



# All About Acrylic

Get the inside scoop on everything acrylic.

By Ilona French

**W**hile nail trends come and go, acrylic services have stayed the course, working as steady moneymakers for nail techs over the years—bread-and-butter menu items, if you will.

This is why manufacturers devote so much time and research to developing their acrylic products; experts weigh seemingly endless considerations while creating the liquid and powder formulations that result in strong, durable acrylic nails. In this article, we'll delve into acrylic strength factors and trends, as well as clever marketing tricks you can use in your salon to attract more acrylic clients. But let's first get to the meat of the subject: product chemicals and the bonding processes of some tried-and-true products available today.



## Under the Surface

West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania-based NSI utilizes advanced technology for its Attraction Acrylic System, and mixes a proprietary blend of trimonomers to create its Attraction Nail Liquid. "Ethyl methacrylate, or EMA, is commonly used throughout our industry," says Risé Carter, the company's national director of sales and education. "EMA alone does not have the capabilities to cross-link the molecular chains. EMA molecules line up in straight lines, therefore requiring the enhancement to be extremely thick in order to have any strength. EMA, however, has excellent adhesion properties. An enhancement needs to be tough, flexible, color-stable and retentive. Enhancement lifting is the No. 1 problem plaguing nail professionals today. Great products are not enough; proper preparation of the natural nail is the best way to prevent lifting."

Hydroxyethyl methacrylate is another adhesion promoter used in NSI Attraction Liquid, while triethylene glycol dimethacrylate monomer reinforces cross-linking and makes acrylic enhancements more resistant to solvents. Special additives, such as flow modifiers, wetting agents and catalysts, increase workability.

Flow modifiers cause the product to self-level, reducing brush strokes on the

surface and improving bead pickup. Wetting agents improve adhesion to the natural nail. A catalyst changes the rate at which a chemical reaction occurs, and can make chemical reactions speed up or slow down. "Without the proper catalyst, it would take days for the enhancement to set," Carter says. "Advancements in nail technology have also helped slow down the evaporation rate, which reduces odor in a salon. This is important, as many salons are trying to achieve a more spa-like environment."

When manufacturing Attraction Nail Powders, NSI uses a blend of triple-linked polymers to deliver exceptional adhesion, strength and flexibility. "Tripolymer technology creates tough, crack-resistant enhancements," says Carter. "The polymer is also chemically attracted to the trimonomer liquid, making bead pickup quicker and easier."

Valencia, California-based All Season Professional (ASP) uses nanotechnology in its Aspire Acrylic Line. "By decreasing the size of the polymer particle, you get better adhesion and greater coverage of the surface area," says Elaine Watson, the company's vice president of marketing and global education director. "The product becomes denser, more scratch-resistant and much stronger. The better

# Acrylic Products



Inspired by nanotechnology—the science of working at the atomic and molecular levels—the new **Aspire Acrylic Line** from All Season Professional features tiny molecules that hold more secure bonds, ensuring strength and crystal clarity. Bonding Acrylic Liquid adheres so well that you never need to apply primer. Combined with Bonding Acrylic Powder, the formulation prevents lifting, yellowing and cloudiness. **800/762-6245, [www.aspnail.com](http://www.aspnail.com).**

Christrio **Deluxe Acrylic Systems Starter Kits** arm nail techs with a variety of tools for creating amazing acrylic enhancements, including low-odor monomer, primer, French Topcoat, a brush, buffer, dappen dish, file, forms or tips, and a variety of micro-ground polymers. And for easy mobility and organization, the kits now come in convenient handbags. **800/574-4252, [www.christrio.com](http://www.christrio.com).**



With the **Custom Color Pigment Acrylic Mixing Kit** from All Season Professional, techs can create their own colors without having to buy individual color powders. Use the kit for nail art add-on services and to create custom color acrylic enhancements. The kit includes detailed, step-by-step trilingual mixing instructions, one pigment-mixing spoon and one empty jar in which to mix colors. **800/762-6245, [www.aspnail.com](http://www.aspnail.com).**

The **Large Acrylic Advantage Starter Kit** from Entity Beauty contains all the tools necessary for nail novices and veterans alike to create impressive acrylic enhancements, including tips, sculpting forms, brushes, buffers and a comprehensive how-to booklet. **888/213-8637, [www.entitybeauty.com](http://www.entitybeauty.com).**



Techs can take their acrylic enhancements to the next level with the **Custom Blending Kit** from Creative Nail Design. The kit includes a palette of 24 pigmented powders that can be combined to create long-lasting, custom manicures and pedicures in colors to match or complement any skin tone, bikini, dress, lacquer or lipstick. **800/833-6245, [www.creativenaildesign.com](http://www.creativenaildesign.com).**

