

THE FIRST STEP TO A
BRAND IDENTITY MAY
BE AS ACCESSIBLE AS
YOUR CLOSET.



DECIPHERING **DRESS**
the

By EILEEN MCCLELLAND

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ESTABLISHING and sticking to a dress code is a smart way to differentiate yourself from the competition and instantly communicate what your brand is all about. You can convey an important message without saying a word. After all, appearance is a huge part of how you'll be perceived when customers walk through your door.

Jennifer Gandia, co-owner of Greenwich Jewelers in Manhattan, says the way you and your staff dress is a reflection of who you are, what your brand is and what your store is about. Obviously, such an integral component of your image shouldn't be accidental, haphazard or left to the daily whims of employees.

"Once you have a good understanding of your branding and what that is communicating to your clients, it should be quite easy to figure out how you present yourself to buy into that image," Gandia says.

Dressing for success in the jewelry store is as variable as the personalities behind the businesses.

Sometimes it means staff in casual resort towns are asked to dress like bankers. Or store owners in traditional locales shatter the stuffiness stigma by opting for something non-traditional their competitors wouldn't be caught dead wearing.

Kate Peterson, president of

Performance Concepts, says many stores have drifted away from the coat-and-tie requirement, primarily because their owners believe it's

intimidating to younger customers.



Others ardently believe that selling a high-ticket item requires

a level of professional decorum that starts with traditional business dress. "You've got to look like you can make dreams come true," says image coach Sandy Dumont.

Gandia says there's no one formula that's going to work for everyone. "Perhaps with conservative clientele and serious merchandise, it might be the right thing to be conservatively dressed," she says. "Or a store might be selling beads and silver and more fun jewelry, and in that case their staff should reflect that they *get it*. They should be demonstrating it and living it. They are a living model for who and what your store is, an extension of your marketing."

CODE





PUTTING THE DRESS CODE IN CONTEXT

At one end of the formality spectrum, Wixon Jewelers of Minneapolis, which has a conservative clientele, mandates business suits for men and women. On the other end, Atlanta's Worthmore Jewelers' only rules are no T-shirts with printing on them and no faded, ripped or distressed jeans.



Shane Decker, president of Ex-Sell-ence, says most of his clients *do* have dress codes — usually more like Wixon's

than Worthmore's — and *do* enforce them. "Some are very strict and if people don't adhere to the dress code they are sent home and asked to change," Decker says. But here's proof there's no one-size-fits-all formula: Worthmore's



Peggy Rainbow, an **INSTORE Smooth Seller**, sells more than \$1 million wearing flip-flops and Capris.

Regional differences and type of merchandise sold are among factors that determine suitable dress.



"In Florida, when people get off a cruise ship, they don't expect you to have on a suit," Decker says. "But in New York or downtown Chicago, or if you have a store that is in the luxury goods business, they don't expect you to be selling in blue jeans. In these cases, customers expect men to be wearing suits and ties and ladies to be wearing dresses."

To further complicate the issue, style consultant **Michael O'Connor** of Style & Substance, says that although consistency in dress may *look* polished,



encouraging sales staff to display a variety of styles rather than a uniform look may appeal to a wider cross-section of clients.

O'Connor suggests letting staff members play to their stylistic strengths so that each customer can seek out a sales professional dressed in the manner he finds most approachable.

First, figure out who you are selling to. The average 27-year-old bridal shopper *may* gravitate toward the father figure in a suit and tie or he *may* be more comfortable chatting with a younger guy who dresses more like he does — say, dark, fashionable jeans and a collared shirt.

"This clientele is really expecting to be given information by people they trust," O'Connor says. "And they don't necessarily trust or relate to that older-style, conservative dress. They want to trust someone who is their peer."



Bob Woolsey, owner of Jones Brothers Jewelers in Peoria, IL, has had success wearing Aloha shirts in the summer, in an

effort to put young bridal customers at ease. "From a generational perspective, coats and ties can create even more stress," Woolsey says. "Rarely, if ever, do we wear sport coats. We do get a lot of positive feedback from customers. I



YOUR STAFF ARE A LIVING MODEL FOR WHO AND WHAT YOUR STORE IS. — JENNIFER GANDIA

think it sets us apart. Fun and relaxed isn't usually how a jewelry store is described."

