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PM's a cut above in suit department
By **IMAGE CONSULTANT JON-MICHAIL**

JOHN Howard is the most image conscious Prime Minister in history -- even more so than sartorial Paul Keating. And I know his government is very serious about the concept of portraying the right image. From a general wardrobe perspective, Howard is far sharper than Kevin Rudd. I would rate Rudd's wardrobe as average.

Howard does suits very well. He's obviously very comfortable in them. But he doesn't do smart casual well at all -- as with a lot of men. Keating also looked good in suits, but he knew how to wear smart casual, too.

When you see Howard in sports gear he usually looks ridiculous. The parachute fabric just does not work. If he learned to co-ordinate smart casual clothes, he would look much more relaxed. Howard has clearly made a lot of changes to his image over the years; a lot of tinkering has gone on.

Leaders are pretty good, in my experience, at taking image advice -- even if they pretend they don't. The problem sometimes lies with advisers not passing on authentic advice.

Looking at Tuesday's presentation when Howard said he had no rabbits to pull out of the hat, it was a classic Machiavellian ploy of talking defeat while planning victory. But I don't think a new suit is going to be able to do much for him in terms of improving his image.

What would make a difference would be for him to loosen up a bit. The photo of Howard going to the factory with no jacket on is interesting. But what is most revealing is who was around him. Looking at his assistants can, at times, reveal more about what's going on.

In one photo, the woman next to him is wearing a loud animal print. I don't know who she is -- she may be an adviser. The point is that the main attention of the photo is on her, not the PM.

From a brand point of view, Rudd has a big opportunity to knock off Howard in the election. Previous Labor leaders Kim Beazley and Simon Crean were really non-competitive.

In the current stakes, Howard would be regarded as a super brand and Kevin Rudd as an emerging brand; six months ago he wasn't even a brand. Howard's image is as a statesman and Rudd's is as a pup.

Howard would be regarded as a safe and established brand and Rudd is a fresh unknown. That's a big positive for Rudd, especially with Generation XY.

When it comes to the concept called trust, there are question marks over both men. As an image maker, I have to say neither Howard nor Rudd convinces me on that level. No change to his wardrobe is going to help Howard look more trustworthy right now.

What would help make him come across as more authentic would be if he used less "weasel" language. But I don't suspect that will happen.



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