



Carl Howell: the Australian who has taken hair replacement to the world.

Carl is a hair-raiser

By SEAN STEVENSON

BALDNESS. The mere mention of the word is enough to strike fear into the hearts of virile young men.

But Carl Howell will tell you there is no need to be afraid.

Mr Howell has a solution, and it does not involve the adoption of a hat as your favourite fashion accessory.

Carl Howell is the founder of Advanced Hair Studios, the hair replacement company with 38 outlets throughout Australia.

While Australians have become familiar with the hair replacement company, few know of its worldwide growth and the remarkable life story of its founder.

In the early 1970s accountancy student Carl Howell dropped out of school in Melbourne and began travelling the world.

To supplement the costs of travel he sold accountancy systems, and it was through this money-making scheme that he met an American who was opening a small hair replacement studio in Florida.

The American had the technical skills and Mr Howell had the business know-how, so the pair decided to go into partnership.

It was 1973, and Carl

Howell was 23 years old.

It was not long before they had opened a chain of studios across the United States.

Mr Howell said during a holiday back in Australia in 1975 he realised the potential for a similar operation in Australia.

The following year he had a falling out with his American partner and returned to Australia on a mission.

On December 6 1976, he opened the first Advanced Hair Studio in South Melbourne with one employee.

The next year he established a second outlet in Sydney, but then decided franchising was the way to go.

"Franchising was the fastest form of expansion, so having established a track record, two years after I started I sold the first AHS franchised outlet in Brisbane," Mr Howell said.

The rest, as they say, is history.

But the company could only expand so much in a country of 18 million people, so the next step was to take AHS to the world.

The company now boasts 60 studios in 10 countries, with worldwide sales exceeding \$40 million this year.

But the growth is just beginning.

Mr Howell expects to

be opening a new AHS outlet every month.

He said the European and Asian markets were still largely untapped.

A joint venture is expected to open in Kuala Lumpur next month, followed by three franchises in other Asian cities including Penang.

Then in March AHS takes the biggest step of all by opening a studio in Japan.

"The rest of the world is trying to catch up with us," he said.

Mr Howell said he hoped one day hair replacement would be as acceptable as having a tooth capped, but while public perceptions had changed a certain amount of stigma remained.

He said many clients still hid the fact they were receiving the treatment, in some cases even from their wives and girlfriends.

But confidentiality is the company's trademark.

AHS counts as its clients many high profile European entertainment and sports stars.

"We have to go to great lengths to protect their confidentiality," Mr Howell said.

"The UK tabloid media are ruthless.

"We fly one major TV personality from London to our Brussels studio because no one knows him there."