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## Too Fickle For a Tattoo?

By Anita Hamilton

When tattoo artist Brandon Bond heard about a new tattoo ink that could be removed with a single laser treatment, he wasn't just skeptical — he was ticked off. The Atlanta-based designer considers the work he has inked on everyone from rapper 50 Cent to champion boxer Floyd Mayweather, Jr. to be pieces of art, almost sacred, so marketing them as disposable was nothing short of an insult.

But even as Bond scoffed at the ironically named [Infinitink](#), which just became available this spring, he could relate to Americans' love-hate relationship with their body art. Cherished as symbols of independence and individuality, tattoos now adorn the flesh of a quarter of all adults under 50. Yet recent studies have also found that about a sixth of everyone who gets one winds up regretting it. Case in point: Bond sports two full sleeves' worth of intricate patterns, but admits there are a few designs on his arms that he'd like to erase altogether. "A lot of the stuff I had gotten as a youngster was very subpar," he says. ([See pictures of Olympic athletes' tattoos.](#))

With such conflicting sentiments in mind, Harvard dermatologist and professor Rox Anderson developed the biodegradable Infinitink by encapsulating the pigment in tiny plastic beads that dissolve more easily than regular ink when struck by a laser beam. But there was a problem: tattoo artists hated to use it because it was too thin (which made it look washed out) and the micropolymer beads were incredibly expensive, says Bond, who now works as a consultant for Nuvilex, which make Infinitink.

So the company decided to reformulate its ink and hired a chemical engineer from Dupont, who

replaced the expensive beads with a technology, already used in ink jet printers to conserve ink, that helps smaller quantities of pigment create the same vibrant results as regular inks. Ultimately, come regret time, that means there's less ink that needs to be removed, which means less time spent gettin zapped by a laser. With this revised formula, Infinitink tattoos still cost as much as 50% more than regular designs, but their removal is a bargain since it requires many fewer sessions — which typically cost \$200 to \$500 a pop — to shatter the ink into small pieces that get absorbed into the lymph nodes.

While many industries, including tattooing, have suffered as a result of the economic downturn, tattoo removal is actually on the rise, says Dr. Amy Derick, a dermatologist in Barrington, Ill., who studies tattoo remorse. "It may be that people want a fresh start or are starting a new job," she says. Or it may be due to heartache or better judgment. Beverly Hills' dermatologist Will Kirby says that tattoo removal customers have doubled from 20 to 40% of his business over the past year. "We've seen quite an uptick. We're busier than ever," notes Kirby.

According to a 2008 study in the *Archives of Dermatology*, women are more likely than men to want their tattoos removed, often due to negative reactions from others. "If there's a sexiness about it, women are often criticized," says dermatologist Derick. Removing ex-lovers' names is the most common request, says dermatologist Kirby, who has zapped such unfortunate choices as "Slippery When Wet" and "Try Me."

Katrina McCoy, a nurse in Cherry Hill, N.J., who is in the process of having a butterfly tattoo with her name above it removed from her arm, says she has even opted out of getting anesthesia during the painful laser sessions, because, "I feel like it is a punishment for doing something retarded." If Infinitink works as advertised, such prolonged penance may no longer be the price for a simple change of heart.

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