

5.2: Dress for Success

Learning Objectives

- Discuss how to dress for success for a sales presentation.

Your appearance communicates volumes about you before you ever open your mouth. You want your prospective customers to take you seriously at first glance, so pay careful attention to what you wear on your sales call. Think about it this way, when you are buying a product off the shelf in a store, isn't packaging the first thing that catches your attention? Marketers know that packaging can influence a consumer's decision to buy before she even researches the product or reads about its features. In the same way, your prospect will make a judgment about you based on the way you "package" yourself; a professionally dressed salesperson can have a huge influence on a prospect's perception of him, his company, and the product he represents. Your appearance should convey professionalism, competence, and success. Most important, regardless of the dress code at your prospect's business, be sure your appearance includes a smile. A smile is an instant rapport builder. No one wants to buy from someone who isn't excited about the company or product he's representing. Show your prospect that this isn't just a job; it's a passion.

Business Casual or Business?

When you are making a sales presentation at a company, dress one step above what you would wear if you worked at the organization. If you are ever unsure about a company's standard dress code, *always* dress up. It's easier to take off a jacket and tie than to put them on at the last minute.

For most of your business-to-business (B2B) sales situations, business attire will be the norm. However, dress codes post-COVID have relaxed. Advice from Forbes suggests being professional in whatever style you choose, being "yourself" by showing personality, and dress to match the industry you are in. Stephanie Coughlan, "Returning To The Office: What Is The Dress Code Now?" Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/04/15/returning-to-the-office-what-is-the-dress-code-now/?sh=7603be9e2f>, April 15, 2022, (accessed May 22, 2024).

Business Casual

Business casual can sometimes be tricky because it's less clearly defined than business attire. According to Indeed.com, business casual "blends traditional business wear with a more relaxed style that's still professional and appropriate for an office environment." Whitney Head, "What is Business Casual", Indeed, May 23, 2023, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/starting-new-job/guide-to-business-casual-attire>, (accessed May 27, 2024). "Business casual is typically defined as no jeans, no shorts, no short dresses or skirts for women, optional ties for men, and a rotation of button-downs or blouses. Business casual dressing is more about avoiding a list of "don'ts" than following a list of "dos" and can vary slightly depending on style, preference, and gender presentation." Anne Sradars, "What is business casual attire?", January 6, 2022, TheStreet.com, <https://www.thestreet.com/lifestyle/...asual-14629494>, (accessed May 27, 2024).

Getting the clothes right but missing the mark on the details will create a poor impression just as much as underdressing for the occasion can, so make sure everything from your nails to your hair and choice of accessories conveys professionalism.

- All clothes should be clean and wrinkle-free.
- If the garment has belt loops, wear a belt. Belts should match shoes.
- Make sure your hair looks professional and well groomed.
- Carry a good quality portfolio or notebook and a nice pen.
- Avoid wearing perfume or cologne.

And don't forget good grooming. Body odor, bad breath, poorly manicured fingernails, and messy hair can be a deal breaker.

Key Takeaways

- When you prepare for a sales presentation, pay careful attention to your appearance because this is an important part of your first impression.
- Always dress more formally than you think your customer will be dressed. When in doubt, dress up.
- Give careful attention to detail, such as accessories and grooming.
- Make sure to convey an image that's in line with your customer's products and values.

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