Techs who want to increase their speed of service will appreciate the **Fast Set System** from Galaxy Nail Products. The self-leveling formula features durable, bubble-free clear and pink acrylic powders that won't yellow, lift or crystallize, and soft polymers that allow for the product flexibility techs need when using quick sculpting methods. **800/229-NAIL, [www.galaxynails.com](http://www.galaxynails.com).**



EZ Flow Nail Systems has balanced chemistry, technology and beauty to create the **High Definition Acrylic System**. The patented monomers and powders work together to continuously renew and strengthen enhancements from the inside out, so your clients can expect incredible durability, shine and clarity of color for several weeks of wear. **800/621-9585, [www.ezflow.com](http://www.ezflow.com).**



adhesion of polymer means that primer is unnecessary."

Because of the system's unique characteristics, Watson has developed a new application technique. "Typically, we drag the brush through the powder to collect a ball," she says. "With this product, I developed a dip-and-peak method. By using this technique, you get a ball of acrylic with the perfect consistency throughout the entire ball. If you dragged the brush through this product, you'd have areas with less monomer and more polymer. I've developed and trained my educators to teach this technique. At every major trade show this year, we have a top educator doing demonstrations and allowing technicians to play with the product for themselves."

Workability is the key feature of the Vicki Peters Signature Series acrylic line. "The liquid-to-powder ratio is less sensitive, so application is easier," says Vicki Peters, vice president of Vicki Peters Signature Series at Kupa in Buena Park, California. "The acrylic consistency is easier to achieve when using the recommended size 8 or 10 brushes. The acrylic will slightly melt on the nail once applied, allowing techs to perfectly press it into place with plenty of workability time. A medium setting liquid with a new, all-EMA powder works for you so you don't have to work so hard to make a smooth nail. Easy to file, the VP Powders provide strength and durability, even though the product is soft and flexible."

Utilizing the latest powder manufacturing technology, Santa Fe Springs, California-based Young Nails has perfected the "Exact Particle Blend," a process that creates just the right homogeneous blend of copolymers within every powder bead. The manufacturing process begins with a certain percentage of ethyl and polymethyl liquids in the reactor before the drying process begins. After the product has been dried and sifted, each particle bead has

exactly the same mix ratio every time. The technique helps to ensure higher consistency, stronger workability and powerful adhesion.

The combination of the company's liquids and powders creates a series of polymer chains. These chain entanglement polymers weave themselves into the keratin structure, creating an entanglement of polymer chains as soon as the product is applied to the natural nail. This helps to ensure enhanced strength and flexibility.

## Whipped Into Shape

Some may think that for an enhancement to perform at peak strength, the nail shape must be square. But a proper design, not its shape, is the key to an enhancement's overall durability. In other words, when using proper product placement techniques, nail technicians can ensure the overall strength of the enhancement regardless of nail shape.

"Design consists of many facets," says Carter. "One of those facets is proper and consistent placement of the apex, or upper arch. This is where the thickest amount of product is applied, and then it tapers down to the cuticle, sidewalls and extension edge. Proper placement of the apex not only assures a beautiful line, but securely protects the strength of the nail."

If you're not sure how to find the apex, Peters suggests simply using a marker to draw a line down the center of the nail from the cuticle to the tip. Draw another line across the smile line. Then, draw an oval over the area where the two lines cross. That will identify the apex.

Once you create structurally sound nails, consider their shape. Trends seem to be moving toward a more natural look, with shorter, softer, squoval or oval nails outpacing severe square or round shapes, but of course there are always exceptions.

# Acrylic Products



If you're just starting out with acrylics or you'd like to try a new system, then give the Vicki Peters Signature Series **Acrylic Sample Kit** from Kupa a try. Included in this product-packed kit are: powders in Pink Glass, Clear Glass and Alpine White, medium-set liquid or odorless liquid, Primer, Equalizer, cuticle oil, Jetsetter for speeding up your tip application, Crystal Glaze Brush On Glue, forms, assorted tips and Vicki's #8 oval Signature application brush. **800/994-5872, [www.kupainc.com](http://www.kupainc.com).**

The Pinnacle **Sculptured System** line from FPO is packed with plenty of high-quality products techs can use to create world-class acrylic enhancements. Products such as Advanced Formula Primer and Powder, Gold Monomer Enhancer, Advanced Formula Primer and Primer Pen, and Adhere Natural Nail Dehydrator employ the latest advancements to produce strong, nonlifting enhancements for competition or everyday wear. **888/544-8214, [www.fpoproducts.com](http://www.fpoproducts.com).**



