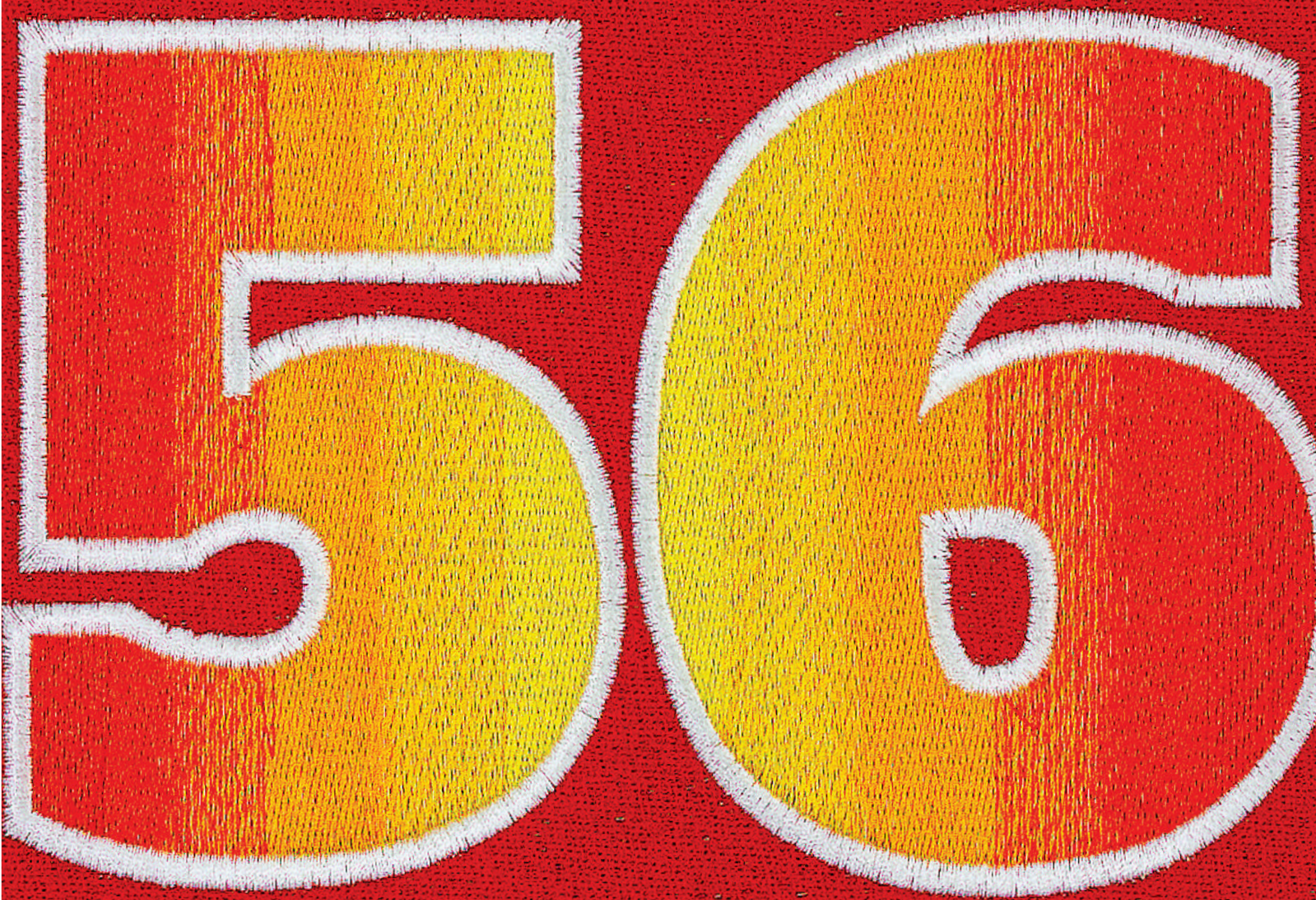


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Photography: Mark Pricsett
Design: Jim Lang
Digitizing and embroidery by Cory Dean, Artwork
Source (asi/36907)

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CORRECTION

Kataaro Custom Martial Arts Products is an Illinois-based embroidery company. The company's name was spelled incorrectly in "The American Dream" article in the November issue. Contact: www.kataaro.com

Join Us on Location

Stitches Staff Writer Daniel Walsh interviews some of the movers-and-shakers on The *Stitches* Power List and asks them some tough questions about where the decorating industry is headed in 2011. Go to *Stitches.com* to listen to the podcasts.



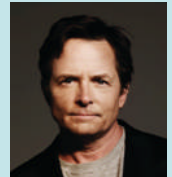
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Curious about the hottest apparel trends for 2011? Go to *Stitches.com* to read a "*Stitches* University" online-exclusive article about the top apparel and accessories trends.



Get Podcasts on the Go

You can download lots of educational MP3 files at *Stitches.com* – so you can get valuable business-building tips while you're on the go. This month, download an exclusive interview ASI editors conducted with Michael J. Fox. The actor and activist told his inspiring story of being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease at 29 – and offered his own methods for overcoming obstacles to continue a highly successful career. Plus, as keynote speaker for The ASI Show Orlando in January, Fox previewed his talk by revealing his favorite promotional items.



Your Bottom Line

In a recent poll on *ASICentral.com*, we asked industry companies: **How worried are you about complying with product-safety regulations?**

More than half of you (48%) are very concerned about complying with product-safety regulations. However, an alarming 52% aren't too worried (or don't care) about product-safety issues related to the products they sell.

Get educated: Turn to page 54 to read "The Price of Safety" article about regulations that affect apparel decorators.





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Looking to add some major sparkle to your designs, but you're wary about using metallic thread? In this issue's "Technically Speaking," **DEBORAH JONES**, owner of MyEmbroideryMentor.com, introduces you to a new technique for achieving sparkle. "If you want to try a new, stress-free method for adding sparkle to almost any design, consider pairing Mylar with your embroidery work: The basic procedure is as simple as stitching over a base of Mylar film," she writes. Plus, Jones' companion video on *Stitches.com* shows you the entire process at an embroidery machine.



In this issue's "Punching Sense," **BONNIE LANDSBERGER**, owner of Cannon Falls, MN-based Moonlight Design, teaches you how to punch a solid base for your embroidery work with individual elements. "To prepare your fabric surface for the least shock and distortion, as well as to tack the fabric to the backing, you need to create a base foundation for your design of sparsely set lines of run stitches across the entire design area," she writes. Plus, you can download the art that Landsberger uses as her example at *Stitches.com* so you can practice digitizing it yourself, following the instructions in this column.



As you learned last issue, Jerilee Auclair, owner of Black Eagle Designs in Vancouver, WA, has passed her expert torch to Erich Campbell, digitizer and e-commerce manager for Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (*asi/140730*). Campbell will rotate the "Ask an Expert" column with **KRISTINE SHREVE**, director of marketing for EnMart and Ensign Emblem. This month, Shreve offers a thorough (and up-to-date) thread primer that will satisfy newbies and experienced embroiderers alike. "Consider the effect you want the thread to produce," she writes. "For embroidery that sparkles, metallic thread should produce the effect you want. If you want variations in color and shade, variegated thread may be the best choice."

Interested in becoming a *Stitches* contributor? Please send an e-mail to nrollender@asicentral.com and let us know what's on your mind.

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THE MAGAZINE



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Please include your name, job title, company and an e-mail address or phone number where we can reach you.



ONLINE

Find recent articles, videos, podcasts and more at *Stitches.com*. The *Stitches Embroidery Business Insights* e-newsletter drops every other Thursday, and the *Stitches Small Business* e-newsletter drops the third Tuesday of every month. For subscription information, visit *Stitches.com*.



WEBINARS

Be on the lookout for upcoming *Stitches* webinars. We'll post a schedule on *Stitches.com/UpcomingWebinars* and announce them in our e-newsletters.

***Stitches* celebrates its 23rd year in 2010.**

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At ASICentral.com/education, watch Timothy M. Andrews, president and CEO of ASI, talk about the new Advertising Specialty Institute Certification Program. "This program's sole purpose is to elevate the level of expertise and professionalism of all members of the advertising specialty industry," he says.

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The future: That was the focus of a *Stitches* Editorial Advisory Board meeting a few years ago in Long Beach, CA. *Stitches* Publisher Rich Fairfield, ASI Magazines Editor-in-Chief Melinda Ligos and I met with board members to talk about where they saw the commercial embroidery industry headed – and what it needed to get there. One big theme was apparent: students. Students at the college level must be able to get educated in embroidery, digitizing and how to run a successful decorating business. That's key to the future success of the industry as a whole.

That's why this issue – where we unveil the first-ever, annual *Stitches* Power List – is a great time for me to announce that *Stitches* has been working with the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), the nation's preeminent art and design college, to launch an embroidery and digitizing program as part of the school's textiles department. We've been working closely with Anais Missakian, department head/professor of textiles at RISD, to get the program up and running: That included working with Hirsch International to supply RISD with a Tajima embroidery machine and digitizing software at a substantial discount; Madeira USA is also providing a six-month supply of embroidery thread and a discount on backing, bobbins and other supplies.

In October, Rich and I visited RISD to see the newly installed machine and the new digitizing lab set up with 18 workstations. *Stitches* Power List member Joyce Jagger, owner of The Embroidery Coach, was on hand to train RISD staff, technicians and select seniors and graduate students in anticipation of embroidery design courses being offered for the first time next summer.

Here's what Anais has to say about the fledgling program: "For several years, we've wanted to enhance our students' understanding of the creative and technical possibilities that embroidery has to offer. Until now, students have experimented with sewing machines and hand techniques to create embroidered and embellished effects. The RISD textile department students and faculty are enthusiastic about experimenting and exploring embroidery techniques to their full potential as another form of expression." We're excited about continuing to work with RISD, and 2011 looks bright.

Thinking about the future is also why we decided to create the Power List. It's our way of acknowledging and honoring the people who we think are the most powerful in the industry today. This is not so much a historical list as it is a forward-looking list, comprised of those industry heavyweights who'll shape the future of the embroidery industry.

If you think there's somebody who should be on next year's Power List, e-mail me at nrollender@asicentral.com, and let me know who it is and why you think they're impacting the industry.



Nicole Rollender
nrollender@asicentral.com

We Asked You ...

Who in the embroidery/ decorating industry has influenced you the most and why?



David Collin, Busy Bees Embroidery, St. Louis, MO; bzzybees@swbell.net: "Many people have influenced me in this industry with the mechanics and shortcuts to get jobs done, but Thomas Moore Jr., owner of St. Louis-based Strawberry Stitch Co., taught me so much about the theory in digitizing, about what makes what happen and why. Best lessons I've learned."

Regina Cassidy, It Takes a Stitch Custom Embroidery, Arlington, VA; regina@ittakesastitch.com:

"My nomination is a group of people. I think the biggest influence early in my embroidery career had to be some of the wonderfully creative home embroiderers. There were a few older (70 and above) women locally who were using their Bernina software to develop new techniques to sew out on their sewing/embroidery machines. They were truly inspiring. At a different time, they could have taken their art form to a whole different level. Art through embroidery isn't limited to those who make money and a business from it. While some see the home embroidery industry as a threat, I see it as an opportunity for embroidery to reach many more people. If not for the home embroidery industry, I wouldn't have ended up in commercial embroidery or known enough about embroidery to be successful. It was a nice 'kiddie pool' to get my feet wet in, and I know that I'm not alone in this path to a second career that I love."



Carolyn Milne, Computer Craft Designs, Hillsboro, OR; carolyn@spiritone.com: "For me, it's Nancy Zieman of Nancy's Notions. When I got my first embroidery machine, I took one of her seminars and was so inspired not only to digitize but to explore the world of fiber art and clothing. Watching her TV show, I'd get inspired every week, and when I'd get discouraged with a project, lo and behold, it seemed she had my house bugged, as she would have a TV show about the subject. Nancy has contributed years of sewing and embroidery knowledge. When I saw her embroidery designs, I was inspired to learn how to do that – and I have."



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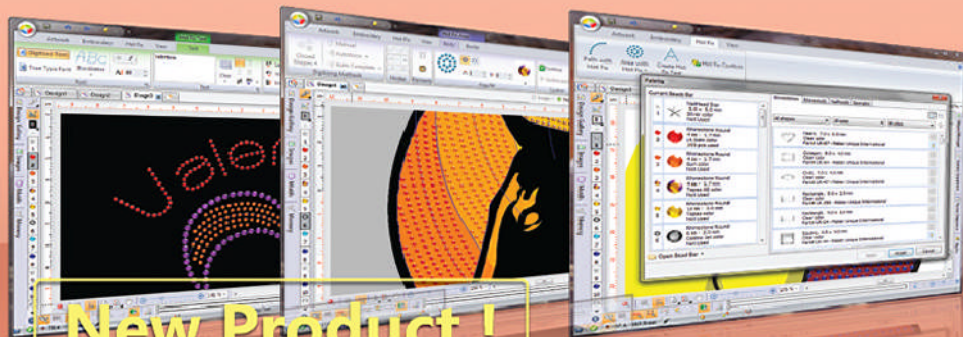
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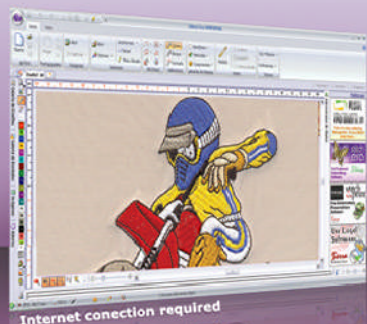
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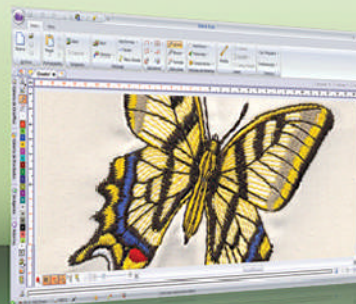
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What's a trend that you think is going to shape the decorating market in 2011?



Erich Campbell, Black Duck Inc. (asi/140730)

Customers are increasingly looking for more complex, multi-layered and multimedia designs. They're looking for more retail-inspired and fashion-driven looks, combining printed, embroidered and often applied elements like rhinestones and nail heads in one design. That will be much simpler for decorators to contend with than it has been in previous years, as we've seen a flourishing in new techniques and materials to address this gap – especially in the heat-applied graphics market. There are more options for everything from standard one-color prints to special effects to full-color sublimation available at the fairly low cost of a good heat press, cutter and/or sublimation printer; or better yet, for those decorators who don't want to purchase extra equipment, finished materials and prints are available for use with a heat press.



Deborah Jones, MyEmbroideryMentor.com

A trend will be continued high visibility of ready-to-wear embroidery design work. This creates a demand for embroidery, but it can also skew its perceived value. Fortunately, the most recent fashion trends have focused on menswear and distressed styles, and styles accented with bling. These have lower stitch counts and the prices have been more in line with what we as decorators like to see.

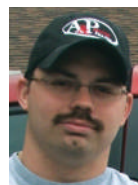
We can make the most of this trend by showing our customers that we can design custom creations that incorporate and go beyond the embroidered fashions available in retail stores. We should practice techniques and focus on how to use these in a practical and time-effective manner. This applies across the spectrum, from casual to



“Look at the themes and colors carried out in footwear, because it has the longest production timeline and provides insight to coming themes.”

Deborah Jones, MyEmbroideryMentor.com

bridal. No matter the niche, keep an eye on the world of fashion for your inspiration in the coming year. Hint: Look at the themes and colors carried out in footwear, because it has the longest production timeline and provides insight to coming themes.



Howard Potter, A & P Master Images

One trend we're seeing is the worn and distressed look. We don't struggle with creating these looks for customers because we have graphic designers in-house who also digitize. Decorators who don't have designers readily available to them might struggle with providing these retail looks to their clients. A good solution for businesses on a budget is to hire a recent college graduate with an associate's or bachelor's degree in graphic design. Before hiring, give your candidate a test to see if he or she can create an acceptable design sample that would work for your business.



Lee Romano Sequeira, Sparkle Plenty Designs Inc. (asi/88442)

Rhinestone and crystal body tattoos are very hot right now – everything from pink ribbons for breast cancer awareness to custom designs such as the Texas Longhorn symbol, and everything in

between. Companies that want to advertise their brands are using these tattoos and similar crystal embellishments on skin, paper, glasswear and phones.



Andy Shuman, Rockland Embroidery Inc. (asi/734150)

Overall, I believe things will trend in a positive direction. One trend, or situation, that I strongly feel will continue is challenging inventory levels. Decorators will need to continue to expect inventory to arrive to their facility from multiple locations and multiple vendors. They'll need to continue to prepare for back orders, and when selling apparel programs, will need to have their customers educated and prepared to substitute styles. The word “prepare” is key in these situations. If decorators don't take the proper steps in advance, inventory issues can become very frustrating.



Jane Swanzy, Swan Threads

I'm seeing more and more heat-press film products: fun, innovative, creative film/vinyl options that give a decorator a lot of options, especially for small-quantity orders. These products can be used alone or combined with embroidery and rhinestones to achieve a really custom look. For me as a decorator, this is exciting. ■

Send your question for the *Stitches* Editorial Advisory Board to nrollender@ascentral.com.



Dear Phil,

I'm desperately looking for fleece baby blankets with satin binding. I can find whip-stitched versions, but I'd like satin binding, as I feel it's more appropriate for baptismal keepsakes. - Denise

You'll find some wonderful baby blankets with satin binding at Terry Town (*asi/90913*); (800) 742-9793; *www.promotionalterry.com*. The blankets come in baby blue, baby pink and white, and are made from anti-pill microfleece. Check out product KP1701-E, a super-soft blanket, and product KP1705-E, a microfiber chenille blanket.



Dear Phil,

Do you have a resource for tri-color striped headbands or sweatbands? - Pam

It looks to me like your answer is right in this supplier's name: Sports Solutions Inc. (*asi/88876*); (800) 257-4075; *www.nosweatspecialties.com*. Product 53-202 is an absorbent terrycloth sweatband with three stripes, and your clients can choose from 25 colors - including four neon hues - for the stripes.



Dear Phil,

I can't remember ever seeing this request in your column. We have a customer who wants us to locate a source for bright yellow Western-style shirts. We'd prefer a wholesale outlet, of course, but at this point, anything would help. - Kelly

This indeed is a tough one. Unfortunately, I couldn't find any suppliers that carry bright yellow Western shirts, but, if your customer is willing to improvise a little, I have some options for you. First, check out Printgear (*asi/79570*); (800) 763-7763; *www.printgear.com*. This supplier carries yellow, cotton button-down shirts (product 610) with woodtone buttons that are definitely a Western style. Also, try Carhartt Workwear & Haws USA (*asi/43861*); (919) 267-3231; *www.hawsusa.com*; product 56335. This Ranchwear shirt comes in light yellow and

features a snap placket and two Western-style chest pockets that secure with a snap. Good luck!

Dear Phil,

I've been searching for a week looking for men's 2XL-Tall hooded sweatshirts in a 90/10 blend or 100% cotton. I've looked at all the major suppliers and I can't find them. My customer has employees who work outside in the winter weather. - Diane

I have good news for you, Diane! I found a hooded sweatshirt in tall sizes at Corporate Image Outfitters (*asi/46741*); (800) 959-4626; *www.corporateimageoutfitters.com*; product K217-TALL. This Carhartt brand hoodie is 80% cotton/20% polyester (that's the highest cotton-to-polyester ratio I could find) and features a zip mock neck, which is a rather cool combo with the hood. It comes in gray, navy, dark red, gold and black.

Got a question for Phil?

If you can't find what you're looking for in the Embroiderers Sourcing Guide, write to: Stitches, Attn: Phil Stitch, 4800 Street Rd., Trevoise, PA 19053. Or fax your question to (215) 953-3107. For the quickest response, e-mail askphil@asicentral.com. For RN inquiries, visit www.stitches.com for the RN Database link. Although I try my best, I can't always answer every request, so please continue your search on your own. Remember, if you contact the companies I mention, tell them you heard about them here!

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By Andraya Vantrease

Metallic MADNESS

These days, shine and sparkle are where it's at. "Colored metallic threads are becoming a lot more interesting to people," says Kristine Shreve, director of marketing for EnMart and Ensign Emblem. "It doesn't necessarily have to be used as an accent anymore. We can make an

entire design that's metallic, yet not so strong that it looks like you're trying to bling everything up." EnMart carries more than 15 colored metallic threads, including bright colors like turquoise, pink, lavender, red and copper. "Silver and gold metallic threads have been left in the dust and color is the craze," Shreve says.

"Everyone is gravitating toward the shine," says Mark Wasson, president of Gunold USA. "We have 25 products out at our trade shows, but people are heading straight for

the metallics." The company is offering a new glitter thread – a thinner, but shinier metallic thread. "The thread was designed to take the idea of glitter to a whole new level, further than just using colored metallic thread," he says.

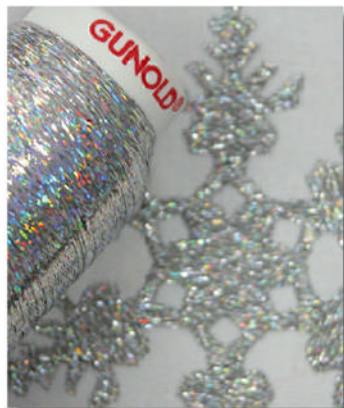
Wasson believes metallic thread really is the next biggest thing, so Gunold has begun offering classes for embroiderers (taught by Deborah Jones, an embroidery instructor, published author and independent contractor for Gunold) to learn the techniques and challenges associated with using metallic threads to add drama to designs.



Distressed Appliqué Still Hot

The distressed look (as seen on Abercrombie & Fitch and Hollister racks) is still on the fashion hot list, and has even made its way into fall and winter gear and corporate attire. "It's great that this fashion-forward trend can be applied to corporate logos and other day-to-day embroidery jobs," says Deborah Jones, owner of MyEmbroideryMentor.com. "I train in how to translate artwork to raw-edge appliqué and other distressed techniques using specific matte thread types."

It's a tough technique to master, since the acrylic thread requires longer digitizing stitch lengths, but when done correctly, the apparel can look like it's from a high-end retail collection. "People see it at retail and don't know where to get it in the industry," says Mark Wasson, president of Gunold USA. "We use the softer, more muted colors with this distressed technique, like they do in stores."



Glitter thread (1411) from Gunold USA (circle 152 on Free Info Card) is available in gold, silver, red, blue and green.

This falcon design by Erich Campbell, digitizer and e-commerce manager for Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (asi/140730; circle 151 on Free Info Card), uses colored metallic threads throughout the entire embroidered piece.

What to Watch in Screen Printing

For 2011, screen-printed designs are migrating from front-center placement to across-seam and wraparound locations – plus, buyers are looking for even more fashion-forward multimedia designs.



At retail, “It’s common to see an allover, water-based ink print layered with a foiled embellishment, then topped with a textured design from a high-density ink,” says Tom Vann, owner of Big Rapids, MI-based Tommy’s T-Shirt Factory. Tommy’s screen prints the popular burnout patterns to create unique shirt designs and takes advantage of pure cotton shirts that disintegrate when treated with burnout chemicals.