Decker believes it's better to err on the side of too formal than not formal enough: "If it's a young bridal shopper looking for platinum, a large diamond and an awesome experience, they expect you to look good, no matter how old you are."

Unsure of your style? Whatever you decide to do, don't fall back on the "uniform" default option by putting *everyone* in a black blazer every day, for example. "Such an option takes all the personality out of the people and the store," Peterson says.

PUTTING THE DRESS CODE INTO EFFECT

Peterson agrees that for stores with a contemporary vibe, the concept of jewelry as fashion dictates that associates dress to reflect current or personal style — within reason.

"It's that 'within reason' part that gets most people in trouble," Peterson says. "That, and trying to serve multiple masters. For example, if you expect your associates to be fashionable, you'll have to make a call on whether open-toed shoes are more of a fashion statement or a safety hazard. Worse — let's

COUNTRY-CLUB CASUAL

ZACHARY'S JEWELERS, ANNAPOLIS, MD

ZACHARY'S JEWELERS is on a corner considered to be one of the top 10 retail locations in Maryland. Spring, summer and fall bring mega-yachts to the harbor and 4.5 million people — many of them tourists — walk past the door.

“So that’s the feeling we want to present here — country-club casual with a Tommy Bahama/Key West kind of flair,” says manager Evangeline Ross. “We’re addressing people who come off yachts in shorts and T-shirts and we don’t want them to feel like they’re not comfortable coming in here.”

In the winter, dress tends to be a little more formal, but suits and ties are not required. Owner Steve Samaras might wear a suit with a turtleneck, and women and men alike dress to express their personalities.

The store carries jewelry from suppliers including John Hardy, Marco Bicego and Charles Krypell as well as Pandora.

Ross, who came from a corporate background where pants *had* to match the jacket, loosened up her look when she made the transition to Zachary Jewelers.

“When I started here I had an image of what I should look like, attractive but casual, more free flowing than in the corporate world. A long tunic with a long scarf and jersey jacket and matching pants, for example.”

One young woman they hired had worked at a company where everyone wore jeans and T-shirts. Knowing she had to start from scratch, Zachary’s owners offered to jump-start her new wardrobe with a complimentary shopping spree, accompanied by Samaras’ wife. “We thought it would be a nice way to introduce her to the company,” Ross says.



face it — not every woman who has been in retail for 20 years has feet that should be shown in public. While you can include a ‘personal grooming’ statement that demands ‘neatly manicured and pedicured nails,’ allowing open-toed shoes puts the retailer in the position we affectionately call ‘toe police,’ having to decide whose toes are pedicured neatly enough for public display. It’s a spot few enjoy.”

Peterson says, the guidelines for drafting your dress code are pretty simple:

- Keep directives broad and reasonable for all, regardless of size or shape. For example, men must wear collared shirts that are clean, pressed and of the appropriate size. Excessively tight shirts or shirts that expose skin around the midsection are unacceptable.



- Avoid items that leave too much to the discretion of the staff member. “Un-faded black denim jeans are acceptable” is probably *not* a good standard. Unless the manager is equipped to determine on a case-by-case basis what is faded and what is not, eliminate the hassle altogether. Casual black pants are acceptable; cotton, linen, wool, khaki and polyester blends are all acceptable fabric — denim is not.

- Be consistent for all positions. The customer doesn’t know if you are the top salesperson or the cleaning lady.

- Strike the words “common sense” from your vocabulary. It’s a myth — especially when it comes to something like how people dress.

- Be consistent in enforcement.



DRESS CODE: LOOK “NICE,” PAY ATTENTION TO HAIR AND MAKEUP. NO TONGUE PIERCINGS.

BE MEMORABLE

DIAMONDS 'N' DUNES, KITTY HAWK, NC

EILEEN ALEXANIAN eschews her beach town's sartorial habits and follows her own muse when it comes to her wardrobe.

While it might be OK for other jewelry retailers to reflect what their customers are wearing, Kitty Hawk is so casual that that approach simply wouldn't work for her. It would fly in the face of professionalism, she believes.

