

SECURITY EXECUTIVE

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DEVELOP A UNIFORM
PROGRAM THAT WILL
SCORE WITH YOUR
OFFICERS AND WITH
YOUR CLIENTS

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DEVELOP A UNIFORM PROGRAM THAT WILL SCORE WITH YOUR OFFICERS AND WITH YOUR CLIENTS

BY DAN MENDELSON

Uniforms perform a critical role in the presentation and performance of a security organization and their officers. Uniforms are, in essence, the unspoken language of an organization. For the public, the apparel and accessories a security officer wears quickly establishes a trusted, authority figure. For the security officer, the right look instills confidence—encouraging him or her to take pride in their work and perform their duties well.

How does a security organization determine the right look for their officers? How do you assure the successful implementation of your uniform program? What should you look for in a uniform supplier? Having worked with both small and large security organizations, both contract and proprietary, for over 15 years in my role as President of Unitex Direct, I have learned what counts most when it comes to creating and managing a security uniform program.

The challenges facing today's security professionals continue to grow. Security professionals must protect assets, people and information. They must assist when natural disasters strike and be vigilant in the

wake of potential terrorist threats. Plus, many activities previously handled by law enforcement officers, such as providing security at public events and in residential neighborhoods, are now handled by contract security personnel.

I hear from our customers that today's security clients—from Fortune 500 companies, high rise buildings, malls, airports and others across America—are demanding more alert, more professional and better trained security personnel. The uniform goes a long way in helping meet these increased demands.

Here are my recommendations to security uniform buyers:

MAKE SURE IT IS A UNIFORM

Any discussion of a uniform program must first begin with what constitutes a uniform. Uniforms are not off-the-rack garments found at department stores and ready-to-wear retailers. They are garments specifically constructed with the work environment in mind. Too many security managers fail to recognize the demands

GET INTO THE GAME WITH THIS GARMENT AND FIBER PRIMER

ABSORBENCY – The ability of a fabric to take in moisture. Absorbency affects skin comfort, static build-up, shrinkage, stain removal, water repellency and wrinkle recovery.

ANTI-BACTERIAL (ANTI-MICROBIAL) – A chemically treated fabric or a fabric made from chemically treated fibers, making the fabric resistant to or an inhibitor of the growth of micro-organisms.

ANTI-STATIC – A fiber or fabric that resists the build-up of static electricity from friction.

BREATHABILITY – The movement of water or water vapor from one side of the fabric to the other, caused by wicking, chemical or electrostatic action. Also known as moisture transport.

COLORFASTNESS – A dyed fabric's ability to resist fading due to washing, exposure to sunlight and other conditions.

COMFORT STRETCH – The freedom of movement in a garment that contains spandex or has stretch engineered into the yarn.

ELASTICITY – The ability of a fiber or fabric to return to its original length, shape or size immediately after the removal of stress.

FLAME RESISTANT – Fabrics treated with special chemical agents to make them resistant to burning.

FLAME RETARDANT – A chemical applied to a fabric, or incorporated into the fiber, which significantly reduces flammability.

HAND – The way the fabric feels when touched. Softness, crispness, dryness and silkiness are all terms that describe the hand of the fabric.

HIGH VISIBILITY FABRICS – Fabrics that contain fluorescent materials in order to make the wearer visible in dim and dark lights.

LYCRA – A man-made elastane fiber that has unique stretch and recovery properties. Lycra adds comfort, fit, shape retention, durability and freedom of movement.

PERFORMANCE FABRICS – Fabrics made for a variety of end-use applications, which provide functional qualities, such as moisture management, UV protection, anti-microbial, thermo-regulation and wind/water resistance.

REPELLENCY – The ability of a fabric to resist wetting and staining by water, stains, soil, etc.

RESILIENCY – The ability of a fabric to spring back to its original shape after being twisted, crushed, wrinkled or distorted.

SMART TEXTILES – Textiles that can sense and react to changes in the environment, such as changes from mechanical, thermal, chemical, magnetic and other sources.

SOIL RELEASE – A finish that allows a stain to leave the fabric faster, increases the wicking action for improved comfort, and therefore imparts greater ease in cleaning.

STAIN REPELLENT/STAIN RESISTANCE – The ability of a fabric to resist wetting and staining by water.

WARP/WEFT – Warp are lengthwise threads attached to a loom before weaving begins. Weft is the threads woven back and forth through the warp to make fabric.