“We can screen print shoelace holes on the side of a cotton shirt and wash it so the print turns into actual holes,” Vann says. “Then, we weave laces through them, so we’ve got a slit on the side of a shirt that’s laced tight through holes we made with the burnout.”

A hot, new ink trend coming into the market is glow-in-the-dark inks. “There aren’t that many on the market yet, but florescent green is pretty available because phosphorus is naturally a green element,” Vann says. “I’ve seen some of these new inks in blue, magenta and more, and they glow for hours, rather than minutes. Next year, we’ll all be using them.”

Screen-printed gray tee from In Your Face Apparel (asi/62494; circle 153 on Free Info Card).



Jessica Alba visits MTV’s *TRL* at MTV Studios Times Square in New York wearing a screen-printed T-shirt. Photo by Jamie McCarthy/WireImage.

Hot Hue: **Teal**

Often referred to as wintermint or blue spruce, teal is excellent for the winter season because it can be paired with equally dramatic, saturated hues such as garnet and evergreen or neutrals such as ivory and charcoal. Restaurants, home-improvement centers and landscaping services are perfect fits for the color, as they customarily implement blues and greens but are usually looking for something new to adopt. – *Alisa Tallman*

TIP: As a jewel tone, teal is just a touch darker than Pantone’s revered Lagoon, which was hailed as this year’s most popular color in fashion. Combined with other saturated hues, teal is a superb choice, not just for wearables, but also for use in logo imprinting or embroidery.

Screen-Printing Trends

Performance fabrics are all over the map right now, but they don’t hold decoration very well because of their features (water resistance, breathability and moisture-wicking). “We’re seeing requests for more polyester, nylon and spandex, which are more difficult to work with, but it’s what people are wearing,” says Jon Sollberger, owner of Chicago-based Clubhouse Designs (asi/700043). “It’s not just the typical cotton anymore” that people want screen printed.

Phthalate free inks are the newest craze among health organizations because they’re safer alternatives to the inks commonly used by screen printers. Phthalate is the chemical that binds the ink and makes it smooth, so in order for the ink to flow properly, the phthalate needs to be replaced with a similar chemical.

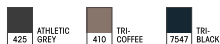
“Water-based is one way to go for having environmentally friendly inks,” says Tom Vann, owner of Big Rapids, MI-based Tommy’s T-Shirt Factory.

ANDRAYA VANTREASE is an editorial intern for *Stitches*. Contact: avantrease@asicentral.com.

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Style Tips: Prints

Fashion is awash in prints this winter. Take your pick from animal prints, floral prints, stripes, tie-dye or even polka dot – this trend is ubiquitous, from runway to ready-to-wear.

David Schary, president of Two Lumps of Sugar (*asi/92389*), appreciates prints' ability to introduce a sense of optimism as the economy continues to mend itself. "Prints are fun; they make people feel 'up' and good about things," he says. He suggests that prints in particular have done a lot for wearables and other promotional products by imbuing them with more personality and hence enabling them to become more effective sales tools.

Jenny Straub, new product development coordinator for the Vitronic Promotional Group (*asi/93990*), says that "products with prints and patterns have broad appeal," and that their fashion flair offers greater longevity. Marty Seaborn, marketing manager at Sun N Sand Accessories Inc. (*asi/90142*), agrees. "From quilted prints to accented bags with floral-print fabrics, a print is an inexpensive way to enhance a product and increase its user value," he says.

Straub cites a wide variety of potential clients for prints, including hair salons, churches, financial institutions, charities and art programs. Seaborn mentions entertainment venues, suggesting that they can incorporate the print trend into sellable products such as bags and hats, or as part of uniforms.

One of the best things about today's print trend is that you can mix and match them to your heart's content. Designers Thakoon Panichgul, Dolce & Gabbana and Rag & Bone included mixed prints in their fall and winter 2010 lineups. Decorators should consider offering print and patterned items in a "collectible format." By releasing the same product in several different styles, end-users will want one of each. – AT



The Vitronic Promotional Group (*asi/93990*; circle 156 on Free Info Card) offers this women's purse (A207) in numerous print styles, including leopard, polka dot and stripes.



This striped messenger bag (0529-PKR-Tucs) from NUMO (*asi/74710*; circle 157 on Free Info Card) has an edgy, urban look.

NEWS BRIEFS

Broder Bros. Co. (asi/42090) has announced that it will be opening a new distribution center in Denver. The 63,500-square-foot warehouse and showroom will be located at 9931 East 47th Avenue.

Dalco Athletic offers polyester full-color dye sublimation patches that can be sewn down or heat applied. Shapes include circles, squares, rectangles, half-circles, long ovals, arched plackets, shields and a football.

EnMart has relocated its West Coast shipping facility to California. The former EnMart West facility, based in Reno, NV, will retain limited stock as a distribution hub for local customers.

Hirsch International is offering an oversize Tajima embroidery hoop. The TFA-510X450 frame is made of high-impact plastic resin and measures 18 inches wide by 20 inches long. It works best with thicker fabrics and has a diagonal distance of 23½ inches.

In Your Face Apparel (asi/62494) has acquired Dallas-based **Collegetown Screen Printing**. The Collegetown brand name has been eliminated and the company's equipment and staff have been folded into In Your Face Apparel. Also, In Your Face has relocated its Dallas corporate offices into a larger facility that brings together its corporate offices, production and warehouse operations into one site.

SanMar (asi/84863) has appointed Russ Wenter and Phil Osborn to the industrial laundry (IL) team.

Stitch Designers (asi/741145) has launched a new website at: www.stitchdesigners.com.

Towel Specialties (asi/91605) is now the exclusive provider of Board Towelz to the decorated apparel industry.

Vantage Apparel (asi/93390) has launched a corporate fan page on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/vantageapparel.

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www.cappatexas.org

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Awards Dinner & Holiday Party
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Jan. 21-23, Long Beach, CA
ISS Show
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Jan. 17-21, Raleigh, Charlotte,
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By Deborah Jones

Add Shine to Your Designs

Want a brand-new way to add pizzazz to your embroidery designs? Try pairing embroidery with Mylar for a new take on shine.



Stitches.com/deborah
In the companion video to "Technically Speaking," Deborah demonstrates this embroidery-paired-with-Mylar technique from start to finish at her embroidery machine.

General Mylar Tips

Don't dry-clean garments that have been embellished using Mylar. The garments can be washed and dried normally, but dry on cool in a short cycle. Eventually, some of the sparkle will diminish, but the Mylar will remain under the embroidery, providing color for the life of the garment or item.

For this reason, it's best to use the Mylar technique demonstrated in this column for items that aren't laundered frequently, such as caps, backpacks, holiday guest towels and decorative items.

Visit the Archives:
If you struggle with metallic thread, visit the Stitches.com article archives and read the January 2010 "Technically Speaking" column, "Be a Rock Star," for tips on using metallic thread.

When you're getting ready to create a stand-out design for the holidays or other special occasion, you might hesitate to use metallic threads or other specialty products. However, if you want to try a new, stress-free method for adding sparkle to almost any design, consider pairing Mylar with your embroidery work. The basic procedure is as simple as stitching over a base of Mylar film. Let's cover some things you need to know before you get started.

First, select a design that would look great with a bit of shine peeking through the stitches. It can be an obvious theme, such as a metallic paint job on an automobile design, or to give a life-like, wet effect to a fish design. Surprisingly, one of my favorite Mylar creations used white Mylar beneath an embroidered design of an Arabian horse head.

Second, verify that the embroidery design you want to pair with Mylar is suitable – it should have a sizeable area of fill stitches. The embroidery-and-Mylar technique works best when you use it with fill-stitched areas, rather than satin-stitched areas. Also, be sure to check that you can buy the Mylar material in the color you want. Mylar is available in many colors, but the most readily available is silver, because Mylar is the material from which many helium gift balloons are made. Note that silver Mylar that has been printed with a different color doesn't offer the desired shiny effect.

I buy most of my Mylar at big-box craft stores; it's usually in the gift-wrap department, packaged flat like



Designs Made for Mylar

Some stock embroidery designs have been especially created for use with this Mylar technique. The butterfly designs featured here were created for this technique by Great Notions (www.greatnotions.com).

tissue paper. Also, be sure that you don't get a cellophane product, as this tears easily and doesn't produce the same effect. Think balloons and you'll select the right material. In fact, you may want to do your first Mylar project

using a balloon to be absolutely certain you have Mylar. Some packages actually say Mylar foil or Mylar tissue, but many call it metallic foil.

Next, you'll need to edit the fill-stitched areas of your selected design. Different software uses different ways of expressing density values. The goal is to use a density value that will produce about 65% of normal coverage. This will place the stitches farther apart and allow the Mylar material to leave them at their normal density, helping to give the Mylar areas a defined and neatly finished appearance. ■

Tip
You can find many designs in your library where you can use Mylar for added dramatic effect. For example, a simple sea-shell design works well and it's equally effective with almost any color choice.

DEBORAH JONES has been involved in the computerized embroidery industry for the last 30 years. Recently, Jones has devoted much of her time developing educational videos for embroiderers and writing the book, *Machine Embroidery on Difficult Materials*. Contact: djones@embroiderycoach.com

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STEP 1 Edit your design.

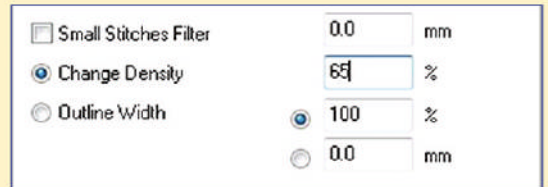
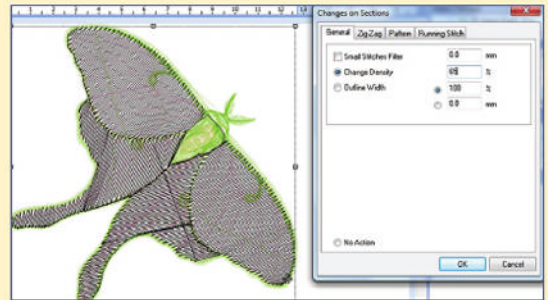
Fill stitches are made up of rows of stitches.

Most designs edited for this embroidery-and-Mylar technique are quite effective with about 65% of normal density. You may want more Mylar to peek through; if so, use about 50% density. For example, when using white Mylar to create the reflective effect of snow or ice, you could use a 50% density value.

Before you begin editing, go to the File Menu in your software, select "Save As" and give the design a new name. This will ensure that your original design will remain in its original form. Select the area that you want to tweak, and change the density for that area. In some software products, you may need to first save the design in a wire-frame

format to effect this change. Be sure to check the stitch count before and after making your density change. Your Mylar version should have fewer stitches.

The method described here is the preferred method, but if you aren't comfortable with this level of editing, there's another way you can achieve this effect: You can enlarge a design at the machine or in your software without changing the stitch count. The larger design, stitching with the same number of stitches, will have the rows of fill stitches spread farther apart, allowing the Mylar to show through.



Some software allows you to set density by percentage value. Regardless of how your system defines density, for the Mylar technique, use a density setting that's about 65% of normal density for a fill-stitch area.

STEP 2 Cut your Mylar.

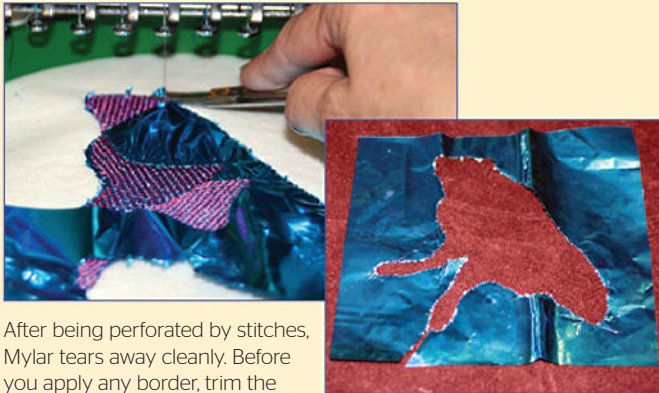
This piece should be slightly larger than the fill area. In typical designs, the fill-stitch area sews first, so you can simply position the Mylar over the base material and start the machine. The first few stitches will hold the Mylar in place. If you prefer, you can lightly spray the reverse side of the Mylar with embroidery spray adhesive. Stitch all of the fill stitches.



Some designs have multiple colors in fill stitches; you may choose to add Mylar in specific colors under each area.

STEP 3

Remove the excess Mylar. The material pulls away easily, and with just a bit of practice you can learn to leave very little remaining attached to the edges of the embroidery. Snip away any small bits before you apply any outline stitching.



After being perforated by stitches, Mylar tears away cleanly. Before you apply any border, trim the small pieces that remain for a clean finish.

STEP 4

Finish the design. Stitch any outlines and detail stitches. The outlines provide a clean finish.



Your finished design will have plenty of sparkle and shine that will stay for the life of the garment or item you've decorated.

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By Bonnie Landsberger

Tools of the Trade

What's a design without a good foundation? Learn to punch a solid base for your embroidery work with individual elements.



Wind down the year by sharpening your digitizing skills. It makes sense that every good design starts with a strong base. To prepare your fabric surface for the least shock and distortion, as well as to tack the fabric to the backing, you need to create a base foundation for your design using sparsely set lines of run stitches across the entire design area. However, many designs don't allow for a freestyle stabilizing base. For example, this holiday ornament design has about the same amount of open areas as it does elements, and many of those elements will be sewn with line stitches, leaving no opportunity to hide all of the base underlay.

You can add stitches under various elements to assure proper column widths, densities and structure just prior to when each element is sewn. However, if you create elements throughout your design like this, but don't use a base foundation, the fabric could buckle, causing unsightly puckers around the design or a distorted design. So, the best solution is to punch some of the elements in a balanced way; if you choose the right path, the first elements you punch can stabilize the area enough to act as a base foundation. ■

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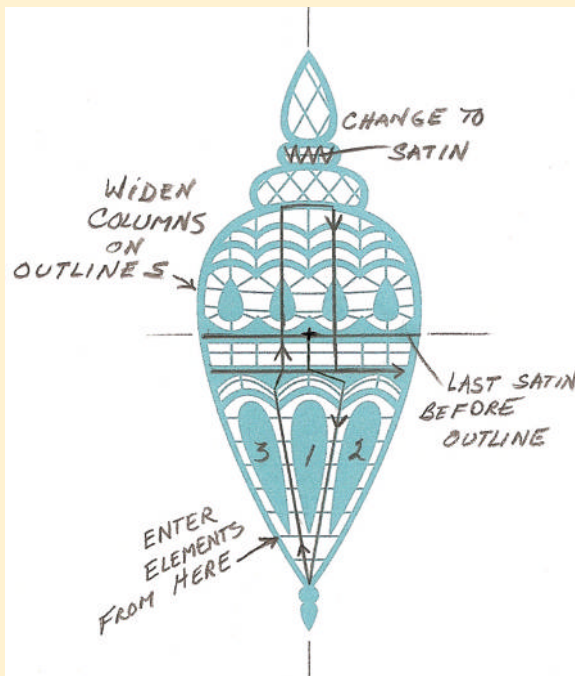
Stitches.com

Punch It Yourself

Download the art for this holiday ornament design at Stitches.com so you can practice digitizing it yourself, following the instructions in this column. And, e-mail nrollender@asicentral.com with your best punching tips.

STEP 1 Map a Path to Speed Up Punching

After you download the artwork for this one-color ornament at Stitches.com, print and study it, and then decide which elements will work best as the first stitches to stabilize the fabric. Choose elements set far apart to avoid setting down too many stitches in one area before you have sufficiently tacked down most of the design area. Highlight the stitches that will sew first, or mark the artwork with arrows or other symbols, so you can refer to this printout and remain focused while you're punching. This ornament design has lines that must be digitized in a running stitch, so these will work very well as a base foundation if some of the lines sew in the beginning of the design.



Draw directional arrows of the first stitches to sew on a printout of the image, and jot down reminders about any changes you'll need to make. Even if you find reasons later to divert from your first plan, your notes will shorten your decision-making time while you're digitizing. I prefer my printout to be the actual size of the design, as it helps me to retain perspective and accuracy. For example, I've added some of my planning notes, including that I'll start at the center, securing the design first in somewhat of a vertical direction that returns to the center, where some of the horizontal lines will begin to sew.

STEP 2 Establish a Base Foundation

The general rule for any design path is to work the stitching from the center to the outside in an effort to gradually shock the fabric. Many designs make this difficult to follow, but if you observe the rule as closely as possible you'll stress the fabric the least. When you're creating the foundation, it's not always necessary to tack the entire design area before beginning larger elements, as long as you've secured a good portion around the larger elements that sew first. As shown in this example, the design's lower elements will sew first, so the very top area hasn't been secured completely yet (this can wait until the sewing returns to the above-center portion of the design).

Be sure to travel along the exact center of the columns that will later be covered with a satin stitch, because if these stitches sew too close to the edge of the column, there's a chance the fabric will slightly shift during sewing (this causes travel stitches to pop out beyond the satin stitches). By using a short stitch length, pop-outs are less likely to occur, and when fabrics require a long stitch length, your travel stitches should be covered as soon as possible during the run.

Starting at center, using a stitch length of 2 mm, I punched the lines in the direction indicated on my mapped path. Then, I traveled down past the center axis along the right side, where it'll later be covered by a satin column that I've planned to widen while digitizing and by employing automatic compensation. Moving in a downward direction, I punched the horizontal lines in the lower area, except for the one that will be used to travel to the three elements. This has created an acceptable foundation for the lower elements, and because the top area has received some stabilization, less stress will occur at the top while these three lower elements sew.



STEP 3 Digitize the Remaining Elements

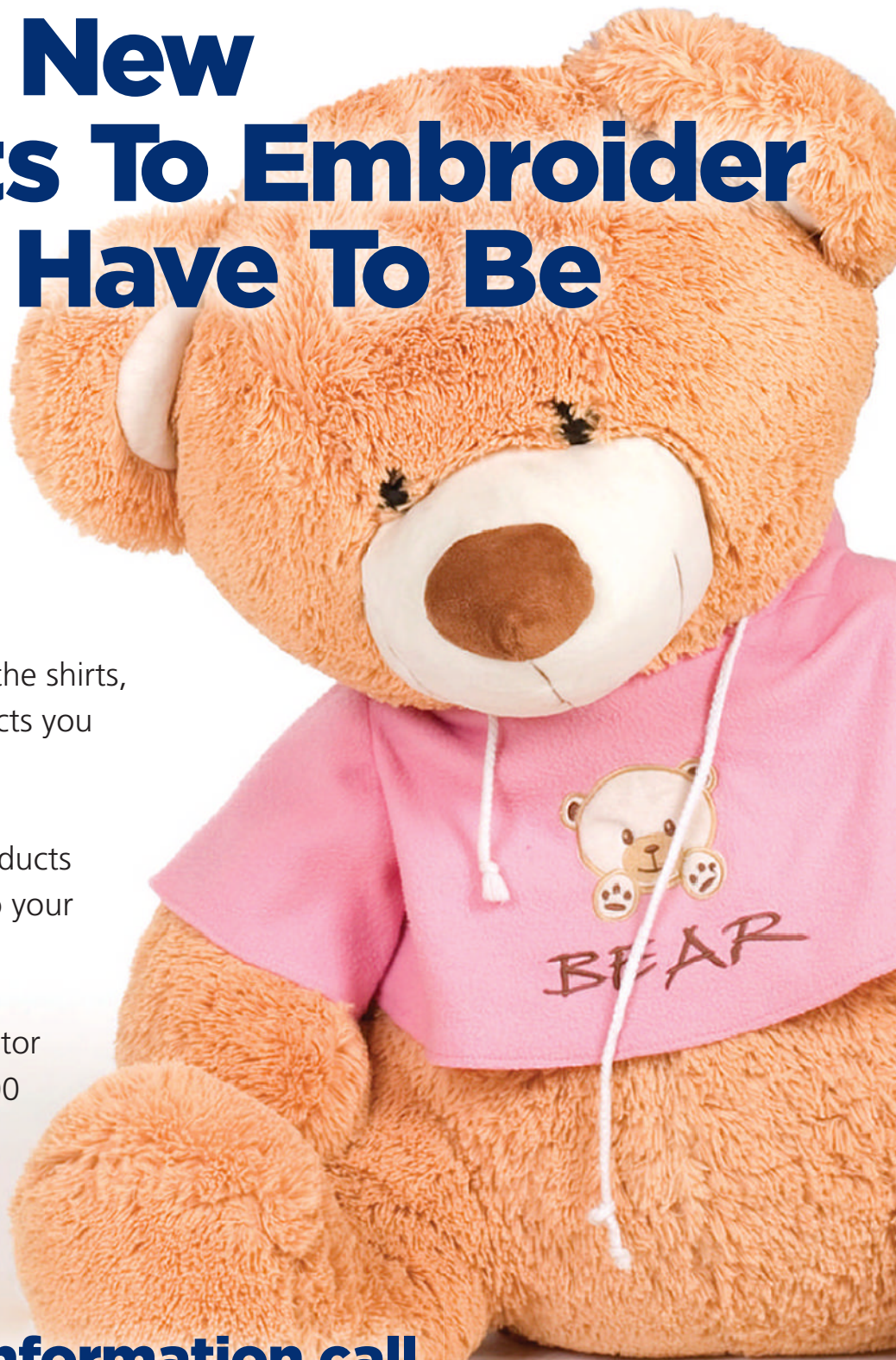
At this point in the digitizing process, there are stabilizing stitches at the right side of the design, so it might work well for the right element to sew first, followed by the center and then the left elements. However, in an effort to secure the area in a balanced manner, I chose the center element to sew first because its underlay will aid in stabilizing the fabric between the travel stitches at the right and center elements; the right element will sew second, followed by the left, while traveling to each with a running stitch along the horizontal line below the elements.



To finish, move upward along the left with a running stitch and punch the remaining line elements and then the top section, completing the top column outlines before returning back near the center, filling in any remaining elements. I followed my mapped plan to sew the center scalloped element last, because now there's a nice grid established for the four teardrops and two scalloped elements. The travel stitches punched at the center of the final column outline allow the satin stitches to complete without additional underlay. Test-sew and make any adjustments such as widening columns, if necessary, to compensate for push and pull of the fabric being sewn.



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By Daniel Walsh

NICHEPRENEURS

Where the Real Martial Artists Go

Joliet, IL-based Kataaro Custom Martial Arts just sort of happened. Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Tom Katch was a full-time construction manager who also ran an eBay business that sold antiques and collectibles. He noticed a demand for martial arts belts, too, so he worked them into his online offerings. Then in 2002, he was laid off from his job.

Today, about as far as he could get from where he started, Katch runs an embroidery business. Go figure. “It’s always been a dream of mine to have some sort of business,” he says. “I was the kid who made a fortune selling candy in school. After I lost my construction manager job, I did have some other job offers. However, I figured this was the time to take the leap.”

