

Economic value of a makeover

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Dubai and London. Two centres equally affected by the recession, and both reporting the same unexpected finding - that women are spending more on their clothes, hair and general appearance than they were just two years ago. Where you might expect a severe cutback on such luxuries, it seems that women are determined to shine through the gloom by buying a new outfit, having a new hair-style or indulging in another manicure for pretty nails.

But it is the issue of simply 'feeling good' that is actually the key. A global financier once told me that he could judge the calibre of a bank by the image of the female staff there, less to do with pure glamour, more to do with good presentation and self-confidence - an infallible barometer, he said, because such women usually have total choice of where to work.

Yet it is down at the other end - in a company that may be struggling - that the principle is confirmed more strongly, because that is where the test really applies. When a business is under pressure, the confidence and poise of a well-dressed and confident woman may give-out just the right signals that will reassure clients and suppliers, and could actually make the difference between gaining that important contract, and losing it.

This does not mean that organisations should put on what the Americans call a 'charm offensive', with teams of glamour-girls chosen to attract customers with synthetic smiles and half-promises.

But in situations where a new contract can reduce the risk of redundancies, it is of the utmost importance to maintain an outward appearance of confidence and efficiency, because any hint of desperation can either induce your customer to go to your competitor or to make you a substantially reduced offer that they know you cannot refuse.

At my favourite shoe-shop in Dubai, they were having trouble balancing the books, as the manageress, Shabman, had mentioned to me, and even then I got a feeling that she was not revealing the full extent of the crisis.

However one bright spot was the success of their latest line in ladies' boots, and I even bought a pair for myself, stretchy and comfortable. However, after only two days, they suddenly split up the back, and I reluctantly had to return them to the shop. But I was not alone; Shabman was having to cope with a queue of people with the same problem.

Later the next day, Shabman confided to me that these faulty boots could have ruined her business.

But instead of feeling depressed, she awoke early next morning and went to one of Dubai's most prestigious spa-hotels for a breakfast-time pampering session and salon visit.

For ninety minutes, she put all those worrying problems out of her mind, and concentrated on relaxing into a gentle body massage with soothing background music. After one hour she felt invigorated and her usually positive attitude had returned.

Back at the shop, she radiated confidence and dealt with each customer in a caring and understanding manner.

In due course and with her excellent communication skills, the crisis resolved itself and I am certain that it came down to the positive impact of a woman able to work at peak performance, with the psychological ingredient of a good 'makeover' and feeling really good about herself.