WASHABLE – Materials that will not fade or shrink during washing or laundering.

WASH-AND-WEAR – Ability of a garment to be washed and require little or no ironing.

WATER REPELLENT/WATER RESISTANT – A term applied to fabrics that have been treated with a finish which causes them to shed water, but is still air-permeable.

WICKABILITY/WICKING – The ability of a fabric to disperse moisture through to the surface of the fabric so that evaporation can occur.

placed on uniforms and mistakenly think the clothing is similar to an everyday wardrobe.

The distinction is important. The apparel and accessories selected to be a part of a uniform for a security officer must consider the tasks that the officer will perform. A uniform supplier's responsibility is to recommend the right product for the environment. That includes everything from style and decoration to wearability and fabric longevity. A savvy security uniform buyer will listen for this type of advice and judge their uniform supplier accordingly.

Many individuals who find themselves in buying positions for uniforms overlook this aspect because of their apparel purchasing experiences as a consumer. In the security field where image is critical, a strong, practical and cohesive look can only be achieved through a professionally designed and managed uniform program.

SELECT THE APPROPRIATE LOOK

What's the best look for your business? Uniform style and construction requirements are directly related to the type of work being performed. For example, the needs of an employee monitoring the activity in an oil refinery are different from one performing concierge-like services at a 5-star hotel or in a Class "A" office building. For professional security uniforms, there are generally considered two approaches: a "soft" look and a "hard" look.

The soft look typically consists of a suit or a blazer worn with contrasting slacks. The style is complemented with a crisp dress shirt and accessorized with an appropriate tie. The soft look is often considered for, but certainly not exclusive to, an indoor uniform used in white-collar, business environments. The fabric and construction may vary based on geography or physical environment. Do not make the mistake of assuming a soft look appears less authoritative. Properly styled, a soft look security professional will convey to the public an aura of strength and professionalism. There are also options for a casual style uniform, such as an embroidered knit shirt and cotton pants, which is sometimes found in a gated community,

A hard look appearance is based on a traditional law enforcement uniform. A security officer outfitted in a hard look will feature a shirt with shoulder epaulets, pocket flaps and military creases for neatness. For a distinctive look, the single color shirt can be modified to have contrasting epaulets and or pocket flaps. The shirt can be accessorized with company shoulder emblems and cloth or metal badges or related operational identification; many of our customers have also elected either American flags which are either forward facing or reverse facing (military). Trousers will feature a permanent crease, lined belt loops and a waistband with snugtex to keep shirts tucked in properly. The trouser may also have striping on the side seam. Color selection and fabrication are again dependent on geography and task performance considerations.

Does one look command greater authority? Is one respected more than the other? There has been much discussion over the merits of the hard versus soft look. Several inner city hospitals have recently switched from the hard look to the soft one, after the former was cited as a source of tension between the community and the hospital. Others, however, are fervent supporters of the hard look in such situations and settings, believing that the authoritative police-style uniforms are better deterrents against crime and offer staff and patients better protection.

According to Paul Fussell, author of; “Uniforms: Why We Are What We Wear,” any uniform will command respect. “It communicates that those who wear it hold permanent and prominent jobs,” he writes in his book. “Respect is higher for police officers or firefighters, but it is nonetheless present to some degree in the uniforms all workers wear.”

Each security customer will have a different notion of what professionalism is and what commands respect. Your uniform supplier needs to be flexible and able to respond quickly to custom uniform requirements in order to service the demand needs of your contracts.

QUALITY, SERVICE THEN COST

It should be noted that good uniform programs can be delivered at differing price points, but cost alone should not drive your purchasing decisions.

Before recommending the style and products to be included in a custom uniform program, Unitex Direct interviews the operations and upper level staff at a contract security firm to understand what works for the company. Also, we have been asked to consult and work directly with the contract client to help them determine what is best for them. It is only after such a needs assessment review that we can properly recommend products and offer our complete solution. We will also look at your uniform room capabilities and make recommendations to improve it operationally.

A security company must evaluate a uniform supplier based on the sum offering of quality, service, product performance and price. You should look for uniform suppliers that offer a range of services to solve all the issues related to selection, inventory maintenance and delivery of your uniform program. The best uniform supplier must offer consistent customer service, reliable on-time deliveries and have product expertise-not just low cost goods. An online ordering system is essential to help branch managers deal with a myriad of uniform requirements for differing client sites as well as managing the back end financial side of the various uniform programs for the contract security company. Your uniform supplier should be able to provide you with all of the equipment and accessories needed to run your operations.

