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Rob Ciccone

Is your image credible in eyes of your clients?

“Low-risk” look found to reassure

When my editor told me about the theme for this issue – business fashion – he said, “I realize this is not your area of expertise. Feel free to write on something else” I thought to myself: “Not my area...why would he think that? Is it because I’m a marketing guy and therefore what do I know about fashion?”

Well, marketing has to do with business growth. Business growth has to do with many things, including credibility, trust and first impressions. And that has everything to do with fashion. Is this a stretch? Read on and judge for yourself.

Credibility is the foundation upon which your success is built. To establish credibility, you have to position yourself as the low-risk provider; your customers have to believe that in doing business with you, they have the least possible amount of risk.

Credibility is created in many ways. To name a few, there’s your company: the history, time in business, market share. The quality of your products and services is important, as are your guarantees and testimonials. Even your telephone and e-mail manners make a difference.

Then there is also you and your team – your appearance, attitude and personality. How you represent yourselves impacts how others perceive your company.

The basic rule of success is: everything counts. It means that nothing you do is neutral; everything you do either works for, or against, your goals for success. It’s a mistake to assume that your choice of wardrobe is an unrelated detail, because it’s the details (or lack of attention to them) that get you every time.

My editor is not alone in assuming that as a marketing consultant, I wouldn’t need to address fashion. Recently, even my wife expressed surprise when she learned that I’m working with a company to reinvent their office dress code and front-line uniforms – until I explained to her the credibility factor and how our objective was to create a perception of credibility greater than their competitors, and that this dress code issue was just one of the ways we would do so. The hard reality is – we are judged on ap-

pearance. You might resist that reality, but you won’t change it.

Personal appearance has a lot to do with first impressions. First impressions are made within four seconds, and solidified within 30 seconds. After that, the brain rejects all information to the contrary, making it difficult to change that first impression. So treating your appearance as a minor detail could sabotage every other business-building activity you’re doing.

But who decides what’s appropriate, and what’s not? The short answer is the customer, not the fashion industry. Remember that fashion magazines are not necessarily geared towards helping the businessperson establish credibility and make the proper first impression. What you see in magazines might not be appropriate for meeting your customers ... unless you work in the fashion industry.

A good rule of thumb when dealing with your customers is to dress the way their advisers would dress – the people they respect and listen to. When in doubt, dress conservatively. That doesn’t mean you can’t find a way to add some personal touches, but dress in a way that gives the appearance of being solid, dependable and low risk.

Stay away from cheap goods, both in clothing and accessories. In business fashion, less truly is more. Invest in a few high-quality items rather than a closet full of inferior goods. The reason for this is both practical (because you look and feel more powerful when you are dressed in quality) and economical (because quality clothing lasts longer over time).

Business fashion should complement the impression you want to make, not detract from it. You want to stand out for your know-how, your products and services, and the superior way in which you do business. When your appearance projects that credible, trustworthy first impression, the marketplace can then see clearly what you really have to offer.

Robert Ciccone is the president and founder of Success Unlimited Sales and Marketing Group (www.susmg.com), a full-service marketing consulting firm that helps companies increase their sales and profits. He can be reached at 604-688-7733 or rob@susmg.com.