

**better image,
better
bottom line**

chapter three

Rachel Quilty

What if you could simply and cost effectively ...

- ❖ brand a powerful business image
- ❖ create an image that attracts clients
- ❖ develop a business image reflecting your business goals
- ❖ build a business presence that projects integrity and credibility
- ❖ position your business image for your market's expectations.

You'll be surprised how simple it is and more importantly, anyone can do it. This chapter is especially for you if:

- ❖ you are having difficulty gaining business authority and respect
- ❖ you are unsure of the appropriate business image to support your goals
- ❖ your image does not reflect your potential.

By giving you foundation knowledge of image and the importance of perception, you will be able to determine what impacts your business image and then develop simple strategies to enhance your business success.

Why is image so important?

The better your image, the better your bottom line. It's that simple. In 30 seconds your potential client has judged your business and decided whether they like you, whether they trust you and whether they will do business with you. Thirty seconds is a very short time, but you **can** manage the impressions your clients make of your business in that time.

Consider these important points ...

Having your business image consistent with your business brand, mission and service standards is essential. Your business image affects everything including your:

- ❖ marketability
- ❖ market position
- ❖ market penetration
- ❖ ability to attract and keep clients
- ❖ the price clients are willing to pay for your products and services.

Within this chapter you will learn how to:

- ❖ align your business image with client expectations
- ❖ build a business identity that complements your image
- ❖ strengthen your professional effectiveness.

Why is image so important for home-based businesses?

You are the message!

Often without the resources of large businesses, home-based businesses need to think carefully about what image they are presenting to their clients.

It is critical for home-based businesses to recognise the importance of their personal, professional and business image.

A client's impression of you will determine if they will do business with you.

Without a doubt limited resources is a major issue. Fortunately changing your business image can be inexpensive. You can present an incredibly professional image on a budget.

So what is a business image?

They say, “If you look good, your product will be good, your prices will be good and your client service will be good.”

You cannot always control business image because image is based on the perceptions of clients or potential clients, but you can control your business identity.

When planned, it allows the company to tell its audience what it wants to say about itself and how it wants to be perceived. A good business identity will visually separate and distinguish a company and its products and services from all others. In a sense identity is destiny, and by controlling your identity, you have taken a big step in controlling your destiny.

Your business image is the result of a combination of impressions held about your name and brand. These impressions are derived from factors including:

- ❖ physical appearance such as logo, colours, office, uniforms and vehicles
- ❖ your business beliefs and values
- ❖ how they are reflected in your performance
- ❖ how you express yourself to your clients, market and community.

Social psychologists say first impressions are made up of 55% visual, 38% tonality, and lastly 7% in the words we use.

Public perception and your business image are the intangible factors to on going market success and growth.

The best positioning you can have among your prospects and clients is that of an expert; an authority in your area of expertise.

For business success you must manage your total image. This broadly comprises of your performance, presentation, attitude, communication skills and reputation. These are the vital areas of 'image' from which we are all judged.

Let's consider each in turn ...

1. Presentation

Social psychologists say first impressions are made up of 55% visual, 38% tonality, and lastly 7% in the words we use.

Visual impressions are important and part of the communication process. Visual aspects of your business such as vehicles, staff attire, workspaces and stationery should reflect the overall elected business image.

Select a business image and attire which impacts on business success. Look at the leaders in your field and model them. If you look like the top people in your field, you are inevitably on the path to the top.

Many companies change their results by establishing a dress code for the people in their company who deal with clients. They know the importance of appearance. They recognise people make lasting and important decisions based on how they look on the outside.

Presenting a professional image is a direct reflection on you:

- ❖ Do you care about yourself?
- ❖ Are you disciplined?
- ❖ Do you provide attention to detail?
- ❖ How you will treat a client?

This includes personal image aspects such as hair, nails, oral and skin care, personal hygiene, overall presentation and shoes. Your grooming must be impeccable. Encourage your staff to appear as neat, tidy and attractive as possible. It has been proven that more attractive people are more persuasive.

2. Attitude and communications skills

Being your own PR department means your relationships and promotion opportunities depend on your own communication efforts.

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More than 70 percent of us do not care for advertising. We are looking instead for the human touch. Too many marketers have forgotten one simple truth - human communication is one of our greatest needs.

