

BUSINESS

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Dressing execs for success

Elmhurst-based consultant finds image is everything

By Mindy Spicer
For Press Publications

Elegance is the word that springs to mind when Anna Wildermuth, president and owner of Elmhurst-based Personal Images Inc., walks into the room.

A graduate of the London Image Institute in Atlanta and a certified image consultant, Wildermuth has extensive training in image enhancement techniques, and the color and psychology of clothing. She is president-elect of the Association of Image Consultants International and works with a variety of high-profile businesses and individuals.

Wildermuth started her professional career in the real estate industry.

"I was a real estate broker for a long time, and many of my colleagues would comment on how well I understood style and that I had a knack for 'making a connection' to my customers," said Wildermuth.

There were several events over several years that steered Wildermuth in the direction of image consulting.

"Once in a while I would put together wardrobe capsules for sales people to help them with their image. Then I had a cousin where the airline lost her luggage, and they would not give her the money unless she actually went out and spent the \$3,000. So, I helped her replace her whole wardrobe, and I began to see where my natural talents were. I just seemed to naturally understand what went together for every season," said Wildermuth.

Once it occurred to her that this was something she could do professionally, Wildermuth began to really research the concept.



Ray Luna/Press Publications

Image consultant Anna Wildermuth adjusts the blazer of William Reyburn, an associate of James A. Ekblad accounting agency.

"I discovered that there were several schools that you could go to in order to get credentials in image consulting," said Wildermuth. "I decided to attend the Image Institute in Atlanta. I became certified and even now I continue to take classes."

It was shortly after this that Wildermuth had the opportunity to handle the clothing for a major golf tourna-

ment. Selecting the designs and coordinating the purchase of all the clothing for players, officials and even the concession people was an exciting challenge that finally convinced Wildermuth that she had found her calling.

"I then went to the Small Business Association and researched the numbers to see if it would be viable as a full-time business. I could see that

it might be a bit of a stretch, because it is certainly an 'added value' area of consulting. So I would have to be very clear about what value could be gained by people using my services," said Wildermuth.

"There also isn't any inventory in this business, which is a plus in some ways, but all you are really selling is your services, so there really isn't

anything to 'mark up,'" said Wildermuth. "Even with all this, I decided I really liked image consulting, and I also like the idea of working for myself, even though I knew there would be a down side."

Wildermuth believes consulting is an interesting field.

"However, you can be the best at what you do, but the work can go up and down depending on what the needs are, whether the chemistry with the potential client is right, and if the money is right," she said. "And, of course, you have to continually remind people of the value they will gain from something like image consulting. Because no tangibles change hands, people can sometimes lose sight of this concept."

Image Consulting is a very practical and pragmatic thing to Wildermuth.

"I understand the bottom line, that image is important to a company. I don't get caught in the design elements to the point of being impractical," she said.

Wildermuth covers a lot of territory in her consulting business, from one-on-one coaching with executives and their wives, to coordinating and managing the new "look" to match a major corporation's name change.

"For example, I've had a wife of a top-level executive come to me all in a panic because they were expected to go on an overseas business trip and attend functions on behalf of the company. I was able to consult with her, look at what her agenda was, and coordinate the appropriate clothes and accessories to match each event."

Wildermuth runs two-day workshops for executives to meet with her one-on-one.

"These two-day Professional
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