

Badgered by Bosses To Wear ID Tags, Workers Get Creative --- Making Fashion Statements Of Necessity, an Industry Strings Baubles and Beads

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Leslie Kleitman, an information-technology manager at Hewlett-Packard Co.'s Palo Alto, Calif., office, used to carry a simple name tag in her purse. "Now, you have to have a picture badge -- and you have to wear it," she says.

She tried hanging it from her belt with a retractable "Hewlett-Packard" clip. But it didn't work with a dress, so she gave the clip to her husband for his fishing vest. She switched to the standard silver "ball and chain" necklace. "It was ugly," she says. It pinched. She sought something new.

At a time of heightened security, a new fashion dilemma is raging in the workplace: just how to wear those clunky ID cards bearing photo, employee number, rank and department. Companies all over the nation have spent millions on picture badges, plastic cases and lanyards. Beefed-up security forces insist that they be ever visible.

Now, employees are resorting to imaginative alternatives to the standard-issue strings some call nooses. They are concocting fancier holders out of eyeglass holders, converting clips into corsages, hanging cards from purses and bobbing them from rosaries. "I have a whole collection and rotate them depending on my mood," says Chris Niemann, who works in sales promotion at Lincoln Benefit Life in Nebraska. Her favorite is a Hot Wheels design. But casual Friday usually has her in a personalized orange and black Olympics ribbon. At a recent conference, she gave out lanyards made of tiny golf balls.

Since Sept. 11, jewelry maker Ava Foxman, founder of Moonbabies, in Linwood, N.J., has sold 100,000 badge holders, from glass-beaded models averaging \$18 to holders made of semiprecious stones at \$300. "We can hardly keep them in stock," she says. Sales are twice as brisk as they have been since she launched the item, mainly for nurses, two years ago.

Her badge holders appear on background actors in the television series "West Wing." Sony in Los Angeles commissioned hundreds of Tibetan prayer beads made of sandalwood, and glass rosaries to mix spirituality with security. Its employee gift shops sell them for \$10. "Boeing wants us to make theirs out of ball bearings," Ms. Foxman says. Boeing carries three models of Moonbabies in its stores, including a silver one with clear beads.

Ms. Foxman says her company is now designing a piece with camera-shaped charms for Eastman Kodak. She has also been hunting through catalogs and stores to find a bead that looks just like a certain pill a major drug company is soon rolling out.

When the magazine publisher Conde Nast began cracking down, it was a tough adjustment for Candy Pratts Price, a longtime accessories director at Vogue who recently became executive fashion editor of its Style.com Web site. This is a woman who would rather lose her eyeglasses than wear an eyeglass chain. As a lifelong New Yorker who uses mass transportation, she doesn't even have a driver's license. What to do?

"I went to the Adidas shop and bought a black and white whistle holder," Ms. Pratts Price says. She used it for her photo ID and her office key, and reluctantly hung it around her neck. A colleague told her, "You look like a gym teacher." Her photo, she says, "looked like E.T." It felt uncomfortable and clashed with her jewelry. Soon, it was buried in her purse.

She left the purse in the office recently when she ran across the street with Vogue's editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour, for a meeting at VH1, where Ms. Pratts Price is creative director of the VH1/Vogue Fashion Awards. Neither was carrying picture identification. Ms. Wintour, she says, showed the guards an American Express card and they were allowed in.

Ms. Pratts Price says the ID cards are way too big. She wants to see them vanish, replaced with tiny microchips that can hang from a key chain or on a button. "I don't want to see another thing around the neck," she says. "Why should I be a walking testament to security?"

Brenda Dutkiewicz, an intensive-care nurse at Good Samaritan hospital in San Jose, Calif., designs holders on the side. They are made of multicolored antique crystal beads and sell for \$30 to \$50, mainly to other nurses. She also has sold some at Apple Computer and the Santa Clara County Clerk's office and says she has people clamoring for more, but doesn't have time to make them.

Lanyard wearers are cluttering their lanyards with everything from commuter tickets to keys to cigarettes. Irma Morales-Viola, who is on the cleanup crew for Ground Zero, has adorned her ribbon with little police medals and other trinkets she collected or bought, such as a small replica of the Twin Towers emblazoned with the words "Never Forget."

Stephen Myers, who works as a computer programmer at Bank of New York, used to keep his identification badge in his wallet and swipe the whole wallet to open doors. Now, he wears it around his neck on a string of the company's color, maroon. But he was struggling to bend down and open doors, so he went to Staples and bought retractable clips -- two for \$5.

These tiny yo-yos hold twine that springs in and out on a pulley. They can be clipped to a belt, a shirt, a pocket, or dangled from a lanyard. Mr. Myers gave one to a colleague. "Everyone was saying, 'Where'd you get those cool retractable clips?' And the next thing I knew they were all over the office."

Hewlett-Packard employees also craved something unique. And Ms. Kleitman's husband, Joseph, found just the thing. Spotting a need in Silicon Valley, an artist friend had designed a necklace badge holder out of polymer clay. Mr. Kleitman brought one home that thrilled his wife. It has various shaped sparkly black-and-white beads, "so it goes with everything," says Ms. Kleitman. "It's become part of my daily routine. I take a shower, and then I put my necklace on."

A colleague saw it, bought one for herself and arranged to sell them in the office. She sold 30 in a week and is awaiting a new shipment.

The product's designer, Kim Korringa, has sold several hundred this year at \$24 apiece, enlisting her teenage daughter and friends to help produce them at her Mountain View, Calif., home. She sells six standard models and entertains custom requests. "People are now wearing these day in and day out and wanting a little more style out of it," she says.

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