

A Uniform approach

Unifying your company through clothes can help branding

Having a uniform for your company is instant brand recognition. Customers know just by looking that a group of people putting up the tent have the authority to do so, based on the same color of their shirts and the logos on the back. When customers have a question, they look for a uniform shirt or name tag by instinct. Whether in a store or out on a job, a uniform is designed to command respect, both for the employee and the company they represent.

"It definitely establishes you as a professional and not just some guy pulled off the street to do a job, which in most cases is the customer's most important day of their life," says John Bibbo Jr., CERP, president, Event Source, Cleveland, Ohio, who is in the process of choosing new uniforms for the company.

However, uniforms don't always elicit the same response from employees who wear them. Clothes are part of each person's identity, so finding a color and style of uniform that will suit everyone in company management, as well as each employee, is next to impossible.

"You simply can't please everyone," says Melani Kodikian, president of A to Z Party Rental, Spring House, Pa. "We have polled employees in the past and it was always a problem. Now, we may ask them for minor preferences, but not for overall decisions. For example, do they prefer zippered or over-the-head sweatshirts?"

Reasons for new uniforms include wear and tear, function and marketing. "We developed a new logo and designated a color to create brand recognition in our area," Kodikian says. "At that time we reissued all employees shirts to be the company color — purple — with the new logo."

"When we re-branded the company in 2007, we wanted uniforms that would support the brand in terms of style, color and the overall look," says Dan Skena, CERP, president, PartySavvy, Monroeville, Pa. "Providing uniforms to our staff gives us control over the impression that they are

going to make on our customers by how they are dressed. We feel that image and first impressions are too important to be left to chance."

Finding a reason to get new uniforms is one thing, but finding the actual uniform is quite another. Factors in the decision include brand, color, style, fit and fabric quality.

"We had test runs of several different options and it did make our decision on products to not invest in as they wouldn't hold up," Bibbo says. "We're still in the process, but wicking material seems to be the way to go."

Once material is decided, the next issue is color and style. "Our uniforms consist of a purple shirt, black pants, black belt and steel-toed shoes," Kodikian says. "We issue a different shirt based on the employee's department. Employees also are provided a black sweatshirt and black winter coat. We do not provide the steel-toed shoes or belt."

She says delivery and shop employees wear short-sleeve or long-sleeve t-shirts. "We find the t-shirt provides more movement, are lightweight and dry quicker. We replace them more frequently than other shirts because they take more abuse from the employees' duties, but they are less expensive to replace," she says.

"Our in-house sales personnel and managers wear short-sleeve or long-sleeve button-down collared shirts. We wanted the sales staff to have a more polished appearance as they are at the front line with the customers," Kodikian says. "Our outside sales staff dress corporate casual and are not required to wear a uniform. However, we do provide them with a complete uniform for the days when we need them to join the ranks and get their hands dirty. During those days they are required to wear the company uniform."

She says the only department that has a different uniform is the tent crew. "After many years of the tent crew complaining about working long days in the sunshine, we changed the color of their **▶ Page 92**

UNIFORMS *From Page 90* t-shirts. The tent crew now wears light grey t-shirts with our logo in purple. They are permitted to wear company-issued Dickie shorts and also are required to wear steel-toed shoes. They noticed an immediate difference with the temperature and the light grey hides the dirt much better than

other colors," she says. Other rental stores also provide all-weather gear. Skena says having a logo on all the clothing helps extend the branding benefit in all types of weather. "For our full-time permanent staff, we outfitted them completely, except for footwear," Skena says. "We provided

them with cargo pants, cargo shorts, collared pullover shirts with a pocket, a light-duty jacket, a winter jacket, a crew neck or hooded sweatshirt, a winter hat and baseball caps. For the seasonal staff, we provide t-shirts and baseball caps only. Our delivery people are out on the road 12 months a year in all kinds of weather. If they need to wear a jacket or a coat, we want it to have our logo. The seasonal workers are normally only with us through the good weather months, which is why we don't provide as much for them. This year, we added something new, which is a black golf type shirt with our logo in white to be worn by staff members when they are working an

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— Melani Kodikian, president, A to Z Party Rental

event as an attendant." Colors, however, can be an issue if they are not regularly carried by a supplier. "We have been working with a uniform company for many years," Kodikian says. "It wasn't until after we chose purple that we discovered the limited options available in purple. Suddenly picking the shirts became very difficult. We spent a few weeks looking through catalogs and searching for options. Ultimately, we had to order from two different companies."

The other issue can be finding all the uniform needs from one source. "The worst part of the process is finding clothing that addresses the varying sizes of each person and finding men's and women's clothing that matches," Bibbo says. He adds that they have researched specialty companies online as well as taking notes from other rental businesses.

In the end, even after uniforms are chosen, employees might have differing opinions. "The worst part was convincing men to wear purple," Kodikian says.

Overall, however, she says the new uniforms have proven to be worth the effort. "The best part is the brand recognition has been successful. Our customers have become familiar with the purple shirt and can pick us out of a crowd. If multiple companies are working at the same site, our clients can find our staff in seconds. In addition, we present ourselves to clients as professionals," she says. **RM**

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