"Everyone here wears shorts and T-shirts," she says. "Lots of people walk around with no shoes. How can you take a grown man seriously when he's walking around in the parking lot and he's not wearing any shoes?"

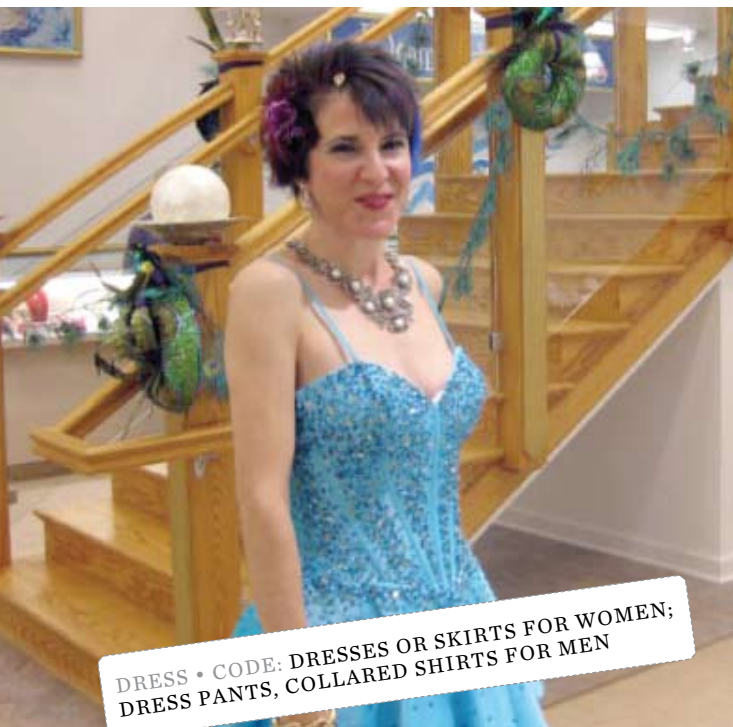
Alexanian, who describes herself as a hosiery queen, has decreed that female staff members *must* wear skirts or dresses with pantyhose, a rule that has scared off some job applicants. "Some people freak out about the pantyhose because it *is* hot here in August, but you've got to look the part," Alexanian says. "If you want to sell a \$4,000 ring, you want to dress like it's a special event."

For the guys, dress pants and a collared shirt are mandated. Not requiring ties is the one concession she makes to local mores. "We avoid the tie thing here because if you wear a tie people think you work for a bank," Alexanian says.

Within those parameters though Alexanian encourages the staff to develop and express their own personal style — as long as they don't copy *hers*.

"I wear a big feather clipped in my hair with different color hair extensions."

"Don't be me. Be you, but be unique. Be memorable."



DRESS • CODE: DRESSES OR SKIRTS FOR WOMEN;
DRESS PANTS, COLLARED SHIRTS FOR MEN

ALL BUSINESS

WIXON JEWELERS, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

WIXON JEWELERS has no casual Fridays, "because customers' money is just as important on Friday as any other day," says co-owner Hope Wixon. Most of Wixon's clients are professionals and small-business owners. "If you're a businessman and you're wearing a suit, you want to deal with someone who reflects your professionalism."

Details count: No chipped nail polish. Suits can't have low tops or super-short skirts. "Obviously hair and perfume shouldn't be something somebody has to suffer through," she notes.

Employees have called Wixon while shopping for work attire, or even e-mailed her cell phone photos of potential outfits to make sure what they're buying fits the dress code.

"Jewelry is not inexpensive," Wixon says. "You need to reflect what you're selling. If someone is spending \$100,000 or \$200,000, they want to talk to a professional."

"And when you are dressed well, you feel better about yourself. Without a dress code, someone might happen to wear something less than their best on the day a big client walks in."





DRESS • CODE:
FASHION-CONSCIOUS
& TRENDY

FASHIONISTAS

GREENWICH JEWELERS, NEW YORK, NY

FASHION-FORWARD attire complements the artful designer jewelry in the cases at Greenwich Jewelers in downtown Manhattan.

