

Global Approach

FAST FACTS

Ali N. Syed
 President
 Avlon Industries
 800-332-8566
 www.avlon.com

ALTHOUGH ethnic hair care has recently become a growing focus in the industry, Avlon Industries has been specializing in the category for 18 years, due to the foresight of its founder and president, Ali Syed. As an intern in 1974, Syed real-

ized that there were not many people interested in formulating for excessively curly hair. That's when he decided to specialize in ethnic hair. "I like hair anyway because it uses more chemistry than color cosmetics. So, I decided if I specialize in this area, I'll have less competition and can probably do well in life," explained Syed.

From the beginning, when Syed was performing literally every duty in his company himself, to today, where Avlon is a multinational corporation, Syed credits its success to his equal knowledge of both business and chemistry. "I was able to go from chemistry to the management world, allowing me to see things from many different angles," said Syed. As the head of such a flourishing organization, however, Syed still spends about 15 percent of his time in the lab; it is still his first love. But with eight different laboratories that comprise Avlon's state-of-the-art research center, Syed also can rely on his team's skills to make the company thrive.

And thrive, it is. When Syed first conceived Avlon, he pinpointed several problem areas in existing business methods for salon-based ethnic hair care products. First, he set out to truly educate the hair stylist about the product chemistry, an undertaking that wasn't popular. Even more significant, Syed saw a



lack of integrity in ethnic hair care business practices, especially in promises made to hair stylists regarding products remaining in the professional market and not merging into the consumer market. "From a business standpoint, integrity is crucial," emphasized Syed. "I felt there was an opportunity to make sure the product stays professional. The hair stylists didn't believe us right away—it took five or six years for them to come around."

Logically, Syed saw the global marketplace as the perfect venue for Avlon's products, because many countries include people with excessively curly hair. The company first conquered Europe, where its products have been top sellers for the past 15 years, and is now on five continents and in about 25 countries. Although Avlon's top market is the United States, following closely are Europe and South America. Born in India, raised in Pakistan and educated in Africa and the United States, Syed maintains the importance of a global understanding. "I always have the global approach and luckily the place I work is like a mini-United Nations," he explained, "We have all nationalities, all religions, all kinds of people working together."

Avlon's employees and customers both benefit from Syed's emphasis on the importance of integrity in the products he endorses. "The customer comes first and along with that, we treat our employees with respect. If they're not taken care of, they're not going to take care of the customer that well," explained Syed.

Because Syed doesn't believe in retirement, there seems to be no obstacle in the way of his dream becoming a reality—for Avlon to become a true multinational organization and a force to be reckoned with. "We are getting there. We are well on our way," said Syed. "Work hard and you'll be successful." **GCI**

