

# ***Leading in the Tech***

## ***An Interview with Tony Sciara of New Image***



**AHLC:** It's great to be here at NIU LIVE 2012. Would you like to share your impressions with our readers now that your 2012 annual conference has kicked off?

**Tony:** We are very excited. We took a big risk a couple of years ago. In the past these conferences had some education and a lot of socializing. A few years ago we realized we were starting to lose focus. We are a very small industry and since you can't go to the library or online to learn about our industry, we felt responsible to educate technicians and studio owners. By the way, that is where the inspiration for our online university, New Image University (NIU), came from. We've had very positive reactions from our online registrants. From there we've decided to take our educational efforts to the next level. This gives us the opportunity to test new topics and ideas and also gather valuable attendee reactions. Every time a hair loss professional attends our conference, he or she takes new ideas, real solutions and fresh inspiration back to their respective business. They are quick to tell us whether they like the program or not.

**AHLC:** You also do host New Image University (NIU). Based on what you just said, we understand that NIU is the extension of NIU LIVE. Can you elaborate why New Image has made significant investments into this form of education?

**Tony:** There are so many people who have been in the business for many years. While experience obviously

# Technology Curve



by: Grant Gunderson

adds to success, sometimes we forget the importance of learning new skills and brushing up on existing skills. Where do new technicians or sales reps go to get trained? Where does a studio owner learn the latest on marketing, sales and business matters specific to the hair loss business? You have to depend on the industry to provide you with that. And that's exactly what NIU is designed to do. Every year, we are adding more titles and becoming more refined. Eventually NIU will develop into a learning community. That's really our dream.

**AHLC:** Your Biolon Certification is now also available online. You basically transformed a live certification event into an online class. Can you share your thoughts about that?

**Tony:** Again, people need to be trained. Since studios are very busy and it is very expensive to travel, we decided to bring the education to the studios. Our first step is Biolon because working with it successfully requires special training. You can study online at your own leisure and at the end of the training, take a test. When you pass, you receive the certification and can then confidently offer a whole new product line with great business potential.

**AHLC:** Certainly a methodology that has been used by many industries but probably a first by this industry.

**Tony:** I think it is. I don't know of its existence anywhere else.

**AHLC:** Recently you also launched a

totally revamped website, setting the trend in the hair loss industry. Are you seeing an increased potential for a strong online presence also in the hair loss industry?

**Tony:** Like many other industries, our business is changing. Even though hair replacement has been around forever, the consumer is changing. They do their research online and by the time they step into a studio they are well informed. Successful hair replacement studios are adapting to that. They conduct more of their business activities online, which is great, as it allows them to research at their own level and at their own speed. Our website is very user-friendly and easy to navigate. They can browse and shop with ease 24/7, without having to talk to a person. The site also offers a place for their own business management, as they can check account balances, print out invoices, receive alerts, etc. all in a safe and secure online environment.

**AHLC:** I like the analogy of how the customers are much more inclined to go out and check on us, they are very informed by the time they come to us. It's nice to do it from the inside as well. With technology so much on the move, what are some of the other major web-based initiatives that you are supporting?

**Tony:** We're looking for other opportunities to support our hair replacement community. We recently launched hairchatter.com, a blog specifically for the hair replacement

industry. There are other initiatives we are working on to develop a community. One of the avenues we are utilizing is Facebook. We are also on Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram. Those are additional ways for us to engage. Eventually NIU will be the central location while being intricately linked to those other platforms. You can research, train, ask questions, share information and even chat with other members. We feel very strongly that this will take our industry to a whole new level.

**AHLC:** Generally speaking, do you see online technology playing a growing role in the way hair loss studios run their businesses and market their services?

**Tony:** Absolutely. If studios don't adapt to the prevailing trends and learn to take advantage of them, they will be left behind. I am glad to see that many of our most successful studios are already participating in the online arena. They have great websites, Facebook pages and blogs of their own. They place Google ads and send out text alerts to their clients to remind them of their next appointment. For those that have been reluctant to go online, it is my recommendation to do so sooner than later. Take small, incremental steps that you are comfortable with and learn as you go, but start taking steps.

**AHLC:** That's sound advice. Tony, thanks so much for your time and we look forward to sharing your comments with our readership and to speaking with you again very soon. 🌟