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Shopping is their business

Priva Sheth



For those who find shopping tedious, expert help is at hand as personal shoppers take over the burden of buying.

Mumbai, Dec. 15:

Twenty-nine year-old Parul Shukla quit her high-profile bank job last year to become an image consultant. After graduating from the London School of Economics and pursuing multiple bank jobs, Ms Shukla moved on to something that was close to her heart — shopping.

“I was bored of my job and wanted to take up something which I enjoyed more. I decided to put my personal interest (shopping) as well as professional experience to use,” said Ms Shukla, who, apart from being a certified image consultant, is also a personal shopper.

Image consultants are personal advisors who help individuals manage their image so that they come across as well dressed and dignified individuals. These consultants also double-up as personal shoppers. Customers can hire them to accompany them to malls to help them shop.

Ms Shukla is one among many other professionals who have bid farewell to their cushy office jobs to pursue their love for shopping. On an average, a personal shopper earns nearly Rs 3,000 per client.

“There is an increasing demand for image consultants. It is a woman dominated field and we have around 200 people across 12 cities who have enrolled in our institute to become certified image consultants,” said Mr Rakesh Agarwal, Chief Consultant, First Impression, which is an image consulting institute.

There are many personal shoppers who have built their own consulting enterprise without any certification. “People loved the way we dressed and many friends used to take us along when they went shopping. This was when we decided to take this up as a full-time profession,” said Ms Sonu Bohra, who started the style consultancy, Fashion Bombay, with a friend and colleague, Ms Jasleen Kaur Gupta.

Fashion advice is based on a number of factors such as the client's budget, age, lifestyle, occasion and body shape. While a few personal shoppers charge an hourly fee, there are some who take a commission on the pre-decided minimum purchase budget.

“I had held my birthday party at a high profile location and wanted to buy something that would look elegant. Since I am a working woman, I don't have time to go searching for the perfect outfit,” said Ms Madhu Gupta, who hired the services of a personal shopper.

“If I am assured of good shopping, I don't mind spending on a personal shopper,” she said.

Image consulting is a major service industry in other countries but in India it has not yet developed properly. “This industry is still in its nascent stage in India. We have developed a business system which will not only train these consultants but also market them at a later stage,” said Mr Agarwal.

“Since this concept is new, it is difficult to get clients who are comfortable with someone else styling them. It is mainly the elite and upper middle class who are our main clients,” said Ms Bohra, who quit her job as a full-time journalist to take up styling as a profession. “There are risks associated with this because you are not sure of a pay cheque every month. I don't regret taking this up either,” she said.

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