
Buyer's Edge

Right outfit speaks volumes at interview

Practical and smart shopping

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In today's job market, landing that initial interview can be considered a major victory. But once the appointment has been scheduled, another major hurdle comes into view: the outfit.

What interview outfit says competent, witty and ready to work without screaming borrowed from my churchgoing relative? With Georgia's unemployment numbers at their highest in nearly three decades, the right outfit can speak volumes — and make you stand out. On Page G4 are a few suggestions to help create a winning interview outfit on a budget that ranges from a few hundred dollars to mere pocket change.

Finding right look for business attire

FOR WOMEN

Start with a suit

In her book "A Guide to Elegance," French author and style guru Genevieve Antoine Dariaux refers to the business suit as the foundation of a woman's wardrobe. Frann Beato, a personal shopper at Macy's in Lenox Square, has noticed a spike in the sale of business attire, particularly suits.

Look for classic lines in neutral colors, and focus on the fit. Skirts should hit right below the knee or fall mid-calf.

Big bucks: She suggests investing in "a great jacket, skirt, pants and blouses," to set the right tone.

Pocket change: Resale shops such as Lucky Exchange or Rag-O-Rama offer unique jacket options that can be paired with what's already in the closet, or simply dust off your church suit and have it dry cleaned.

Start at the bottom

New shoes can make an old suit look modern, said Belk's Arlene Goldstein, who added that designer shoes will feature substantial straps, exaggerated heels and plenty of foot coverage.

Big bucks: Shop around for a stylish yet comfortable pair of leather pumps; you'll need them to pound the pavement.

Pocket change: Find an inexpensive pair of midheel black pumps.

Keep it simple

"Subtlety is your friend when it comes to an interview outfit," said Goldstein, vice president of trend merchandising for Belk. "Look polished; that can never hurt you," she said, adding that first lady Michelle Obama and President Barack Obama provide a classic template for workplace attire. A simple sheath paired with a cardigan, a la first lady Obama, is an easy go-to outfit for any interview.

Big bucks: If suits aren't your speed, pair a straight skirt in black or navy with a cardigan and a bold necklace.

Pocket change: Hit the clearance aisle of your favorite department store for a new necklace to complement what's already in your closet.

Use a little color

A colorful blouse can make an old suit feel new again. Retailers are dealing with their own economic struggles, so finding a sale shouldn't be too difficult. Goldstein says to start with classic white, then branch out with a pop of color to wake up a navy suit. "You don't want to look boring," she said, adding that yellow, cobalt blue, pink and lime green will be strong colors heading into spring.

Big bucks: Build a wardrobe of colorful blouses in fabrics ranging from silk to cotton.

Pocket change: Hit megastores like Target or Wal-Mart for a crisp white blouse that works with what you have.

Accessorize

Try a statement necklace to stand out among the sea of blue suits. "The neck is the most important statement of the season," Goldstein said. But don't go overboard. "It's not about a costume," she warned.

Big bucks: Opt for a single strand of pearls from a designer like Ralph Lauren, which offers a glass pearl version for \$58 at Macy's.

Pocket change: Hit the resale shops for a funky yet chic necklace. Options at Lucky Exchange typically cost less than \$20.

FOR MEN

Yes, you need a suit

“More men are getting back to dressing up and looking more professional and put together,” said Howard Sallerson, menswear buyer for Macy’s Southern region. Make your investment last by opting for a two-button jacket with side vents paired with flat front pants. Modern suits fit closer to the body, similar to those worn by President Obama.

Big bucks: Prices can vary widely, but Sallerson says you can expect to pay \$200 to \$800. Macy’s brands range from Alfani to Tasso. Check the sales aisle because many are discounted as much as 50 percent.

Pocket change: Hit the discounters like Stein Mart, Ross and TJ Maxx.

Get a new tie

“You can have on a 10-year-old suit and shoes that have been resoled, but a new tie calls attention to the man,” Goldstein said. Make that hiring manager remember you for the bold striped tie in a color that complements your suit. Opt for the yellow, orange or pink (yes, pink).

Big bucks: Show you’re worth the money in a silk tie from moguls-turned designers Donald Trump or Sean Combs.

Pocket change: Check out the assortment at discount retailers like TJ Maxx, which carry many of the top labels.

Get a crisp white shirt

Opt for breathable cotton and try not to break a sweat.

Big bucks: Spring for the wrinkle-free cotton version

Pocket change: Have your whitest dress shirt dry cleaned, pronto.

Shoes make the man

Kick the casual shoes to the curb and pick up a pair of leather wingtips.

Big bucks: Leather Oxfords typically start at around \$50. Start with style, then shop for comfort.

Pocket change: Scuffed shoes say you’ve been pounding the pavement a little too hard. Grab some shoe polish and get busy.

Forget pleated pants

Flat-front pants flatter the fellas, too, Sallerson said. **Big bucks:** Shop around for wool slacks that fit.

Pocket change: Dockers, anyone?