Katch had never designed or embroidered a martial arts belt before, but he saw an opportunity there. In his former life, the belts he had acquired and sold through his eBay business had returned good profit margins – and he saw there really was a demand for something more than the cheap belts sold through department stores and most martial arts shops. “Professional martial artists wanted better-quality belts,” he says. “And, they wanted them embroidered in Japanese, Chinese and Korean characters with their names, martial arts schools or associations. And I just started saying, ‘Yes, yes, I can.’”

Katch started with imported belts, but quickly found that wasn’t going to work. He searched for an embroiderer and found one

in Brad Smith. “The belt quality wasn’t good enough with the imports, so we figured out how to make a quality belt,” Katch says. Smith eventually went back to work full-time as a pipe fitter, leaving Katch without an embroiderer again.

So Katch taught himself how to embroider. He bought a Tajima 1501c, basically a newer version of the model he learned on with Smith, and went to work on his own designs. He used stock designs when he could, but found they weren’t always trustworthy. After all, he was often dealing with characters in the Japanese, Chinese and Korean languages. So once again, he had to learn how to do it himself. “None of it’s perfect, so I have to know the language structure; I have to know the strokes,” he says.

Now, Katch contracts out to various artisans around the country who make the belts. “We’re striving to do everything made-in-the-USA,” he says. “We give the artisans a living wage. They have a flexible lifestyle. They love what they do.” But it’s not just an ideological bent.

Rather, it’s a way to work his niche. He gets and keeps his customers with quality, not the cheapest price

Katch gets most of his business through word of mouth and the company’s website, www.kataaro.com. “I don’t want to advertise, in a sense, because I can’t grow any faster than I’m growing,” he says. At least, not without going into debt – something he generally avoids. The result is a solid business model, he says, and if it ain’t broke, Katch doesn’t plan to fix it.



NICHEPRENEURS

Small-Town Decorator-of-all-Trades

Management Awards sits on the main drag, between downtown Paris, TX, a town of about 25,000 people, and a nearby strip mall. Paris sits about 100 miles outside of Dallas, and is the sort of place that, unless you’ve heard of the award-winning 1984 movie named after the town, you probably haven’t heard of.

Without a huge population, there’s not a lot of room for true specialists. “In a small town, everyone does a bit of everything,” says owner Steve Glover. So his primarily screen-printing shop does embroidery. Plus silk screening and vinyl. He throws in some promotional products. And just for good

measure, the shop even does trophies and plaques, going the sand-carving route or taking a laser to it.

Glover didn’t start the business this way 20 years ago, but over time, it evolved in that direction. Customers would ask Glover if he could perform a service he didn’t offer yet. After a while of fielding requests, Glover basically figured he and his staff should probably learn new decorating techniques, rather than rejecting potential clients. “We thought we were smart enough to learn this on our own,” says Glover, who runs a three-person shop. His daughter, Amanda Justice, handles the screen printing. Operator Jan

Easthouse runs the embroidery machines. He focuses on trophies, plaques and promotional products. Sand carving and laser imprinting the engravings may seem a bit out there, but Glover learned how to do it in order to add that aspect to his business.

It’s a flexible decorating business, but it’s the type of approach needed in a small town that doesn’t have enough of a concentrated population to have too many specialized areas of operation. “You never know what that person’s going to want when they walk in the door,” Glover says. ■

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The Power List

Stitches reveals its list of the most powerful people and companies in the industry today. Ranked from 1 to 56, everyone on this list is influencing the direction the decorating industry will take in 2011 and beyond.

By Robert Carey, Joan Chaykin, Shane Dale, Joe Haley,
Alex Palmer, Nicole Rollender, Daniel Walsh and Erica Young

THE POWER 56

- 1. Paul Gallagher and Hitoshi Tajima** - Hirsch International/Tajima Industries Ltd.
- 2. Martin Kristiaman** - Wilcom International Pty. Ltd.
- 3. Marty Lott** - SanMar
- 4. Gerard Metrailler** - Corel Corp.
- 5. Ray Titus** - EmbroidMe
- 6. Dean F. Shulman** - Brother International Corp.
- 7. Glenn Chamandy** - Gildan Activewear
- 8. Pang Shiu Keung** - Lee Shun Computer Embroidery
- 9. Anna Wintour** - *Vogue*
- 10. Tas Tsonis and Brian Goldberg** - Pulse Microsystems Ltd.
- 11. Tetsuji Yamaue and Bob Stone** - Barudan
- 12. Ted Stahl** - GroupeSTAHL
- 13. Ira Neaman** - Vantage Apparel
- 14. Tom Myers** - Broder Bros. Co.
- 15. François Lesage** - House of Lesage
- 16. Hajo Voeller** - Madeira USA Ltd.
- 17. Mike Angel** - Melco
- 18. Scott Colman** - SWF East
- 19. Mike Rhodes** - Bodek and Rhodes
- 20. Craig Mertens** - Digital Art Solutions
- 21. Zahoor Kareem** - CafePress
- 22. Phil Rubin and Eric Rubin** - Blue Generation
- 23. Chris Waldick** - FastManager SMS
- 24. Dov Charney, Tom Casey and Marty Bailey** - American Apparel
- 25. Owen Dunne** - American & Efirid Inc.
- 26. Robert Kronenberger** - American Needle
- 27. Susan Ritchie, Arch Ritchie and Jennifer Cox** - National Network of Embroidery Professionals



Power is a force that's keenly felt – it reverberates, as powerful people influence companies, industries, regions, even whole countries. The decorating industry itself is a powerful force, as imprinting touches nearly every other industry – and product – out there.

Welcome to the *Stitches* Power List, our first-annual ranking of 56 industry heavyweights, those with the most influence now – and into next year – over how business is conducted in the decorating marketplace. They're the people everyone in the industry knows – and wants to emulate. The ones who challenge the status quo and are a force for driving growth – the innovators who develop new and exciting decorating and digitizing techniques; the thinkers who bring new equipment, software and apparel products to market; the

mentors who continue to develop raw talent; the stellar businesspeople who drive profits and revenues to their companies; and even people who work at companies that don't operate in the industry at all, but impact it nonetheless.

Each person and company on this list is making an impact on how everyone in the industry operates – and they're setting a go-to-market course for the industry as it heads into 2011. Turn the page to learn who these most powerful people in the industry are, and their plans for the future.

THE METHODOLOGY

The first step in considering possible candidates for the *Stitches* Power List was a solicitation of nominations. In that effort, we received more than 50 potential names for this list. We then also considered the heads of the top machine, software, thread and apparel suppliers, along with other industry vendors, plus others outside of the industry who we felt were important.

Each of these people were then measured on areas such as awards won, how successful the company they work at has been, how much that company has invested in the industry, how many times the person has been mentioned or quoted in *Stitches* magazine, and how many times the person's name popped up on Google searches. These ranking brought the list to the 56 you see here.

28. Joyce Jagger - The Embroidery Coach
29. Cory Dean and Emily Cheney - Artwork Source
30. Ray Materson - *Sins and Needles*
31. Michael Savoia - Villa Savoia Inc.
32. Chase Roh, Ph.D. - AnaJet Inc.
33. Jimmy Lamb - Sawgrass Technologies
34. Vasilis Thomaidis - Compucon
35. Mark Venit and Jay Malanga - ShopWorks
36. Thomas Moore Jr. - Strawberry Stitch Co.
37. John Lynch - Lynka Promotional Solutions
38. Jack Ma - The Alibaba Group
39. Akira Ikeda - Mimaki Engineering
40. Fred Lebow - Cotswold Industries
41. Lee Caroselli - Balboa Threadworks
42. Steve Garnier - Epilog Laser
43. Mark D. Lange, Ph.D. - National Cotton Council of America
44. Abdus Salam Murshedy - Envoy Group
45. Martin Favre - Bernina of America
46. Michael Stuart - MS Designs Ltd.
47. Darin Anderson - Embroidery.com
48. Eileen Roche - *Designs in Machine Embroidery*
49. Michael Robertson - Specialty Graphic Imaging Association
50. Deborah Jones - MyEmbroideryMentor.com
51. Christopher Bernat - Vapor Apparel
52. Joanna Grant - Affinity Express
53. Randy Carr - World Emblem International
54. Kristine Shreve - EnMart and Ensign Emblem
55. Jenny Hart - Sublime Stitching
56. Nick Coe - Land's End

FUN FACT:

Paul Gallagher was hired to be Hirsch's chief problem-solver.

1. PAUL GALLAGHER and HITOSHI TAJIMA

President and CEO, Hirsch International; President, Tajima Industries Ltd.



Paul Gallagher

Why they're on the list: One out of every two customers in the embroidery industry is a Hirsch International customer. Founded in 1968, the company has more than 4 million sewing- and embroidery-machine users worldwide. For 35 years, Hirsch has been the exclusive U.S. distributor of Tajima-brand embroidery machines from Nagoya, Japan-based Tajima Industries Ltd.

In 1944, Hitoshi Tajima founded Tokai Industrial Sewing Machine Co. Ltd., which broke into the embroidery industry in 1964 and has since produced more than 3,000 types of embroidery machines with one to 56 heads. Today, Tajima Industries Ltd., which is widely accepted as the world's leading developer and manufacturer of top-quality, advanced embroidery systems, distributes Tajima embroidery equipment to more than 100 countries.

Backstory: Gallagher left a job in New York City to take over at Hirsch on September 11, 2001 – which he has always seen as “an omen” of sorts – in order to be the company's chief problem-solver. “I was really the fix-it guy,” he says. “What I've always done in my career is fix and grow companies in a wide range of industries, from tow trucks to lithium batteries.”

Gallagher was brought in because Hirsch, a publicly traded company at the time, ran into financial trouble in the late '90s. “We had a successful turnaround to making the company more customer-centric,” he says. “Over the next several years, we diversified from the legacy business of embroidery to decorated apparel. That's when we added screen printing, laser and other products. The common theme was always best-in-class, top-quality products to our clients in North America.”

After the financial collapse and economic downturn of 2008, Hirsch saw its stock decline significantly, which led to it dropping out of the public sector and becoming a private company once again. “When we saw the downturn in the financial markets and in the economy, we saw quite a decrease in capital spending by our customer base,” Gallagher says.

Hirsch went private on October 29, 2009 – a step in the right direction, according to Gallagher. “If there was a silver lining in the cloud of the economy, for us it was that it devastated the stock price to the point where it allowed us to go private,” he says. “The real advantage is now there are no outside shareholders and we can totally focus on our customers.”

Leading the way: Gallagher says Hirsch has held a leadership position in the decorated-apparel industry since its inception. “Our relationship with Tajima, the technology leader in embroidery, allowed us to gain a significant market share of embroidery growth in the '80s and '90s,” he says. “Tajima was – and is – the dominant market brand, and the result of that was a significant amount of customers we have to this day.” In 2005, Tajima America Corp., headed up by Kenji Tajima, and Tajima Manufacturing Inc. opened the new Rancho Dominguez, CA-based headquarters to offer comprehensive parts and services support, along with machine assembly, to the Americas.

Now, Hirsch's extensive product line

includes embroidery machines, screen-printing equipment, direct-to-garment printers, textile lasers and companion multi-level DG/ML by Pulse software. Some of Hirsch's newer products include Tajima DG/ML by Pulse Version 2010 software, SEIT Single-Head Laser and Tajima Shuttlehook. Hirsch also provides a range of decorated-apparel training, from embroidery machines and digital products to software and application.

Personalization prospers: Gallagher says the strongest trend that Hirsch and Tajima are seeing in the retail and end-marketplaces is personalized products. “People are spending money on this,” he says. “And, the personalization runs the gamut from team sports logos to individual monograms. Whether it's uniforms or corporate logo wear, that business is very strong.”

Following that, in 1994, the Japan-based Tokai Industrial Sewing Machine Co. Ltd. Technical Center was established to design and develop new products, including new operator-friendly machines with low vibration and super-low noise.

Looking ahead: “The newer decorating technologies – digital printing on apparel, more sophisticated laser etching and cutting – really kind of change the direction of the embroidery industry a little bit,” Gallagher says. “The transition we made five years ago was to say, ‘We're not going to be focused on just embroidery; we're focusing on embroidery and other types of decoration on apparel.’ ” That all-inclusive attitude reflects the desires of Hirsch's customers, Gallagher says. “The transition I see is that our customers who had been focused on one technology – embroidery – are now focused on offering their clients multiple technologies,” he says.

Predictions: “Everyone tightened up the last couple years, but we're seeing a real hunger and thirst for technology now and ways to be more efficient,” Gallagher says.

– *Shane Dale and Nicole Rollender*



2. MARTIN KRISTIAMAN

CEO, Wilcom International Pty. Ltd.



Why he's on the list: For more than 30 years, Wilcom International's technology has helped decorators personalize garments. And, Wilcom is Kristiaman's first and only employer; he joined the company in 1980, one week after earning his bachelor's degree in industrial and mechanical engineering. "Our school had installed a numerically-controlled milling machine, and I selected a project where you could see 3-D graphic simulations on a large green graphic screen," he says. "The idea of graphic simulation then was like having a new iPad today. My professor introduced me to Wilcom founders Robert Pongrass and Bill Wilson, and I became their first staff member. I learned programming on the job, and found that software was an exciting tool to solve real-life problems."

In the mid-1990s, Kristiaman earned his MBA and switched to the commercial side of the business, building business with clients and OEM partners in Japan, the U.S. and Europe. He became Wilcom COO in August 2001, and CEO in 2004.

About Wilcom: In 2007, the firm became Corel Corp.'s strategic partner for collaboration in decorated apparel,

particularly for embroidery. The following year, Wilcom released EmbroideryStudio and DecoStudio e1 and e1.5, seamlessly integrating CorelDRAW, plus combining embroidery effects and specialized printing techniques to allow for new decorating ideas. In 2009, the firm released DecoNetwork, an e-commerce solution and online design tool suitable for embroidery, direct-to-garment printing, heat transfers and other imprinting possibilities. Wilcom has 200,000 software licenses in use worldwide; 100,000 of them in the U.S. There are 70 employees located throughout Australia, Europe, Asia and the U.S.

The aesthetic side of the industry: The multi-decoration systems that combine embroidery, sequins, rhinestones and other bling, plus garment printing and other types of printing, will result in an abundance of new decorating ideas. To allow embroidery shops to mix and match techniques any way they can think of (with consistently high quality), "We've opened the technology between Corel's development team and ours to an unprecedented level, and we'll continue in that direction," Kristiaman says.

Going hand-in-hand with the ballooning number of decorating ideas is the ability to do "mass customization, quantity one," Kristiaman says. Over time, consumers have gotten comfortable using the Internet to help themselves in banking, airline and hotel booking, creating photo albums and more. So, "Consumers naturally are gravitating toward

FUN FACT:
Martin Kristiaman has worked for one company and one company only: Wilcom International.

the idea of personalizing their apparel before they buy, and they can do that through the Web and then place the order with new online decorating business models," he says.

"It's becoming a reality."

The business side of the industry: New decorating ideas and unbounded, online personalization require more sophisticated business software. "DecoNetwork was designed specifically for helping shops operate more efficiently in processing one-off orders, getting approval, managing small-batch production, managing supplies, handling payments and managing shipping," Kristiaman says. "These tools will continue to improve over the next few years, especially as the growth in online retailing accelerates. There will be a need for lower overhead, yet a wider reach in sales, so that embroidery firms can deliver opportunities at an affordable price but still be profitable."

The most interesting aspect of the industry: End-buyers increasingly want apparel and accessories personalized to the point that they don't have to wear anything that's the same as anyone else – and the ability to actually do this is becoming a viable business model. "After 30 years of dreaming about it, this paradigm shift is probably more exciting than anything else that's happened before," Kristiaman says. "Even better for the entire industry is that small orders are best fulfilled locally, not from overseas. So with advancing technology, businesses of any size can compete and thrive." – Robert Carey

3. MARTY LOTT

President, SanMar (asi/84863)



Why he's on the list: Lott is the most popular kid at school, a veritable decorating industry BMOC. The head of supplier SanMar is loved by all, and it shows with the many

awards and accolades he has received. Lott has been named to the *Counselor* magazine Power 50 four years running, claiming the title of number one in 2008 and number two in 2009. He is often cited in industry publications and sits on panels to discuss customer service and leadership issues.

And, lead he does. Lott has guided SanMar for four decades, snatching up awards and accolades everywhere. In the last four years, the supplier has snagged 80% of the *Counselor* Distributor Choice Awards for apparel and was named Supplier of the Year in 2007. Consistently in the *Counselor* Top 40, SanMar was *Wearables* magazine's

Reader's Choice Award winner in its apparel design contest earlier this year. And it's been a finalist in the *Counselor* Best Places To Work contest two years running.

Awards aside, SanMar also delivers. Its six warehouse locations ensure that decorators receive apparel in a timely manner – 84% of the country can get goods the next day. The 3.25 million square feet of inventory houses 17 retail and private apparel brands. And on top of that, the company has a heart, launching eco initiatives, green products, community outreach programs and adhering to being a socially responsible business. It has attained an ASI 5-Star Supplier rating and had over half a million product clicks in ESP last year.

Soothsayer: Moving forward into a new year, like many, Lott sees positive signs ahead. "I am cautiously optimistic," he says. "The economy's continued slow gains

FUN FACT:

Marty Lott didn't earn a salary during his first seven years working for SanMar.

should lead to growth and the opportunities that provides." 2011 is also a landmark year for the company.

"A high point will be celebrating SanMar's 40th anniversary," Lott says.

Still feeling it: After 40 years in the business (the first seven of which he never earned a salary) Lott is still driven by the people he spends his time with. "The opportunity to work with my sons and the fantastic team at SanMar," is what Lott says excites him most. "For 40 years, we've faced many challenges, but I love this industry and am excited and challenged every day."

Making connections: Lott believes that over the next five years, technology will continue to creep into the way we do business. "It'll firmly remain a people business, but forms of communication will evolve with social media," he says. "And back-end supplier/decorator computer systems will interact seamlessly." – *Joe Haley*

4. GERARD METRAILLER

Senior Director, Product Management Graphics, Corel Corp.



Why he's on the list: CorelDRAW is the number-one graphics application in the apparel and garment space. "We know from our research – and from walking around the show floor at ISS Shows and at other decorating industry events – that CorelDRAW is on almost everyone's comput-

ers," says Metrailler, who is responsible for developing and maintaining Corel's worldwide graphics product strategy. He drives global strategy and development, and executes initiatives for Corel's chief graphics products: CorelDRAW Graphics Suite, Corel DESIGNER Technical Suite, and Corel Painter. The Graphics Suite product is used widely for print, direct-to-garment printing and Web work, while a strategic partnership since 2007 with Wilcom International has resulted in strong embroidery-focused products as well, including Wilcom EmbroideryStudio e1.5 for multi-decoration.

Industry direction: Metrailler, who speaks fluent French, German and English, sees the budding multi-decoration environment expanding. "People aren't doing just one thing, such as just embroidery, or just screen printing, in their shops anymore," he says. "They're moving into many different artwork and decoration outputs on all types of products."

FUN FACT:

Gerard Metrailler speaks fluent French, German and English.

Product evolution: "Our core products must allow decorators to create the graphics they want with ease, but also with the highest quality," Metrailler says. "They need to be able to get the image that's in their head into the world of

embroidery, printing or any other medium."

The most exciting aspect of this industry: "I'm amazed at the outstanding quality of graphics that we're seeing – the sheer creativity that's found across every medium and in every combination," Metrailler says, citing the uptick in direct-to-garment designs as a base layer, with embroidery sewn on top of it. – *RC*

5. RAY TITUS

CEO, EmbroidMe (asi/384000)



Why he's on the list: As the world's largest embroidery franchise chain, EmbroidMe, founded by Titus, boasts 10 straight years of growth since the company began and is spreading across the globe quickly, currently operating in 15 countries.

Backstory: Running a successful franchising company comes naturally to Titus, who wrote an eighth-grade school paper on how to start a franchise company. He worked with his family at printing company Minute-man Press until the age of 23, when he stepped away to start his own sign company, SIGNARAMA. The success of the franchise and his passion for embroidered goods spurred Titus to found EmbroidMe in 2000. Within four years it had opened its 200th store, and in 2007 Titus was honored with the *Counselor* International Person of the Year award. Titus says that EmbroidMe continues to grow rapidly in spite of the slow economy, and with more than 400 retail locations, "We're in a position that once we see a trend or an opportunity, we can act very quickly."

Outside-the-box is the new normal: Titus advises that growth will come to those decorators who innovate. "It's not

business as usual anymore," he says. "We can't take any customers or industries for granted; we have to continue to look for new ways to market, promote and build our businesses." He gives the example of a recent agreement one of EmbroidMe's franchisees made with a college to serve as its onsite producer of embroidered goods. "Rather than just setting up a company store or doing something online, we actually negotiated the contract where we'd have space on the campus and be able to produce the work right at the facility," Titus says. "That's that kind of thinking we need we build and grow with ad specialties and promotional products."

International rising: "The international side of the business is a huge growth area," Titus says. "There are decorating trends coming from everywhere, from Australia to Italy to you-name-it."

Online and brick-and-mortar are both important: While having hundreds of retail locations serving local needs is a crucial element of EmbroidMe's success, offering products online is an important part of the company's draw. "Our franchisees have a very diversified marketing approach," Titus says. "Yes, they're in the local market where they get walk-in or call-in traffic, but they also have a great online presence." — Alex Palmer

6. DEAN F. SHULMAN

Senior Vice President, Brother International Corp.



Why he's on the list: Shulman, who has a degree in biology from Washington University in St. Louis, has worn many hats in the industry, especially in his 25 years with Brother, where he has worked as a marketing director, parts supervisor and website creator. He became Brother's first director of marketing in 1986, and oversaw the company's

expansion into printers and multifunctional technology. "My biggest contribution in the '90s was the ability to recognize the cell phone market and the home office," he says, adding that Brother's P-Touch desktop labeler was one of the most important results of his contributions. Nearly five years ago, Brother asked Shulman to reinvent its sewing and embroidery business.

Brother Backstory: Along with sewing and embroidery equipment (used by 4 million people worldwide), Brother offers garment and laser printers, digitizing, lettering and monogramming software, thread accessories and downloadable embroidery designs. Brother created the very first 10-needle, home-based embroidery machine with a camera built into the nose, which allows users to scan and display a hoop's contents,

and the world's first scanning feature built into a sewing and embroidery machine (the Quattro 6000D). Brother's Sewing & Embroidery Division has seen a 12% growth in sales in each of the last two years.

Deep impact: From its inexpensive sewing supplies stocked at Walmart to its embroidery machines that cost five figures, Shulman says one of Brother's primary goals is to turn decorated apparel from a hardware industry into a fashion industry. "We did that early on by aligning ourselves with *Project Runway*, (we're actually integrated into the show)," he says.

Shulman says the recent awards that Brother won for product innovation — particularly those from *Consumer Reports* and *Consumer Digest* — have enhanced Brother's visibility. "It's amazing how many people use those two vehicles to do their buying decisions," he says.

