

Do You Need An Image Consultant?

By Roberto Rocha • Success Correspondent - Every 2nd Saturday

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You're sick of hearing how much image counts. You think there's a grain of truth to it, but you're not fully convinced. Well, let me introduce you to the very profitable and overbooked business of image consulting.

Behind every great man is a rich advisor, I like to say. From presidents and CEOs to rap stars and basketball icons, all men of grand stature have likely profitted from the advice of an image consultant. The public is viciously judgmental and will pick apart a man's slightest flaw. Consultants are there to train a man in the art of faultless execution that looks natural. And they never run out of clients.

If you're in a field that demands a powerful, smooth and professional image, or if you want to hit the fast track running, you might want to consider hiring an image consultant. But don't pick up the phone until you read this.



what is an image consultant?

An image consultant is someone who knows style, etiquette and how to make a good sale. All he does is pass on that information to you.

A consultant teaches men the things they need to succeed in a world where time is sparse, impressions count more than ever and a clean-cut image can make or break you.

Besides giving advice on pinstripes and handshakes, consultants claim to boost their clients' confidence, persuasion skills and communication abilities. By fine-tuning body language, social graces and networking tactics, clients feel better armed in the ruthless business game of survival.

"We're all very visual as human beings," says Toronto-area image consultant Angèle Desgagné. "People react to us according to how put together we are. If someone is distracted by your presentation, they won't pay attention to your expertise."

what do image consultants do?

You can break down the lessons that image consultants have to teach into two categories:

Fashion & Grooming

In a standard session with an image consultant you will learn how to:

- pick a wardrobe for your line of work, and that suits your body type and personality
- shop for clothes efficiently
- groom yourself properly
- hide body and skin imperfections that may subconsciously turn people off

Manners & Etiquette

An image consultant will also teach you how to:

- behave at different functions
- talk in a confident, authoritative manner
- make effective presentations
- handle small talk and awkward silences
- use nonverbal communication effectively and eliminate nervous jitters
- take the upper hand in a media interview
- use the right cutlery for the right dishes at formal dinners

image-conscious positions

Just about anybody and everybody who's a public figure, who deals a lot with people, who runs a business and must keep up appearances, who is famous, or who wants to rise in the ranks of a profession that is heavily image-conscious could employ the services of an image consultant.

A list of positions that rely on image consultants might include:

- politicians
- corporate executives
- television & movie actors
- real estate agents
- upper- and mid-level executives who want promotions
- athletes
- public relations workers
- salespeople & receptionists
- tourism service workers

Desgagné suggests another occupation that often uses the services of image consultants: computer and tech workers.

"In those fields, people are often underdressed," she says. "They don't look professional, and so they don't promote their expertise and knowledge. They're in a holiday kind of mode, not in the mood to produce."

When you see a celebrity interviewed on your favorite talk show, don't think he or she is that naturally winsome. Destiny's Child, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Pamela Anderson all have consultants. Hugh Grant and Paris Hilton most certainly hired consultants to turn around their tawdry pasts.

Even reputed mafia boss Vito Palazzolo of Sicily is known to have hired one. One would guess that even presidential candidates have a handful on standby.

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time for an image evaluation

Not everyone needs an image makeover. If you work a cushy desk job in a laid back office where khakis and polos are tolerated, coming to work in designer threads and gesticulating like a car salesman won't help you much.

A consultant's service becomes valuable when you're moving up the corporate ladder and image becomes increasingly vital. You're making important contacts and meeting other business leaders. You're representing your entire company at events. You want to impress potential clients, partners and your superiors. It's at this point that you need one.

If you're changing careers, say from technical into law, where you'll be speaking in front of judges and juries, your concept of style could use a little polish. Image-intensive fields like entertainment, public relations and sales demand people with impeccable appearances. Consider a consultant if you're heading that way.

image consultant fees

The price depends on the package. A session with a consultant can run anywhere from \$300 to \$3,000 US. It can be as basic as being told what to wear and how to talk, or as involved as taking you shopping, recording you in action and analyzing your mannerisms.

Some consultants offer retainer services, in case you change professions, lose or gain weight, or if you just want a check-up to see how you're doing.

"Don't look at it as an extra cost," Desgagné suggests. "Look at it as an investment that you'll use the rest of your life. When we feel good about how we look, we can do anything."

finding an image consultant

A Google search for "image consultant" will yield scores of hits, but you're better off looking at directory listings in your area. You can find accredited consultants listed by country and state at the Association of Image Consultants International website (www.aici.org).

Many companies hire or have hired consultants for group seminars, so ask your HR department or your boss about it. Otherwise, just ask around. Ask top people you're comfortable with. If you hear the same name mentioned more than once, give that person a call.

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choosing an image consultant

Consultants can be pretty pricey. You want to make sure you're getting your money's worth. It's wise to ask a consultant the following:

- for references and past clients (you should call them up and get their opinions)
- how they work, what topics they address
- if they are certified image consultants
- how much time the service requires
- their hourly fee and estimates in writing (good in case they flake on you midway)
- if they provide a video of the consultation (so you can review it later)

clean yourself up

Consider this: How full is the self-help section of your local bookstore? How many times have you seen the same tips in men's magazines and on TV shows? What consultants teach is nothing new. A search through AskMen.com or a fashion-savvy girlfriend will summarize most of a consultant's advice.

However, all that advice is general, dispensed in one-size-fits-all chunks. A consultant tailors his advice to your needs specifically, looking at your body type and addressing your personal shortcomings.

They also give you the chance to step out of your style boundary, which you may otherwise think is perfectly okay.

"Being objective about oneself is very hard to do," says Desgagné. "We get caught up in our preferences, our likes and dislikes. A consultant lets you have a real exchange of information face-to-face."

So take it from the people who have made it big. A consultant can be worth every penny if you want success in certain professions, or if you're dying for a promotion, for power, or for respect