“For our customers jewelry is part of their fashion wardrobe and not something to be taken out on special occasions,” says Jennifer Gandia, co-owner of Greenwich Jewelers with her sister, Christina Gandia Gambale.

Gandia describes her personal style as edgy, and she believes it’s not only appropriate, but desirable, to show off her personal style in the workplace.

“We consider ourselves a fashion store, so we don’t really encourage conservative dress, even though we’re in the business district,” Gandia says. “We ask them to dress neatly and appropriately, not too exposed in any way. Otherwise, their interpretation of stylish dress is pretty much open. We’ve been really lucky. We’ve not had anyone take it too far or do something that would be considered inappropriate.”

Gandia holds a fashion meeting once a month; everyone attends and is assigned a magazine to review. “We talk about the trends and how they relate to jewelry and what we should be wearing.”

Positive reinforcement is another aspect of the dress code. “We tend to high-five each other when we have a good outfit on,” Gandia says. “Our staff is encouraged to wear jewelry from the store that works with their outfit for the day.”



DRESS • CODE: MEN WEAR FULL SUITS AND TIES; WOMEN WEAR PANTS OR SKIRT SUITS, PANTYHOSE AND CLOSED-TOE SHOES.

DRESS CODE ADVICE FROM SANDY DUMONT

(www.theimagearchitect.com)

1 Going casual? Think country club, not beach bum.



2 Stay away from army green. “Grunge” colors dull the complexion. Jewel tones are in — fuchsia, magenta, violet.



3 Black is a big-city look and the perfect foil for accessories, but if you don’t have

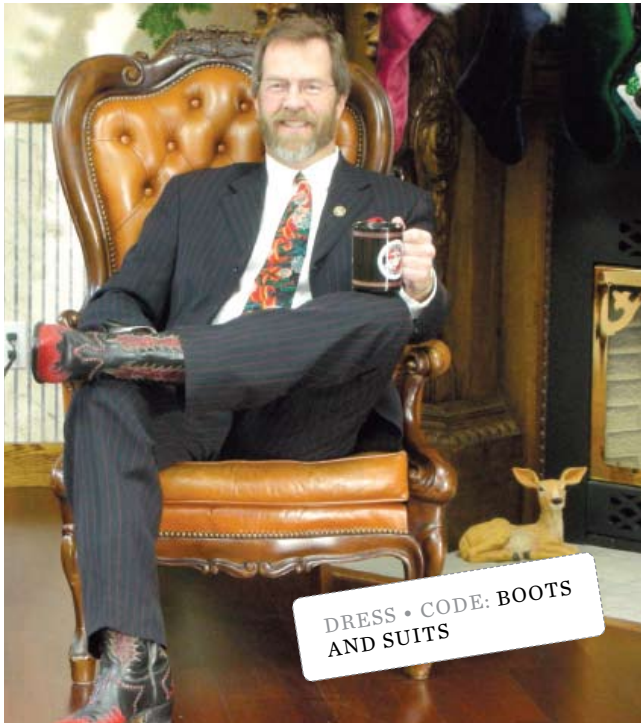
big-city makeup and hair, that black outfit is going to wear you. Make sure hair, makeup and accessories are equally sophisticated.

4 Avoid polo shirts. They emphasize beer guts and sloping shoulders in guys, and offer no waistlines in women.



5 If you’d like to get your staff to concentrate on upgrading their fashion sense,

start collecting photos of movie stars from magazines to prove your point. “Find a famous movie star in grungy attire, looking awful and disheveled and then show them a picture of the star looking like a million dollars. Ask them, ‘If you see both versions of that person, which one are you going to go to in the store?’ It’s great fun, like a little school project.”



BOOTS & SUITS

ADAIR JEWELERS, MISSOULA, MT

JIM ADAIR, owner of Adair Jewelers in Missoula, MT, says he's a bit of a renegade. He likes to wear boots and colorful, distinctive ties with his business suits.

But in general, he and his staff dress far more formally than almost anyone else in the Western college town of Missoula, MT — even CPAs and attorneys tend to favor business casual.