New trends: Shulman says the typical cycle in which decorators bought new high-end embroidery equipment used to be five years. Today, it's about 18 months. He also sees the overall industrial market continuing to be brought down to the consumer level. "So, in the digital printing area, most of those machines are \$20,000 to \$30,000," he says. — SD

7. GLENN CHAMANDY

President and CEO, Gildan Activewear



Why he's on the list: Glenn Chamandy founded Gildan with his brother, Gregory, in 1984 and has since devoted himself to developing it into an international leader of quality branded basic apparel. Holding the position of president and COO until 2004, he took over as president and CEO that year.

Full speed ahead: Gildan saw strong growth in 2010, reporting record quarterly results in August, with net sales for the first nine months of the fiscal year up 28% from the same period the year before. In spite of the current uncertain economic environment, including significant inflation in cotton and other raw materials, Chamandy says that Gildan is "continuing to implement its strategic plan and proceeding with all of its capital expenditure projects for capacity expansion, cost reduction and service improvement." These capital investments include a new state-of-the-art textile facility in Honduras and the expansion and automation of Gildan's distribution center in Eden, NC.

Softstyle: As far as products, Gildan is transitioning to a new Softstyle yarn that Chamandy describes as delivering a "soft feel and great value while improving the printability and fabric performance after wash. We've also added three new collegiate colors to an already great palette."

Growing fast: While North America continues to be a crucial market for Gildan, it has been expanding rapidly overseas, particularly in the Latin America and Asia-Pacific region, and China especially. In October, the *Montreal Gazette* quoted Chamandy expressing the belief that the company would double in size within the next five years. "That's a low-cost, high-volume production platform for building market share in the Asia-Pacific region, and we're planning to expand that," Chamandy said at a meeting of nonprofit business association Cercle finance et placement du Quebec. — AP

8. PANG SHIU KEUNG

Director, Lee Shun Computer Embroidery

Why he's on the list: Keung heads a Chinese embroidery factory based in Hong Kong and Shenzhen that has provided embroidery work for many of the world's largest retailers, including Old Navy, Gap, Abercrombie and Fitch, American Eagle Outfitters, Nike and Disney.

Working for the big guys: Lee Shun Computer Embroidery is anonymous to most, like many Chinese manufacturers that toil in the shadows producing wares for American retailers. More than 400 people work the production line, which operates 24 hours a day using a variety of machines. The focus is computer embroidery.

Overseas options: With more embroidery work being outsourced to Asia every year, Lee Shun has a key role to play as a preferred option of major North American retailers. Keung overseas a model that's in high demand for these companies, and that business model's future could have a significant effect on the industry. — Daniel Walsh

9. ANNA WINTOUR

Editor-in-Chief, *Vogue*



Why she's on the list: Styles change frequently, but two things are constant for London-born Wintour: her bob hairstyle, which she has sported since she was 15 (she's 61 now), and her dedication to the bible of all fashion magazines, *Vogue*. In an interview on *60 Minutes*, designer Karl Lagerfeld called her the most famous fashion journalist in the world.

R.J. Cutler, director of *The September Issue*, a movie about *Vogue* and its leader, wrote on *The Huffington Post* that he "observed Anna Wintour day-in and day-out as she single-handedly commanded the \$300-billion global fashion industry. In a business where last week's fashion shows are already old news, she has been at the top of her field."

Indeed, the iconic Wintour, who's the alleged inspiration for the title character in *The Devil Wears Prada* and who has a

variety of tough nicknames including Nuclear Wintour, is the voice of fashion and has earned the respect of fashion designers around the world. She has the power to make or break a designer and has been credited with changing young unknowns into some of the most sought-after names in the industry.

Ripple effect: In an interview with Barbara Walters, Wintour said that the mood of the country affects fashion, and a person can glean the trends and mood of the world by reading *Vogue*. Wintour's massive influence isn't limited to the runways of New York, Paris and Milan. Colors, fabrics, embroideries and embellishments are just some of collateral fashion extras that end up making their way into the apparel and accessory landscapes of retail outlets across the nation. And, in 2010, *Vogue* featured all types of embellishments (chiefly embroidery, appliqué and beading) on the designer apparel and accessories in its glossy pages, reigniting consumer interest in stitched garments. — Joan Chaykin

10. TAS TSONIS and BRIAN GOLDBERG

Co-CEOs, Pulse Microsystems Ltd.



Why they're on the list: Since the 1980s, Pulse – led by its co-CEOs – has invested heavily in research and development for its art-generation and apparel-embellishment software and owns 13

patents, including method and system for automatically deriving stippling stitch designs in embroidery patterns. “One thing I never worry about is the technology,” Tsonis says. “Innovation will continue because our people are motivated to make their products better and simpler.”

Past and future: Pulse has a 20-year relationship with Tajima; impressively, the Tajima DG/ML by Pulse Version 2010 has received the Certified by Microsoft designation for its compatibility with Microsoft Vista and Windows 7, and has 38 new fonts

plus productivity enhancers such as multiple core processing that reduces stitching time by 33% on a 20,000-stitch design. Pulse supplies 15 brands to home embroidery enthusiasts, and owns AnntheGran, an online community of home users that Pulse recently upgraded. The firm has more than 20,000 professional embroidery firms and 300,000 home-based users.

Getting custom: Tsonis sees mass customization as a key trend, and he and Goldberg are focused on automating that process both for embroidery and printing. “We’ve automated a lot of factories for this, but the lifeblood of this industry really is the mom-and-pop entrepreneurs,” he says. “They’ll always need to make a few T-shirts for local organizations, and easy-to-use software and high-quality machines are what they need. We spend a lot of time working on the quality of fonts to satisfy those who only do lettering, all the way up to the major names in this business. We also create our products so that a small shop only has to buy what it needs at that moment, but can add on in the future with no compatibility problems.” – RC

11. TETSUJI YAMAUE and BOB STONE

CEO, Barudan; Vice President of Sales, Barudan America Inc.



Why they're on the list: Barudan led the way for the embroidery industry in Japan, building the first industrial embroidery machine 51 years ago. The embroidery machine manufacturer has eight offices

worldwide and serves more than 100 countries, including factories in Japan, France and China. Barudan builds embroidery machines from one to 56 heads in nine-, 12- and 15-needle configurations.

Backstory: Barudan’s founder, Yoshio Shibata, invented the automatic color-change system in 1972, which got the ball rolling for Barudan’s popularity – but it was his high-speed, multi-head embroidery machine creation in 1977 that caused sales to skyrocket, Stone says. This success led to the establishment of Barudan America Inc. in Solon, OH, in 1985.

What decorators want: “Today, there are two types of decorators: established and startups,” Stone says. “Both markets are entirely different in what they want and what they expect. In most cases, the established decorators started with a reputable machine and understand that to get a quality product, they can’t cut corners. The established embroiderers know the importance of service, tech support, parts availability and, most of all, the end product – the quality of the embroidery. Those decorators are the easiest

to sell to; they’ve paid their dues, so to speak, and know what they want and need.”

On the other hand, the startups are a growing part of the industry, which is vital to Barudan’s success, Stone says – but too many of them are focused on price instead of the end product. “I do about a dozen or so trade shows a year, and the newbies make up a large part of the attendees,” he says. “Often, they don’t know what questions to ask. They fail to ask about warranty, parts availability, service and support or resale value.”

The good news, Stone says, is Barudan focuses on educating customers about machines, software and the overall decorating industry. “The bottom line is, we need the startups to become established decorators,” he says. “If we service newbies to the best of our ability, they become very loyal customers. As they grow, they buy more machines, software, parts and supplies.”

Looking ahead: Barudan has a few new machine updates coming out in the first quarter of 2011, Stone says. “Of course, stitch quality is of the utmost importance,” he says. “The generation of sewing head that we currently produce has been around in some form since 1996. We’ve tweaked it to make it better, stronger and quieter. Most folks probably aren’t aware that Barudan embroidery machines are still hand-built and assembled, not much differently than the way Mr. Shibata did it 50 years ago.”

On a positive note, smaller shops are beginning to buy machines again, Stone says. – SD

12. TED STAHL

Executive Chairman of the Board, GroupeSTAHL



Why he's on the list: The head of the global group of companies under the GroupeSTAHL umbrella, Stahl transformed his family-owned, Midwestern die-cut letters and numbers business (founded by his grandfather, A.C. Stahl, in 1932) into a multinational supplier of apparel decorating systems and supplies. Now, GroupeSTAHL is the largest international manufacturer of heat presses and CAD/CUT materials. It has introduced a number of patented decorating technologies to the industry, including Thermo-FILM for athletic jersey personalization and WaterJet technology for custom-cutting twill. It also launched the industry's first free online art creation software (CadworxLive.com). GroupeSTAHL has educated thousands through the industry's longest-running traveling seminar workshop program.

Staying power: Stahl says his group of companies has been able to remain at the top of the decorated apparel manufacturing business for nearly 80 years by constantly adapting to its decorating customers' changing needs. For example, "The computerized WaterJet technology that we pioneered was developed to enable the cutting of twill materials without fraying and is symbolic of the answer to the demand from custom-

ers to provide custom-cut logos in any quantity," he says. "Our custom-cutting division today is still answering that demand, using a wide variety of cutting methods including water jet, laser cutting and blade cutting."

On the other hand, Thermo-FILM, which was introduced 40 years ago, is still a top product in the industry, according to Stahl. Part of the reason for that is its "green" aspect, since it's manufactured with no PVC (used to make vinyl), which was the predominant choice for letters and numbers back then. "Today, it's hard to find any place in the world that isn't using it in some form, since it's available not only in die cuts, but also by the roll for cutting," he says. Based on all of GroupeSTAHL's advancements in the sports industry, Stahl will be inducted into the National Sporting Goods Association Hall of Fame in May.

Looking ahead: "Decorating methods that are faster, better and cheaper, whether that's digital transfer production, improved direct-to-garment printing, improved laser transfer papers or improved cuttable materials," Stahl says. "More and more businesses will offer digital design decorating services. Everyone will have access to the same technologies. It'll be the people who turn those technologies into custom apparel sales who'll be leading the way." — SD

13. IRA NEAMAN

President, Vantage Apparel (asi/93390)



Why he's on the list: When Neaman talks, people listen. That's why the venerable head of Vantage Apparel is a driving force in the apparel world. For five years

he's been named to the *Counselor* Power 50, that's on top of being named the *Counselor* Person of the Year in 2003. In addition, his hands-on training and education sessions at industry trade shows are a must-attend for anyone serious about selling branded apparel. It's no wonder he's sought out by editors and writers looking for comments on everything apparel-related.

Aside from his personal accolades, the company Neaman helms is annually in the top 40 in revenues in the ad specialty

industry and has won numerous *Counselor* Distributor Choice and *Wearables* magazine Design Awards. Vantage also has attained the coveted 5-Star Supplier rating in ESP, where it also had nearly 62,000 product clicks last year. The company can be a one-stop shop for apparel purchasers, as it offers cutting-edge decoration, with 1,250 embroidery heads plus digital printers, laser cutters, screen-print machines and more.

Highs and lows: "The high point in 2011 will be when the shortage/speculation of cotton ends, the price of cotton starts falling and the mills and factories can acquire cotton and fabric at lower costs," Neaman

FUN FACT:
Ira Neaman has been on the *Counselor* Power 50 list for five years, and was the *Counselor* Person of the Year in 2003.

says. "The low point will be if the dollar weakens."

While everyone has been riding a wild ride the last two to three years, the idea that the end is in sight is appealing to Neaman. "That we have the promise of a slow, steady economic growth excites me," he says.

Crystal ball: "There will always be something new due to technology and lifestyle, with elements borrowed from the past," Neaman says. As for new innovations, "Mobile apps will get significantly faster with more touch screens and more common use of voice recognition," he says, and believes that future challenges include the continued shortage of skilled workers. — JH



14. TOM MYERS CEO, Broder Bros. Co. (asi/42090)



Why he's on the list: Myers heads the largest *Counselor* Top 40 apparel supplier firm in the ad specialty industry. He is a perennial member of the *Counselor* Power 50 list, ranking in the top 10 in three out of the last four years.

With eight distribution facilities, Broder is able to reach 80% of the U.S. with next-day shipping. Its 2.5 million square feet of inventory includes 35 brands and 800 different products, and continues to grow. "We're offering full lines from our major suppliers," Myers says. "We're introducing Ashworth – the best 'off course' golf brand – to complement adidas – the best 'on course' golf brand." In 2009, the company had 421,000 ESP product clicks.

2011 in a nutshell: To get the economy rolling businesses need to hire, although Myers sees gridlock ahead. "As buyers and sellers of apparel, we're going to be on a roller coaster," he says. "Talk about high points and low points – I'd not be surprised to see price increases in early 2011 and price reduc-

tions by late 2011, once the impact of additional acres being devoted to producing cotton is understood in the marketplace. The prices of polyester and every other apparel fiber will be following cotton – both up and down. Interestingly, the price of apparel won't scare off customers, although there will be grumbling about high prices."

FUN FACT:

Actor Charlie Sheen is a fan of the Devon & Jones Isla Camp shirt carried by Broder Bros. Co.

Challenges abound: "The biggest challenge over the next five years will be keeping up with the demand," Myers says. "The market for decorated basic apparel continues to grow. The embroidered segment is growing faster. New technologies and new apparel styles are allowing family-operated business to produce great-looking stuff.

"One challenge is dealing with the low capacity utilization of decorating equipment. Contract decorators need to price more competitively and serve customers better to avoid living in a land of too many machines chasing too few orders."

His favorite industry-related Tweet: "It was from my sister-in-law, who lives in Hollywood: 'I just saw Charlie Sheen buy a Devon & Jones Isla Camp shirt in Malibu.'" Myers says. – JH

15. FRANÇOIS LESAGE Embroiderer and Founder, House of Lesage



Why he's on the list: Lesage is regarded by many as the greatest living embroiderer. Now in his 80s, Lesage's hand embroidery has been prized in France's haute couture for decades.

Fifty years at the top: Lesage has been called the "king of embroidery" and "the last embroiderer," but whatever you call him, if you're in the embroidery scene, you should know him. He began his trade

in the late 1940s by traveling to the U.S. to open a shop on Hollywood's Sunset Strip. His embroidered designs adorned such famed beauties as Ava Gardner and Marlene Dietrich and were in demand among designers such as Yves St. Laurent and Christian Lacroix. Today, France's top designers still seek Lesage's work. Chanel acquired his fashion house, Lesage Paris, eight years ago, and new designs continue to emerge from there.

FUN FACT:

The designs of François Lesage, the "king of embroidery," once adorned Ava Gardner and Marlene Dietrich.

Likewise, his work has been at the center of exhibitions in New York, Tokyo and Los Angeles.

The first family of embroidery: Lesage's family has been in the embroi-

dery trade since the 1800s, and that may continue for many more years, though perhaps not in France. Lesage's son, Jean-François, has opened the House of Lesage in Madras, India, where a great deal of the world's embroidery work has migrated. – DW

16. HAJO VOELLER President and CEO, Madeira USA Ltd.



Why he's on the list: President of Madeira USA for seven years, Voeller was selected to oversee Madeira Germany's U.S. division due to his years of previous executive experience in sales and marketing. Voeller continually has his fingers on the pulse of the industry, and believes that increased reaction time will be the most critical trend for embroiderers in the near future: "The ability to react sooner and faster to the requests of your customers will be the differentiator between businesses that are ahead of the pack and those that are trailing behind," he says. "You'll see this, again, in the specialization that will enable some companies to offer either small or big quantities of goods in record time."

FUN FACT:
Thanks to a function on Madeira's website, embroiderers can actually calculate the cost of a thread break.

Backstory: With the most specialty threads on the market, Madeira estimates that its thread is used by one-third of all embroiderers. The company recently added Frosted Matt thread and its Automated Frame System and plastic film frames, designed for badge and emblem creation. On its website, www.madeiraart.com, the company continues to add new, interactive features, including a function that allows an embroiderer to calculate the cost of a thread break.

Specialization rising: Voeller expects that in 2011, embroiderers will continue "to purchase goods based on specific orders, rather than investing in inventory. I'm a big believer in really targeting your markets, and I also see specialization as a key for running a business successfully in the coming year," he says. "Specialization will be a key to survival, as decorating companies target their work to certain customer groups." — AP

17. MIKE ANGEL Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Melco



Why he's on the list: Angel, who has been in the decorated apparel industry for 12 years, joined Melco in February 2005. He was previously the director of sales and marketing for Pantograms from 1998 to 2005.

Melco, which created the industry's first digitizing technology (currently DesignShop v9 Desktop Digitizing Software), was founded in 1972 as a subsidiary of Oerlikon; it has more than 100,000 clients. The company offers a variety of embroidery equipment, including AMAYA XTS commercial modular single-head machines and networkable multi-heads, and the MelcoJet G2 direct-to-garment printer.

Award winner: Melco was recently awarded an International Trade Award by the U.S. Department of Commerce for opening new international markets. "Melco benefited from trade conferences, market research and matchmaking services pro-

FUN FACT:
Melco has big-name clients like Disney, Williams-Sonoma, New Balance and ZAZZLE.

vided through the Denver U.S. Export Assistance Center and overseas commercial specialists of the U.S. Commercial Service," Angel says.

Keeping a high profile: Melco has several big-name clients, including Disney, Williams-Sonoma, New Balance and ZAZZLE. "Big brands like Disney want to meet the demands of their customers, and a big part of the demand is personalization," Angel says. Melco is very focused on helping companies offer mass personalization via its LiveDesign Fusion e-commerce personalization configurator and Personalization API software as a service.

Predictions: "Mass personalization is the future," says Angel, who notes that Melco trains its users on its own campus, www.melcouniversity.com. "Internet retail sales will continue to play an important role in the decorated apparel industry. With that said, the capability to offer decorated apparel online, and produce and deliver personalized products on demand, is the key to success in the next five years and beyond." — SD

18. SCOTT COLMAN

President and Founder, SWF East



Why he's on the list: Since founding SWF East in 1999, Colman quickly guided the embroidery equipment manufacturer to being a leader in its market category with

its additional product lines of direct-to-garment printers, screen-printing equipment and digitizing software. He had worked in the industry for 10 years before founding SWF, including at the production shop Uniform Nametape and serving as the general manager at Pantograms.

Take a deep breath: Colman is upbeat about the near future. He predicts that “2011 will be a breath of fresh air,” after two very challenging years. “Many of our customers are feeling the upswing starting to happen in the industry,” he says. “As consumer spending seems to gain some confidence, things are normalizing, which helps people’s confidence in investing.”

Direct and customized: Colman expects direct-to-garment printing to significantly evolve over the next few years. “All decorators who want to be viable in this marketplace will need to address the concept of mass personalization, and the

direct-to-garment printing concept is the horse that will be ridden into this arena,” he says. Another shift those in the embroidered apparel industry will want to watch out for is mass customization. He sees this not only in terms of personalized goods, but also “custom prints that are digital and variable in size, color and data.”

The future: In 2011, SWF East will be introducing a new line of heat presses to the market made by the company Drucktech. Colman predicts that this full line of feature-rich presses “will change the way the market looks at heat presses,” but that’s all he’ll say about it for now. —AP

19. MIKE RHODES

President, Bodek and Rhodes (*asi/40788*)



Why he's on the list: *Counselor* magazine Top 40 supplier Bodek and Rhodes is a

stalwart apparel company – five warehouses, 37 brands, socially responsible and CPSIA-compliant; it’s no wonder that so many decorators turn to it for blank goods. In fact, it had 182,000 product clicks in ESP last year. Rhodes, a second-generation family member, is regularly named to the *Counselor* Power 50 list and is highly regarded as a person with influence among his industry peers. That clout comes from steering the third-largest apparel supplier in the U.S.

The customer-minded supplier added personnel when others were cutting staff (noting that a loss in staff affects clients) and it has bulked up its customer service tools, adding free custom website designs and a virtual apparel-design studio.

In addition, Bodek and Rhodes has a dedicated staff, including industry educator and *Counselor* Hot List member Marc Held, who

was also named the *Counselor* Supplier Rep of the Year in 2007.

Customers come first: “Customers have told our sales folks that they’re upbeat and are feeling a lot of activity from their customers,” Rhodes says. However, he does offer one caveat: “Cotton costs could throw a wet towel on the market if costs continue to increase and cause prices to increase too high.”

And, staying true to Bodek’s focus on its clients, Rhodes says the company will continue to aid them in their daily efforts. “We’re rolling out a lot of Web offerings and new technology to help our customers grow their business,” he says. “Our new products for 2011 are exciting and are led by the addition of Next Level Apparel.”

Looking ahead: “We expect there will be consolidation at all levels of the supply chain, from manufacturer to decorator,” Rhodes says. “Technology will continue to help our industry be more productive and profitable. The decorated-apparel industry is strong and will remain strong. We don’t expect any challenges that will be difficult for the industry to overcome – our industry is filled with entrepreneurs who’ve always adapted and succeeded.” —JH

FUN FACT:
Bodek and Rhodes
boasts five warehouses
and 37 brands.

20. CRAIG MERTENS

President and CEO, Digital Art Solutions (*asi/14970*)



Why he's on the list: Brother-and-sister duo Craig Mertens and Nicole Mertens have been in the decorated-apparel industry since 1982, and they've been busy. Founded in 1999, their company, Digital Art Solutions (which acquired Smart Design Inc.) has experienced an average annual growth of more than 10% over the last three years.

The diverse product line includes digital art content, graphics software (Smart Designer add-on graphics software for CorelDRAW) and apparel decoration systems. "We've introduced more than 20 new products and services to the industry, including two decorating processes in our Rhinestone System and SmartGarment Printing System," says Craig, who notes that his U.S. client base exceeds 60,000 users.

High points for the industry in 2011: Direct-to-garment and

rhinestone systems. "Since 2007, rhinestoning has grown like crazy and it's becoming a standard thing in everyone's decorating systems," Craig says. "You used to have to buy transfers to do this, but now you can do it yourself with a vinyl cutter, materials and the software."

Other trends driving growth: As decoration processes have gotten more complex, people have relied more on stock artwork and productivity software, which plays to the firm's strength. "Digital printing has gotten more complicated, so shops need better tools to produce patterns for that," Craig says.

The industry in five years: Most shops will want online content delivery for Web stores and other purposes, so Digital Art Solutions will eventually distribute content via the cloud rather than CDs and DVDs. "This will require us to reconfigure our delivery method, and make both capital investments and training investments to adapt," Craig says. — RC

21. ZAHOOOR KAREEM

CEO, CafePress (*asi/43167*)

Why he's on the list: Under Kareem's direction, CafePress has led the way in the T-shirt revolution, providing custom designs on T-shirts on a wide-scale format (and largely online) before most others got in on the act. It boasts a user-created catalog of 250 million unique shirts and other products, and the website averages 11 million unique visits per month. The company is tied in to a network of thousands of independent decorating shops.

Why it matters: Aside from the virtual CafePress shop, which includes an online storefront, the firm also provides website hosting, order management, fulfillment, payment processing and customer service. More than anything, though, CafePress offers a voice for the connected and disconnected alike.

Artist outlet: CafePress allows its users to create and sell a wide variety of products on the Web, making it easy for artists to sell their own wares without having to physically set up a brick-and-mortar operation. Because of that, over 2.5 million independent shops have been opened on CafePress since its founding in 1999.

