



Style Lines

BAUER ALUMNUS CONNECTS BUSINESS TO MEN'S FASHION

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Fola Lawson (BBA '08, MS ACCY '09) and his partners Tunde Lawal, Olu Lawson and Stephen Mosby aim to offer "new school vintage" clothing with their online retail business and fashion blog Southern Gents.





o some, getting dressed each morning is an inconsequential task – but for one Bauer College alumnus, it's the basis for a business.

Fola Lawson (BBA' 08, MS ACCY '09) has long had a flair for fashion, and in 2011, he and three friends (also UH alumni) launched the brand Southern Gents, first as a style blog and later as an online menswear store.

The business leverages a growing interest among consumers in high fashion for men, carrying neckties, bow ties, lapel pins and other accessories. But more so than selling products, Southern Gents is working to communicate a philosophy, Lawson said.

"To us, being a Southern Gent means to have upstanding character and to be a pivotal impact in one's community," he said. "In order to do that, you have to be taken seriously, and you have to brand yourself properly."

As co-founder and creative director of Southern Gents, Lawson worked first with the team to develop content for the blog, beginning with basics, from proper blazer fits to shopping guides. The sleek, clean design of the blog (www.s-gents.com) offers a throwback to 50's and 60's refined professional menswear, describing the aesthetic as "new school vintage."

With partners Tunde Lawal, Olu Lawson and Stephen Mosby, Lawson writes for the blog and curates the evolving style of Southern Gents.

"We started this blog, and it was supposed to be about a robust lifestyle, regarding all aspects of men's style," Lawson said. "If you look back through history, it

was the norm for a guy to have a button-down and suspenders. Our idea was to have this new school vintage approach."

They introduced the blog alongside a series of mixers, events that the four felt were missing from Houston's young professional scene, and offered the opportunity for partnerships with non-profits.

They held one of the first Southern Gents mixers at The Health Museum, with the theme "No Shave November," to raise awareness of men's health issues. The team has since held events at art galleries and participated in pop-up events supporting various causes.

"We wanted to create an upstanding, elegant type of social atmosphere that was good for the community and would build relationships. We thought doing it through style would be a great way," Lawson said.

Southern Gents extended its programming from mixers to community outreach last year after Houston charter school YES Prep invited the group to campus for an open-session discussion. Lawson and his partners spoke with students about their futures and shared their own challenges and experiences.

In addition to expressing himself creatively through Southern Gents, Lawson works full-time as a certified public accountant, applying the training he received in his undergraduate and graduate programs at Bauer. Even though he focused on accounting during his studies, Lawson said, he also learned more about running a business, including logistics, customer service, inventory and finances, and management. He has since applied all of these skills to Southern Gents.





1. Signature UH Tie, \$35 • 2. Eclipse Pocket Square, \$18 • 3. UH Red Lapel Pin, \$20 • 4. UH Brass Lapel Pin, \$20
5. SG Vintage Readers, \$45 • 6. Cougar Red Bowtie, \$35 • 7. Cougar Red Tie, \$35 • 8. Cougar Navy Tie, \$35

For more product information, visit www.s-gents.com.

“Southern Gents will bridge the gap between real life and elegance and ‘gentlemen-hood.’ That means professionals who not only take



pride in putting forth a great representation of themselves, they also care deeply about the community they serve and the business they’re doing.”

“My time at Bauer helped me to understand beyond what I’m passionate about as a person and being able to make that work in real life,” Lawson said. “Those are the important things that make or break a business.”

After operating as a blog for a year, Southern Gents opened its online retail store, filling a gap in the market. Menswear items available previously were at inaccessible prices or weren’t designed to their standards, Lawson said.

“We thought this would be a perfect opportunity for us to get into the market by introducing carefully crafted and uniquely designed menswear items,” he added. “We decided to give it a shot, and we came out with our first 10 products — five bowties and five ties. Since then, we’ve never looked back.”

Southern Gents’ customer base continues to grow, Lawson said, likely because consumers are recognizing the role of style and self confidence in creating a positive first impression in the business world.

Employees might be good at what they do, he added, but coworkers and superiors may not see that if they are not presenting themselves as professionally as possible.

“(Your coworkers’) knowledge of you is how you carry yourself and how you speak, your attitude and mood in the office every day,” Lawson explained. “It’s important for young people today to understand that first impressions go a long way and to be mindful that someone is always watching.”

Although Southern Gents is still a young company, Lawson hopes that the brand will become a household name and continue to foster strong community relationships.

“We’d like to think, when you see a gentleman dressed in a nice tie and a nice suit, he is acknowledged as having that ‘Southern Gent’ look. We’d also like our brand to resonate further beyond the idea of looking neat, or simply being well dressed.” Lawson said.

He added: “Southern Gents bridges the gap between lifestyle and elegance and ‘gentlemen-hood.’ That means men and women who not only take pride in putting forth a great representation of themselves, but they also care deeply about the community they serve and the business they’re doing.”

