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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

BUSINESS | DECEMBER 14, 2010

Dress to Impress, UBS Tells Staff

By ELENA BERTON

First impressions count. This is the message Swiss bank UBS AG is sending its Swiss retail banking staff with a 43-page code dispensing advice on how to impress customers with a polished appearance.

Echoing rules applied at Swiss boarding schools, UBS's guidelines go beyond a list of dress "do's" and "don'ts" by providing hygiene and grooming tips often dotted with aphorisms worthy of fashion and beauty magazines.

The move is part of a test UBS is carrying out in Switzerland across five pilot branches. It follows a recent advertising campaign aimed at re-establishing confidence in the Swiss bank's brand and mending relations with clients.



Swiss bank UBS released a detailed employee dress code with suggestions on perfume and eating habits that is raising eyebrows across the internet. WSJ's Elva Ramirez discusses the controversy.

The UBS Dress Code: Do's and Don'ts

Do's

For women:

Wear your jacket buttoned.

When sitting, the buttons should be unfastened.

Make sure to touch up hair regrowth regularly if you color your hair.

For men:

Store your suit on a large hanger with rounded shoulders to preserve the shape of the garment.

Schedule barber appointments every four weeks to maintain your haircut shape.

As if taking a cue from style manuals, which often stress the importance of well-cut basic outfits in neutral colors, the bank expects its retail banking staff to wear suits in dark grey, black or navy blue, since these colors "symbolize competence, formalism and sobriety."

Short skirts are off limits for female staff, who are told the ideal length should reach the middle of the knee. Showy accessories and trendy spectacles are a no-no. The document isn't short of handy grooming tips.

"Light makeup consisting of foundation, mascara and discreet lipstick ... will enhance your personality," the code says, while advising women not to wear black nail polish and nail art.

The hair-care section notes studies have shown that properly cared-for hair and a stylish haircut "increase an individual's popularity."

On the other hand, designer stubble is out of the question for men, as is excessive facial hair. UBS's advice for men even extends to underwear, which should be of good quality and easily washable, but still remain undetectable. Black knee-high socks are preferable as they prevent showing bare skin when crossing legs, it says.

Strong fragrances are unadvisable in the presence of customers, along with garlic and cigarette breath, the code says. The solution: "Avoid garlic and onion-based dishes."

Don'ts

- Eating garlic and onions
- Smoking or spending time in smoke-filled places
- Wearing short-sleeved shirts or cuff links
- Wearing socks that are too short, showing your skin while sitting
- Allowing underwear to be seen
- Touching up perfume during or after lunch break
- Using tie knots that don't match your face shape and/or body shape

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Oswald J. Gruebel, chief executive of Swiss Bank UBS, speaks during a press conference in Zurich earlier this year.

Accessorizing for male staff excludes items like bracelets and earrings, but wearing timepieces is encouraged, since wristwatches suggest "reliability and great care for punctuality."

Male employees are also warned about using hair dyes to mask their advancing age, since the "artificial color contrasts excessively with the actual age of your skin."

UBS spokesman Jean-Raphael Fontannaz acknowledged that the code may appear very detailed and "in line with Swiss precision," but pointed out that these guidelines were originally set up for temporary staffers who may be new to working in a banking environment.

He said the dress code may be rolled out in all UBS's branches in Switzerland if the test proves successful. "Even so, only around 1,500 [employees] would be affected, less than 10% of our staff in Switzerland," Mr. Fontannaz added.

"The goal is for clients to immediately know that they are at UBS when they are entering the bank," he said. "After the test phase we may implement the dress code, or adapt it, or not use it at all."

—Anita Greil in Zurich contributed to this article.

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*Thank God I work for myself
and can dress as I please as
well as enjoy a good manly
stubble!*

—Michael Dubonnais

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