



Image of Success

WITH STARS, CORPORATE HOUSES AND GOVERNMENT BECOMING CONSCIOUS ABOUT THEIR IMPRESSION, IMAGE CONSULTING IS EMERGING AS A CAREER OPTION



Remember the blurb 'First impression is the last impression' – a common mantra for students to impress teachers in school, or wooing a potential date or cracking a job interview?

This familiar blurb has outgrown and metamorphosed into Image Consulting, which is catching on in India. Creating the right impression is no longer a soft skill – its a viable profession.

Image Consulting is about understanding one's image and enhancing it for improved branding. The urge to look good and make a lasting impression on the people we meet is a normal human behaviour. This has become a necessity for one and all now.

According to Nidhi Sharma, founder of Bon Impressions, an image consulting firm in Mumbai, "India has become a global village and Indians are slowly becoming global citizens. From colleges to the corporate world, everyone is now aware that we need to appear, behave and

communicate in a manner that leaves lasting impression on people. Exposure and intense competition has brought in the desire, not only to excel, but also add the "X" factor to our personality."

India is the youngest country in the world today. Statistics indicate that the average age of an Indian will be 29 by 2020. The result is stiff competition, forcing candidates who face campus placements, job interviews or promotions to project an image that exudes competence, capability and confidence.

This competition is leading more and more people to image consultants to help enhance their image.

Rakesh Agarwal of Image Consulting Business Institute (ICBI), believes that presenting oneself the right way has made Image Consulting relevant. "With competition increasing by the day it is important to present oneself better in order to get more out of opportunities in life. Everyone realises this today and Image Consulting is the only solution available. More than 80% of any communication, any message is visual and although all of us carry certain skills, ability and experience but the people we meet often judge us by what meets the eye," said Agarwal.

ICBI claims to be a pioneering venture in the image consulting space in India and in three years has become a big player in the field. Worldwide, it's a 40 year old multibillion dollar industry.

In the last ten years, the sector has grown fast. Agarwal says, "This is probably one of the fastest growing industry and in another couple of years it will become a need. Even in recession, it does better; when things are tough and people realise that the only thing that will save them is to become even better."

This has boosted Image Consulting and transformed the concept of personal grooming into a phenomenon. From an individual to a corporate, every player seeks to project itself the best way.

The industry is big in Mumbai and Delhi. Individual image correction is prominent in Mumbai with celebrities

taking the help of image consultants for a successful career.

Mansi Kapadia, owner of fashion image consultant studio. Ra-The styling studio, in Mumbai has a clientele which includes Asha Bhosle, Sameera Reddy, Neil Nitin Mukesh, Ustad Amjad Ali & Sons, Mona Singh, Rashmi Desai, Ajay Jadeja and Shekhar Suman among others.

She has also done styling for shows like *Nach Baliye 4*, *Comedy Circus 20-20*, *Indian Idol*, *Boggie Woggie*, *Master Chef Kitchen India*, and *Dance India Dance*.

"Personal grooming is very important now as an image consultant gives a third person perspective about your personality which helps in the overall grooming thereby exuding authority through your personality," said Kapadia.

She has seven years of experience in styling and believes in refining a personality rather than changing it.

The corporate world - retail industry, airline and hospitality industry as well as fashion and styling industry is well aware of projecting a positive image. This consciousness is leading companies to groom employees in soft skills to create the right image on clients.

British Academy for English Language (BAFEL) founded by Alka Gupta in 2001, is one such organisation which is working on a large scale in Delhi.

Gupta says her firm offers customised training for Team Building, Conflict Management, Crisis handling, communication skills, business communication, public speaking and presentation skills, personal effectiveness, coaching and mentoring, personality development and grooming, positive attitude, leadership skills, interpersonal skills and motivational workshops to clients.

Her clientele includes companies and some foreign embassies and high commissions.

BAFEL recently worked with Delhi Police and Delhi Metro to organise a stress management workshop and communication skill programme for them respectively.

Talking about image consulting at



KNOW MORE

What is image consulting?
Image consulting is a training programme that helps in improving one's image for better branding.