The challenge in 2011: "The economy will continue to be a challenge and we believe it will force a new breed of competition," Kareem says. "As entrepreneurs, this is an exciting prospect for CafePress." — JH

22. PHIL RUBIN and ERIC RUBIN

CEO; President, Blue Generation (*asi/40653*)



Why they're on the list: The Rubins run a multinational company with production facilities in Egypt that handle all aspects of the apparel manufacturing process. They earned the title of *Counselor* magazine Supplier Family Business of the Year in 2009.

Retail to manufacturing: What began as a retail venture has morphed into a successful and growing promotional division that recently broke into the *Counselor* Top 40. The company's success can be attributed to many things, including being on the leading edge of the women's apparel trend and reducing its production cycle by 60 days. The company has weathered the poor economy and is now seeing significant growth. "Our sales are up double digits this year and we foresee that this will continue into 2011," Eric says. "The biggest challenge the industry will face is rising prices overseas on every level — raw materials, labor and shipping. Maintaining inventory levels will also be a challenge due to the current turmoil in the textile markets."

Everything but the kitchen sink: Blue Generation touts a comprehensive business. "Our operation is totally vertical, from spinning the thread to dyeing the fabric to manufacturing the finished product," says Eric. "This also includes producing our own labels, hangtags, buttons and thread. This result is total quality control of the end product. In addition, we stock millions of dollars of dyed fabric and finished garments overseas in a warehouse the size of a football field." — JH

23. CHRIS WALDICK

Founder and President, FastManager SMS



Why he's on the list: In 2000, five years after starting a screen-printing firm, Waldick created what has become the most-used business-management software for small decorators, with more than 1,200 users. Revenue growth for the company has been more than 25% each year since 2007, and 20% of new business comes from shops that were using competing products, says Waldick, who's a member of the Embellished Activewear Standards Initiative.

Trends causing the firm to evolve its products: With technology lowering the barriers to entry into this business each year, "Smaller shops are definitely going to grow over the next couple of years and fuel this business," Waldick predicts. For instance, it used to be that shops had complicated pricing systems, but with today's technology allowing new decorating processes and faster turnarounds, the software needs updated pricing engines that acknowledge this reality.

Also, "more point-of-sale opportunities, having multiple physical and online stores, interacting across the Web to transfer data – all of this will affect our products," Wal-

dick says. "We're moving toward having most data reside on the Web, and people accessing it from whichever devices they're using at that moment. We must see how mobile technologies will be used and how our products will need to work on all of them."

On keeping the right focus: "This economy has given us many new customer opportunities," Waldick says. "Our bread and butter is a network application, so we don't get completely caught up on the newest, bright shiny objects and what they might be able to do in the future. We stay focused on what people are doing today, and making those things easier." – RC

24. DOV CHARNEY, TOM CASEY and MARTY BAILEY

CEO; President; Operations Manager, American Apparel (asi/35297)



Dov Charney

Why they're on the list: American Apparel is biggest clothing manufacturer based exclusively in the U.S. Charney founded the company in 1989 and dove into the custom-apparel business. Bailey joined in 2002 and tripled American Apparel's production by remaking its operations model.

Still standing: American Apparel took a hard hit when the global recession hit just as the company was expanding into retail, opening more than 285 stores over the past six years. Stocks tanked, credit lines dried up, controversies arose and naysayers gleefully predicted the demise of the controversial Charney and his

company.

But American Apparel is still standing. Its British lender came through with new credit terms, billionaire Ron Burkle bought

into the company and stocks rebounded. Meanwhile, Charney and Bailey haven't faltered in their stance on domestic manufacturing. The company's ability to survive can serve as an example for others considering domestic manufacturing.

A-team: Charney gets most of the publicity as the company's controversial and out-

spoken young founder and visionary, and it's his ideas and willingness to allow a creative workplace that enabled the vibrant American Apparel brand to flourish. But if not for Bailey's skillful operations management, the company might still be just another niche designer instead of the big operation it is today. The two men balance and complement each other, and they both recognize the need to embrace change in the marketplace. "You've got to be versatile," Bailey says. "You've got to get out of the paradigm of, 'This is what we do, and this is how we do it.' It has to be about what we need."

With the addition of former Blockbuster CFO Casey as American Apparel's president, Charney and Bailey are once again hearing and responding to changing demands by bringing in a financial guru to fill a perceived gap at the company. – DW

FUN FACT:
American Apparel is the largest clothing manufacturer based exclusively in the U.S.

25. OWEN DUNNE

Director, Robison-Anton Division,
American & Efird Inc.



Why he's on the list: Dunne oversees the Robison-Anton division of American & Efird, widely considered to be the number-two threadmaker in the industry. He has worked with American & Efird since 1996, when the company

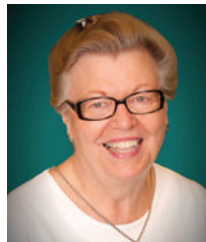
acquired Threads USA.

Ups and downs: For Dunne, the high points of the past year include the industry's growing ability to stay stylish with its "ability to reproduce fashion trends in small embroidery business." On the other hand, he says, "Consumer concern over hazardous content in products is growing. What are we most excited about? This concern of hazardous content is driving consumers to pay particular attention to the materials going into a decorated-apparel product." He says Robison-Anton is well-positioned to allay these concerns: "Our North American customers can rest assured that the embroidery threads they're receiving are Oeko-Tex Certified and made in the U.S."

Looking local: The global reach of American & Efird and its Robison-Anton division is balanced by a strong focus on local markets. "As this market seeks to reproduce – and in some instances, create – new fashion trends, thread suppliers must be ready," Dunne says. He cites two trends for 2011: "Going finer and more detailed in logo, and going heavier and more unique with decorative embellishments." – AP

27. SUSAN RITCHIE, ARCH RITCHIE and JENNIFER COX

Co-founders, National Network of Embroidery Professionals (NNEP) (asi/187622)



Why they're on the list: The Ohio-based trade association boasts more than 1,600 members; through its events, advice and logistical assistance, as well as member benefits and savings, NNEP continues to be an asset to the commercial embroidery industry.

Backstory: After years running an expanding commercial embroidery business, Susan and Arch Ritchie, along with their daughter Jennifer Cox, created NNEP in 1996.

Made in America: Susan expects to see an increasing demand for American-made garments in the coming year: "As consumers become more and more aware of the major loss of manufacturing within this country due to the overseas market, there will be an increased commitment to products manufactured within the States," she says. "The cost difference will always be a factor, but with time this will begin to close, making USA products more competitive."

New technology: Further in the future, Cox says that, "What's next depends on what new technologies bring to the table. Digital garment printing was only the thing of someone's imagination less than a decade ago. Combining digital garment printing with complex embroidery is still in its infancy. There's so much possibility there – I think some exciting things will come from that front over the next five years."



Fashion forward: Fashion will play a role for embroiderers who have a specialty niche, according to Susan. "They'll want to have the ability to produce multiple application options for their customers," she says. "The tween customer may prove to be a market that needs to be considered more aggressively by the garment suppliers." – AP

26. ROBERT KRONENBERGER

CEO, American Needle



Why he's on the list: Kronenberg's family-owned company was the first to sell embroidered baseball caps for retail purchase. American Needle won a high-profile Supreme Court case against the National Football League this year that will shape the business of professional sports (and maybe the sports-apparel business).

Changing American fashion: American Needle was just another hat company until it revolutionized men's fashion in 1946

by introducing the first retail baseball cap embroidered with a team logo. That first run of Chicago Cubs hats sold out in one day, and American Needle kept producing them. "At the time, there was no competition," Kronenberg says. Sixty-four years later, the cap is firmly entrenched as part of American fashion and has spread to countries where baseball isn't even played. American Needle remains a part of it but has expanded to other apparel.

"The most important case in sports history": Kronenberg showed the same kind of vision as his forebears when he gave the go-ahead to take the NFL to court over its move to exclu-

28. JOYCE JAGGER

Owner, The Embroidery Coach



Why she's on the list: Embroidery Tips & More, Jagger's busy Binghamton, NY-based training and consulting firm for embroidery business owners, includes onsite and phone consultation for embroidery businesses of all sizes, a resource-packed website (featuring more than 150 videos and a tip of the day that she e-mails to her students, as she prefers to call her clients), monthly webinars and live phone chats, e-newsletters, blogs, and now a just-published book that's already generating a lot of buzz: *The Truth About Embroidery Business Success*. Jagger, who has 90 students at any one time, estimates she has trained more than 500 decorator business owners.

High-profile job: Jagger, who started her own embroidery business in 1978 and sold the 36-head company in 1998, has recently been helping to incorporate embroidery into Rhode Island School of Design's (RISD) Textile Department. "I've been working with Anais Missakian, head of RISD's textile department, and *Stitches* Editor Nicole Rollender, to add embroidery and digitizing to the curriculum," she says. "This is an exciting assignment for me. At this point, there are 14 senior and graduate students who are eager to learn embroidery and digitizing, and it makes me happy to be the one to teach them."

Happy New Year: Jagger says that based on feedback from her clients, sales in decorated apparel are going strong in fourth-quarter 2010. "They're a lot busier and are making more sales this year than they were last year," she says. "It's going to keep on increasing. This is supposed to be a 'down economy,' but if you offer high-quality products and excellent customer service, you're going to stay busy. I'm looking forward to 2011 – I have more students joining me at this time than I have in the past few years. Embroidery business owners are hungry for information." – JC

29. CORY DEAN and EMILY CHENEY

Digitizers, Artwork Source (asi/36901)



Why they're on the list: This Tacoma, WA-based digitizing firm is a 24/7 operation with a staff that includes 80 digitizers and 40 vectorizers. Dean, who started the company, took a \$25,000 loan from his parents and grew the digitizing company to more than \$10 million

in revenue in a very short time.

Dean says his company experienced 10% growth in 2009 and plowed \$500,000 into a new website. Just about 17% of Artwork Source's revenue comes from outside of the U.S., "so going global is part of our way of life," he says. "We just completed a new building overseas."

Star Digitizer Cheney works on complicated projects and trains the company's customer service staff. "I like working in this industry because there's always something new to learn," she says, "and there's a challenging element of creative problem solving when digitizing for embroidery – especially with some of our photographic-style designs." For its top-notch digitizing efforts, Artwork Source has won digitizing and design awards from *Stitches*, *Impressions*, *Printwear* and *CorelPro* magazines.

Going global: Dean sees three production models: One is to only use overseas labor from China or India. "These aren't a good fit for most people since communications, billing and security can be risky," he says. "Then there's the purely American model, but it's difficult to create the infrastructure needed to offer top quality using only U.S. staff and resources. Lastly, there's the hybrid system that we use, which we've found combines the best of both worlds and allows us to offer the best service."

Changes: Dean sees a change in the way people shop. "More people want products that appeal exactly to their personal style," he says. "They don't want to compromise by accepting an item that was one of 100,000 pieces run overseas. Companies like CafePress, NikeID and Zazzle will continue to grow at breakneck pace as they cater to those specific tastes. Machine companies will sell a lot of one-head machines and almost no 12-heads. And, the fastest-growing decorating companies will be the ones that sell one-off items at a high price and use technology to organize it with little labor." – JC

sive licensing in 2000. Ten years later, the case went before the Supreme Court in what *Sports Illustrated* called "the most important case in sports history." At stake in professional sports was a de facto anti-trust exemption for the NFL and other pro sports leagues that would have drastically remade the way several billion-dollar pro sports businesses do business. American Needle won a stunning 9-0 victory.

But that case isn't over, as it's headed back to the district court level for further rulings on other parts of the case that could similarly remake the sports-apparel business. If American Needle wins at the lower level, sports apparel businesses could have dozens of new markets to do business in, because they'll be able to more freely do work for individual professional clubs. Kronenberger isn't backing down after one win. – DW

30. RAY MATERSON

Embroiderer, Social Activist and Author of *Sins and Needles*



Why he's on the list: Materson was serving a 15-year prison sentence in Connecticut for armed robbery when he started learning to machine-embroider. It changed

his life, and *Sins and Needles*, the book he wrote about his experience, has a high-enough profile that it could prompt state prisons to take a closer look at embroidery.

From addict to artist: Materson was convicted in 1987 of armed robbery and kidnapping after he carjacked and robbed someone for cash to feed his cocaine addiction. He spent over seven years in jail before making parole in 1995. While

in prison, he reflected on his life; one good memory was of his grandmother embroidering on the front porch. He picked up embroidery by handcrafting a hoop from a food container and unraveling socks to use for thread.

Today, Materson sells his embroidery as art, sometimes working on commission, and is a case worker for the Community Justice Project, a Vermont-based organization that helps children of prison inmates and ex-cons. He also speaks publicly about the role that prison and embroidery played in turning around his life, and some say he's an example for how embroidery can be used to help rehabilitate felons.

London calling: After his book was published, Materson drew a good

FUN FACT:
Ray Materson spent eight years in prison, where embroidery turned his life around.

amount of publicity from mainstream media, but strangely enough, U.S. prisons didn't come calling. Rather, Materson heard from a British organization that promotes embroidery for prisoners. He thinks both artistic embroidery and mechanized embroidery-machine shops can help inmates. "I think any jobs in prison is a good thing," Materson says. But it's the handcrafting that prompts thought and introspection, and this is what he promotes most. – *DW*

31. MICHAEL SAVOIA

Owner, Villa Savoia Inc.



Why he's on the list: Savoia creates trend-setting embroidery and appliqué work for the interior-design industry. The Hollywood, CA-based business owner has worked with top interior designers such as Michael K. Smith, Thomas Pheasant and French master

Jean-François Lesage. His creations have been featured in popular magazines such as *Architectural Digest* and *Interior Design*. His prized pillows, linens and curtains are showcased in the homes of celebrities and other well-known locations, like Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House in Los Angeles.

Traveling man: "I've started traveling to major cities across the country to visit clients and potential clients in their offices," Savoia

says. "Pictures are great, but they don't really connect the way a personal sales presentation can. Embellished fabric is like candy to interior designers, and seeing the work up close makes it have great impact."

FUN FACT:
Michael Savoia's pillows, linens and curtains are showcased in the homes of celebrities and Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House.

Gaining attention: One of Savoia's goals is getting noticed by both clients and the media. "I'm currently interviewing public relations specialists who can help get my work in the public's eye," he says. "My goals include creating more business; reaching out to college students to show them the potential of embroidery in the fashion, interior design and textile curriculum;

and to promote embroidery by organizing a traveling exhibit of the work of Jean-François Lesage – who's the creative head of perhaps one of the most important decorative arts embroidery companies in the world." – *JC*



32. CHASE ROH, PH.D.

President, CEO and Founder, AnaJet Inc. (asi/16000)



Why he's on the list: Roh is CEO of the 27th-fastest-growing private company in the U.S. AnaJet has grown at an annual rate of nearly triple-digit percentages

during the last three years. With 3,000 U.S.-based customers, it holds the largest market share in direct-to-garment printers in America, and it is the primary supplier of direct-to-garment printers to decorators and distributors.

Wind at its back: AnaJet's growth rate was in the triple digits until the October 2008 financial crisis – but the company has still grown at “healthy double-digit rates” since then, according to Roh. “Our direct-to-garment printing is a highly demanded new class of equipment,” he says. “Despite the recession, most of

our customers are doing well, and they're ordering both the printers and supplies.”

Knowledge is power: AnaJet has taken full advantage of the recent direct-to-garment explosion, largely because it has taken the time to pass on knowledge about the printers to promotional product distributors, Roh says. “When many promotional product distributors came to us a few years ago, most did not have any printing or production experience,” he says. “We developed the proper training and support programs for digital apparel printing for both decorators and distributors.”

Looking ahead: Roh says AnaJet is expanding its engineering and marketing departments to help clients expand their businesses, as well as beefing up its online efforts with webinars, social media

FUN FACT:
AnaJet is the 27th-fastest-growing private company in the U.S.

and streaming videos. Higher-speed printers are forthcoming, too. And the company will continue its growth, Roh says, since the decorated-apparel business isn't typically impacted by general business cycles. “We expect that the apparel-decoration industry will do well in 2011, even if the economic recovery continues to be weak,” he says.

The power of social media: Roh expects the role of social media in the industry, including Facebook and Twitter, to expand. “Our most effective Tweet was soliciting visitors to come to our booth at the recent SGIA Expo – the turnout was tremendous,” he says. “Using social media these days helps our customers stay current with what's new at AnaJet, and also with current events and news within the decorated apparel industry.” – SD

33. JIMMY LAMB

Manager of Communication, Sawgrass Technologies



Why he's on the list: Lamb, author of *The Embroidery Business Survival Guide*, is one of the industry's most well-known and entertaining educators, hosting at least 80-plus seminars a year at trade shows and other events. “My philosophy is,

in order to properly educate, you have to get their attention, and part of that is entertaining them. If you have a little bit of fun, you're more likely to be engaged and educated,” he says.

Lamb has worked in top marketing roles for other industry companies, including Hirsch International. In a former life, he ran a successful embroidery shop with his wife.

Knowledge is power: Sawgrass has been an innovator of sublimation inks and supplies, and has many high-visibility sublimation customers, such as Dell. Lamb says Sawgrass is constantly refining its inks and drivers for its printers, but a big part of the sublimation movement is educating the public. “Especially with

embroiderers, they don't really know what sublimation is,” he says. “We're really trying to educate people that there's a lot of inexpensive digital technology they can bring into their shops.”

FUN FACT:
Jimmy Lamb hosts at least 80-plus seminars a year at trade shows and other events.

Predictions: Many of the more successful decorators are performing multiple applications under one roof to attract more customers, Lamb says. “If they want to add digital heat transfers or sublimation, some of them are very low-cost to bring in, and it gives them a whole new layer of things to offer their customers,” he says. “It's far easier to sell to an existing customer than to acquire a new customer.”

In terms of overall economic success in this industry, Lamb says he knows people who are extremely busy and people who aren't. “I've always said that true entrepreneurs will always be OK,” he says. “They look at what the current market condition is and adjust. Others twiddle their thumbs right out of business. Microsoft, Burger King, Hilton – they were all started during a recession. Those are important lessons. Things aren't going to go back to where they were; they'll just go in a different direction.” – SD

34. VASILIS THOMAIDIS President and CEO, Compucon



Why he's on the list: Since 1982, the Greece-based firm has produced a variety of embroidery and laser-engraving software under its own brand as well as OEM brands. Its products cover each level of the industry: the home market, entry-level professional shops and large shops; 5,000

systems are installed worldwide.

"My driving force has always been combining the two fields that I love – software and electronic design – to develop exciting new products and solutions," Thomaidis says. "This was the reason I went into the business 27 years ago, and it is still what drives me. Developing a solution that will help your customers do their work in an easier, faster and cheaper way is very fulfilling.

How the firm is adapting: Compucon, which has \$4.7 million in annual revenue despite the slow economy, has steadily grown its overall position in the apparel-decorating industry, but not always in the same segments. We've been moving more of our focus toward emerging markets as the industry shifts more globally and new opportunities come up, Thomaidis says. He notes the merging of embroidery and printing, and as such, is delivering free tools to integrate with graphic software packages.

Home is where the money is: Thomaidis says professional segments haven't been investing as much in new hardware and software, and there will be further emphasis on consumer-oriented applications and solutions. As a result, he says, "Households will further move into customized apparel decorating. The evolution of tablet-style computers will be an important factor in this growth; they'll become another household appliance. So, software solutions especially adapted to them must be developed." – RC

35. MARK VENIT and JAY MALANGA Chairman; President, ShopWorks



Jay Malanga

Why they're on the list: In 1995, Malanga's JAM Grafx formed a new company with Venit's Apparel Graphics Institute, a leading management/marketing consultant within the industry. Renamed ShopWorks, the firm released OnSite in 1998; this industry-specific software handles marketing, pricing, sales, administration, accounting and finance. Later products include OrdersLink, a Web-based order-status application; and PromoStores, a Web-

based e-commerce system to streamline order fulfillment. The firm serves more than 600 decorators, manufacturers and distributors – with revenues ranging from \$300,000 to \$100 million – and adds about 40 more annually. Venit just completed a book titled, *The Business of T-shirts: An insider's roadmap to successfully selling and marketing decorated apparel.*

2011 outlook: Even in slow economic periods, Venit says, decorating remains in demand because companies want and need different ways to present their logo, design or message. "Decorated apparel's place in Western society is locked in – it's ubiquitous," he says. "Its use for company uniforms or as identification and as a morale-builder among members or participants has held up. The athletic sector is always pretty stable, too. Buyers occasionally trade down one level, but that's the exception. And in this current economic cycle, that possibility is behind us."

Next-generation products: "People don't have to be locked down to a desktop or weighed down by a laptop – they can walk the production floor with an iPad to record and access information, scan barcodes and more," Malanga says. "We're adapting our products to the touch-screen interfaces, too."

Major challenges: Malanga says distinctions between embroiderers, screen printers and advertising specialty distributors are disappearing, and that ShopWorks must strive to deliver benefits for these changing businesses. "We keep our products customer-driven by actively soliciting their input; that will be even more important in five years," he says. – RC

36. THOMAS MOORE JR. President, Strawberry Stitch Co.



Why he's on the list: Moore is regularly cited as one of the most influential digitizers in the industry because of his precise punching work (he has taken home more than 40 digitizing and design awards) and his dedication to educating new and experienced digitizers. St. Louis-based Strawberry Stitch opened its Embroidery Design

School in 2000, naming Moore as its director and focusing on teaching computer graphics with a decorated-apparel focus, combined with digitizing theory centered around Moore's widely-referenced manual, *Digitizing 101 (Digitizing 210)* will be out next month).

While growing Strawberry Stitch to be a Wilcom dealer and a CorelDRAW Training Partner and moving all of the Embroidery Design School's curriculum to a Web-based instructional

37. JOHN LYNCH

Owner, Lynka Promotional Solutions



Why he's on the list: Lynka, which Lynch co-founded in 1992, is one of Europe's top promotional products companies and has earned more than 40 international awards for the quality of its printing and embroidery. Poland-based Lynka's success can partly be attributed to its branding as a full-service "one-stop shop" where buyers can purchase decorated and customized products.

Growing wildly: In its early years, the Polish market was key to Lynka's success. By 2005, the company was firmly immersed in the German market, and moved on to add Austria and Germany. Poland's entry into the European Union opened new markets, and now Lynka does business in 22 European countries. In 2009, despite the global recession, the company grew its export sales by 25%, thanks to significant growth in the Scandinavia market as well as the "Benelux countries" of Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg. Lynka is now selling in most EU nations, including far-flung regions like Malta and Ireland.

Europe catches up: "It's like North America in the 1990s, where blank goods were sold, and it was the distributor's problem to decorate the product," Lynch says. "More and more players are 'seeing the light,' and starting to offer decoration services, but having started so late, they're running into plenty of difficulties. It has been my assertion for many years now that suppliers who don't adjust to this reality will be left in the dust. Fortunately, in our sector, there are very few players who realize this, and we are moving as fast as we can to build systems and capacity to support our continued growth. I think this is our number-one competitive advantage." — *AP*

38. JACK MA

Chairman and CEO, The Alibaba Group



Why he's on the list: The Alibaba Group oversees the world's biggest product-sourcing website, targeted toward small manufacturers and based in Hangzhou, China. Alibaba.com had 39.9 million registered users and 6.3 million suppliers as of June 30, up from 3.6 million and 832,815 on March 31, respectively.