Nailite carries a diverse selection of acrylic systems for any preference and skill level, but among the most popular of its products is the **Universal Liquid**. This high-quality liquid can be used with any company's powder to create durable enhancements with maximum product workability. **800/222-4472, [www.nailiteinc.com](http://www.nailiteinc.com).**



The **NSI Attraction Acrylic System** utilizes advanced technology to create tough, crack-resistant enhancements. Attraction Nail Liquid features a proprietary blend of tri-monomers, while Attraction Nail Powder features a unique blend of tripolymers designed to deliver exceptional adhesion, strength and flexibility. **800/354-6741, [www.nsinails.com](http://www.nsinails.com).**



Trés Chic Nails proves that variety is key with the **Expressions Acrylic** line: Expressions Acrylic Nail Liquid is available in six different formulas to match a range of skill levels and preferences, and fiberglass-reinforced Expressions Acrylic Sculpting Powders are available in many colors that can be mixed and matched to achieve just the right shade and amount of coverage. **800/838-0037, [www.treschicnails.com](http://www.treschicnails.com).**

Because the powder absorbs monomer at a quick, efficient rate, the **Absolute** acrylic system from OPI Products gives techs the flexibility to work with wet product for fills and overlays or dryer product for free edge extensions without sacrificing application performance, working time, adhesion, strength and durability. The powder comes in shades such as Brilliant Pink, Perfect White and Truly Natural. **800/341-9999, [www.opi.com](http://www.opi.com).**



# Acrylic Q&A

We asked top educators to solve some of the most common acrylic woes. Here's what they said:



**Erin Dixon**  
NSI educator, owner  
of Nail Care Services,  
Newport News, VA

**Q. How do I prevent lifting?**

**A.** Most problems with lifting can be traced to preparation of the natural nail. Inadvertently touching the nail or the sculpting brush can transfer oils and contaminants from the skin and interfere with bonding. The natural nail should be cleaned and prepped according to the manufacturer's guidelines before acrylic application. Acrylic should never touch the cuticle or skin.

**Q. How do I shorten service time?**

**A.** Practice, practice, practice. Successful acrylic application depends on practicing the individual steps (for your particular brand) until they become second nature. By preparing appropriately, you will cut service time for each appointment because there will be less service breakdown.

**Q. How do I blend colors?**

**A.** Blending colors is not only fun, it's profitable! If the thought of blending makes you nervous, invest in an inexpensive color wheel. The color wheel will show you how to blend any color from the primary colors: yellow, blue and red. For example, you can mix red and yellow to get orange, or mix blue and yellow to get green.

White or black (in tiny amounts) will lighten or darken a shade—just don't overdo it. Play with the colors and apply a few test beads to see the colors you can create.

To spice up an ordinary French manicure, add a bit of iridescent acrylic to the mix. Start blending by tweaking your French pink to accentuate your client's skin tone. I label my blends with the recipe I used so that if I like the color, I can recreate it in the future. (Note: For more information on skin tones and color matching, see "Setting the Tone" in *Nailpro's* May 2007 issue.)

Custom color is the next big thing in the salon. Clients love being able to have color personalized just for them. I'm starting to see clients combining

unusual colors with unexpected free edge shapes—for instance, red free edges with black nail beds on an extreme oval-shape nail. The funkier the combo, the better. The blended colors don't take much additional time but can increase the service ticket price by 50 percent or more. Even clients who are ultraconservative will enjoy a hint of shimmer in basic French acrylic.



**Lysa Comfort**  
president and  
international educator,  
Charisma Nail  
Innovations, Encino, CA

**Q. How do you make an acrylic nail look natural?**

**A.** By using products that have a natural appearance, using softer whites instead of bright white for the free edge, pinching the nail to give it a more natural shape and staying away from extreme shapes.

**Q. Can I use my liquid with your company's powders?**

**A.** Yes. Most powders work with these liquids, unless odorless.

**Q. Do I have to use primer?**

**A.** No, not if you properly etch the nail and perform a proper application.



**Elaine Watson**  
vice president of  
marketing and global  
education director,  
All Season Professional,  
Valencia, CA

**Q. What is the setup time of your product?**

**A.** This is a tough question. While the product sets up quickly, it has an increased molding stage. It's fast like a competition product yet allows you some time to really perfect your structure.