Research has shown when businesses lose clients 70 percent are lost because they do not like the human side of doing business with that organisation. Through more effective communication, you can build your human side and your brand.

Be positive, upbeat and decisive. If someone likes their work, it shows in happier communication, reflecting well on the business. We prefer to talk with somebody who smiles and laughs readily, and is interested and enthusiastic.

Corporations also know the importance of the human touch and train their client service people in the art of remembering and using names.

If you take a positive and deliberate approach to networking, you will find this extra level of attention makes it easier to establish relationships. The advantage in small business is you can manage this simply by being you. You will succeed by being yourself, not by pretending to be someone you are not.

Tailor your message to whomever you are talking. Always make sure you are prepared to have a bit of fun, even when dealing with the serious side of business.

3. Performance and reputation

Businesses are continually looking for the edge. Successful communication occurs when performance matches the image. Only when you add action to words are you believed. Communication is not a neutral act; it aims for a result. Often you can contribute significantly by doing what you promised.

The total 'experience' a client has with your product or services will determine your business success.

The buying decisions of clients are based on value and image. However attaining and maintaining a good image can't be an end in itself. The first rule of effective business image is not just to look good, but also to be good. Every organisation, regardless of size is challenged to remain differentiated, significant and relevant.

Therefore, as tangible differences in actual services and products diminish, the client perception of an organisation and their product or services has now become the key market place differentiator.

One of the rules of success is that 'Everything counts!'

What is your current business image?

Making a statement about your business image includes the following:

- ❖ office
- ❖ stationery
- ❖ attire or staff uniforms
- ❖ marketing material
- ❖ website
- ❖ email and correspondence
- ❖ answering machine message
- ❖ telephone greeting
- ❖ response to client queries
- ❖ vehicles
- ❖ staff conduct and appearance.

Consider each issue and what message these items say about your personal, professional and business image? Create a list of phrases that come to mind. This is step one to improving your business image and will be referred to later in this chapter.

How you are perceived contributes to how people behave towards you. It is in your best interest to develop a credible and effective business image to develop the most persuasive image.

What is your best business image?

Your business image should reflect your abilities, values, goals and business mission.

Your image MUST:

- ❖ reach your target clientele
- ❖ reinforce your brand and preferred reputation
- ❖ generate trust
- ❖ have a degree of longevity and consistency.

Create a list of phrases that reflects your preferred business image. This list will be used later in Step 2 when identifying an appropriate image for your business.

In summary, you should have outlined attributes you would like clients to list about your business and what reputation you would like your business to have in the community.

Why change or update your business image?

The right business image can:

- ❖ help you achieve your business goals
- ❖ improve your business credibility, branding and positioning
- ❖ improve your communication and persuasiveness

Businesses who have a professional image, are appropriately attired and/or have the trappings of authority are accorded more attention or obedience by those they encounter.

- ❖ increase your staff's confidence and effectiveness
- ❖ earn you improved market standing and success. When you communicate with purpose you begin to build your brand edge. Seventy percent of a market will pay a 20% premium on branded products, and forty percent will pay a 30% premium.

Consider your brand and reap the rewards!

Your image directly influences your thinking, what you are feeling and your behaviour; and then influences those we interact with through their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

Sixty-seven percent of first impressions are accurate. People judge you firstly by appearance, then by how you communicate, and finally by the words you use. Is your business image an accurate reflection?

You can save money on advertising by improving all aspects of your business image. Improving your image is the direct effect of improving your perceived professionalism and quality of your brand.

Research has shown time and again there is a direct correlation between a product's level of awareness and its market share. Even more fascinating is the fairly common

perception that a better known product is a better product; whether it is or not.

In order to create perceptions, a steady flow of information is needed to raise awareness. Remember your goal is to control the flow of information about you and to do that, you must provide information that clearly defines your business which in turn is you!

Keeping up a steady flow of information increases your chances of influencing what people think of you, your product, service or company. The absence of such information leaves it for your critics and competitors to define your business.

A fact, which has been confirmed by many studies, is that businesses who have a professional image, are appropriately attired and/or have the trappings of authority are accorded more attention or obedience by those they encounter. Improving your business image increases your persuasiveness.

It is likely you are not taking advantage of this principle. Consequently you are undervaluing and very possibly, underselling yourself and/or your business.

