



# The Uniform Advantage

## **It's Not Just What You Wear**

Why uniforms? A uniform promotes a consistent brand image, identifies employees, and can convey many things, from a position of authority to a level of service. Uniforms evoke assumptions and associations about the wearer. It is important to understand how uniforms affect consumers and their decision-making processes.

In 2000, UTSA sponsored a study conducted by J.D. Power and Associates. Information was gathered from almost 800 consumers and more than 200 business-to-business buyers. The goal of the study was to provide a qualitative measurement of how uniforms impact customers and their relationships with product and service providers.

The results of the UTSA study are hardly surprising. Most customers prefer uniforms in business settings. The findings are notable, however, as a window into the customer/ service provider relationship. In order to understand the role that uniforms can play in that relationship, the survey data is broken down into several components.

## THE UNIFORM ADVANTAGE\*

### It's How You Wear It

Consumers associate certain positive traits with uniformed employees. A uniform conveys a higher work ethic and instills in a consumer a greater sense of trust and confidence. When a consumer sees an employee in uniform, they feel that they receive a better product and higher quality of service (see *Table 1*).

### Location, Location, Location

Where customers see uniforms matters. Customers surveyed prefer to see uniformed employees in the Transportation/Storage Services and Utilities categories (74 and 71% of participants, respectively), followed by Hospitality Services, Household Services, Healthcare Services, and Automotive Services. In these settings, the customers surveyed indicate that, all other factors being equal, they would definitely or probably use the service where the employees were in uniform (see *Table 2*).

### Is More Better?

An analysis of the survey data indicates that with regard to several settings, the more frequently respondents use a particular product/service, the

stronger their preference is for uniformed employees in that setting. This was true for: Car Washes, Dental/Medical Offices, Fast Food Restaurants, Grocery Stores, Home Electronics Stores, Mid-scale/Upscale Restaurants, and Parking Lot Attendants/Valet Services (see *Table 3*).

When asked about Home Health Care and Moving Services, respondents' preference for uniforms is inversely related to how often they use the service. The less frequently the service is used, the stronger the preference for uniforms.

Customers were also asked about their preferences for uniforms in typically non-uniform settings. All other factors being equal, 68% of respondents would use a Taxi/Shuttle Service whose employees were in uniform. Other settings where a majority of respondents preferred uniforms include Home Health Care, Physical/Occupational Therapy, Resort/Spa, and Lawn/Landscaping Service.

### What to Wear?

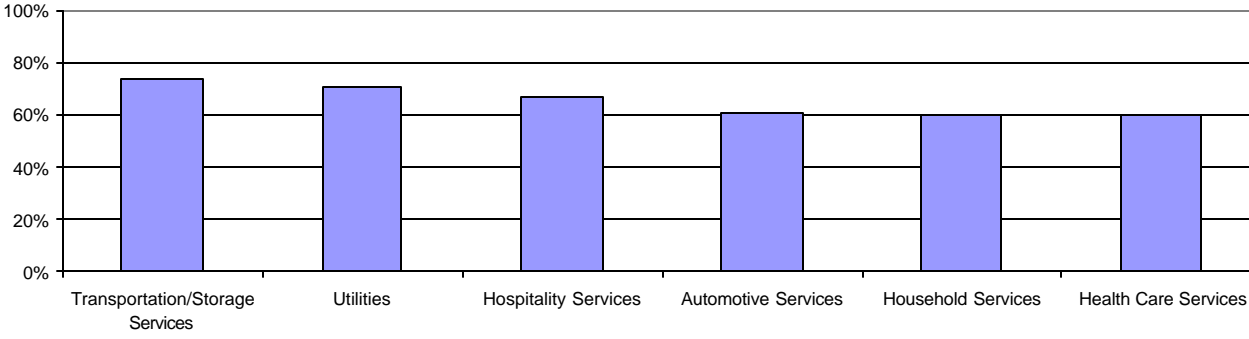
Here, too, there are few surprises. In most settings, the preferred uniforms are the uniforms that would be expected, such as work shirts and pants in hands-on labor settings and a lab coat/over coat in Health Care settings.

**Table 1: Positive responses (“Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree”)**

Statement	Percent
<b>Confidence:</b> Employees in uniforms increase my confidence in their ability to do their jobs.	61.36%
<b>Attentiveness:</b> I believe that employees in uniform pay more attention to me than employees not in uniform.	43.69%
<b>Courtesy:</b> I believe that employees in uniform are more courteous than those who don't wear uniforms.	47.85%
<b>Trust:</b> I trust employees in uniform more than I trust employees not in uniform.	55.05%
<b>Comfort:</b> I feel more comfortable explaining my purchase requirements to employees in uniform than to those not in uniform.	54.17%
<b>Credibility:</b> I believe that employees wearing uniforms are more credible than employees not in uniform.	52.78%
<b>Competence:</b> I think that employees wearing uniforms are more likely to understand their jobs more thoroughly than employees who don't wear uniforms.	39.14%
<b>Work Quality:</b> I believe the work is done better when it is done by employees in uniform than when it is done by employees not wearing uniforms.	41.41%
<b>Product/Service Quality:</b> When I see an employee in uniform I believe that product quality will be higher than if the employee is not in uniform.	57.70%
<b>Employee Knowledge:</b> I believe employees in uniform are more knowledgeable about their product than those not in uniforms.	40.28%
<b>Ease of Identification:</b> It is easier for me to identify who can help me when employees are in uniform than when employees are not in uniform.	82.58%

\*Information taken from *The Customer Perception of Uniforms in the Marketplace*, sponsored by the Uniform and Textile Service Association, conducted by J.D. Power and Associates. 16 May 2000.