Crashing the American market: The Alibaba Group pushed into the American market in 2009 with a \$30 million marketing campaign. Companies like Walmart and Procter & Gamble use its services to purchase goods. Some suspect The Alibaba Group may even try to compete with Amazon and eBay, though Ma and company say otherwise. For now, Ma, a former English teacher, may be content to continue opening channels to Asian factories for suppliers in the promotional products market, including embroiderers.

Exponential growth: Going from English teacher to CEO of a massive company might seem an unlikely rise, but Ma has made it. The rise has been rapid, too. The Alibaba Group only came into existence in 1999. In 2007, its \$1.7 billion initial public offer on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange was the biggest Internet company's offering since Google went public three years earlier. — *AP*

FUN FACT:

In 2007, The Alibaba Group's \$1.7 billion initial public offer on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange was the biggest Internet company's offering since Google went public three years earlier.

platform, Moore has evolved as an industry consultant. He has a client base of 9,000 and works with such manufacturers as Williams-Sonoma, Pottery Barn, Pottery Barn Kids, Chambers Bedding, Eddie Bauer, Land's End, Radio Cap, Vanity Fair, North Face, American Identity and Real Polo.

Continuing education: "For a long time, education in this industry was a hearsay, pass-along, artisan-type trade knowledge," Moore says. "But as the industry went away from that and become more about mass production, it didn't keep up with the education

required in the typical production facilities of other products."

That's one of the reasons that Moore has dedicated so much time and effort to educating the industry. "What I saw was this big void in education, which reflects pricing and demand for products," he says.

Predictions: "I see some manufacturing coming back state-side," Moore says. "I also see some new techniques as far as multimedia, including combinations of rhinestone embroidery that are progressing." — *SD*

39. AKIRA IKEDA President, Mimaki Engineering

Why he's on the list: Ikeda's leadership helped Mimaki become a publicly listed company in March 2007. Mimaki specializes in high-speed inkjet printers and cutting plotters for the decorating industry. On the industrial side, it's an industry leader in flatbed inkjet and cutting plotters, and in its software: ProfileMasterII (which allows users to reproduce exact colors) and FineCut 7 for CorelDRAW and Illustrator.

On the textile and apparel side, Mimaki offers RasterLink Pro5 TA, which includes image paneling and color-replacement function, and TxLink for digital textile printing.

Italian fashion leaders: Ikeda has overseen the spread of Mimaki's textile printers into some of the most fashion-forward places in the world, including Milan, Italy, and northeast France. In fact, more than half of the textile printers in these regions are Mimaki-made.

Signs of the times: Mimaki prides itself on creating printers and inks that allow for some of the top illuminated signs and shop banners in the industry. For example, its JV4-130 printer, along with aqueous pigment ink and white cloth, was responsible for a series of wall advertisements inside a Japanese store, and a combination of its JV3-130S printer, solvent ink, vinyl matte and lamination film was used to create some vibrant bus graphics.

Looking ahead: Ikeda says Mimaki's overseas sales have greatly surpassed its U.S. sales recently, and its next step is to expand into the Asian regions, including a manufacturing and sales subsidiary in China. Mimaki also plans to introduce a series of new machines for the sign-graphics market that will improve upon image quality. — SD

FUN FACT:
Mimaki's products have been used to create vibrant bus graphics and Japanese wall advertisements.

40. FRED LEBOW Consultant and Developer, Cotswold Industries



Why he's on the list: Considered the guru of stabilizers for the embroidery industry, Lebow's most recent success was with the new Eco Stick, a biodegradable tearaway stabilizer that's been received enthusiastically in the market. He is

frequently tapped as a speaker for events, including the Imprinted Sportswear Show, NNEP Show and Hands-on Sewing School, among others.

Going green: Lebow has been developing innovations for the sewn-products market for more than 30 years. He's worked with Cotswold for 20-plus years, developing its entire line of stabilizers. With the success of the Eco Stick, Lebow sees the environmentally friendly trend continuing. "Hopefully, we won't have a choice," he says. "You'll be seeing a lot more recycled products. With stabilizers and the screen-printing industry, if they're going to stay in this country, it has to be more green than it is."

Go-to man for stabilizers: Lebow is well-known as an educator and the person to go to when one needs help with stabilizers. In the industry, his name has almost become synonymous with stabilizers ... better-known in some corners than the company itself. — AP

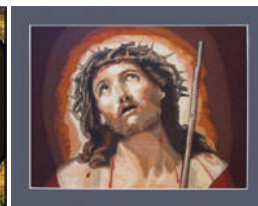
41. LEE CAROSELLI Co-Owner, Balboa Threadworks



Why she's on the list: A well-respected industry educator, embroiderer and digitizer, Caroselli turned heads with her one-of-a-kind Elvis Presley stamp design (yes, *that* one). She created the design with only six colors, "when people didn't believe we could blend thread colors on a commercial machine," says Caroselli,

whose Palm Desert, CA-based Balboa Threadworks has become synonymous with true embroidery artistry. Her design style has permeated the industry in her work, and in her students' work; it's also evident in second-generation designs found on Great Notions, Dakota Collectibles and other stock design websites.

Jesus is a favorite: In addition to the Elvis design, another



Caroselli favorite is a design of Christ from a 16th-century painting by the Italian artist Guido Reni. "This design is run at shows that I attend, and the response has been strongly positive," she says.

Diversity matters: "If embroiderers aren't learning to digitize, they're learning how to communicate with their digitizers in order to control the quality of their designs, and their bottom line," she says. "Diversifying our products has led to the marriage of embroidery and graphics." She expects the next decade to show what can happen given a longer marriage between those two. "We'll see every form of graphic mixed with the elegance of embroidery designs and then finished with dashes of bling," she says. — JC

42. STEVE GARNIER

CEO, Epilog Laser

Why he's on the list: Epilog has 27,000 clients in Europe and the U.S. and saw record-breaking laser equipment sales the last two years, thanks to the Zing 16 Laser, Zing 24 Laser upgrade, and Zing 24 Rotary Attachment. Garnier is the man driving the train.

Lasers and clothes: Many decorators might not be aware of the CO2 and fiber laser-engraving embellishment method, but Epilog has brought it to the decorated-apparel industry. "Fabric is becoming a very popular material for laser applications," says Mike Dean, Epilog's vice president of sales and marketing. "Because the laser is computer-controlled, users can dictate exactly how much speed and power is being given to the laser. You can literally etch away the tiniest layer of fabric to expose a contrast between the engraving and original material. Additionally, because the laser is so precise, our customers often use the laser for cutting patterns and materials for appliqués and other embroidery-related projects. Anything from tackle twill to leather to microfleece can be processed easily with a laser."

Work for this man: Epilog has made the *Denver Business Journal's* Best Places to Work list in three of the last four years (#5 in 2007, #7 in 2008 and #4 in 2009), and has been nominated for 2010, as well. It also won the 2009 Bronze Quill Award for Media Relations/Campaign Management and was named one of the Fastest-Growing Companies in Colorado by *Colorado-BIZ* magazine. — SD

43. MARK D. LANGE, PH.D.

President and CEO, National Cotton Council of America



Why he's on the list: Lange heads up the organization that understands more about this key ingredient in the apparel industry than any other group, tracking key data to provide to companies and growers nationwide.

Cotton cost: Today's cotton prices are the highest they've been since the Civil War. Acreage devoted to cotton has declined in the U.S. and abroad; demand declined for two years and then burst upward in 2010. The supply and demand issue is straight out of Economics 101, but it's still "incredible," Lange says. "The strength of the price reflects a real concern about the scarcity of the fiber."

The man with his finger on the pulse of the cotton industry has the knowledge and crystal ball to see what lies ahead. "Right now the futures prices for the 2011 crop is below what the current future prices are," Lange says. Currently prices are about \$1.35 to \$1.45 per pound, and he's anticipating it to be around 97 cents to 98 cents within a full year. That reduced price will certainly trickle down to the cost of finished goods.

The upshot: Lange believes that the next harvest cycle could be positive. However, it won't be until the crop is being processed that people in this industry can breathe a bit easier, he says with a degree of cautious optimism. — JH

FUN FACT:
Though today's cotton prices are the highest they've been since the Civil War, Lange predicts they're going to start falling soon.

44. ABDUS SALAM MURSHEDY

President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporter Association; Managing Director, Envoy Group

Why he's on the list: Murshedy heads the most influential trade group in Bangladesh, the source of an increasingly large portion of the world's apparel and embroidery production. He also started the Envoy Group, a multi-business conglomerate with more than a dozen garment houses.

Athlete turned businessman: Murshedy gained fame as a soccer player, playing and serving as captain for the national team and setting the single-season mark for most goals scored in Bangladesh's national soccer league. He started the Envoy Group in 1984 and expanded it well beyond apparel, going into information technology, freight, real estate, banking and health care.

A center of the apparel world: With Bangladesh becoming more of a power in apparel production, Murshedy's role as head of BGMEA could become that much more significant due to recent unrest by workers seeking better wages and working conditions. Nearly 3 million workers are employed by Bangladesh's more than 4,000 garment factories. That comprises about 40% of the nation's industrial workforce, which should give a sense of how prevalent the industry is there. Most people work more than 10 hours a day and as many as 15, often for the monthly minimum wage of \$25. Murshedy could have a central role in steering the course of a major source of embroidery production. — DW

FUN FACT:
Murshedy is a soccer star, playing and serving as captain for Bangladesh's national team. He even set the single-season mark for most goals scored.

45. MARTIN FAVRE

President, Bernina of America

Why he's on the list: Favre led the way on key acquisitions of embroidery-related companies for Bernina, and he's the man behind the Embroidery Software Protection Coalition's crackdown on design piracy.

Big spender: Favre was the man at the top when Bernina acquired Oklahoma Embroidery Supplies and Designs in 1997 and Quilters' Resource Inc. in 2001. Considering he came to Bernina as an export marketing manager with a directive to grow market share in the Americas, these acquisitions fit in well. Of course, by the time they came around, he'd been promoted to Bernina of America's president.

The anti-pirate: Favre headed the Embroidery Software Protection Coalition, a multi-company coalition that aggressively went after people accused of using stock designs without permission. The approach was controversial, as people who claimed they didn't know they'd bought designs without copyright received letters threatening lawsuits, but some felt a crackdown on piracy of intellectual property was long overdue. After some negative publicity, the ESPC faded away, but Bernina remains front-and-center in the debate on copyrights. And, Bernina also owns Great Notions, one of the industry's largest and most popular stock-design firms. — *DW*

46. MICHAEL STUART

Owner, MS Designs Ltd.



Why he's on the list: Stuart studied architectural drafting in college, but due to a recession, couldn't find a job. So, he joined a New York-based embroidery firm as a designer. "Instead of skyscrapers, I was drawing elaborate embroidery – my architecture," says Stuart, who bought the firm in 1981. His work has been worn by A-list celebrities from Jennifer Lopez to Julianne Moore, and he has created pieces for top designers like Calvin Klein and

Oscar de la Renta, bringing haute couture hand and machine embroidery to the center of the fashion world.

Coming out of hibernation: Stuart expects the industry's recovery to be in full swing next year. "The period of hibernation is coming to a close," he says. "Most designers cut back budgets so drastically that decoration and embroidery took a backseat to bread-and-butter looks that kept their companies afloat." But now things seem to be shifting: "There is a vibe," Stuart says. "It is easy to detect, as there has been no heartbeat at all for most of '09 and '10. That vibe is from the survivors!"

Embellishment returns: "Embellishment has and will always be cyclical," says Stuart, advising that embroiderers be on the lookout for a return to this style in the coming years. "When most have forgotten what others had done years ago, they do it again. My experience is that it takes seven years to go around."

Keep it simple: Stuart expects simplicity to be the coming trend. "Clean, simple looks," he says. "And for the bigger boys, lots of work in the fabric, but not shiny or glitz. Kind of like Calvin being designed by Valentino." — *AP*

47. DARIN ANDERSEN

CEO, Embroidery.com



Why he's on the list: A tech-savvy youngster, Andersen began digitizing in the late '80s for Thread Images, his father's embroidery business. He realized the potential of a graphical interface to the Internet and after trying various methods, he eventually created an automated system that could securely collect payment information and make the designs available in a download center. "The entire system had to be written from scratch," he says. "With the automation, individual designs could be offered at a price that home and commercial embroiderers were willing to pay. We approached independent digitizers who had small, attractive collections."

Embroidery hub: In 1999, Andersen acquired the domain name Embroidery.com, and grew his business into a massively successful online center – it contains more than 85,000 designs being accessed by 195,000 registered users. Through

the Embroidery.com portal, more than \$6 million in royalties has been paid to embroidery designers and \$32,000 raised for charity. In addition, Andersen oversees a prominent education center on the site that provides over 600 hours of live, online e-classes, a public library of over 300 step-by-step projects and 150 instructional video segments.

Predictions: Andersen says there will be greater reliance upon online resources that assist each stage of the apparel ordering, production, and customization and accounting processes. "Locally installed software applications such as QuickBooks will give way to powerful online subscription-based services that are easy to set up and integrate the company's website," he says. "Customers will have greater control. Businesses large and small will benefit from these services by greatly reducing the overhead. However, with these advancements comes the challenge of fostering and maintaining personal relationships with customers." — *JC*



48. EILEEN ROCHE

Editor and Publisher, *Designs in Machine Embroidery*



Why she's on the list: Roche is an in-demand educator, the author of *Contemporary Machine Embroidered Quilts and Contemporary Machine Embroidered Fashions*, and a regular guest on PBS TV's *Sewing With Nancy*, *Sew Much Fun*, *Martha's Sewing Room* and HGTV's *Sew Much More*.

Combination of services: Roche attributes her success to hard work and a great team of employees. Looking ahead, she predicts finding "competent, inspired and dependable" workers will be a challenge, as will maintaining clients. "Companies that are willing to offer a combination of services such as large production runs and small custom jobs will fare best," she says. "Smaller companies will outsource large jobs while focusing on smaller, profitable jobs in-house."

Edgier embroidery: Roche sees easy-to-incorporate mixed-media techniques on the forefront of 2011's new innovations in the decorating industry. "I also think more fashionistas will be seeking one-of-a-kind garments, such as edgier embroidery with radical densities, raw-edge appliqué and cut work," she says. Still, the same challenge remains: "delivering unique finishes while making a profit." — *Erica Young*

49. MICHAEL ROBERTSON

President and CEO, Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA)



Why he's on the list: Robertson has been president and CEO of SGIA since 2001 and part of the organization since 1982. SGIA is the only international association for specialty imaging and provides services such as the extensive SGIA Information Network and portals that offer members the latest news and research on the industry.

A diverse marketplace: SGIA represents a diverse group of garment decorators, but most fall into one of two camps: "On one hand, we have the more traditional garment decorators, where screen-printing is the predominate technology and their business model has changed little over the years," Robertson says. "On the other hand, marketing companies are employing garment-decoration technologies to create a product suited to their market channels." Having both sectors, Robertson says, "adds new competition and presents a challenge for those unwilling to adjust with the times."

Looking ahead: Robertson anticipates a slowly improving economy in 2011, with good opportunities available for decorators who seize the moment. "North American-based garment decorators who are on top of their game will benefit from a rapidly changing marketplace, and customers will benefit from regional production for some applications," he says. And while he anticipates that both screen-printing and digital-imaging technologies will be valued for some time to come, he also expects "to see more combined solutions where digital imaging and screen printing are used in tandem or in combination. This opens new creative options while maximizing production capability." — *AP*

50. DEBORAH JONES

Owner, MyEmbroideryMentor.com



Why she's on the list: For more than 30 years, Jones has worked with computerized embroidery techniques for a vast range of accessories and apparel. Jones' private consulting, videos and seminars through MyEmbroideryMentor.com and her articles have earned her a Floriani Lifetime Achievement Award for embroidery education.

Fresh faces: Jones plays a key role in educating new embroiderers, and she expresses particular pleasure at seeing individuals from a variety of backgrounds entering the industry, which she expects will continue through 2011. "I'm most excited to see continuing growth of new

embroidery businesses," she says. "Veteran embroiderers should embrace the opportunity to mentor newer embroiderers to help preserve the integrity of the art of embroidery."

FUN FACT:

Jones' favorite Tweet announced that Simon Cowell received a monogrammed scarf from *American Idol*.

Viva variety: In the longer term, Jones anticipates more crossings of styles and methods in embroidery. "Bold is in at the present time, so we will probably swing toward softer effects," she says. "Distressed embroidery and other decorating methods show no signs of slowing down. Bling, the polar opposite, will also remain popular."

Most memorable Tweet: Jones' favorite: "The Tweet announcing that Simon Cowell received a monogrammed scarf as a departure gift from *American Idol*." — *AP*

51. CHRISTOPHER BERNAT

Chief Revenue Officer and Co-Founder, Vapor Apparel
(asi/93396)



Why he's on the list: Bernat and his partner, Jackson Burnett, started Vapor Apparel six years ago. It's the first company to develop performance-apparel garments in an array of styles, colors and fabrics specifically for the sublimation process.

Risk and reaction: Bernat and his team have always had a good vision of the macro trends in the marketplace, and have focused their attention on customization. "But next year will be about managing risk and maximizing reaction time. It'll be good for those who deliver value to customers, and tough for others who don't," he says. "We're excited about our new 'Zero Decorated Inventory' model that we're launching for several major specialty retailers. We like to win on value, not price."

Industry growth: Bernat echoes *The New York Times* Columnist Thomas Friedman when he says the world is quickly getting flatter, which will challenge conventional sales models. "More and more customers will demand to buy from manufacturers through the Internet, which is here to stay," Bernat says. "We'll see massive growth for the digital printing industry as consumables go down in price and customization enters its next stage of adoption in society." As for new innovations? "Who knows!" he says. "If you focus on value creation, the business will grow." — *EY*

FUN FACT:

Vapor Apparel is the first company to develop performance-apparel garments specifically for sublimation.

52. JOANNA GRANT

Vice President of Graphic Production and Support Services, Affinity Express



Why she's on the list: After building its expertise in advertising since its founding in 2000, Affinity Express has become a comprehensive resource for digitizing, graphics and multimedia services for advertising and marketing; it serves decorators, distributors and suppliers alike. "We didn't want to

offer a product that decorators liked but other industry players wouldn't be interested in," Grant says. The firm's business is trending steeply in the right direction: Sales volume is "way above what we had predicted for 2010," she says.

Ever-evolving: In the graphics world, the true product is knowledgeable, intuitive and quick service. As a result, "We're always moving forward from a training standpoint," Grant says. "We serve those who don't have the in-house capacity to do certain things, which means being able to handle whatever their needs are. So we make sure to have the most up-to-date and useful techniques from Wilcom, Adobe and the other digitizing software firms."

Five years from now: People will develop new ways to decorate, requiring Affinity to become capable of accommodating those techniques, according to Grant. For instance, rhinestones hit the big time about three years ago, and "We had to become proficient at applying the techniques for laying out stones," she says. — *RC*

53. RANDY CARR

CEO, World Emblem International (asi/98264)



Why he's on the list: Carr took over the business 11 years ago, and grew it from a small, local embroiderer to an international company with some 700 employees

in eight locations. World Emblem International has had a busy 2010, rolling out new products, including 3-D Doming and Trimax transfers, and acquiring French distributor Imatel in June of this year.

Expanding the customer base: Carr

expects to continue servicing World Emblem's core customer base for industrial uniforms and patches, but he sees possibilities for higher-end options, as well. "I've seen a lot more people getting away from the traditional emblem look and going for the name badge, hospitality style," he says. "More people are getting away from rental clothing and more into purchasing their own clothing, but need to identify themselves with a removable piece of identification."

Boosting flexibility: The company's new Trimax transfers allow customers

to buy the transfers and order the garments separately, applying the transfers as needed. "They don't have to supply the money for inventory of garments already being printed, but they still get the economies of scale by buying the transfers all in one spot," Carr says. World Emblem has added to that by putting more focus on training its sales force. "We put a lot more money into training our employees to be team leaders, our team leaders to be managers and our managers to be executives, and I think that brought us a lot of dividends," Carr says. — *AP*

54. KRISTINE SHREVE

Director of Marketing, EnMart and Ensign Emblem



Why she's on the list: Shreve is at the forefront of the embroidery industry's push into modern Internet marketing and communications, leading a new way of connecting with and maintaining customers.

Fresh eyes: Shreve approaches her marketing role with the sensibility of someone who understands the modern Internet, and that sensibility may make her a model for other companies. She has blogged for years and has four personal blogs that she updates with varying frequency, so she understands the dynamics of online social media. That means she gets the distinction between using Twitter and Facebook to broadcast to thousands of people about what you ate for breakfast vs. using them to more personally target several hundred people who you can get to know. "My feeling is, I don't want 5,000 followers on Twitter, because you can't connect with 5,000 people," Shreve says. "I want it to be enough that we can have discussions. We don't want to have so many that it's just faceless masses."

A modern girl in an old world: Shreve's blogging and use of social media has helped give embroidery and sublimation supplies company EnMart, a relatively young firm and subsidiary of Ensign Emblem, a more personal contact with its customers. That was starkly at odds with many people she would come across at Ensign and in the industry. "People in this industry haven't picked up on social networking or even the Internet," Shreve says. "I needed to figure out a way to talk to people." — DW

56. NICK COE

President, Land's End (asi/250566)

Why he's on the list: Coe leads catalog and retail giant Land's End, which offers a massive retail outlet for decorated apparel.

Expanding into promotional products: Coe made waves last year when Land's End announced it was expanding its promotional product offerings. As an ASI-listed distributor, Land's End had offered decorated apparel for years, but has now expanded into other product categories such as desk accessories, pens, bags and golf items.

Going mainstream: Land's End has something many embroidery companies don't: An easy outlet to a vast purchasing audience. How Coe directs that over the next few years could have a dramatic impact on the embroidery industry, either co-opting North American embroiderers or forcing more work overseas. The company is a massive competitor, and Coe is the key man behind that. — DW

FUN FACT: Land's End offers decorated apparel, desk accessories, pens, bags and golf items to the ad specialty industry.

55. JENNY HART

Artist and Owner, Sublime Stitching



Why she's on the list: Hart's embroidery and artwork have appeared pretty much everywhere. Her shop in Austin, TX, has become widely known for its work despite beginning as a one-person startup.

"This ain't your grandma's embroidery": That phrase tops Sublime Stitching's website, and it's definitely true. Hart was an artist long before she took up embroidery, and she's brought to the trade an edginess that differentiates her from her peers and helped her cross into the mainstream. While many toyed with teddy bears and flowers, she was stitching designs of tattoos, rock stars and technology. "I just didn't want bunnies and teddy bears," Hart says. "Because there are so many notions of what traditional embroidery is, I liked even more bringing in designs of taxis, pinups, Las Vegas and things like that." Her work has graced publications as varied as *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vogue* and *Spin* and in collaborations with bands such as The Flaming Lips and The Decemberists.

