



BEWARE THE MYTHS AROUND A SOUND IMAGE

Chata is interviewed by Catherine Milward-Bridges, a seasoned communication specialist, who founded simplyput.co.za, where engagement savvy and business smarts meet.

In business a book is most certainly judged by its cover. First impressions don't only last; they matter - especially in business.

The modern day business has to use the currency of attention to gain - and hopefully retain - new customers. Therefore, the image that you and your business create is critical to its success.

The best way to tackle this topic is to dispel the myths around it.

Myth 1: Building a healthy bottom line is a lot more important than worrying about an image

Let's look at what is needed to build (and maintain) a healthy bottom line:

- Motivated and engaged staff
- Happy customers who will confidently recommend your business to friends and acquaintances
- A steady stream of new customers
- Shareholders who respect you as a business person
- Suppliers with whom you have a good rapport

All of the above need a business owner to present and carry themselves in a way that commands respect. In other words, they need to look and feel good about themselves, in order to win over key people.

Myth 2: This is too effeminate a topic for real businessmen

In order to be effective in business, you need to invest in yourself.

This goes beyond training and self-development. It's also about creating an image of yourself and your business that echoes your brand. The way you look and how you feel are intertwined. If you don't look good - regardless of gender - you're not likely to feel good.

So, the package that you present to the world every day will certainly impact on your momentum as a business person. Michael Mol, Patrice Motsepe and Richard Branson are a case in point.

Myth 3: Incurring expense for building one's image, is throwing good money after bad

The evolved customer wants more than just a product or a service. They want to build a relationship with business owners - to feel that their interest in them (the customer) surpasses a share of their wallet.

A sound business and self-image is:

- The catalyst to cementing those critical relationships with customers, staff and shareholders
- Empowering and catching; those with whom you interact will be a lot more receptive if they feel empowered in your presence
- A vital networking tool
- Like brilliant architecture - it draws people

Though I pride myself on being an ardent advocate of service excellence, I do concede that in the absence of sound relationships, it does fall flat. So, investing in a sound image would be money very well spent.

Princeton psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov's findings are among several others that claim that it takes less than one second to form an impression of a stranger.

What impression are you and your business creating? Tell us what you think. How have you reaped the benefits of a sound image - in business and personally?

The message is clear: How you look is how you feel!