

Watch out for your image



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SUITABLE

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If Suitable were to ask you for the time, where would you look for the answer: your wristwatch, a BlackBerry or a computer?

Since the proliferation of personal digital assistants and cellphones, there have been rumblings that wrist-

watches no longer serve any purpose.

After all, in any given environment, there are a handful of ways to count hours and minutes until the workday is done.

Yet for all the portable gadgets and electronics, nothing says as much about an individual as a watch. For men, watches are one of the few ways to communicate taste, status and personality.

Women, meanwhile, knowingly treat watches as a fashion accessory, often matching them to occasions or outfits.

» SEE 'SUITABLE' PAGE 2

There's a watch for every wrist

» Although reading too much into a watch can be problematic, there is no time like the present to decode why watches will always be an integral part of a person's professional image – and what messages your timepiece might convey.

Toronto-based image consultant Anne Sowden makes a valuable case for wearing one: It not only fulfills a practical and aesthetic purpose, but also a symbolic one. "If you don't wear one, you may be sending a message that time is not important," she says.

But thought should go into making your horological statement. For all the binary style possibilities – sporty or dressy, large or small face, leather strap or metal bracelet – Ms. Sowden says, you should always make sure that you are wearing the watch as opposed to the watch wearing you.

In other words, you may want to steer clear of a timepiece – at least at the office – that has colleagues begging to count the number of diamonds encircling the face. And while supersized men's and women's watches from Panerai or TechnoMarine are very *au courant*, they really look best on larger wrists.

Suitable understands the desire some people may have to wear a watch that is a testament to their success. In all likelihood, colleagues will never see the money you have spent



An Hour Vision watch. 'If you don't wear one, you may be sending a message that time is not important.'

on your kitchen, but those who care can instantly gauge how much you've dropped on your Breguet, Breitling or Baume & Mercier.

As Ulrich Wohn, president and chief executive officer of TAG Heuer North America, says by e-mail from Springfield, N.J., "A timepiece is one of the first clues to core values and embodiment of the essence of what makes a man

tick."

TAG Heuer is a brand that has multiple entry points: Lucky teenagers will get one on their 16th birthday, which can take them through their 30s, while the new Grand Carrera chronograph costs \$5,700.

This may seem expensive when you can get a perfectly respectable Kenneth Cole watch for \$350 or a Timex for \$35, but watch prices are noto-

rious for being all over the map.

Holt Renfrew, for instance, carries one Gucci model for \$495 and another – the priciest in the store – for \$15,505 (called the Signora, this women's style boasts a bracelet of white gold and malachite).

One of the reasons why people are willing to spend so much money on a watch according to Robert Emmons,

president and CEO of Swatch Group of Canada (which includes Omega, Longines and Breguet) is that it's among the few remaining platforms to show off fine craftsmanship.

"As a lot of other things are getting more casual in people's lives, watches are getting – I won't say fancier – but there are more precious metals. They're also looking for automatics, which go back to the history of watch-making," he says. By this, Mr. Emmons is also referring to the irony that serious watch collectors openly recognize: the truly exceptional watches are never about flash.

"When you have \$50-million, you're buying a watch that is \$70,000 and looks simpler than one for \$300. These men are buying for themselves; they don't need to show it off."

Is there really a difference between metal and leather? Mr. Emmons says the decision is primarily climate related (leather and humidity do not mix), although he admits there once was a time when leather was considered "preferred business attire."

Speaking of which, for those who insist on leaving their wrists naked, BlackBerry holstered to belts are not preferred business attire. Stick them in the briefcase or upper jacket pocket – unless you plan on having a wild west-style PDA shootout at high noon.