

Image consultants hope to rise from obscurity

BY SARAH MASON

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Between jewelry billboards off Interstate 30, silky shampoo ads in magazines and cologne commercials on TV, image is a key component of most advertising campaigns. However, image consultants say their profession remains relatively obscure.

"My toughest competition is ignorance, the lack of knowledge that we even exist," said Elaine Stoltz, owner of Stoltz Image Consulting.

Though the world may have its eyes on image, the industry of image consulting is almost invisible to the average consumer, according to Stoltz.

Image consultants like Stoltz advise clients on what colors and styles best match and bring out a client's better features.

Because some consumers are not aware of this practice and some might be adverse to being told how to dress and upgrade their image, Stoltz spends much of her time and money on marketing, educating consumers of the social and professional benefits of finding an image consultant.

Though many people may not want to admit it, it is human instinct to make judgments based on a first impression, said Kathryn Bryan, president of KASAL Inc., an image consulting company. Making a good impression sets the

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— Kathryn Bryan, president of KASAL Inc.

tone for personal and professional relationships, so it's important to make a good one, she said.

"It only takes seven seconds to make the first impression and you only get to do it once," Bryan said. "You never know when you're going to meet your next potential boss."

Business benefits from advice

Bryan and Stoltz both have experiences with clients who go on to get a promotion, or even a date, after receiving image consultation. The bottom line is that most people feel more confident and happier when they look better, Stoltz said.

Companies often take advantage of the benefits of image consultants because a confident employee is more likely to work harder, Bryan said.

Image consultants may also serve as an objective and educated adviser when a coworker or staff member's image is unprofessional or reflects poorly on the business.

The best way to present an employee

with image consultant service, is to propose the service as a perk of working with the company, Bryan said.

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Image consultants' lessons boost confidence and maximize the talent of personnel, which may give companies an extra edge when competing with other businesses, Bryan said. This may serve as an advantage to companies who are trying to stay afloat during today's economy, she said.

Changes in the industry

When Stoltz started working as an image consultant about 20 years ago, she would measure and hand write a multi-page description of what clothing shapes best matched a clients' figure.

Now Stoltz uses modern technology to show and describe to clients what to wear.

"What we do is take about 15 meas-

urements — for both men and women — and put it into a computer, which prints out a book about 150 pages long," Stoltz said. "It tells them every neckline possible, every length of jacket they can wear. From dress styles, to necklaces, how long their hairstyles should be, to lingerie, swimsuits and shorts."

Advancements in technology also help Stoltz test hundreds of high-definition colors on clients in order to create a color fan of shades that best fits a client's features.

Becoming an image consultant

There are no state regulations to the qualifications it takes to become an image consultant, Bryan said.

There are organizations such as the Association of Image Consultants International, which offers levels of certification courses — where Stoltz became one of seven worldwide master image consultants — but no consultants are required to belong to such an organization.

The main requirement or skill all image consultants must have is compassion, said Bethany Siggins, owner of Bethany Siggins Image Consulting in Dallas and former student of Stoltz.

"Other than a lot of interest in color and style, you need a general concern for people and a desire to help others and encourage others," Siggins said.

Contact Mason at SMason@bizpress.net