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BUSINESS FORUM

Image skills can help you land a client or a promotion

BY SANDY DUMONT

Impression management is the new competitive edge in business. It has everything to do with "deliberate" dressing and little to do with fashion or style.

Fashion comes and goes with the whims and moods of the moment – often with little or no concern for the results in the mirror. Fashion victims from both sexes abound.

On the other hand, a command of powerful, yet subtle, image tools enables a person to literally control the reaction of others through impression management. It also dramatically increases self-awareness and self-confidence because it is empowering to know that one will always be seen as profes-



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of St. Louis concluded that good-looking people tended to make more money and get promoted more often than those with average looks. Fortunately, image skills can be learned and used so one can be judged more attractive.

Dressing "deliberately" with an acute awareness of the effects that every element of one's persona will have on the observer is, very simply, the clever implementation of style.

sional, polished and classy.

An April 8 article in The Virginian-Pilot's Business section reported that a study by the Federal Reserve Bank

"Having style" is not the same as "being in style."

"Having style" implies that one is a creature of natural refinement and elegance. Being "in style" suggests that a person is dressed in the colors and styles of the moment. Flat-front trousers, for example, are in style. However, only "flat-bellied" persons dare wear them. Otherwise, they only serve to point out one's lack of flatness in the torso area. Sometimes it's better not to be in style.

Artists have practiced impression management since the beginning of time by using color and composition as standard tools. Color can suggest a person is happy, sad, mischievous, young or old. Good composition creates one focal point in a painting, so there is

order rather than chaos. Clever use of composition or "line" in a painting can direct the eye where the artist wants it.

The same concepts are used in impression management and can be used to control the way a person is perceived and precisely where one looks.

Image isn't really about the way we look. It's about the way we are seen by others. Two men of similar looks wearing the same suit, shirt and tie will be judged differently when only their eyeglasses differ. A man wearing gold or silver metal-rimmed glasses easily can appear more clinical, and therefore less outgoing, than a man with horn-rimmed glasses.

And two women of similar looks wearing identical power

suits also will be judged very differently when only their hairstyle differs. A dated hairstyle creates the impression that a woman's products or services are dated. The appearance must be state-of-the-art from head to toe in order to stand out from the competition.

All things being equal among competing businesses – degrees, technology, industry knowledge – impression management can be a major factor in landing new clients or climbing the corporate ladder.

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