The It Girl: There's a certain "It Girl" quality to Hart. Maybe it's because she's young or outside the norm. Maybe it's because many hold her in high regard as an artist and hand-embroiderer long before they talk about her business. Perhaps it has something to do with her role in the Austin Craft Mafia, a collaborative of independent startup businesses that has spawned offshoots in other cities to promote and support the businesses within them. Or it could be the high-profile spat she initiated with Minneapolis-based Urban Threads and Embroidery Library in 2009, questioning whether they stole her designs, before backing off that claim.

Though in some ways Hart stands at the fringe of the embroidery industry, she's at the center of conversation, and considering the quality of her designs and the pure artistic talent she possesses, that's where she belongs. — DW

FUN FACT:

Jenny Hart got her start stitching designs of tattoos, rock stars and technology, not flowers and bunnies.

The Price of Safety



The CPSIA has had a clear impact on decorators when it comes to apparel imprints. Under the rules, rhinestones and crystals are now basically off-limits for children's products because their lead content is too high to meet federal standards.

Product-safety legislation has given U.S. businesses, including decorators, a challenge – and an opportunity – to ensure the safety of the goods they provide to consumers.

By Daniel Walsh

*I*f you make, sell or decorate children's products, you might want to read this.

This February, the federal government will begin enforcing safety standards on the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA). The law, passed in 2008, calls for stricter standards on lead content in children's products and requires testing to prove that products meet those standards. "It had very tough new requirements," says Rick Locker, an attorney representing various children's product groups, including the Toy Indus-

try Association and Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association. "It's for products designed and intended primarily for children 12 and under." Producers and sellers of children's products must ensure that an independent laboratory tests each product to guarantee its lead content meets new federal standards, and all products must have labeling and documentation to support this. Penalties for non-compliance can run in the millions.

For those in the decorated-apparel industry, this law applies to a few things, but not everything. Most textiles are

exempt, as the likelihood of them including lead is low. However, if that fabric is treated in a number of ways, such as screen printing, that exemption disappears. Using metallic threads or appliqué, zippers or fasteners also brings the law into play, so that means it could apply to decorators.

Embroiderers and other decorators can easily become educated about the law and its requirements. Among other concerns, decorators need to learn about using rhinestones, which contain lead, and purchasing certain types of apparel and accessories, which can have lead sub-

strates found in fabric treatments. “We’re very likely to see some price increases as a direct result of this legislation,” says Deborah Jones, owner of MyEmbroideryMentor.com. “That’s not necessarily saying it’s a bad thing, because it provides safety – but at a cost.”

THIS LAW’S STORY

Naturally, the law wasn’t passed with just the apparel industry in mind.

When Congress passed the CPSIA in 2008, Democrats had just retaken control of Congress two years earlier, and they reacted to six years of government deregulation by stepping up regulation in several sectors. During that same time period, product safety was at the forefront of a lot of people’s minds. A spate of product recalls in 2007 included Chinese-made toys and other children’s products that were found to have high levels of lead and other toxins in them. In addition, Chinese-made baby formula tainted with the industrial toxin melamine sickened more than 50,000 babies, killing at least four.

Scrutiny on consumer-safety regulators was already increasing when, in November 2007, the *Washington Post* reported that the last two chairpersons on the federal commission tasked with regulating consumer safety had taken dozens of trips at the expense of the companies they regulated. Six weeks after that report, the House of Representatives passed the CPSIA, which regulated the levels of toxic substances like lead and phthalates in children’s products; the Senate followed three months later. Thus, the consumer product safety era in American business was born. “Congress was angry, and that anger came out in a bill that has enforced numerous responsibilities on an agency that wasn’t prepared for it or staffed for it,” says Rick Brenner, CEO of supplier Prime Line (*asi/79530*).

The law’s impact has taken a while to sort out. Congress enacted broad direc-

tives, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is still determining some of the rules. Just this past August, the CPSC finally released the criteria and process for labs to become federally accredited third-party testers of products and their components. A week later, the agency released its long-awaited definition of what qualifies as a children’s product. Spanning 65 pages, the document summarized at the end, “... a children’s product means a consumer product designed or intended primarily for children 12 years of age or younger.” The CPSC enacted a stay that delayed enforcement from going into effect until Feb. 10, 2011, because not enough labs had been accredited to handle testing. Without another stay, the grace period will end that day.

APPAREL LIMITATIONS

This was supposed to be a law about toys. Baby formula. Lead. That’s what many thought, particularly in the apparel industry, where most of the products are simply cloth. But it does apply, at least theoretically. Zippers can have lead. Buttons can be swallowed by a small child ... theoretically.

Some embroiderers have responded by ruling out certain items they may have once

used for decoration on children’s clothing because of their content. “In the apparel industry, the biggest impact was no more bling,” says Jennifer Taggart, an environmental and consumer products attorney who writes the blog, *The Smart Mama.com*. (See the “*Decoration Safety*” sidebar for the impact on apparel decoration techniques.) Barbara Dail is one of those embroiderers. The Creative Solution, a Yorba Linda, CA-based company that she co-owns, avoids rhinestones in products for young children. “Instead of decorating with rhinestones, which we can use for products for high-school kids, we have to use rhinestuds for the younger kids because of the lead content,” Dail says. Her staff even goes so far as to avoid rhinestones with middle school-age children, Dail says. She simply doesn’t want to take any chances.

With so much in the law left up to the CPSC to interpret, some firms simply chose to quit the kidswear business. “We had some customers whose children’s lines were just a small part of their business, and they just said, ‘We’re not going to deal with it,’ ” says Mindy Anastos, a spokesperson for L.A. T Sportswear (*asi/65948*), which sells a popular line of children’s

DECORATION SAFETY

The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) has had a clear impact on decorators and promotional products distributors when it comes to apparel imprints.

Under the rules, rhinestones and crystals are now basically off-limits for children’s products because their lead content is too high to meet federal standards. Some decorators are using plastic replicas to do the job in their place. Jennifer Taggart, an environmental and consumer-products lawyer, says she had one client who lost \$30,000 worth of inventory when the new rules went into effect, essentially nixing the sale of hats with rhinestones to the young girls for whom they were designed.

Embroidery falls under the category of textiles, says D. Fenton, executive director of compliance at the Quality Certification Alliance. Different threads are treated in different ways. Natural fibers such as cotton, silk, wool, hemp, flax and linen don’t need to be tested. “Depending on the fiber content, embroidery should be exempt,” he says.

Inks must be certified as lead-free and shouldn’t contain phthalates, Fenton says. Inks in the CMYK ink scale – cyan, magenta, yellow and key (or black) – have been shown to be lead-free, Taggart says. Other color prints are not, and typically require third-party testing before they’re used in screen printing. Plastisol content must be no higher than the limit for lead in paints and coatings (plastisol is found in some screen-print inks, though not in water-based inks).



“In the apparel industry, the biggest impact was no more bling.”

Jennifer Taggart, environmental and consumer products attorney

clothing called Rabbit Skins. Other companies that were considering whether to start children’s lines chose not to because CPSIA compliance seemed a hassle to comply with, she adds. The result has been some lost business for L.A. T, but Anastos says that hasn’t stopped others from courting the children’s apparel market. “Mostly other companies have stepped in to try to fill that void, so obviously we’re trying to go after them,” she says.

At L.A. T, company leaders have simply built the costs of compliance into their estimates. Short-term, the impact was significant because it took time and up-front costs to do what’s necessary to comply, Anastos says. But long-term, it’s viewed as a minor impact to the company. L.A. T has tried to get ahead of the regulations by initiating testing for lead, phthalates and other toxins early enough to ensure that everything meets federal standards.

“The law says there’s no mandatory test, but everything must meet the standards,” Anastos says. “In our mind, we want to make sure that L.A. T products meet the standard. A lot of people are nervous about the law, so we want to do all the things we need to do to put their minds at ease. I

think a lot of people felt overwhelmed by the regulations, the interpretation. Now, people have settled back. They realize the reality of the situation where the law is here to stay, so people are working on complying.”

THE IMPRINTED-PRODUCTS CONUNDRUM

Picture this: A black backpack is imported to the U.S. Upon arrival, it’s blank, with no design on it. A company could imprint it with a police department’s logo so the department could give the backpacks to its officers. Or, the company could imprint it with a Hannah Montana logo. “When it comes into the country as a blank, unimprinted bag, it’s not a children’s product,” Brenner says. “Depending on what I imprint upon it, it becomes a children’s product.” Some, like Brenner, say the item is no more or less safe if it has an adult’s or child’s design upon it. Their thinking is if the bag or toy or other product has unsafe levels of lead in it, it should be deemed unsafe regardless.

But the law wasn’t designed that way. “Our industry flies under the radar of most regulators,” Stone says. On the sur-

face, perhaps it seemed simple that baby formula and toys were for kids, regardless. But a pen becomes a children’s product once you put a child’s design upon it. The fact that any of Prime Line’s products could become a children’s item means the company tests every single product that comes in, regardless of whether or not it’s supposedly been tested previously by the original manufacturer.

Brenner says he doesn’t want to take any chances.

CRITICISM ALL AROUND

Anne Northup missed her chance to vote on the CPSIA when the former Republican congresswoman was swept out of Congress by the Democratic tide in the 2006 congressional elections. Four years later, she looks at the law from the angle of someone now tasked with interpreting it, as a member of the newly expanded five-member CPSC board. She says she sees the need for some regulation, but she thinks the law is poorly designed, setting arbitrary limits without being able to determine potential risks.

“Certainly there’s a danger there,” Northup says. “Lead for young children is serious. If it’s absorbed, it can cause serious problems. The law, unfortunately, doesn’t allow CPSC to evaluate whether there’s a risk.” If there’s lead in the product or one of several other components, such as phthalates (a plasticizer) it has to meet the standards, even if some say there’s no apparent danger. “The law did not give us a lot of leeway to make a risk analysis, and I’m surprised we have not taken steps to offer more flexibility,” Northup says. She worries the law will put some companies out of business.

Some say the lack of flexibility is costing them money. Rick Woldenberg, chairman of Illinois-based Learning Resources Inc. (LRI), wrote the CPSC with formal comment on a regulation proposal, dub-

“We had some customers whose children’s lines were just a small part of their business, and they just said, ‘We’re not going to deal with it.’”

Mindy Anastos, L.A. T Sportswear (*asi/65948*)

bing it “The End of (Business) Life As We Know It.” The parentheses are his. He anticipates this to cost us about \$15 million annually, and that’s just the amount of additional time and testing needed to comply,” says Larry Lynn, the compliance and quality director at LRI, which produces educational toys and other products. The company increased its oversight team from two to six for LRI and a sister company, which combined have about 180 employees. “In 25 years, we’ve had one recall, for 130 parts, for which we actually recovered every single component,” Lynn says. “Now here we’ve taken what’s always worked and

turned it into this \$15 million operation to prove what we’ve always known. We’re not trying to escape responsibility. We’re just trying to do it in a reasonable manner that doesn’t make you go broke.”

Others say the law doesn’t go far enough. “I view it as being rather tepid,” says Tom Myers, CEO of apparel supplier Broder Bros. Co. (*asi/42090*). He says producing safe products is part of business, and companies need to design systems that ensure that. His company had already done so, long before the CPSIA passed, because his customers demanded it. “We have standards which are higher

than CPSIA standards,” he says. “People who buy from us include Federated Stores and Walmart. They already have a higher level of sensitivity to issues like this than the promotional products industry.”

Myers remembers very clearly the discovery of melamine in some baby formula just two years ago. If a company would do that to meet a quote, he says, it’s not unreasonable for federal regulators and companies to want to make sure it doesn’t happen again. He recalls dealing with one Chinese company that had agreed to allow inspection of its factory. The inspectors showed up a few days early and were told they had picked the wrong day. “We said, we have to be able to inspect it whenever we want, not give you time to unchain the orphans,” Myers says.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR DECORATORS

The CPSC has initiated a stay on the children’s product testing regulations taking effect until the criteria for third-party testers is finalized. At press time, it was set for completion by November 19, three months from the date of the release of the third-party testers’ criteria.

So the question is, what’s next. Companies like Broder have initiated means of tracking an item’s path from manufacture to sale, and the necessary tests are in place. “You need to be able to control your supply chain,” Stone says.

Some companies are “looking for a ‘get out of jail free card,’ ” Stone says, instead of embracing compliance. They need to accept that there’s no escape from a law that’s not going away, certainly not during an election year.

Beyond that, Myers says, a client deserves to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that a product is safe. “It’s stuff people should be doing anyhow,” he says. “People should be doing more of this.” ■

Daniel Walsh is a staff writer for *Stitches*. Contact: dwalsh@asicentral.com

THE CPSIA: A PRIMER

Manufacturers, suppliers, decorators and distributors based in the U.S. are responsible for compliance with the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA). Here are some of the basics you need to know.

1. Penalties: The law carries penalties from \$5,000 to \$100,000 per violation, such as a failure to report possible product hazards to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) in a timely fashion. Criminal penalties are increased to up to five years. Also, the CPSC must approve any solution to a recall.

2. Testing: Affected manufacturers must provide a “General Conformity Certificate” stating that the product complies with federal safety rules. It must list the date and location of manufacturing and testing, contact information for obtaining records to back this up, and each relevant rule and standard.

3. Lead: Children’s products can’t have more than 300 parts per million of lead. The general limit is scheduled to drop to 100 ppm on August 14, 2011, but the CPSC could decide that limit isn’t feasible. The lead content limit for paints and coatings is 90 ppm.

4. Third-party testing: Beginning February 10, 2011, manufacturers must test all children’s products at an accredited independent testing lab and issue a certificate based on the testing that indicates the product meets all CPSC standards. A list of accredited testers can be viewed online at www.cpsc.gov/cgi-bin/labsearch. (Many companies are already testing.) This tenet had been stayed until the CPSC resolved the definition of a children’s product and requirements for testers, both of which were determined in August. The CPSC held a comment period in September for the third-party requirements, and the standards won’t be finalized until after the comment period has concluded.

For more information, visit www.cpsc.gov/about/cpsia/cpsia.html.

Stitch up the Big Screen

Layering embroidery over a large screen-printed design can mean a nice profit for your shop. Learn how to make these types of designs work for you.

By Thomas Trimmingham



This T-shirt was printed by Rick Roth, president and CEO of Mirror Image Inc., a Pawtucket, RI-based screen-printing distributorship, as a fundraising shirt for the MusicMakers Relief Foundation (www.musicmaker.org), which raises funds for musicians from the South. Henry Bernstein of Hirsch International then created a felt guitar appliqué, which was sewn over the printed design, and then layered over with embroidery. Photo courtesy of Hirsch International, Hauppauge, N.Y.

Multimedia decoration has exploded in retail, and is now becoming a staple look in the promotional apparel sector for many style-conscious buyers. True, the left-chest embroidered logo and the standard center-front, screen-printed T-shirt design aren't going away, but now decorators need to expand their capabilities to include mixed-media looks. One of the more popular looks at retail and in the imprinted apparel sector is a large, splashy screen-printed design that's accented with embroidery or other embellishments.

“Oversize printing that takes up a lot of the garment really has customers talking,” says Maurice Chalonec, president of Boston-based RCSilk. “Larger, printed pieces can command a higher price point, and fewer printers can handle this style of printing, so it can be less competitive.”

Competitive is the key word here – when a decorator, whether an embroiderer or screen printer, starts combining two or more imprinting methods, it raises important questions about artwork formats, production and pricing. “It takes more work to sell a special effect than it used to,” says Tom Vann, owner of Big Rapids, MI-based Tommy’s T-Shirt Factory. “One of the best ways to do it is to create your own spin on it and then label it yourself. This takes more work to develop something like a football look with a texture and then giving it a name (like “FTball look”), but in the end you can charge more for it this way than just adding embroidery, rhinestones or glitter to a print.”



Figure 1. The background image is created intentionally in a style that will complement the embroidery in the foreground.

MULTIMEDIA ARTWORK

In multimedia decoration that combines screen-printing ink and thread, the screen-printed portion is usually printed first, and then the embroidery is sewn on top of the print (embroidery tends to create a more uneven surface). So, for example, if you use

a lightweight, screen-printed background print to create a foundation for the embroidery to pop off of, you effectively set off your embroidery work (see Figure 1).

There are some definite art setup guidelines that you should follow to get the best

results when you’re combining print and embroidery, including:

1. **Create your artwork with significant allowance for the embroidery placement.** Consider using a laser to initiate the start point of the embroidery, since

GET STARTED WITH SCREEN PRINTING

Here’s a three-question, screen-printing primer for embroiderers who are on the fence about whether or not to add printing to their shops.

1. What is it? Screen printing is considered a stencil-printing process.

Johnny Shell, vice president of technical services for the Specialty Graphics Imaging Association, explains the process: “A woven mesh is tightly stretched over a frame and coated with a light-sensitive liquid material, called emulsion. Once dry, it’s water-soluble; however, when the emulsion is exposed to light, it hardens to form an impermeable stencil. A film positive with the image to be printed is created. The clear areas of the film allow light to pass through and harden the emulsion. Opaque areas of the film that represent the image block light from the emulsion, which stays water-soluble in those areas. After exposure, the stencil is washed and the unexposed emulsion washes away, leaving the open mesh to allow ink to pass through. A rubber squeegee is used to push ink through these open areas onto the printing substrate.”

2. What equipment do you need? Chris Thomas, spokesperson for Atlas Screen Supply Co., advises shoppers to insist on three things when buying

screen-printing equipment. First, he stresses the importance of a quality exposure unit. “An exposure unit should have at least six high-output bulbs with a vacuum-blanket top,” he says. “Second, select a four-color press with micro-registration. This allows you to move screens very slightly, making adjustments so that multiple colors come together in a way that the image looks right.” Last, he suggests a conveyor drier, noting that many decorators settle for just a flash drier, which only halfway dries the ink between screens. “This is where designs get bent, because plastisol ink has to reach 320 degrees to cure and be wash-fast,” he says. “You should have a flash drier and a conveyor drier.”

3. What type of apparel and fabrics work best? Screen-print inks are versatile enough to work on a wide variety of fabrics. “Plastisol is the most popular ink system in use and is used on cotton, cotton/poly blends, polyester and nylon,” Shell says. “Special inks and/or additives are needed for polyesters and nylon, so check with your supplier.” In addition, there are water-based inks (which provide a softer hand and don’t carry phthalates like plastisol). – *Tonia Cook Kimbrough*

achieving exact placement can be difficult.

2. Create your screen-printed artwork as a broken, distressed or washed-out print. This way, both the ink and the fabric surface will be easier to hoop for embroidery and your garment will be less likely to show the pressure of the hoop in the final product.

3. Simplify or lighten up the coverage of embroidery stitches so the thread

accents won't be too heavy.

One particular concern for decorators in the art stage of multimedia development is that the screen-printed backdrop image shouldn't be too heavy a print. While some of this is a production issue, an equal portion of it can be handled at the art stage. If you intend to accent a solid printed area with embroidery, it can be useful to break that image down with a filter that makes

the image look worn out (see *Figure 2*). This solves two issues at once: 1) Breaking the image's solid areas apart allows for the print to be lighter, making it less likely to show the hooping and stitching process in the final garment; 2) a distressed or worn-looking image tends to be more forgiving if everything isn't aligned as perfectly in the final design (see *Figure 3*).

"The effect works better if the embroidery location is less critical, or it takes an extremely proficient decorator to make it line up perfectly," says Greg Gaardbo, an industry consultant and owner of Arlington Heights, IL-based Shockwaves Promotional Apparel.

PRODUCTION CONCERNS

When you're creating a multimedia look with screen printing and embroidery, you should be concerned with what type of inks will be printed onto the garment. Gaardbo has a strong preference: "Water-based inks – and this means discharge inks on dark garments – are the best choice because they won't create a surface that's difficult to stitch or heat press," he says. "Plastisol inks will sometimes show a mark from the hooping process if the inks are too heavy and, while they can work, they aren't my ideal choice."

The additional advantage that water-based printing has over standard inks is that it won't re-melt if you use a heat press to apply rhinestones or sequins to the printed design. "One of the most popular trends right now is to apply sequins over a screen-printed background on a garment," Gaardbo says.

While this style of water-based printing has its advantages, it's moderately more problematic, and not every screen printer can consistently execute it properly. If your forte is embroidery, it's a good idea to discuss the challenges of using different types of inks with the printer you've chosen to execute the work before you embroider it (if you're printing and embroidering the

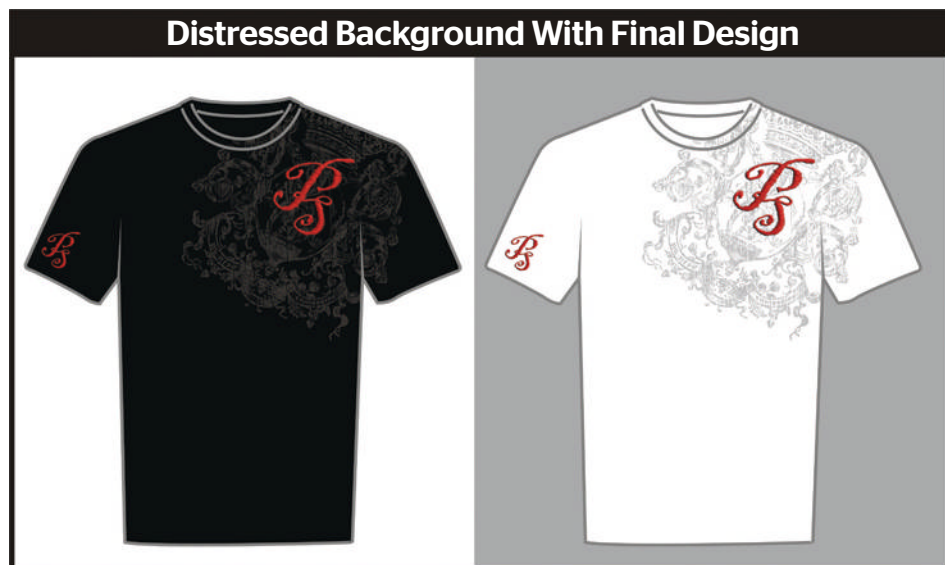


Figure 2. The background design is distressed to look worn-out and also become even lighter on the shirt.