How do we improve our image and design the best image?

There are four steps to improving your business image.

1. Identify your existing image
2. Determine your preferred image
3. Plan the strategic aspects of your new image
4. Implement your new image

You need to develop a highly effective professional image thus creating credibility. Investing in your business image is investing in your future success.

Let's create a better bottom line for your business with a better business image. *Further tips and case studies are available at www.jumptheq.com.au.*

Step 1 - Identify your existing image

Most important is the consistent delivery of products and services with your business image. Your business performance is what underlines your business image. Your image can be critically harmed if your performance is inconsistent with your image.

Consider how your potential may be discounted by the perceptions of others. You need to ensure you manage that perception. It will make an extraordinary difference. How you are known; your personal or business brand or your reputation is the most important thing as it is your promise to your client. This will ensure your business or personal integrity.

In order to improve, we must first identify the current perceptions and reputation of our business.

Review the list you developed in the *What is your current business image?* (page 68) section that identified a number of items which make a statement about your business image such as your office, stationery and attire.

When people consider your business, what words would they use to describe it? These words should be contained in your list.

Is this your ideal business image and is it accurate?

Let's now examine Step 2 to ensure we have captured every ingredient of your preferred reputation and future business image.

Step 2 - Determine your preferred image

Determine what values, virtues and qualities reflect your business. What do you believe in? List a number of attributes, values or qualities you would like identified with your business eg. professional, excellence, creative, leader. Review the list you developed in the *What is your best business image? section (page 69)* and continue to develop a list of words you would like your clients to say when they consider your business.

The goal is to make the first impression a powerful statement of the self serving result the prospective client is going to receive from purchasing your products or services. The only reason they deal with you is that, to some extent, they see an advantage in it for themselves. They are buying a result or a benefit.

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say about yourself; however you describe yourself; whatever image you develop; people will accept without argument. They will then watch your behaviour to make sure what you say about yourself and the way you behave are consistent with each other.

Step 3 - Plan the strategic aspects of your new image

Does your business image:

- ❖ reflect your market's expectations?
- ❖ powerfully reinforce your brand?
- ❖ attract clients?
- ❖ reflect your business goals?
- ❖ imply your business success which includes your attire?
- ❖ complement your brands, logos and colours?
- ❖ reflect the culture of the business?
- ❖ strengthen your professional effectiveness?

What changes can you make to improve your image?

The following issues should also be considered when planning your new image:

- ❖ Position yourself with your business image

You should develop the habit of continually thinking about how you are positioned in the hearts and minds of your clients.

Seek feedback from your staff on what they believe is professional, realistic and appropriate.

- ❖ Your business image must reflect your brand

Your brand should identify you as a leader and therefore should be distinctive and visible as well as consistent.

- ❖ Your clients will judge you quickly by your appearance

A decision about your abilities, capabilities and effectiveness are determined initially by what you wear before you say a word. Adopt a big business approach. An appropriate dress code is a core part of every business image. Develop a look which is comfortable, smart and easy to maintain, and make it your unofficial uniform. Your business uniform should reflect the image, values and standards of the business. A coordinated, consistent and professional image becomes your signature. You become a professional brand.

- ❖ Ensure your business image commands your authority
Whether it is a uniform, vehicle or stationery; the trappings of power or wealth should be consistent with your position as an expert in your field as people are easily swayed by the appearance of authority.

- ❖ Changing your professional or business image

This process operates on an emotional, psychological and physical level. A professional image will generate an increase in teamwork, discipline and efficiency.

❖ Why adopt a 'uniform' approach?

Necessity! Your professional business image must be consistent. Use templates, stationery, scripts and consistent procedures. You are quickly able to do what is required, knowing it will promote an effective business image.

❖ Prioritise areas with the most impact for immediate results

These may include your email and correspondence format, email signature, answering machine message and telephone greeting so as to respond to client queries more effectively.

❖ Improving business image and morale

Upgrading the office and workspaces to ensure they appear clean, tidy and professional. This may include new office and reception furniture as well as ensuring vehicles are detailed and restocked.

❖ Review your marketing material

Your website, stationery and promotional material may need additional time and resources and should be budgeted accordingly. Is it consistent, branded and in line with your preferred image?