UNIFORM COMPONENTS

BUTTONHOLE (EYELET) – Formed by a contoured patch of zig-zag stitching, followed by a cut—a portion of which is circular. Eyelet buttonholes are usually used on heavy fabrics and/or with large buttons.

BUTTONHOLE (STRAIGHT) – Formed by two pairs of straight, parallel rows of zigzag stitching, followed by a single, straight knife cut. Each end of the row of stitching is secured by a bartack.

COLLAR (BANDED) – The visible or panel portion of the collar is cut separately and attached to the neckband portion. This is normal dress shirt construction.

COLLAR (CONVERTIBLE) – The panel or visible portion of the collar and the neckband portion are cut as one piece, but folded once along the length to produce the appearance of a banded collar.

CUFF (LINED) – A cuff with interlining placed between the two pieces of body fabric.

CUFF (ONE-PIECE) – A two-ply cuff formed by folding over a single piece of fabric, usually with a lining in between.

CUFF (TWO-PIECE) – A cuff in which two identical pieces of fabric, usually with a lining in between, are joined by a seam along the edge, then turned and sometimes topstitched near the folded edges.

INSEAM – The distance from the bottom of a trouser leg to the crotch. The measurement is taken along the inside leg seam that joins the front and the back leg panels.

LAPEL – The part of a garment that is turned back in the front; the front fold on a shirt that is a continuation of the collar.

OUTSEAM – The distance from the bottom of the trouser leg to the top of the pant at the waist. The measurement is taken along the outside leg seam that joins the front and back leg panels, and includes the width of the waistband.

POCKET (PATCH) – A pocket attached to the outside of the garment and constructed of self-fabric. Typically found on a blazer or coveralls.

POCKET (SET IN) – A pocket attached on the inside of a garment and reached via a slit or flap. Typically found on suits.

POCKET FACING – A piece of shell (outer) material super-imposed on the top of the pocket material at its opening to conceal the lining.

SLEEVE LENGTH – The sleeves measured from the center of the neckline in the back to the end of the sleeve or cuff.

SLEEVE VENT – A finished slit or opening in the sleeve. Vents are usually secured by snaps or buttons at the base of the cuff.

WAISTBAND (ONE-PIECE) – A single thickness of fabric that is doubled and stitched to the top of a pant.

WAISTBAND (TWO-PIECE) – When two identical pieces of fabric are placed back-to-back at the top of a pant, raw edges turned inside, and joined with two widely spaced rows of stitching. the pant body is inserted between and along one edge.

FABRICS AND BLENDS

BROADCLOTH – A plain weave tightly woven fabric, characterized by a slight ridge effect in one direction, usually the filling. The most common broadcloth is made from cotton or cotton/polyester blends.

CANVAS – Cotton, linen, or synthetic fabric made with a basic plain weave in heavy and firm weight yarns for industrial or heavy duty purposes. Also referred to as “duck,” although the term “canvas” usually relates to the heavier, coarser constructions

CHAMBRAY – A plain woven fabric that can be made from cotton, silk, or manufactured fibers, but is most commonly cotton. It incorporates a colored warp (often blue) and white filling yarns

GABARDINE – A tightly woven, twilled, worsted fabric with a slight diagonal line on the right side. Wool gabardine is known as a year-round fabric for business suiting. Polyester, cotton, rayon, and various blends are also used in making gabardine.

JACQUARD – Woven fabrics manufactured by using the Jacquard attachment on the loom. This attachment provides versatility in designs and permits individual control of each of the warp yarns. Thus, fabrics of almost any type or complexity can be made. Brocade and damask are types of jacquard woven fabrics.

MESH – A type of fabric characterized by its net-like open appearance, and the spaces between the yarns. Mesh is available in a variety of constructions including wovens, knits, laces, or crocheted fabrics.

NYLON – Produced in 1938, the first completely synthetic fiber developed. Known for its high strength and excellent resilience, nylon has superior abrasion resistance and high flexibility.

OXFORD – A fine, soft, lightweight woven cotton or blended with manufactured fibers in a 2x1 basket weave variation of the plain weave construction. The fabric is used primarily in shirting.

