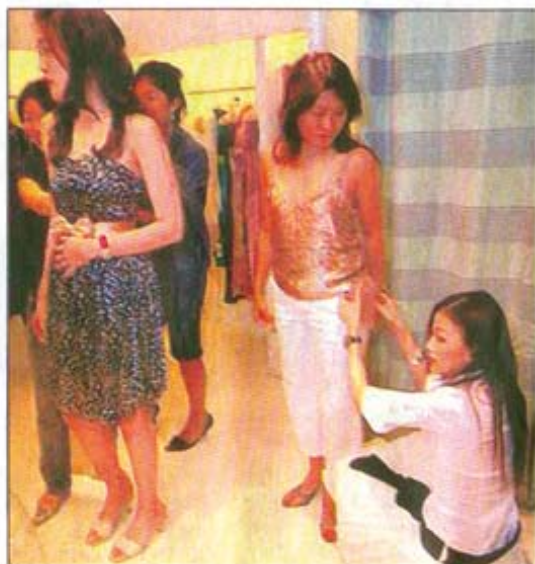


Merchants of image

The image and styling business is booming as corporates and savvy individuals see value in the social graces,



Dressing matters: Karen Ng (right) believes that you can be trendy and modern and still look professional

And interestingly, it's not just the women who hire image consultants — men too are seeking help these days. One of them is successful Hong Kong businessman Patrick Ho, who hired image consultant Karen Ng to spiff up his image.

He says: "Before this, my friends kept pulling my leg. They said that for someone of my status, I should be dressing better instead of the casual clothes that I used to wear. It makes a big difference. I've always been a confident person, now my look fits my personality."

He was so pleased with the results that he went on to send his senior managers to Ms Ng as well. "I felt it was necessary for them to look more professional because we deal a lot with lawyers and bankers and I didn't want

them to be underdressed. They are representing the company after all."

There are also those like Karen Ng of Glitz by Karen who call themselves a new breed of image consultants — one that blends fashion and basic image consulting principles. The traditional view is that image consultants tend to advise clients to follow classic trends as opposed to fashion fads.

Says Ms Ng who shops overseas regularly for her clients: "People need to make changes. Society is changing so we can't just stick to the basic principles. Just because you need to look professional and office appropriate doesn't mean that you cannot look modern and trendy. "Dressing right is not good enough because you don't shine. You need to inject creativity to stand out. This is what the new generation of image consulting is all about."