Who can opt for it?
Anyone, whether a student or a working professional, who has a knack towards image correction.

How rewarding is the career?
An image consultant one can earn from two services; personal coaching and corporate workshops. This can vary anywhere from Rs 30,000 to Rs 2,00,000 per month, depending on the career stage.

Why do you need image consultant?
If you want your image or the image of your company to create the right impression.



and its need in the corporate world, Gupta said, "Everybody in any capacity needs to interact with people and that person carries an image of the company. Image consulting can help in creating a good impact. Companies when hiring often compromise on the soft skills aspect but the need remains. Image correcting is what everybody needs whether it is public or private, individual or group."

Gupta has been in this industry for 11 years and informs that directors and CEOs of big companies come for consulting as well. BAFEL has already opened one centre at

Dhaka in Bangladesh.

Image consulting experts feel it is both an art and science. Alka Gupta believes it to be a science as it involves the psychology of each client. "We need to work on the psychology of people; the family background and potential are to be kept in mind. We deal with people and not machines," says Gupta.

Nidhi Sharma believes it is a combination of both a science and art. "It's an art and a science. Art because it gives us space to be creative, be authentic and present ourselves in the style best representative of our personality, goals and

aims. And science because there is logical and researched reasons why we need to manage our conduct and the impact our non-verbal communication has on others," said Sharma.

Demand is huge, feels Gupta. The demand requires adequate supply of trained professionals who could help in enhancing image of an individual as well as a company. This demand leaves a lot of scope for students to explore a profession in image consulting.

Reiterating the surging demand for image consulting, Nidhi Sharma said, "It's a budding industry and

growing at a fast pace, for those who are interested in wanting to have a career; working with people and making a difference, image management is a very fulfilling option. Image Management can take candidates into various aspects of personal development and can be an added advantage for those working in HR field. Candidates can choose to work with various age groups of people from children to professionals, from corporate to fashion, from housewives to politicians, the segments are varied and can be adapted according to interest."

Experts point out that not everybody can be an image consultant. Saira Shah Halim, co-founder and principal consultant of Attitude Learning System, says certain skills are required to be an image consultant.

"To be an image consultant one needs to have a knack for it. An additional knowledge in communication is essential," said Halim, who has been in communication, soft skills and voice and accent training for nine years.

However Mansi Kapadia of 'Ra-The styling Studio' believes image consulting is a good option for working professionals or ones looking for an alternative. It is a viable option for women and image consulting to an extent is a womens' bastion.

Nidhi Sharma of Bon Impressions says, "For a professional this can be a great alternative option, I myself, was an advertising professional for 15 years and switched to Image consulting and have been working in the field for the past 3 years. I have never regretted the decision. It's not only fulfilling, it gives you an opportunity to become an entrepreneur. For those in HR and training field, Image Consulting is an added advantage that can propel their career growth. For others it can be a great part time option for added income in spare time."

Commenting on the sector, Rajesh Agarwal of ICBI said, "Till six months back, it was more of women looking at this profession as a

second career but lately there is a huge surge of youngsters coming forward. Today, increasingly, youngsters are looking for the freedom to do something on their own rather than doing a 9 to 5 job."

While it is a phenomenon in Delhi and Mumbai, experts believe Kolkata still has a long way to go.

"Kolkata has huge potential but it is untapped. It's a big business in Mumbai thanks to Bollywood but Tollywood is hesitant to hire a stylist. I think the sense of styling and the entire idea of Image building needs to be sold properly to Kolkatans. It's about time corporates in Kolkata should realise that undergoing training is an essential investment and not an unnecessary expenditure," says Halim, who believes individual and brand management will take some time to

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flourish in the Kolkata market.

Rakesh Agarwal of ICBI disagrees. He says eastern India is the biggest market for any educational or training school.

"Earlier, we were promoting it as a secondary career but very soon it will be a mainstream career. The average age earlier was 35 but now even 19-year olds enrol for the course," said Agarwal. His institute offers a range of courses along with support system for aspiring image consultants.

If you have it in you to make a brand out of any individual and are confident to be a catalyst in a brand's successful image then Image Consulting is the right career for you.