

The Big Business of Smelling Like a Rose

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It stinks to stink, we generally agree these days, and that's abundantly evident in our never-ending quest to smell better.

Consumers spend tens of billions of dollars annually, in America and around the globe, to look good and find the just-right fragrance to accompany the primping. Research firm IBISWorld says revenue for the cosmetics and beauty products manufacturing industry — perfumes, deodorants, makeup, lotions, face creams and hair-care products — will amount to around \$48.5 billion in the U.S. alone this year. (Perfumes, colognes and deodorants are about one-quarter of this total.)



Reviver wipes: Credit Reviver

Note that we're not even touching soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes or body washes here. But to provide a rough picture of how stratospheric the numbers can become, consider that personal-care giants Procter & Gamble (PG) and Unilever (UN), which make products from Head & Shoulders and Gillette to Vaseline and Q-Tips, had combined revenue of more than \$150 billion last year.

Today, though, it's the post-shower sweet spot that's in focus, a broad segment that's getting more options all the time. Should you choose, you could almost, *almost*, forgo traditional scrubbing and cleaning, at least theoretically, of yourself and your clothes. Grab your [72-hour deodorant](#), your [dry shampoo](#) and a [body spray](#). Downy [wrinkle-release](#) what you're wearing, and pop in some [long-lasting breath mints](#).

If that's not enough, [lint-roll yourself](#) with a scented sticky sheet. Or [go natural](#). You can also celebrate that self-cleaning clothes [may be near](#). And, while on the go and needing to go, you can whip out the Dollar Shave Club's [One Wipe Charlies](#), a product marketed bluntly as "butt wipes made for men."

"This is the new trend, to find ways of not showering," says Dr. Amy Derick, a clinical instructor of dermatology at Northwestern University and [a private practitioner](#). "The issue is that, if people do not shower, for example, their hair, their scalp gets oily, and oily hair is prone to developing dandruff."

For the face, washing gets rid of oils and environmental pollutants we encounter daily, while staying clean elsewhere helps keep staphylococcus bacteria at bay, she says. Simply put, Derick says, there are hygienic reasons to bathe that go beyond scenting ourselves with soaps. It might not kill you if you did away with the washing, but it would certainly make you stronger, and not necessarily in a desirable way.

You might be evil

Why do we go to all the trouble to smell so nice? Because as Dr. Alan Hirsch, director of the [Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation](#) explains, scents are extremely powerful influencers of the human mood.

"One thing to understand is that, in a very intrinsic way, you are as you smell," he says. "If you smell good, people perceive you're good. If you smell bad, people think you're bad. Your underlying human soul is manifest based on the way you smell."

In other words, the bouquets we encounter are critical to how we judge others, and in turn, to how we are judged — you don't have to like it, you might not even be consciously aware of it, but there's no getting around it. Hirsch says the part of the human brain that processes smell in humans is closely tied to our emotions, leading us to make split-second decisions based on what the nose knows.

"The quickest way to induce a change in emotion or behavior, quicker than almost any other sensory modality, is with smell," he says. "You'll smell a smell, and you'll immediately decide, 'I like it, or I don't like it.'" This goes for products and people, too.

Katherine Ashenburg, the writer of "[The Dirt on Clean: An Unsanitized History](#)," told *The New York Times* in 2010 that humans don't need to obsess as we do about getting rid of the grime, but that's hardly stopping anyone. "We have never needed to wash less, and we have never done it more," she said. (Salon also had a [fascinating interview](#) with the author in 2007.)

It is indeed possible to overdo it, Derick says, as too many harsh soaps and scrubs can be bad for the skin. That said, it doesn't mean you should drop the showers entirely if you want to avoid a certain degree of unpleasantness.

Trumping the Magna Carta

In days of yore, laborers smelled bad, whereas aristocrats were perfumed, Hirsch says, meaning you could tell class differences pretty quickly, even if your eyesight were failing. The wonders of plumbing technology helped change that.

"More democratizing than the Magna Carta, or more democratizing than the Constitution," he says, "has been running water."

Still, it's once we're out of the tub that our ingenuity really kicks in. Take the Kusin brothers, the team behind a new line of reusable deodorizing wipe pads, called [Reviver](#). First available earlier this year for giving the family dog and cat a swipe of aromatic goodness, Reviver for humans is now being sold at Walgreen ([WAG](#)) stores across the U.S.

"They're like breath mints for your clothes," says Ben Kusin, Reviver's founder and CEO. "[That's] one of the easiest ways to think about it."

While the wipes aren't going to save you from ever doing laundry again, at least until your closet is filled with the aforementioned self-cleaning apparel, they might spare you, and those around you, from whatever funkiness you're carrying around.

"If you just don't want to smell like your day, if you don't want to smell like where you've been, that's the need for this product," Eric Kusin, the company president, says.

One of the target users for Reviver is smokers and, in fact, Ben Kusin says the idea was spawned with the intention of masking the after-effects of a cigarette.

Which brings us to a curious place: People in America have a better sense of smell than ever, Hirsch says, in large measure because indoor smoke has been outlawed almost everywhere you go. As a result, we now have the olfactory good fortune, or perhaps bad fortune, of no longer having secondhand smoke irritate our nostrils. What that means is we're now likely more aware of odors that in years past would have been overwhelmed by the already bad smell of cigs.

And we know those unsavory scents are practically impossible to escape entirely. Sometimes, only being honest here, that's because it's you.

"We're telling everyone, 'we all stink,'" says Eric Kusin. "The world stinks, and thereby, by proxy, we stink, too."

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