

TEN THINGS YOU NEED TO ASK BEFORE SIGNING A UNIFORM SERVICE CONTRACT

By Richard J. Caen
President
Uniform Masters



Servicing uniforms is a fairly straightforward proposition, but there are important decisions to be made and a few important details that need to be taken into consideration.

In an industry where confusing terms and hidden costs seem to be par for the course, my goal has always been to demystify the process and to help our clients arrive at the most efficient and economical long-term solution to their needs.

I can't tell you how many times a new client has told me, "I wish I knew all this before I signed my last contract!"

So here are some things you should know. A few insights that will help you arrive at the best solution – and decide whether you're working with the right service provider.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call.

Richard J. Caen
President
Uniform Masters

901-363-4841

service@uniform-masters.com



1

What are your overall goals?

It's important to take time up front to define your business goals for uniforms. If you are having trouble formalizing your goals, talk to a uniform professional that you trust. Or try answering the questions outlined in this paper.

Here are a few key considerations: What is your objective in ordering uniforms at this time? Are you ordering uniforms because that's what your company has always done? Are there service issues that you have experienced in the past that you wish to avoid? Are there multiple working environments or job classifications to consider? What is your budget? Do you have a reference point for what your budget ought to be? Do you have examples of uniforms you like?

Having clear goals in mind – and written down – will help you make better decisions throughout the process. It'll also help you hold your uniform service provider accountable.

2

What are the various working conditions that must be taken into consideration?

The number one mistake people make in ordering uniforms is failing to take into consideration the scope of working conditions to be allowed for.

Often times, several different factors will come into play – either different situations for different groups of employees, or multiple conditions for a single group of employees. Or a little of both. Make sure you have system solution to cover all needs. In most cases, we look for a single uniform solution that has the flexibility to meet all needs – but sometimes you need multiple options in the uniform toolkit.

Things to take into consideration: How dirty is the job? Inside or outside? Or both? What kind of climate needs to be allowed for? How many different job descriptions/situations need to be addressed? How do they differ? What are the key job function and utility factors? Appearance factors? Comfort factors? Example(s) for reference?



3

What are your safety concerns and what regulatory requirements need to be met?

Obviously, safety is your number one concern. So take the time to spell out every single one of your job safety concerns – you'll be surprised how many of them can be addressed with a uniform solution.

Are there flame resistance, visibility or other safety factors to be taken into account? Needs for insulation, protection from flying debris, needs to avoid slips and falls? Do you know all the OSHA (or other) regulations that apply to your various work zones? Are certifications of compliance required by your organization? Is there a potential need for additional safety services (e.g., mat service or supplies)?

Answering these questions thoroughly now could save a lot of pain, liability and expense down the road.

4

What are your staff preferences for uniform styles and materials?

Having your staff wear their uniforms with a sense of pride can be every bit as important as fit and function.

Have you asked your staff what they need and what they prefer in order for them to be comfortable in (and excited about) their uniforms? If not, go ahead and do that now. While you may not be able to satisfy all their preferences, it will be helpful to at least listen to their ideas.

5

What sort of branding statement do you wish to make to customers?

It could be that selecting the cheapest uniforms may not present the most professional brand image to your customers.

It always helps to let your uniform service provider know what sort of brand image you wish to project. Professionalism? Blue collar ingenuity? High tech specialty? Friendliness? Old school service? Modern thinking?

Don't just pick a fashion style you like – decide what kind of overall impression you want to make.



6

Do you want to consider laundering services?

The real question is, what is the best way for all your uniforms to get cleaned? Your company can handle it, or your employees can handle it, or your uniform service can handle it. Or maybe some hybrid combinations serves your needs best – often, the answer is more that one of the above (e.g., salespeople wash their own polo shirts, while people on the shop floor have cleaned garments delivered weekly).

Your uniform service specialist should be able to walk you through the pros and cons of each option, and the costs (and hidden costs) associated with each. Laundering service may turn out to be a better long-term solution that you think.

7

What level of employee turnover should be allowed for?

One of the things we try to avoid for our clients is unpleasant surprises. Unless you have a plan in place, it can be an expensive hassle to order new uniforms for new employees, replace uniforms because of size differences, or even replace uniforms that an ex employee didn't bother to return. If you can estimate the level of turnover you anticipate, these problems can be solved in advance – and more economically.

8

What will you actually be paying every month?

Ask your uniform service provider to spell out all the charges, explain them, and give you a total. If you do this – and get it in writing, you will save yourself a lot of headaches down the road. If your provider refuses, get a different provider.

The number one complaint we hear about other uniform companies is that the bills are higher than expected, and they continually get higher and higher. You will do well if you walk in expecting that there are hidden fees and insisting that you want them all out in the open.



9

What are the actual terms of your warranty?

This is another critical point. If you see language like a promise to “perform to industry standards,” beware. If you see references to third party arbitration, be suspicious. If you see terms like 90-day notice, be very suspicious. If your salesperson verbalizes a warranty, but refuses to give it to you in writing, be on your way out the door.

Here’s our warranty:

THE UNIFORM MASTERS GUARANTEE

While most uniform services promise they will perform to the “industry standard,” we simply guarantee your satisfaction. If anything goes wrong, we will make it right in thirty days or less. We’re human. We do make mistakes. But the way we respond and correct our mistakes is one thing that really sets us apart.

Ask your provider if they will live up to that. And sign their name to it.

10

Is there a human being you can call if you have any problems after you sign the contract?

I cannot emphasize enough what a key, critical point this is! Standard procedure for a lot of companies out there is to let answering machines field service complaints. And they can be so slow to respond. If they ever do.

Before you sign the dotted line, make sure you have the name and number of a real person who will take your call, and who has the authority to take care of your issues.





UNIFORM MASTERS

UNIFORMS • MATS • PEACE OF MIND

3276 Democrat Rd. | Memphis, TN 38118
901-363-4841 | uniform-masters.com