

## Omar Alberto

There is no one cooler than Omar. His deep, raspy voice, with an accent not easily identified, emanates from his office as he juggles three phones, shoots off emails, and rattles out names of the new faces that his booking agents just have to see. Omar moves as if he's listening to the syncopated rhythms of a salsa song—smooth, suave, and spicy. All the while, models traipse in and out of his office so Omar can send them off to the next shoot, approve their photos, or simply hang out with them. And it's all done with Omar's world-class smile. Omar is in the image-making business, and make images he does.

A 25-year veteran of the fashion and modeling industries, the charismatic Panamanian began his journey in 1978 on the catwalks of Paris and Milan. In 1987 he opened his own agency, Omar's Men, in Los Angeles to provide great-looking men with the same superstar status accorded to the female model; his concept took off and he soon operated a bicoastal business. In 2003 Omar joined Warning Model Management forming a strategic alliance with its rapidly growing talent division, Warning Talent.

Omar single-handedly changed the face of male modeling by disregarding the cookie-cutter images of men and replacing them with a new realism. Tapping into the interests of American women, Omar was on to something. "Women don't want blond-haired, blue-eyed Ken dolls," insists Omar. "My boys can have big ears, big noses and crooked teeth. What counts is personality and presence." In its first two years, Omar's men snatched up more than 60 percent of the business.

Among the many careers Omar has advised are those of Djimon Houson, Antonio Sabato, Jr., Billy Baldwin, Rupert Everett, and Tyrese, all of whom have transitioned to lucrative careers as performers. His "boys" have graced the pages of every top fashion magazine around the world including *GQ*, *L'Uomo Vogue*, and *Arena Magazine*.

Omar has produced talent for the world's top fashion and commercial photographers, including Bruce Weber, with whom he most recently worked on a groundbreaking six-page spread for *W Magazine* featuring soccer star Landon Donovan, and also Michael Compton, who employed Omar in a Banana Republic Campaign. Designers Omar has worked with include Burberry, Gucci, Ralph Lauren, and Dolce & Gabbana to name a few.

"Omar's eye is uncanny," says photographer Mario Testino who collaborated with Omar on assignments for *Vogue* and designers Dolce & Gabbana. "He never misses. He never steers me wrong."

Before opening Omar's Men, Omar modeled throughout Europe under L'Image Di Riccardo Guy in Milan and in the U.S. under Elite Model Management in New York. He jumped behind the scenes in 1980 when he became an agent at L'Image before moving on to East/West Models and then It Models. Eventually, Omar created Omar's Incorporated for Men and Women, which he merged with Prima Models to create United Prima Omar's (UPO). UPO later became Q Models, a publicly traded company.

Omar truly understands the beauty of diversity. He was born and raised in Panama by his Spanish father of Brazilian and Bermudan descent and a Jewish-Ethiopian mother. The youngest of three sons, Omar found success as a competitive swimmer before enduring eighteen months of military academy in Caracas. He studied at the Colegio de La Salle in Panama, Costa Rica, and Venezuela, and then at the Instituto Nacional De Artes in Barcelona. At 20, Omar enrolled in a two-year program at Laboratory Institute of Merchandise, a private college specializing in fashion buying and merchandising, but he truly rounded out his education in fashion at the famed Studio 54.

When he's not catapulting the careers of fresh talent, this tattooed, Latin, sharply dressed, family man can be found playing the bongos or shooting hoops with his two sons, Alesandro, and Kuria, who was adopted from Kenya in 2005.