**Table 2: Definitely/Probably Prefer Uniforms**



Worth noting is that the preferred uniform for Taxi/Shuttle Service is not simply one which promotes the company brand, but which denotes authority to perform the service being provided. Image is the concern of customers when they find themselves in Mid-scale/Upscale Retail settings; here they prefer to see uniforms that convey a clean, professional image.

**And Where to Wear It**

For those customers with a uniform preference, where they see that uniform can have an effect on their decision-making process. Survey participants were asked if, all other factors being equal, seeing their preferred type of uniform on an employee would increase the likelihood of their buying from that goods or services provider. In almost all settings the uniform factor would make the customer at least slightly more likely to buy (see *Table 4*).

<b>Table 3: Uniform Preferences</b>	
<b>Consumer Service Setting</b>	<b>Definitely/Probably in Uniform (%)</b>
Delivery Service	84%
Fast Food Restaurant	87%
Cable/Phone Installation	83%
Exterminator	88%
Mid-scale/Upscale Restaurant	83%
Bus/Subway	84%
Gas/Electric/Water Utilities	76%
Appliance Repair	75%
Car Repair/Service	79%
Dental/Medical Office	77%
Parking Lot Attendant/Valet Service	86%
Hotel/Front Desk	76%
Grocery Store	81%
Plumbing	75%
Moving Company	77%

**Business-to-Business**

Business-to-business respondents indicate a strong preference for uniforms in almost every setting. Of the eleven settings proffered, respondents preferred uniforms in nine (see *Table 5*). Here, as in the customer data, the standard work shirt/pants combination was the preferred uniform in the following settings: Plumbing, Electrical, Heating/AC, Lawn/Landscaping Service, Janitorial Service, and Electrical Manufacturing (see *Table 6*).

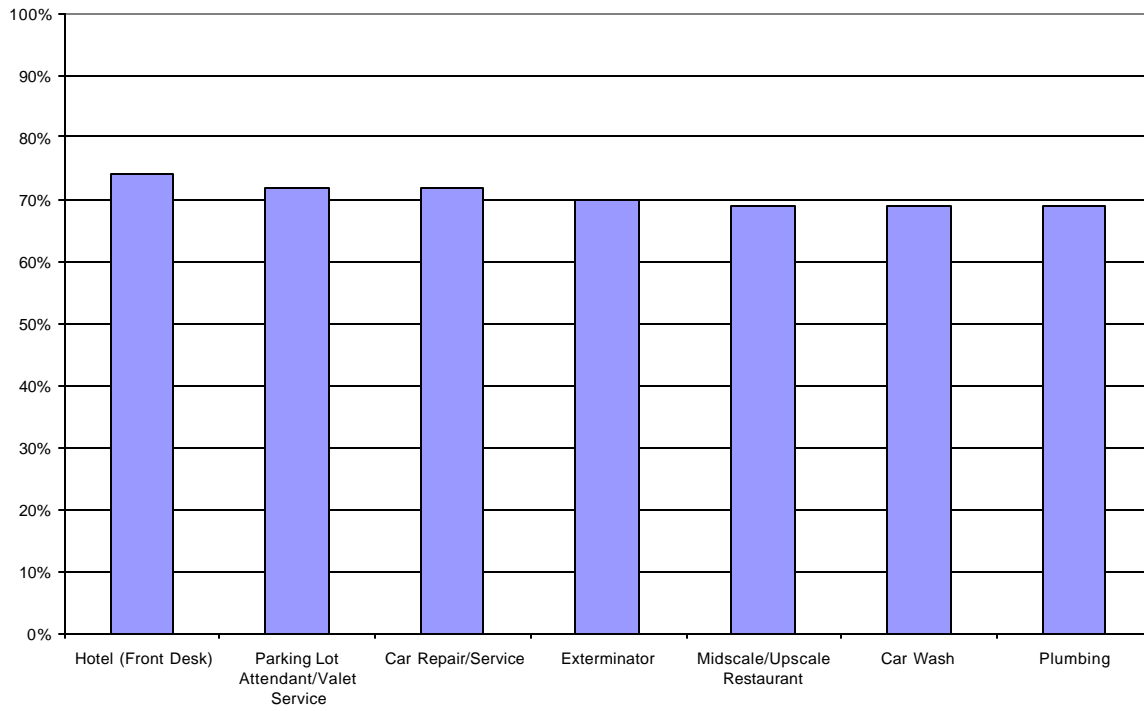
Mirroring the consumer data, for these respondents, seeing a preferred uniform style increases likelihood to purchase in every setting. Most respondents agree that uniforms make it easier to identify someone who can help, and that a uniform infers many positive personal attributes about the wearer.

**In a Nutshell**

Among the quantitative findings of the UTSA study are that almost 60% of consumers and business-to-business respondents prefer uniforms across the board. Positive personal attributes are attached to uniform wearers, and when all other factors are equal, uniforms can make a difference.

<b>Table 6: Uniform Preference</b>	
<b>Business-to-Business Survey Settings</b>	<b>Definitely/Probably in Uniform (%)</b>
Food Service	74%
Heating/AC	74%
Janitorial Service	69%
Food Processing	69%
Electrical	68%

**Table 4: Areas Where Preferred Uniform Had Greatest Impact on Choice of Provider**



**Table 5: Probably/Definitely Prefer Uniforms**

