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First Impressions: Your Professional Appearance



By [Donna Erickson](#)
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We recommend that our law firm clients ensure that their high standards of professionalism and excellence are reflected not just in the caliber of legal services, but also in their public images and reputations.

Ask any managing partner or law firm marketer about the importance of a lawyer's professional appearance, and get ready for an earful.

First impressions are formed in a matter of minutes - sometimes seconds.

How is your professional appearance?

Clients want their legal counsel to act and look like a lawyer - professional in appearance and in conduct. That doesn't mean you have to wear a suit every day. However, you never want to feel as though you should apologize for how you look. It is always better to err on the side of dressing up than down. Your client base and target market should dictate your attire.

Many firms have elected to go with an open collared business shirt and dress slacks, with coat and tie optional, for men. A good plan for men and women is to keep a neutral coat or jacket in your office for those impromptu business meetings that come up where you wouldn't want to be less than business professional in your dress.

In some law firms, men and women lawyers are dressed so casually they can easily be mistaken for support staff. Business casual has gone by the wayside in many firms because people took the "casual" part too seriously. You really don't know who you may be meeting on any given day, so your dress should always be professional. And you never know whose clients you will meet in the hall or on the elevator.

Men. If you are going to wear a tie, do button the top button of your shirt. If the collar is too tight, buy shirts that fit or get them custom made. Either you have a beard and mustache, or you don't. The simple unshaven look leaves an impression of just being too lazy this morning to care about your appearance.

Women. Is your hairstyle dating your look? Make sure your style is professional and age appropriate. Do you find yourself opting for khakis and a blouse or sweater? Investing in a classic, professional wardrobe is a good decision.

Staff. If your firm has already gone to casual day on Friday, have you been specific about what should not be worn? Casual day originally meant well kept jeans, but in many firms, people have taken that far down the road. Do your clients really want to see representatives of their law firm in old jeans, flip flops, or T-shirts?

Is it time for an image makeover? With a reputation of financial success, appropriate dress and grooming should never be an obstacle for a lawyer. A lawyer who looks like he or she is 20 years old or consistently dresses on the casual end of the spectrum may have difficulty gaining the trust and confidence of clients. A young lawyer may benefit from a professional hairstyle and adding basic, classic items to their wardrobe. Look in the mirror and ask yourself, "Could an outsider easily identify me as a lawyer and not a member of support staff?" There are salons that offer image makeovers for men and women, including a recommendation of a style and colors of clothing for your professional image. Personal shoppers can help you find the right clothing within your budget.

You only get one chance to make a first impression

About the Author . . . [Donna Erickson](#) is the President of [Erickson Marketing, Inc.](#), a national full-service marketing consulting firm working exclusively with law firms. She has more than 20 years of hands-on experience developing and implementing effective marketing initiatives in law firms, both large and small. Donna is a charter member and past-president of the Minnesota Chapter of the Legal Marketing Association and can be reached at +1. 612. 669. 5548, Donna@EricksonMarketingInc.com, Erickson Marketing, Inc., P.O. Box 490758, Minneapolis, MN 55449.



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