



31.3% feel patterned tights are perfectly acceptable but only 4% think very short skirts are acceptable

Suits you

The suit is so passé, according to a new study on business dress. Smart-casual is the new look. Where does this leave HR? asks Suzy Bashford

The fact that organisers of Royal Ascot had to issue a special statement clarifying the meaning of "formal dress" this year (women should not show their midriffs or wear G-strings), is a sign that appropriateness is a constantly moving feast. Laretta Roberts, editor of fashion magazine *Drapers*, says she certainly finds it depressing that "the art of dressing smartly and appropriately is being lost". She adds: "Should race-goers really have to be told that?" she reels. "It's ridiculous. But I suppose what some people consider black-tie attire these days also beggars belief. Some men don't wear a tie while their partners look like they're at a dodgy nightclub."

This relaxed attitude towards dress code has also moved into the workplace too. For the past seven years image consultancy The Aziz Corporation has been monitoring the evolution of business dress. But this year's study marks a new tipping point: for the first time ever, more employers (51%) are ditching the suit for 'smart-casual'.

Since the study was launched in 2001, the suit has gradually become less and less common in everyday business life. Replacing it has been a gradual rise in the acceptance of casual clothes. There is even a decline in the number of

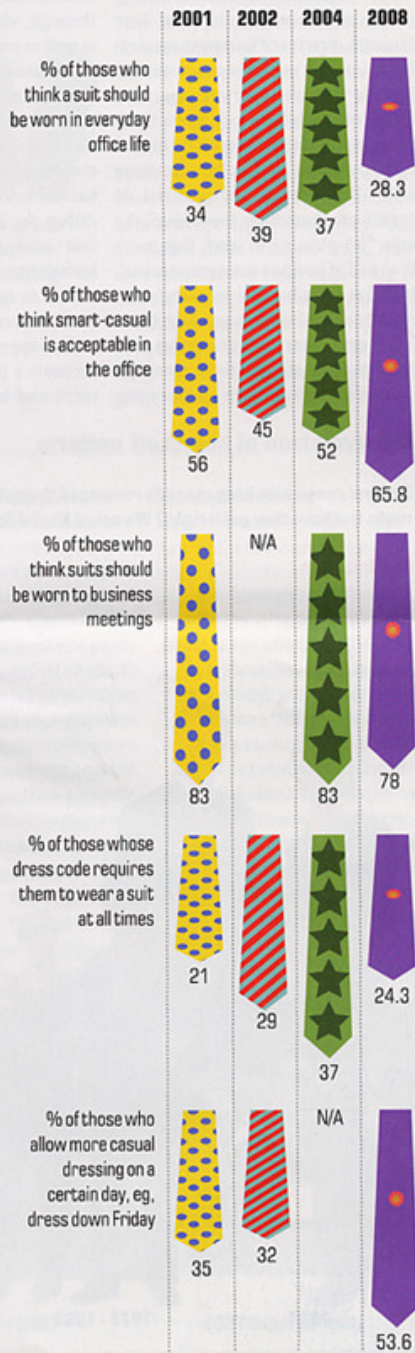
people who believe that a suit should be worn in business meetings (see right).

Khalid Aziz, chairman of The Aziz Corporation, believes that, as well as reflecting that "generation Y is not interested in wearing suits", the research also "speaks to a bigger agenda". He says: "Cradle-to-grave loyalty to a company has gone, people are more independent and patterns of work have changed. There are many more assignment-based projects now where someone might work for nine months then go off scuba-diving for three months."

While there is still a hard core who prefer wearing a suit everyday, these are aged over 50 – 36.3%, compared to 28.3% over the whole sample. Confusingly, though, 86.2% of those under 30 still believe a suit should be worn for business meetings, indicating a lack of conviction about whether the suit really is a label of the past.

Dress code Working practices

Year on year comparison



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SOURCE: THE AZIZ CORPORATION