POLYESTER – A manufactured fiber introduced in the early 1950s, and is second only to cotton in worldwide use. Polyester has high strength (although somewhat lower than nylon), excellent resiliency, and high abrasion resistance. Low absorbency allows the fiber to dry quickly.

POPLIN – A fabric made using a rib variation of the plain weave. The construction is characterized by having a slight ridge effect in one direction, usually the filling. Poplin used to be associated with casual clothing, but as the “world of work” has become more relaxed, this fabric has developed into a staple of men’s wardrobes, being used frequently in casual trousers.

RAYON – A manufactured fiber composed of regenerated cellulose, derived from wood pulp, cotton linters, or other vegetable matter. Today, various names for rayon fibers are taken from different manufacturing processes.

SERGE – A fabric with a smooth hand that is created by a two-up, two-down twill weave

WOOL – Usually associated with fiber or fabric made from the fleece of sheep or lamb. However, the term “wool” can also apply to all animal hair fibers, including the hair of the Cashmere or Angora goat or the specialty hair fibers of the camel, alpaca, llama or vicuna.

The costs of a uniform program are often based on the needs and environment in which the uniforms are to be worn. At Unitex Direct, we work with security firms and law enforcement agencies throughout the country. While on a recent site visit to a customer, we reviewed some apparel products they had picked from a mail order catalog without really having an understanding of the wear and tear that the employees would have on their uniforms and the cost they would incur to replace them. For a small initial upfront program cost increase, we recommended apparel items that are commonly used by the FBI and SWAT teams around the nation that would give them greater functionality, comfort and durability. In the end, their annual uniform costs went down, even though they are initially paying more for products because our recommended products would outlast what they originally had purchased.

PAY ATTENTION TO FABRIC AND GARMENT CARE CONSIDERATIONS

Equally important to the overall look is the construction and fabrication from which the garments in a uniform program are made. Properly attired security officers, in well-fitted comfortable clothing, will feel better about themselves and perform better on the job. As most consumers can attest, today’s clothing options are vastly different from past generations. Customers can now buy pants that stretch and shirts designed to resist stains. And while cotton is still popular, advances in technology have made other fabrics desirable. Gone are the days when polyester is frowned upon—your “father’s polyester.” Today’s version of the synthetic fabric is both comfortable and fashionable.

These benefits and styling options extend to the uniform industry. Your uniform provider should offer products across the fabric spectrum. Options range from 100 percent cotton to 100 percent synthetic polyester to blended fabrics and so-called performance fabrics that stretch and wick away moisture. (For a better understanding of the industry’s vernacular, see the Garment and Fabric Primer that accompanies this story).

Your uniform supplier can offer advice on the care characteristics of these products. Some have restrictions on industrial laundry and some are easy-care fabrics that can be washed at home. If your uniform maintenance plan includes an industrial laundry program, the product must be tested to ensure that it holds up well under these cleaning conditions. Additionally, certain types of garments can only be dry-cleaned. Because dry cleaning costs are high, these types of garments are only recommended where the nature of the account is such that these maintenance costs can be factored in.

DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE INVENTORY REQUIREMENTS

No talk of a uniform program would be complete without the subject of inventory. Your uniform supplier should maintain a perpetual inventory across the complete size scale that you require.

In the first 12 months, your supplier needs to start out with a higher than anticipated inventory of stock for all components of a custom program. We have received many urgent calls from security firms looking for uniforms because their number of employees increased quicker than they, or their uniform supplier, anticipated.

Everyone recognizes that security officers come in all shapes and sizes. Proper sizing will not only ensure a well-dressed security officer, but a comfortable employee as well. There are also those in the workforce who may be outside typical sizes. Your uniform supplier should offer sizing options that cover the spectrum.

You should be aware that, from a uniform supplier's perspective, it is reasonable to ask a contract security company for a long term commitment in order to stock a fully custom uniform program.

