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STYLE MAVEN BRANDING GETS PERSONAL AT NATE & DOT CONSULTING

By Lisa Bertagnoli

Call Jennifer Sara Levin what you want, but please don't call her an image consultant. Levin, 29, founder of Nate & Dot Consulting in Chicago, prefers "personal branding and presentation," a phrase that she says "resonates better."

Not that she finds anything wrong with image consulting; she simply finds that it's misunderstood. "People will listen to my spiel, and then say, 'So, you're a stylist,'" Levin said.

To be sure, Nate & Dot has its roots in fashion - it's named after Levin's stylish paternal grandparents, for whom she staged fashion shows as a child. But Levin's work reaches beyond organizing closets and revamping wardrobes. She helps clients with their total presentation, which can mean rsum writing, business etiquette, interview coaching and networking skills.

Levin's client list includes a mix of corporations and individuals. Currently, her corporate list includes a large title company, where she's helping employees meet the company's dress code, and a financial services company, where the sales staff needs help cultivating business relationships. Levin also teaches business etiquette and networking to international students at Northwestern University's law school.

Unlike others in the image industry, Levin doesn't have a retail or fashion background. A graduate of Emory University and Northwestern University law school, Levin started her professional life as an attorney. Throughout her four-year legal career, Levin helped friends and relatives, not with legal advice, but with rsum writing, interview prepping and shopping. "I really enjoyed fashion, and it started with family and friends' wardrobes," she said. At the three law firms she worked, she helped male colleagues choose clothes for dates and other occasions.

In January 2006, Levin did some investigating into the image-consulting business to find out what local consultancies offered. "There was a need for both wardrobe and coaching, and nobody was doing both," she said. She officially launched Nate & Dot in August, thinking she'd have a handful of clients and stay at her law firm until the end of the year.

However, Levin was so swamped with business, both corporate and individual, that she quit her full-time job in September. Although individual clients could fuel her business, she enjoys corporate work and is seeking more of it, in addition to corporate and academic speaking engagements. "You speak, and people want to work with you afterward," she said.