

What Message Is In Your Photo?

A photo is a quick message and is worth a thousand words.

At first glance, Karl Rove appeared meticulously groomed when his photo hit the cover of *Time*, July 25, 2005. He wore wire rims, sported a fresh haircut and was dressed in a starch-white shirt and a dark charcoal suit. He had an American flag in his lapel. His power tie was red with perfectly spaced tiny white dots. However, his collar was creased.

Did the media-savvy Bush camp mess up or did they intend to send the message that their Deputy chief of staff, headlined by *Time* as “ROVE ON THE SPOT” and “A Source of Trouble,” is a man who sends his shirts to the laundry, just like the average Joe.

Earlier this year, top-level executive John LaMancuso’s full-page photo appeared in *Selling Power*. He wore a black suit with a muted pinstripe and four buttons on the sleeve. His white shirt was immaculate. His power tie was red, with a small, repeating geometric design that alternated in rows of white and gray. He looked tall, clean-shaven and had wet-combed dark hair. His smile radiated a friendly self-confidence. His arms, folded just below his chest, were relaxed. He was well-manicured. There was no wedding ring on his left hand.

He was a perfect match for the quote that served as the photo caption.

“We were trying to create an ideal marriage between the people, the process and the technology,” said John LaMancuso, senior vice president of sales for ADP Major Accounts Services.

ADP is Automatic Data Processing Inc., a \$7.4 billion firm with a reputation for being one of the world’s largest payroll and tax filing processors. The photogenic John LaMancuso excelled as a symbol of their high-powered success.

In contrast, Paul Frank wore a black knit cap that emphasized his long dark sideburns for

his cover shot on *Inc*, August, 2005. He also wore a black t-shirt pulled over a long-sleeved green and white striped shirt, with blue jeans frayed at the bottoms and worn to a powder-white shine at the knees. On his feet, he wore dark brown work boots and on his face a slight smile with a look of mischief in his eyes. He sat knock-kneed on a red, white and black metal model of Julius, his sock puppet turned cartoon character, that started his \$100 million design business.

Is it any surprise that Paul Frank is a highly creative entrepreneur who co-branded Julius with Hello Kitty, effectively turning the licensing industry “cool,” and that today his co-branding deals range from Oscar Mayer to Barbie to the Elvis Presley estate?

A quick message is also sent via product or background in the photo.

Two years ago, Naoto Okinaka, general manager of Suntory, launched Iemon, a green tea that became the most successful new product in Japanese soft-drink history. Its sales are expected to reach nearly \$900 million this year.

This September, the industrious Okinaka can be seen smiling inside the pages of *Business 2.0*, as he stands in front of rows and rows of green plastic bottles shaped like a traditional bamboo flask. He’s wearing a more casual dark suit and a white shirt, open at the collar. His thick black hair falls slightly over his left forehead. He’s holding one of those green plastic bottles with Japanese writing on it, the record-selling Iemon.

In *Fast Company*, this fall, Build-A-Bear CEO Maxine Clark surrounded herself with four young girls, each holding a custom-made stuffed animal, as Clark stood holding her own cuddly brown bear. She wore a blue denim shirt with a short red jacket, tan dockers and white tennis shoes. Her brown hair was cut short for a slightly tousled look. Her surroundings were colorful, including a large cut-out bear with a big 3-dimensional valentine heart, a red-seated

corkscrew stool and a large white toy box with cartoon characters on it.

Beneath the photo ran the multi-colored words “customer-centered leader,” an apt description of Clark, founder of the global enterprise, with over 200 stores ringing up sales of \$302 million.

Who’s with you and who’s not, what you’re wearing and what not, what’s in the background and what’s not are all important to the snap of the eye.

The questions to ask are: What should I wear? What colors? How do I want to be perceived by my customers, investors, colleagues? Who or what should be in the photo with me? What message am I sending?

In 1993, Clint Eastwood was photographed, head full of hair, holding two Oscars for winning Best Picture and Best Director for “Unforgiven.”

In 2005, that photo appears again in *Selling Power*, but this time atop another with Eastwood, hair gray and thinning, holding his second fistful of Oscars for “Million Dollar Baby.”

Twice, Clint Eastwood sent a great message. However, not all businessmen or women will be so lucky. They may only get one chance. So, whatever the message, they need to make that photo count.

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