COMMUNICATION IS THE MOST CRITICAL COMPONENT

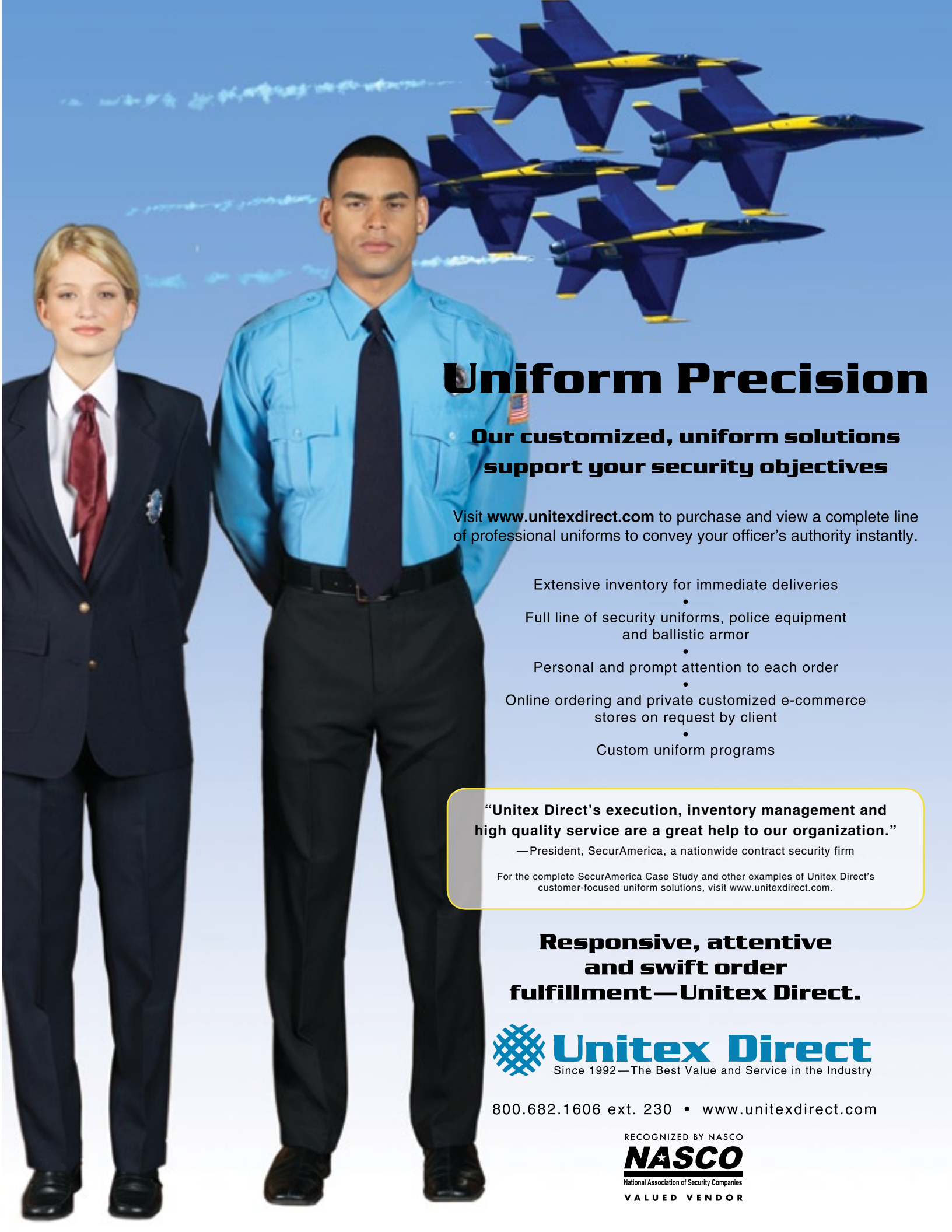
Ultimately, the key to the creation and management of a uniform program comes down to one element—communication. Not only is this important between the uniform supplier and the contract

security company, but it is also essential between the contract security company and the employees that wear the uniforms.

Full, constant and vigilant attention is required to maintain a business relationship in this day and age. To ensure a smooth-flowing process, a uniform supplier needs to listen to his customer, offer flexibility and be on hand at a moment's notice when problems arise.

It may appear to take considerable work to evaluate a uniform supplier, select appropriate products and maintain the inventory for a custom uniform program. But for a security company to present security officers that look clean, sharp, and professional, the rewards far outweigh the efforts. **SE**

Dan Mendelson is president of Unitex Direct, a national uniform supplier located in Walled Lake, Michigan. Since 1992, Unitex Direct has provided uniforms, accessories, equipment and promotional products to security, public safety, aviation and hospitality companies. It offers volume manufacturing programs to suit every size customer and has the purchasing power with leading industry brands guaranteeing low prices for customers. Visit them on the Web at www.unitexdirect.com or call 800.682.1606 ext 230 to learn more.



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