

Looking the Part

Driver uniforms can help to strengthen brands and build a sense of unity

The TDL Group's trailers may be covered with images of Tim Hortons' famed coffee and doughnuts, but the company's drivers can be identified just as easily as the equipment itself. Even when they are nowhere near the truck, everything they wear is linked to a uniform program that reflects the Canadian icon's corporate brand.

It's an extensive wardrobe by every measure. Winter items include a five-in-one winter coat, balaclava, toques, fur-lined gloves, sweaters and hooded sweatshirts. Summer wear includes raincoats, shirts, work gloves and ball caps. And the various pieces are handed to employees within 10 days of their first orientation session.

Mark Mostacci, national safety, compliance and training officer



with the TDL Group (the parent company behind Tim Hortons), suggests that employees embrace the idea of a uniform, regardless of the dress codes that existed at fleets which employed them in the past. "They're very surprised -- and pleasantly surprised more than anything -- because a lot of companies don't go to the expense to clothe them," he says.

Supporters of employee uniforms suggest that a common wardrobe offers a number of benefits. In addition to helping to enhance a corporate brand, the look can help employees to feel a sense of unity and professionalism. Uniforms may even have an impact on performance. Those who are readily identified as an employee will

undoubtedly be aware that their actions will reflect on the company which employs them.

It is the finishing touch that helps to identify a fleet as an elite

organization, Mostacci suggests.

There are a number of practical issues when establishing a fleet's uniform program. While reflecting current trends, a conservative style will stand the test of time, notes Brad Heizman, senior marketing manager with Cintas Canada, a uniform supplier. Today's employees tend to be looking for looser patterns and garments that meet functional needs, he adds.

The TDL Group began to incorporate cargo pants for the latter reason. "They are great for drivers because we have to have compartments for just about anything," Mostacci says. A five-in-one winter jacket can also be easily modified to support the personal comfort of any driver, whether it is used as a windbreaker or incorporates the zip-in lining.

As an extension of corporate branding efforts, the logo on every shirt or jacket deserves attention of its own. While screen printing techniques can reproduce an image on a cotton shirt, an embroidered piece will last longer. Computer-driven production techniques have also lowered the related prices, which tend to be based on the number of stitches.

The choices in a uniform can help to support health and safety efforts as well. The jackets worn by the employees of the TDL Group include reflective stripes, making them more visible in darkened parking lots, and protective footwear is addressed through a \$150 annual boot allowance. Employees are instructed to buy footwear that includes CSA's recognizable green patch and a related steel toe, and it is an approach that allows some flexibility. "Some guys like the low cut and some guys like the high cut," Mostacci explains, noting how drivers provide receipts to show that boots were purchased.

Some allowances may also need to be made for extreme sizes that do not fall into average inventories. One employee with a large frame actually requires a custom-ordered shirt, Mostacci adds. "Some companies will say, 'Go out and buy a XXX that's close to the colour.' We don't want him to feel like the odd man out."

Like any investment in a fleet, the related costs need to be monitored. The TDL Group reviews the uniform budgets annually, and looks to employees to test different styles. As a national fleet, it also looks for vendors that have a presence at locations across the country, to avoid any unwanted delays in shipments.

Since clothes will wear out over time, budgets will need to allow for regular replacements, too.

"The individual inventory level will depend on the work week of the employee," Heizman adds. "Employees working five days a week are generally given 11 shirts and 11 pants in their inventory. This allows each employee to wear a new uniform to work each day and allow the garments to be cleaned on a weekly basis."

Professional drivers are important members of any team, and uniform strategies like these can help to ensure they look the part.

— *The Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council (CTHRC) is an incorporated not-for-profit organization that helps attract, train and retain workers for Canada's trucking industry. For more information, visit www.cthrc.com.*