

YOUR COMPREHENSIVE STARTUP GUIDE



# The Business Mag

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# SUIT



# YOURSELF

Mark Twain once said that “clothes make the man”. His observation that “naked people have little or no influence on society” may be accurate, but is choosing the right clobber still important for work?

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If Richard Branson had worn steel-rimmed glasses and a double-breasted suit and shaved off his beard, I would have taken him seriously. As it was I couldn't." So ran the withering assessment of the Virgin boss by the late Lord King, former chairman of British Airways. Yet he of the aggrrieving beard and wrong suit has become one of the most renowned entrepreneurs of the past 50 years.

So how much does what we wear affect our success? Could Branson have achieved more if he'd impressed Lord King with a tailor-made pinstripe and a shiny fresh chin? We'll never know. But it's clear that, for better or worse,

his approach to clothes made a lasting impression.

We all want to be judged by our output not our wardrobe, but people subconsciously assume the woman in the Armani suit or man in the bespoke three-piece is in charge – not the chap in moccasins and a surfing T-shirt. And looking like you're in charge is a good start when getting folk to invest in your business.

"Dressing up is like getting into a role," says Denise Taylor, chartered psychologist and career coach at Amazing People. "Like an actor, you're finding the right character, and you want to match your appearance to client expectations. Create a good

impression and they will associate positive attributes to you.

Create a negative image, and it's hard to turn it around."

Clothes and image have long shaped our judgments. "In the 1500s, the way people dressed told others about their status," says psychologist Dr Susan Marchant-Haycox. "For ladies, the wider the dress, the higher the status. To the point women had to enter a room sideways their bustles were so ridiculous."

When it comes to the modern workplace, a recent study by Ipsos asked people in 24 countries about what we throw on for our jobs, and found that 55% of workers thought >



**IF THE CAP FITS:**  
We are reassured by professionals dressing in a certain way and are suspicious of those who don't conform to the dress code.

■ **BAGGY TROUSERS,  
DIRTY SHIRT.**  
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properly.



someone wearing business garb was more productive in their job than somebody in civvies. And 65% of workers said that senior managers should always be more dressed up than their team. The fact is we expect a certain sort of professional to dress a certain way. If they don't, it's not congruent with our expectations.

"On holiday last year, I went on a tiny plane," says Taylor. "There were just four passengers, but the pilot still arrived in his white shirt and epaulettes. He needed to be in role and we needed that too. How would we have felt if he'd arrived in jeans and an Iron Maiden T-shirt?"

It all comes down to trust. If you don't look like the service or product you're representing, clients won't feel they can rely on you. "The first thing people see is presentation," says style psychologist Kate Nightingale. "Next is body language, behaviour, how you speak and – only finally – your work. It's important to know what characteristics are demanded from your industry, and to show them."

By dressing smartly you give investors and clients the respect they deserve too. Auster Pickles, founder of bespoke tailor Buxton Pickles, says he always wears suits to client meetings, even if he knows the people, to show he's taking their business seriously. "You spend 20 years of your life working your nuts off to be qualified, so don't then sit opposite the guy who is going to invest in you in a £99 suit that doesn't fit," he says. "If you are talking to an investor about building a business, you want to create an image of a person who runs a successful business already. And you only get one chance to make a first impression. You wouldn't think twice about spending £500 on a course, but a good suit is seen as a 'luxury'. It's crazy."

Surely, you may think, the one place you can wear what you like is home. But even if you're alone in your kitchen office, it's best not to become a fashion scrapheap. Even the swishest ▶

**6 You spend years working your nuts off to be qualified, so don't then sit opposite the guy who is going to invest in you in a £99 suit that doesn't fit 9**



## SAM BOMPAS



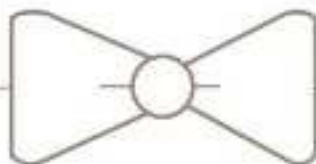
SAM BOMPAS (LEFT) FROM JELLYMONGER BOMPAS & PARR (JELLYMONGERS.CO.UK) ON WHY HE AND BUSINESS PARTNER HARRY PARR'S 'TRADEMARK' BOW TIE HAS WORKED

Today I am wearing bright socks, a scarlet velvet jacket, mint green bow tie and a full-length beaver-fur coat. You need a bow tie when making jelly as a normal tie might dangle into the bowl.

I have always worn bow ties. I was mortified when my father turned up at school in one when I was 16, but then I thought it must be rather good because it's so shocking. Now it's practical too. It means we can whip the aprons off, go from kitchen to front of house and instantly look fly. If you have a signature 'thing' it's like a fun uniform. I love the service wear aesthetic, like the dapper continental waiters from the 1920s. They saw their work as a calling, a fine art. I like to honour that.

First impressions are paramount. I think there is a level of expectation when people come and meet us. They want to see something fun and delightful. We dress to meet expectations: what we wear frames our powerful ideas.

Luckily the people we have to impress formally are there because they want something spectacular, and would rather we didn't tone it down. But I believe everyone can still dress smartly on their own terms. I'd say we are conventional, with just enough difference to be memorable.





of dressing gowns can have a detrimental effect on your own mindset. A 1994 study showed that clothing enhances people's self-perception of work-related attributes including professionalism, intelligence, trustworthiness and efficiency. So pick the right outfit and you'll feel like The Boss. Pick the slouchy jean, and you'll feel exactly that. Slouchy.

"A smart suit arouses different emotions than casual leggings," says Nightingale. "And it will affect how you behave accordingly." What we wear for 'work hours' represents a professional person, distinct from off-duty you at home. Try it: stick on a suit. Note the psychological shift.

However, if all this is true, how did Branson get away with it? The Virgin boss has become symbolic of a breed of enigmatic entrepreneur that has made it to the top despite consciously dressing down. And if business leaders have to shackle themselves to the suit and tie, how come Steve Jobs became the world's most iconic CEO with a wardrobe full of black roll-necks?

While there's one dress code for the Bransons, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberrgs of this world, it seems, the rest of us are wise to follow a different suit. "If you have stacks of experience and lots of client testimonials, you can

be more relaxed about what you wear," says Taylor. "But my take would be, if you're new and don't have as much experience, you're back to those initial judgments."

One thing we could borrow from the Jobs school of fashion is the 'personal brand' that makes you stand out. Having a trademark, whether a mustard jacket or lilac scarf, could be advantageous at networking events, for example, as they make it easier for people to pick you out. "Splashes of individuality are a great thing," says Pickles. "There are ways of having formal attire with individuality. That's what bespoke is all about." ■

**‘ If business leaders have to shackle themselves to the suit and tie, how come Steve Jobs became the world's most iconic CEO with a wardrobe full of roll-necks? ’**



## SO WHO THREW OUT THE SARTORIAL RULEBOOK?

**Richard Branson.** The granddaddy of casual is still rocking scruffy blonde locks and resisting a suit and tie.



**Steve Jobs** was the master of the black roll-neck and jeans. "The message Apple was trying to convey was relaxed and functional and Steve dressed accordingly," says Austen Pickles.

**Craig Newmark** from Craigslist not only has a beret fetish that makes him look like a French painter, but also eschews a tidy tie.



**Dennis Crowley** the co-founder of Dodgeball and Foursquare social networking sites, routinely dons college hoodies. Where's the campus, dude?

**Vivien Holloway** may be in the fashion industry, but she's not sacrificed her vintage 1950s look for anyone. From a stall at Kensington Market to selling all over the world and dressing celebrities, she's made it work.