❖ Annually review your client service policies

Seek feedback from your staff on what they believe is professional, realistic and appropriate.

Consistency in your message or business image is essential to assure clients you can deliver; and your promise is the same today as it is tomorrow.

❖ Style is important

When upgrading your business image, style includes appearing in a way which reflects your individuality and current trends. Having style sends the message you are confident in yourself and your business. Style is about projecting an accurate sense of yourself and your business. Ensure you and your staff identify with the business image and your unique business elements.

❖ Branding

Ensure your business image is branding your business and reflects your products and/or services' market position. Your overall image should be consistent with your brand. For example budget or luxury, high quality, inexpensive products and services should be marketed consistently as budget or luxury etc.

❖ Confidence

When you look good and appear comfortable with yourself, your appearance can then recede from attention and others can focus on you and the conversation. Focus clients on the relevancy of your products and services rather than if they want to do business with you as they consider your image.

❖ Consistency

Consistency in your message or business image is essential to assure clients you can deliver; and your promise is the same today as it is tomorrow.

❖ Timing can be everything

Strategically plan the introduction of various aspects of your new image. Ensure staff have had sufficient time to clearly understand and embrace the changes.

❖ Colour has an immediate psychological impact

Choose the colour and design of your stationery, logo and uniforms with care.

Step 4 - Implementing your new image

Execution! If you are specific and action oriented, your relationships and business can really take off.

An interesting aspect to human behaviour is that we will behave consistently with a commitment we have made. This underlines the importance of you and your staff's ownership of outcomes; as well as taking the time to commit to designing and then implementing your improved business image.

As a commitment device, a written acceptance to maintain and uphold the business image of the company at all times has great advantages. Research has concluded that whenever one takes a stand that is visible to others, there arises a drive to maintain that stand in order to look like a consistent person.

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When seeking this commitment from staff, provide an explanation of why you are implementing new measures such as staff uniforms or codes of conduct. *Because* is the key word. Because people simply like reasons for doing what they do. Ensure your staff understand how important their image is to you.

If you are not taking advantage of managing your business image, chances are you are undervaluing and very possibly, underselling yourself and/or your business.

Image management is vital in today's business world.

With a better image, a better bottom line is achievable.

Often your incredible potential is not recognised because your outer presentation does not endorse you. Take charge of the message you deliver.

How do we achieve this? We may be small or home-based but these businesses have resources that large businesses do not.

Generally, you

- ❖ have all the information you need to make a decision.
- ❖ are more agile, responsive and can change direction promptly.

❖ are the human touch.

❖ control the message. Your enthusiasm, passion and commitment will inspire.

❖ have the whole business at your fingertips.

It makes sense to focus and invest in areas impacting on your client's perception of your business. Altering your business image can be effective in capturing a greater market, building presence and ensuring long term business success.

In essence, you can control your bottom line.

The better your image, the better your bottom line. It's that simple. In 30 seconds your potential client has judged your business and decided whether they like you, whether they trust you and whether they will do business with you.

Rachel Quilty



Rachel Quilty

Advising over 1500 businesses on an employer's legal obligations, Rachel Quilty acknowledges that it can be a challenge ensuring a professional business image at all times and recognises the complexity that surrounds introducing dress codes, customer service and other company policies.

Rachel Quilty, National General Manager of Jump the Q, a Professional Image Consulting and Finishing School, regularly speaks at seminars, conferences and workshops on professional image, personal branding and appropriate work wear.

For over a decade Rachel Quilty butted heads with the Electrical Trades Union within the Construction Industry as an Industrial Relations Advocate representing employers. When the union threatened lights out for Queensland, Rachel's role was leading a swift return to work. With 1000's of electricians regularly on strike appearing before various Courts and Commissions is second nature for Rachel as is the strategic management of industrial and human resource issues.

It is essential to understand the important role that image management play in effective marketing, negotiations, sales, communication and customer service. Specialising in professional and business image, Jump the Q's work addresses educating individuals and businesses on vital verbal and non-verbal communication. They say, "that the meaning of the communication is the response you get." It is vital in business to manage your personal and corporate identity and image to ensure a positive response, successful promotion and business positioning.

- ❖ To contact Rachel call 1300 655 755 or email info@jumptheq.com.au or visit www.jumptheq.com.au for free ebook