"For all the 30 years I've had my store it has been suits and ties," Adair says. "Quite frankly, I don't know of any other jewelers in town who require suits and ties. Gals wear business suits, too. We feel it sets us apart from the competition because there are a lot of choices on where people go to shop for jewelry — but we are professional jewelers. We are not jewelry salespeople. And that's the difference. If you're going to be a professional jeweler, then dress the part.

"I'm one of the few people in town who wears suits and ties. But I'm on TV every night. I do my own ads. I've always worn what I consider to be fun ties. People comment on the ties. By doing the TV ads I have cultivated an image of what I want my store to represent. I've heard Shane Decker say it a hundred times, you've got 15 or 30 seconds to make that first impression. The guy that looks like a pro is going to stand out."



**"OUR
CUSTOMERS
SAY WE LOOK
LIKE REAL
PEOPLE."**

SPLIT DECISION

YANINA & CO., CEDAR HILLS, NJ

YANINA & CO., owned by Yanina Fleysher and her family, reflects a luxurious urban lifestyle and specializes in custom and couture-style jewelry.

"Our goal was to make people feel as though they have stepped into the store from Park Avenue in New York City," says Maureen O'Keefe, the marketing manager.

Yanina & Co. has a dress code that varies with the days of the week. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays call for business attire. On Thursdays and Fridays, classy casual is permitted. (Dark jeans are fine, but no T-shirts, sneakers or sandals. Women wear dressy tops and men opt for collared shirts or sweaters. "We don't wear jeans with holes or light-washed jeans, even if they are in

CASUAL CHIC

SONNY'S ROCKS, DENVER, CO

“MOST GUYS just *hate* coming into a jewelry store,” says Michael Nedler, president of Sonny’s Rocks in Denver. “They’d rather set their hair on fire. You can feel it, you can see it. Denver is a very casual city, so when we were a coat-and-tie store, customers would walk into our store, take a look at how we were dressed up, and apologize for how they looked. They’d say, ‘Oh, I didn’t dress up enough to be here,’ which you hate to hear.”

So even before Nedler and partner Mark Allen transformed their traditional store into Sonny’s Rocks in 2009 — with a rock ‘n’ roll theme and an irreverent attitude — they had thrown out the coats and ties in exchange for a business casual look.

“I don’t have any suits left. I don’t wear them,” Nedler says. These days, in their new digs on one of Denver’s busiest corners, it’s gone beyond business casual to laid-back casual, which means jeans as often as not. The store caters to bridal customers ranging in age from early 20s to early 40s, as well as fashion shoppers, ages 30 and up. Top-selling brands include Ritani, Peter Storm, Martin Flyer, Hidalgo, Alex Sepkus, Rebecca, Pandora, Teno, Charriol and Breuning.

“We want it to be like if you walk into your neighbor’s house. We want the whole feel of the store to be a place you can hang out and be comfortable,” Nedler says.

Even tattoos are OK, as long as they are not emblazoned across an associate’s forehead. In fact, Nedler, who is thrilled with his own dragon tattoo, offers to pay for tattoos as a company benefit. “Most of my crew has taken us up on the offer, but you don’t have to be inked to work here,” Nedler says.



DRESS • CODE: VARIES BY DAY OF THE WEEK

style. No spaghetti straps or tube tops, even when it’s hot. You don’t want to be distracting.”) On dressy Saturdays, they wear all black. “When we’re so busy on Saturday it makes a nice impression that we’re all somewhat uniform — and black shows off jewelry well,” O’Keefe says.

The casual days came about several years ago after Yanina & Co.’s owners noticed their customers were dressing down, even when coming to the store directly from work. “I don’t think anybody is offended by us wearing jeans,” O’Keefe says. “They see it in a lot of other places besides their jewelry store. Our customers love seeing us like this because they say we look like real people,” she says.

Casual days have actually helped build relationships between customers and staff. “We have found that certain customers relate to certain sales people because they share a personal style,” O’Keefe says. “So it’s nice when a customer can see what we like to wear, and we can get into a fashion conversation.”



DRESS • CODE: LAID BACK; TATTOOS OK BUT NOT REQUIRED