

SEEING

With age comes wisdom, and the first generation of salon websites staking claim to online territory are climbing the learning curve. These virtual pioneers are realizing the web's potential as a marketing agency, headhunter, salesforce, receptionist and client educator.

"Anyone can create a site with Front Page software," says Austin, Texas-based **Avant** salon owner, **Roy Fredericks**. "It's ridiculous not to have one. We gain both employees and clients through the site, keep them, communicate with them and grow them."

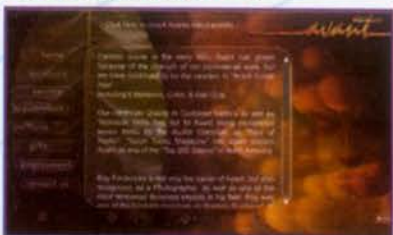
For **Irene Gray**, owner of the **Habitude** salons in Seattle, Washington, her website is literally a portal into the salon. "Atmosphere is a very hard thing to translate, but with a website, a client can virtually come in and get a feel for our pricing, our structure and philosophy before they have to take the plunge," she says.

Both Fredericks and Gray have allowed their websites to evolve over time, and the results are mature, well-conceived sites that support their businesses. Their cutting-edge sites represent two of 10 salon sites identified and profiled by editors **Jennifer Wehunt** and **Jennifer Hedlund**. While each site is different in style and content, all successfully deliver a visually appealing and fresh design; contain an easy-to-navigate, efficient layout; and offer visitors something out of the ordinary.

Read on, then log on to glean ideas for giving your own online presence a boost. You just might see the tangible bottom-line results from your virtual ventures.

AVANT

Austin, Texas
www.avantsalon.com
Roy Fredericks, owner



SITE LAUNCHED: Avant's first site was launched a decade ago, making it possibly the very first salon to have an online entity, at www.salon.com (a URL later sold to a major online magazine). Back then, Fredericks hand-coded the site himself: "I'm a very nerdy hairdresser," he says. The site's current incarnation is about a year old.

DESIGNED BY: "Your two, typical, Austin dreadlocked musician/artists, David Lawell and Manuel Muniz," Fredericks says.

COST: \$6,000

UPDATE RATE: photos are swapped out every four months

SPECIAL FEATURES: Avant's site is based on current web design and successfully builds on the salon's contemporary, avant-garde attitude. When visitors log on, they are met with a safari-inspired Flash (an animation program) movie, and the exotic theme is carried throughout the site's pages.

BUSINESS RESULTS: Fredericks says clients who might not otherwise voice their concerns feel very comfortable addressing issues through e-mail. "That's one of the most powerful things—that I can respond to employees and guests so quickly."

FUTURE PLANS: Fredericks plans to publish a simplified HTML (a basic computer language) version of the site along with the Flash option.

CINTA SALON

San Francisco, California
www.cinta.com
Cinta Gibbons, owner



SITE LAUNCHED: 1999

DESIGNED BY: Local website designer, Scott Abbot, whose "claim to fame is that he got laid off from some of the best dot-coms," says Gibbons.

COST: \$5,000 to \$6,000, with a nominal fee for updates

UPDATE RATE: "Monthly," reports Gibbons. "We know we've fallen behind when our regular visitors call in and let us know."

SPECIAL FEATURES: While many salons are still weighing the addition of online booking, at www.cinta.com, it's a done deal thanks to an integrated function with the Salon Manager software.

"Our male clients especially love the fact that they can set up a hair appointment at any time of night," Gibbons says. "A lot of them say they get in an extra hair cut a year because of it." As an added service, the site posts a list recommending the order in which services should be scheduled. **Continued**