of products targeted to their individual needs, and skincare companies are going beyond simply adjusting packaging design to target men, seeking to accommodate specific skin woes while keeping offerings easy to navigate.
Ceylon
Ceylon, cofounded by Patrick Boateng II and Blake Rascoe, came to market towards the end of 2018 with three key products designed for men of color, addressing conditions such as razor bumps while avoiding harsh chemicals. Ceylon’s Detoxifying Facial Wash, Hydrating Toner, and Clarifying Moisturizer were developed after Rascoe ran into issues with the acne-clearing product recommended to him by his dermatologist. The formula bleached and washed out his skin.

“The vast majority of products out there don’t actually account for the ways in which skin of color reacts to different ingredients or might need special attention,” Rascoe told Cassius. “This is doubly true for men’s products, many of which lack any specific benefits other than being wrapped in black or grey packaging with ‘men’ written on the front.”

Bevel, a men’s grooming brand developed by Tristan Walker for men of color, boasts a shaving line that specifically helps with razor bumps, particularly common on black skin. Procter & Gamble bought the company late in 2018, and soon after, Bevel introduced a skincare collection to supplement the shaving products, including an exfoliating toner with aloe vera designed to help prevent ingrown hairs and razor bumps, and a spot corrector with green tea extract that applies clear.

For a growing cohort of men, masculinity is no longer associated with the macho imagery that “for men” grooming products have relied on for decades in marketing messages. Brands that succeed in this market
are embracing more fluid interpretations of manliness and beauty, and making space where men can experiment with skincare and participate in the growing selfcare and wellness movements.

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