



## You Look Mah-vo-lous?

(the “missing section” from my new book: *Tell The World You Don't Suck*)

We all remember our parents telling us that it doesn't matter what someone looks like on the outside, it's who they are on the inside that counts. That is absolutely true. It's our talents and creativity that really matter when it comes to doing our jobs, and all of that is “inside” material, of course.

Unfortunately, we are all judged first on the outsides. Study after study have shown that people who are perceived to be physically attractive are generally more successful than those who aren't. And in a creative industry, this is even more true--your external image counts a lot, perhaps much more than you realize.

Image (in the rest of this Manual I'm going to use that word to mean your physical external image to the world, not a photographic one or your vision) is important. Like it or not, that is just the way it is. But, it is also a game of perception. There are plenty of people who are not technically beautiful people who are, nonetheless, perceived as attractive and, therefore, have that leg up over their competition. You can take steps to be one of those people. In other words, if you are tall, trim, with facial symmetry (that's what counts when it comes to being seen as a physically beautiful person, in case you didn't know<sup>1</sup>) and great skin, well, thank the gods for your lucky roll of the genetic dice. Most of us do not fall into that category. But we can still look fabulous without resorting to plastic surgery.

The first step is to spend time with your grooming. Because creative pros so often work alone, it is easy to get into the habit of skipping a shave here and there (I'm I'm not just talking about the men) or not bother with makeup or hair products (and I'm not just talking about women here). You might think “no one is going to see me today so I don't have to...” but the reality is that you will encounter other humans just about every day. Maybe it is only the FedEx guy or the people at the grocery, but each of these people count. You are putting the image of your business out there every time you use your business AMEX card or accepting a package or whatever--and you should always look like a put-together professional.

So start every day with good grooming. Bathe or shower (yes, I'm afraid I really do have to mention this) regularly, keep your hair trimmed and pay attention to details like nosehairs, ear-hairs, armpits and legs. Yes, for you women who choose not to shave, you must understand that it is a detriment to your business to have visibly hairy pits or legs--keep them covered<sup>2</sup>. Also for women, pay special attention to mustaches and stray chin hairs--wax, laser, bleach, whatever. Men need to shave every day and to keep any facial hair they choose to keep very

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jyi.org/volumes/volume6/issue6/features/feng.html>

<sup>2</sup> Fair or not, that is just the way it is in the US especially. The preferred aesthetic, by far, is the shaved underarm and leg. In fact, many people think it actually unclean to be otherwise.

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well trimmed. I see many creative males with these scraggly beards--they do not make you look like an *Artiste*, they make you look unemployed (and unemployable). Same for the sloppy haircuts. If you want to do tossed or spikey, then make sure you are using product. Women, same thing--you can do the deliberately "messy" up-dos, but take the time to make them look good.

Oh, and don't forget the deodorant and consider wearing cologne. Scent is important and can stick longer in human memory than many other things. Stick to light scents if you choose to wear any--think citrus (men) and light florals for women. Save the deep, musky, sexy scents for the clubs. And go easy on the amount.

Next, take a look at your wardrobe. What do you generally wear to work? While creatives get a special dispensation from the land of bad suits<sup>3</sup>, that doesn't mean you get to wear just anything. Yes, you can wear denim, but you should make it good denim, for example. Especially for meetings--you can still wear jeans if you insist, but make them a fine pair of designer jeans that *fit you correctly* (take them to a tailor even) and match them with a great jacket and fabulous (collared) shirt. For men, if you look to magazines like GQ and pay attention to their business casual and even their weekend looks, you'll probably be okay. One thing, though: no shorts. Ever. Really. Not even on a shoot when you can avoid it, with the exceptions being like in extreme weather conditions.

For women, the same general rules. If you are going to wear jeans, make them fabulous. Better yet, wear great slacks. Get some great jackets and get them tailored (same for the pants and jeans). Wear nice blouses to meetings, but knit shirts for shoots are fine (like really tailored t-shirt-ish shirts) but maybe throw on a scarf to just add a little somethin'-somethin'. Wear skirts or dresses to meetings when you can or want to (on shoots this is usually impractical of course). Women might be able to get away with city shorts (the very long shorts) but they must be worn with a jacket or something, and definitely great shoes to dress them up.

Speaking of shoes, for both genders this is something to pay attention to. Buy great shoes and keep them polished and in good repair. Many people notice shoes first as a marker of style--as creative pros, you should be stylin'! Again, because you don't have to be conservative you are in luck here--there are all sorts of fabulous shoes out there for either gender, and most are comfortable too. Women don't have to wear heels (for meetings) but they can, and men can consider classics like wingtips, or maybe some fun variation on a classic like a black & white spectator (fun!). The one thing you should avoid? Flip-flops. I love 'em too, but even the fanciest still don't come off professional enough.

Finally, take a look at accessories. Jewelry for both genders is fine, as long as it is cool and not tacky. Gold pinky ring? Probably tacky even if it has been in your family for years. Avoid the gold chain/open collar combo too, please, but earrings on either gender are now the norm in the creative industries so you can wear your diamond studs if you choose or, for women, your

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<sup>3</sup> And as someone now in law school, let me tell you how fabulous you guys have it. There is something akin to a rule of cheesy suits in the Law.

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big hoops or long cascades. Rings can look great on either gender too, just be careful of the tacky. Generally, if you think some guy named Benny the Fish might wear it, just say “no.” Try a great watch for starters. Watches are another thing that people (rather surprisingly) notice and judge you on.

But you don’t have to wear jewelry or be flamboyant. The classics are always in style. Subtle, clean lines, well-pressed with starched shirts and impeccably shined shoes, you’ll be just fine. Over the summer I saw a man in a perfectly tailored green-striped seersucker suit, white shirt with a monogram on his cuff, and tie. He wore no jewelry and had classically preppy shoes on as well. His skin almost glowed as his shave was close and his skin must have been well moisturized. It was over 80° outside and he just looked cool...in every sense of the word. Later I realized that he was actually a physically *tiny* man, but he came off as confident, successful, and just *together*.

The thing is to find your own style. But, “sloppy” is not a style. “It’s just easier to dress this way” and “comfort is my priority” won’t fly either. And you can’t use price as a barrier either. I often get complimented on my style and I can tell you that I never, ever pay full price for anything. Shops like TJMaxx and Marshall’s can be great resources, so can outlet stores like Nordstrom’s Rack. Even Target has some good foundation pieces you can get cheap to wear with your better pieces.

The point is to look your best. You are your company’s representative to the world. You may be going to the store to get coffee for the studio, but maybe you’ll run into a client there--you never know. You want to look your best, look confident, and look like someone a client can trust. To do that, you need to up your outside image a bit. Think of it this way, would you feel more confident spending thousands of dollars with a doctor (specialist) who was well-groomed and had a nice office with good furniture and fresh flowers in the waiting area, or one who had a patched lab coat, stained carpet, and a plastic fern in the corner with dust on it?

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