**Q. In what colors are your powders available? Are they transparent or opaque?**

**A.** We offer raw pigment and allow the technician to make whatever color she wants without purchasing dozens of containers of powder. You can make something subtle, such as opaque pink for a set of pink-and-whites, or custom-blend color acrylic to match a favorite handbag. The possibilities are endless. Our basic colors are pink, intense pink, white and clear. Our pigment kit has all of the primary colors—red, blue and yellow—along with a container of glitter additive to make glitter acrylics.



**Alisha Rimando**  
director of training, education and development,  
Entity Beauty, Orlando, FL

**Q. How can I make the nail thin without**

**having it break? How do I avoid filing out the smile line on the sides? How do I avoid cracking on the sides?**

**A.** The answers to all three questions involve the structure of the C-curve, the parabolic arc under the nail. When using a copolymer acrylic like Entity's, after application (when the product has set but remains flexible), mold the extension edge around a Perfect Curve Sculpting Tool to create a consistent C-curve. Hold the product in place on each side of the nail at the lateral folds until the product dries completely, about 30 seconds. Since the nail surface now appears to be slimmer, there will be minimal filing on the sides, preventing you from filing out your smile line on the sides. This is also where you need strength. Removing less product from this lateral area avoids future cracking. With the C-curve, the nail has more surface area and is shaped like a bridge or an egg, which increases strength in design to help retain structure and withstand the impact when a client hits the nail—so you can file the enhancement thin and still maintain strength within the structure.

## Get Your Glitter On

“Creative people are really pushing their artistic abilities, developing great new nail styles and incorporating nail art into acrylic enhancements,” says Arica Carpenter, marketing coordinator for ASP. “Fashion-forward is the next big thing, incorporating media such as dried flowers or pieces of lace into acrylics.”

Color is also a hot trend for enhancements. “With the ability to mix or premix your own colors, you can really develop a style that shows off the client’s individuality and personality,” Carpenter says. “A new trend that is really starting to pop up is color tips on sculpted nails with glitter incorporated on the tips.”

According to Carter, when working with glitter or nail art additives, it is important to remember that the ratio of nail art product to enhancement product should be kept at 1-to-3, and a higher amount of embellishment could result in loss of enhancement integrity. When creating a design using NSI Sea Gems or Cracked Ice additives, first apply a thin layer of acrylic to bond with the natural nail. The nail embellishment can then be pressed into the enhancement before the acrylic completely sets. Finally, seal the embellishment by applying another layer of acrylic.

Clients also often request simple nail art, such as soft glitter shades that cover the entire nail, and nail art that is fast and easy to apply in the salon, adds Lysa Comfort, president and international educator for Encino, California-based Charisma Nail Innovations.

## Spark Interest

Looking for some ideas on how to better market acrylic services to clients? Here are several tried-and-true methods:

**Wear it yourself.** “I have noticed that if I have my nails done in a cute, creative way, other women tend to spot them and strike up a conversation,” says Carpenter. “Look at it this way: You have the opportunity to turn yourself into a walking billboard without

anyone even knowing it.”

**Create hype.** Recruit some of your more outgoing clients to hand out your business cards. “Have some creatively shaped nail cards,” says Carpenter. “Tell your client that if she recommends clients to you, you’ll throw in some free nail art, such as rhinestones, the next time she comes in for an appointment. This way, she feels great about her nails and you get the word-of-mouth recommendation, which is priceless.”

### **Remind clients about upkeep.**

“Keeping the hands, skin, cuticles and enhancements beautiful throughout the full two weeks is key in creating a larger acrylic clientele,” says Alisha Rimando, director of training, education and development for Orlando, Florida-based Entity Beauty. “Retail cuticle oil and Nanovive Cuticle Rescue and Intense Skin Treatment. These products will help keep acrylic enhancements flexible and your clients’ skin and cuticles soft and moisturized from deep within.”

**Stay up-to-date on trends.** “In an industry that deals so much with chemicals, products are constantly evolving, and you must keep up with the latest in science and technology,” says Rimando. Along those lines, Peters has scheduled two Kupa Kamp acrylic education events in Las Vegas for this fall: Session 1 is designed for novice techs, while Session 2 targets more seasoned techs who want to master their craft.

“Acrylic is my absolute favorite medium to work with. You can truly make any nail look flawless,” says Rimando. “Once you master the product itself, you can create anything. Learning the precise techniques for using acrylic products will help you to master any other medium in our industry.”

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With more than a decade of experience as a licensed cosmetologist, Ilona French—writer, editor and owner of Archmedia Productions—specializes in business and beauty topics.