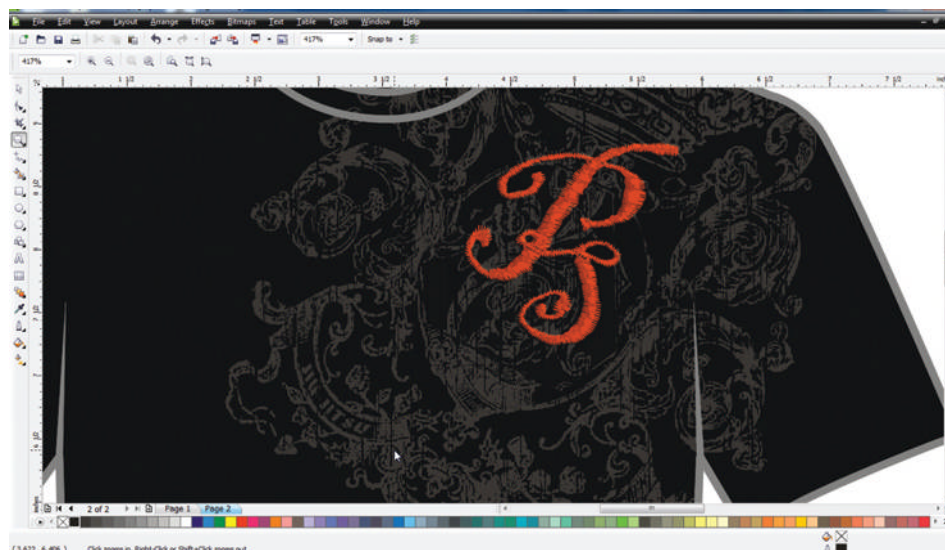


Figure 3. The final design is mocked up with the graphics and embroidery in place to show the client.

LEARN IT LIVE!
 Embroidery and screen printing are top decoration techniques, but they're not the only ones. In "Decoration Techniques Decoded: Discover the Hottest Tools and Trends" at The ASI Show Orlando (Sunday, January 23, 2:45 p.m.), you'll learn about four other decoration processes that will help you make the sale every time.

garments, do some test prints with different types of inks).

Remember that just because a screen printer has successfully printed standard inks, he may not have the proper equipment, inks or production knowledge to print discharge inks. The best method for choosing a printer is to ask for some examples of his work using this style of printing,

“Oversize printing that takes up a lot of the garment really has customers talking.”

Maurice Chalonec, RCSilk

so you'll know they can print your artwork correctly on the garment. Shockwaves has a showroom that features a variety of effects so contractors can see what the company's capabilities are (see Figure 4).

Another big factor in multimedia production is the weight and fabric style of the garment you're going to print and embroider. Some garments aren't able to be discharge printed, meaning that you wouldn't even be able to use water-based inks. Discharge printing is the process where the garment dye is released as it's cured, allowing the shirt to lighten up in the printed areas and

Figure 4. An experienced screen printer will have some dramatic samples to show how he can handle special effects and water-based printing.

letting the ink color become prominent. In some garments the dye in the shirt isn't reactive with the discharge ink, or the shirt color isn't predictable upon printing, so the end result won't be acceptable. And, very lightweight garments will require specific embroidery stabilizers to result in top-notch stitching. "Many embroiderers use tear-away backings, but for these types of garments they have to hold the stitches well enough if the fabric is loosely woven," Gaardbo says.

PRICING CONCERNS

Pricing and selling multimedia work is often difficult for decorators, since they're leery of charging more for these garments. However, when you're dealing with clients who want this type of decoration to promote their team, business, organization or event, you'll usually find that they under-

stand more elaborate work costs more – and are willing to pay for it.

When you're presenting the types of more elaborate decoration work you do to clients, it makes sense for you to have a good variety of samples so they can see the uniqueness and quality of the work you offer. Then, you might want to walk the client through the actual artwork and decoration process, whether it's verbally, with a video or showing actual machinery in action. It isn't uncommon for multimedia garments with all-over screen printing and embroidery to cost more than \$20 each, depending on the wholesale cost of the garment; you can also recommend the client order an appropriate volume. One final tip: It may not be enough to cover the printing and then the embroidery without adding a little extra, because the setup for the embroidery will be slower than for straight embroidery jobs. ■

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THAT'S NOT ALL

Want to add some unusual screen-printing effects to your designs? Here are four to consider:

- 1. Gel.** This is popular for boys' shirts and is commonly used to augment prints with splatters on them or water, or to create a gloss on an area of a design. A large deposit of ink is typically required and the gel is sometimes colored; glitter can also be added.
- 2. Crackle.** Special additives can be used with pigments to create an ink that will crack and look worn-out on the finished garment. This effect is very popular with the rise of the "distressed" trend.
- 3. Suede.** An ink additive can make an ink feel fuzzy to the touch and have a soft suede-like appearance that's perfect for leather-looking prints or different themes that need a texture. Blue suede in a pattern can create an excellent denim look.
- 4. High density.** Though this isn't as common, it's still a popular look to have accent areas on the shirt that have a raised appearance with sharp edges and clean lines. A high-density ink is printed through a bigger mesh to create a print that can be stacked up to look as if it's raised off of the garment.



A Level Playing Field

A hearing-impaired, part-time decorator needs help in a hurry to dig himself out of a financial ditch – and stand toe-to-toe with his competitors.

Meet the Mentee



Frank Allnutt, owner of Big Frank Sports in Martinsburg, WV, began his part-time decorating business in 2005 as a sporting goods detailer. He switched to apparel decoration in late 2006. His specialty – he has a Tajima Neo II single-head machine – is uniforms for sports tournaments, especially softball. “At this point, I’m mostly doing screen printing, but in November and December, the screen-printing market tends to slow down,” he says. “So, I’m doing full dye-sublimation uniforms along with screen printing. We also do caps.”

Allnutt has been deaf for most of his life. “I was actually born deaf in one ear with hearing in the other,” he says, “but at the age of seven, I went deaf in the other ear.”

At first, this disability didn’t impede the progress of Allnutt’s decorating business. “A lot of people placed orders online, so that helped a lot,” he says, “but once uniforms started rolling out, I got more and more phone calls, and consequently, more rejections.”

Allnutt’s other part-time job – which used to be his full-time position until he began his decorating company – is as a high-school health teacher in the mornings. “I’ve been in education for 13 years,” he says. “I currently have that job, and I have my benefits, which is good. So, if the decorating business doesn’t fly, I can always go back to teaching full-time. But my ultimate goal is to leave teaching and run my own business.”

Week One

Consider your financial and marketing goals for your business.

Step 1: Determine your short-term business goals.

Step 2: Determine your medium-term goals.

Step 3: Determine your long-term goals.

The Challenge

During Steve Freeman, owner of Qdigitizing.com and Syntax Digital Solutions (asi/700501) in Cave Creek, AZ, and Allnutt’s initial conversation, Freeman discovered that Allnutt’s part-time decorating business was losing more money than it was bringing in. “Frank didn’t have a firm grip on where his finances were with the company,” Freeman says. “I told Frank

that one of his goals was to become profitable, and so we need to know what the starting point is.”

Once Allnutt spoke to an accountant per Freeman’s request, he realized how far behind he was. “It was eye-opening pretty much, the money that I lost in the past couple of years,” he says.

The Mentor’s Take

Freeman told Allnutt that he had to quickly begin to make a profit in his decorating business if he ever dreamed of leaving behind his teaching position to decorate full-time. “Part of the problem is there’s just not enough revenue, even if he were profitable, to support a full-time job,” Freeman says. “It’s just not enough money to sustain his lifestyle.”

Want to Get Educated?

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MY GOALS

1. Expand my local presence to get more orders from local clients. “Approximately 99% of our business is out-of-state uniform and T-shirt sales, with embroidery only for uniform ball caps,” Allnutt says. “So, I want to expand into my local market, which is a little bit outside my comfort zone.”

2. Determine ways to overcome initial rejection when customers discover I’m deaf. Some of Allnutt’s struggles are due to potential customers’ unwillingness to work with someone who’s hearing-impaired, he says. “It is a challenge. It’s not like they can pick up the phone and call me, and sometimes it takes a lifetime responding. I call a potential customer, they say, ‘Hello,’ and after five ‘hellos’ I start talking and they hang up.”

3. Begin to market myself more effectively. “My business is by word of mouth,” he says. “We have a website, but we’re not collecting orders like we used to.”

Freeman wanted to start focusing on two things: “We have to analyze why Frank isn’t making a profit, and then put together short-, medium- and long-term goals.”

The Result

Freeman and Allnutt decided upon an outline for goals for the short-term (the

next six months), medium-term (six to 12 months) and long-term (beyond 12 months):

1. Short-term: Allnutt actually had decorating jobs lined up through the next month, so his goal was to keep doing what he was doing while ramping up his marketing efforts with Freeman's help, and break even (at the very least) during this time span.

2. Medium-term: "My mid-term goal is to find jobs and make them a little bit more spread out so they're not rushed each week and I don't get burned out," Allnutt says.

Freeman was hoping for a bit more here, but since the point of the exercise was to get Allnutt thinking ahead, it would suffice. "That's not really a business goal so much as an operational plan, which are two totally different things," Freeman says, "but I can live with that for now."

3. Long-term: "My long-term goal is to quit the part-time teaching job, but also to increase business revenue by at least 20% in one year, if possible," Allnutt says. Freeman says that's a bit ambitious, but again, progress is the most important thing, especially since, to this point, Allnutt hadn't thought much about the current and future profitability of his business. "I think at the end of the year he'll be going down the right track and we'll be able to have a conversation to get him the rest of the way," Freeman says.

Freeman also told Allnutt that he had to factor in his time spent decorating when gauging the profitability of his business going forward. "He's not making money right now, so short-term is to get to a break-even point, mid-term is to make a profit and long-term is to retire from teaching," Freeman says.

Week Two

Create a business plan, identify target markets and choose items to give prospects.

Step 1: Write a general business plan.

Step 2: Figure out three local businesses you'd like to sell to.

Step 3: Decide on one or two promotional items you'd like to leave with potential customers when you meet with them.

The Challenge

After Allnutt laid out his goals for the near and more distant future, his next step was to put together a solid business plan that he could use as a guide to successfully market his business.

Also, Allnutt admitted that he had become somewhat discouraged in trying to contact local businesses for possible decoration orders – not because he's deaf, but because he believes that, with many local companies, other prominent decorators had beaten him to the punch. "That's something we need to discuss," he says. "I need to know how to market in the area that one person pretty much dominates."

The Mentor's Take

Freeman gave Allnutt a "homework assignment" this week to create a general business plan that he can have on paper and follow. The main question that Freeman said Allnutt needed to ask himself was: What do I want to accomplish?

"If you're targeting local businesses, what do you want to get from them? You need to understand what you want to try to get out of a business before you walk into it," Freeman says. "If you want to sell a bank 10,000 T-shirts for Breast Cancer Awareness Week, that's different than trying to sell 1,000 shirts to a bar and grill."

Freeman also impressed upon Allnutt the importance of having a promotional item available as a leave-behind for each client that he visits face-to-face. The product needs to fully demonstrate his decorating abilities, be tailored to that particular company and, most importantly, be useful, according to Freeman.

"The number-one trick to a giveaway product is to give them something they'll use," Freeman says. "You want to do your very best to give something that your customers will use. And, don't put your name and number on it so big and ugly that somebody doesn't want to use it. You

should just put your name and number on the bottom-right corner. If it's big and clear enough to give your phone number, that's all you need, and the rest of it should be devoted to looking nice."

Freeman reminded Allnutt to carefully consider the costs of certain leave-behinds before deciding upon the items. "If you come into a bar and you have a T-shirt embellished with their logo on it, what's your cost involved with that?" he asked Allnutt. "I know you don't do digitizing, so you're going to have a digitizing cost. Are you up to that for roughly \$30?"



Meet the Mentor

Steve Freeman, owner of Qdigitizing.com (asi/700501) and Syntax Digital Solutions in Cave Creek, AZ, has been in the commercial embroidery industry since 1989. His previous positions included owner and operator of Tempe Embroidery Company, a 60-head contract embroidery operation, and TCI Programming, one of the first Internet-based contract digitizing firms.

After he sold Tempe Embroidery, Freeman was hired as technical embroidery manager for Ashworth Inc. where he was responsible for improving the efficiency of a 600-head commercial embroidery operation. After Ashworth, Freeman was hired by Zazzle.com to build an embroidery and digitizing department.

As co-owner of Qdigitizing.com for the last several years, Freeman is responsible for all of its U.S.-based operations, including business development, marketing, customer service and product quality. He enjoys programming custom database applications for the imprinted apparel industry in his spare time.

The Result

Allnutt put together a business plan that targets three types of customers, and he decided upon the following strategies for each one:

1. Local small businesses (specifically, local bars and pet-related stores)

- Make phone calls to see if these companies currently use anyone for their decorated-apparel needs.
- Make a follow-up appointment with a face-to-face presentation, at which time free samples will be provided.

2. Local sports organizations

- Show up at a local league game and make an introduction to whoever runs the program.
- Put together a package presentation to bid on next year's services.
- Compose a fundraising package that includes a percentage of proceeds donated to the league or organization.

3. Deaf schools across America

- Make initial contact with the school's purchasing agent or athletic director.
- Ask to be placed on the bid list.
- Explain the advantages of working with Big Frank Sports.

Freeman approved of the result of Allnutt's homework assignment. "I think this is a really good start," he says. "The only thing I would ask is: Have you made any specific targets for yourself? Have you specifically targeted anybody yet?" Allnutt said he hadn't made it this far, so Freeman declared this to be Allnutt's homework assignment for the following week.

As for leave-behinds, Allnutt was considering sublimated coasters for bars and mouse pads in the shape of animals for veterinary clinics and grooming/boarding stores. The only problem? "I haven't been able to find a mouse pad that I can sublimate or decorate in the shape of an animal," he says.

Freeman told Allnutt that there are definitely animal-shape mouse pads out there and to continue to search for them online or in ESP, as he thought it was a fantastic idea. "Everybody uses computers nowadays, and if you can do a mouse pad with

THINKING-AHEAD TIP

One big marketing area in which decorators come up a bit short, according to Freeman, is in forgetting to bring an appropriate leave-behind, as well as a verbal backup plan, when soliciting businesses that may be hesitant to sacrifice some of their time to talk to the decorator. "Say I'm the owner of a bar and grill, and I have a waitstaff of 10 people," Freeman says. "What are you going to have in your hands with you when you arrive, what are you going to leave behind, and what are you going to say when I say, 'I don't have time to talk to you'? You have to plan that out up front."

your name and number on it as a sample, people will use it," Freeman says, adding that most mouse pads are very inexpensive, which is a huge bonus.

Week Three

Devise an in-person marketing strategy that will level the playing field with full-hearing decorators, begin to do one thing to market yourself every day, and identify five prospects by name.

Step 1: Figure out the best times to meet face-to-face with prospective clients.

Step 2: Come up with at least one thing you can do every day to get your name out there.

Step 3: Specifically target five local businesses to which you can sell your products.

The Challenge

After the previous week's exercise, Allnutt decided that he wanted to take advantage of the local bar scene. "There are a lot of bars around here. You never know how many you're going to find by just driving around," he says. "There's one bar specifically that I'm looking at. They have special occasions – Mardi Gras, dart tournaments – so I'm looking at that one. They have more potential because they host events."

The problem is that it's often difficult

for Allnutt to communicate with people when there is a lot of background noise going on – such as at a bar in the evenings – as his inability to hear makes it difficult for him to tell just how loudly he needs to speak.

"I can read lips very well, but with a bar, I'd have to go early in the evening when it's not so loud," Allnutt says. "At nighttime, it might be a little bit more challenging. I'll ask if we can talk in the office or another place with less background noise. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. They normally say, 'Can you call me and make another appointment?' or 'We're not interested right now.'"

And while Allnutt now takes advantage of a video service that includes a sign language interpreter to help him make phone calls, he admits that it's still a chore to make cold calls and that he can't always begin a conversation before the person on the other end gives up on him and disconnects.

The Mentor's Take

Freeman told Allnutt not to get discouraged about cold-calling difficulties, as all decorators struggle with it. "You could make 100 phone calls and get 98 rejections, whether you're deaf or not," Freeman says. "Cold-calling is rough."

"If I were you, I would go to the places that you frequent as a customer," Freeman advised Allnutt. "So, if every week you go with your buddies to watch a football game at a sports bar, that's the bar you go to first. If you go to a local print store, that's where you make your first call. You want to try to avoid the discouragement of pure cold-calling."

Freeman also encouraged Allnutt to come up with five such businesses that he could contact – and determine a time to meet with them in which background noise wouldn't be a significant factor. "You need to put yourself in a marketing mode every single day," Freeman says. "Ask yourself, 'What am I going to do today to increase my sales?' So, you want to try your best to go into a friendly environment first. They don't have to be close friendlies; they can

be casual friendlies. Just start someplace where you have a foot in the door. Then, when you exhaust your friendlies, go into the cold-calling.”

The Result

Allnutt met Freeman’s goal of at least one contact per day by calling three bars and two vet/grooming companies.

Allnutt was rejected almost right away by the bars – one manager simply said he wasn’t interested, and the others said they were satisfied with their current decorators – but he did receive an invite to make a presentation the following week at both of the pet-related companies. “With them, they were more open to my work because I was offering an overnight bag with the company’s name embroidered on it,” he says.

Freeman told Allnutt that this was a great result. “That’s a 40% return on your calls. If you have that kind of interest on all your calls, you and I would never need to have a conversation again,” he says.

But the next step, according to Freeman, is closing a sale during the presentation. “The art of sales is to close the deal, even if it’s small,” he says. “Try to get something out of it. Don’t be too pushy, but converting a prospect to a buying customer is what it’s all about. You need to be prepared to show someone the products they’re going to want.”

As far as making face-to-face business stops, Allnutt drove by one particular bar of interest to him, but decided not to drop in. “I drove by in the afternoon and there was only one car parked there,” he says.

Freeman noted, however, that afternoons could be the perfect time for Allnutt – or any decorator – to meet with this type of prospect. “Typically, the manager is the first person who gets there and sets up for the evening rush,” Freeman says. “You may find that’s the person you want to speak to. I come from the restaurant world. Sometimes they’re very busy during their prep times and don’t want to be bothered. You don’t want to go in when there are a dozen cars there because the bar’s going to be busy and they’re going to be busy making money.

THINKING-AHEAD TIP

Decorators who have enough business to keep them busy through the next month may decide to put marketing on the back burner until things slow down. Freeman says this is a gigantic mistake. “You have to advertise and market during your busy times so when the slow times hit, you’ll have some business then,” he says. “That’s why, if you go into a store right now, they’re always selling for next season, not the current season. When you’re looking to the future, don’t get stuck in the present. Keep your eyes fixed on the horizon.”

You want them in the spending-money, not the making-money, frame of mind.”

The Ultimate Wrap-Up

The fact is that, from a financial standpoint, things looked very murky for Allnutt’s decorating business heading into the mentoring process. Now, Allnutt says he understands the importance of constantly

“There’s no such thing as luck when it comes to marketing. It’s all about hard work.”

Steve Freeman, Qdigitizing.com (*asi/700501*)

marketing and selling himself, rather than waiting for business to pick up.

“One thing Steve said is you have to do something every day to market your business,” Allnutt says. “You have to go get the business. Normally I’ve let it come to me, but now I have to go get it.”

Freeman told Allnutt that he was thrilled to hear him say that. “You’re doing all the right things for your short-term goal, and you’re headed down the right path for your mid- and long-term goals,” Freeman says. “You can’t give up. No one’s going to do it for you, so even on those days that you don’t feel like marketing, you still have to market. And if you don’t do it today, you need to double it tomorrow. There’s no such thing as luck when it comes to marketing. It’s all about hard work.”

Another big piece of marketing advice that Freeman gave Allnutt is the importance of following up with customers, whether through phone or e-mail. Allnutt put this into practice at the very end of the mentoring process with a prospective customer at a deaf school in Washington D.C. “I sent an e-mail trying to find out who the contact person was,” Allnutt says. “I finally contacted that person, called him back after we talked, and we got to talking about what he needed. He said, ‘Write down an informal proposal, what you are going to sell and so forth,’ and that one sheet would be fine. So, I went from following up to being told to submit a proposal.”

“Well, what do you know? It works,” Freeman responded happily, while reminding Allnutt to remain aggressive. “If he asked you for a proposal, he is now giving you permission to contact him. That means it’s entirely incumbent upon you to be as persistent as can be without making a pest out of yourself. There’s nothing wrong with one call per week.

You don’t call more than one time a week from this point going forward – one call, one e-mail, nothing more than that, and if they don’t get back to you within four weeks, they probably aren’t going to. But now, it’s up to you to not fall off the radar. That’s the way this process works.”

At a minimum, Freeman advised Allnutt that he needed to double his business in the long run if he was going to be successful. “One of the most important things is that Frank wasn’t really aware of his financial situation before, and now he’s painfully aware,” Freeman says. “So, it’s a little bleak, but he has all the right pieces in place. If he just works it and he works it hard and smart, he’ll be OK. But he has to have his heart in it.” ■

SHANE DALE is a contributing writer for *Stitches*.

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Stitches December 2010, Vol. 24, No. 10 (ISSN 099-5893) (USPS 2387) is published monthly, except bi-monthly in March/April and September/October, by Advertising Specialty Institute, 4800 Street Road, Trevoise, PA 19053. Periodical postage paid at Langhorne, PA and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: free and controlled circulation to qualified subscribers. Non-qualified persons may subscribe at the following rates: USA, 1 year, \$35, 2 years, \$69. Canada, 1 year, \$39. Outside USA and Canada, 1 year, \$59 (\$95 airmail delivery). POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Stitches, PO Box 2197 Skokie, IL 60076.

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Coming Next Issue

What's coming up in January 2011 *Stitches*

By Nicole Rollender

The Growth Issue

■ We've got a blueprint to help you revamp your business from top to bottom in 2011. You'll make improvements in operations, customer service and human resources (and more)!

Decorator Beware

■ There are intellectual property battles raging over embroidery (and other graphics designs) – with both stock design companies and individual embroiderers ending up the victims of piracy and unwittingly purchasing pirated designs. Learn what you need to know to stay above the fray.

"I Hit \$1 Million This Year!"

■ Want to know the secrets of decorators who started small and ended up being ultra-successful? We profile these profitable embroiderers, charting their growth and sharing their challenges, lessons learned and top tips.

Plus ...

- How to market to women
- How to work with contract decorators

And much, much more!



needle watch



Needle Patrol



Our friend Slick (an embroidery machine needle) has hidden himself somewhere in this issue. He might be in an editorial photo, graphic or text - he's not in an advertisement. If you find the needle, send us a note that says, "I found the December needle on page XX," along with your name, company, address and phone number (or e-mail address) so we can contact you if you're the winner, and mail or fax it to us at **Stitches, Attn: Needle Patrol**, 4800 Street Rd., Trevoise, PA 19053; fax: (215) 953-3107. Also, tell us a little about your business. No phone calls please; you must respond in writing. Hurry! Responses for the December needle are due by December 30. From the correct responses, we'll randomly select one winner who'll receive a \$100 gift certificate, courtesy of **MADERA** Laconia, NH. Please submit only one entry per drawing. We'll announce the winner in the February issue.

Slick's Standing Up Straight

In the September/October issue, Slick hid near the bar graph image in our "The Inventory Crisis" on page 58. **Marianne Myrick** of **Myrick Specialties** was chosen at random from a grand total of 56 responses. As this issue's winner, Marianne will receive Madeira USA's gift certificate. Keep your eyes peeled for the industry's favorite game of hide and seek!



By Kristine Shreve



Got a decorator dilemma?

E-mail your question to nrollender@asicentral.com. We'll request your permission to print your question and our expert's response in *Stitches*. Note: Unfortunately, we're unable to answer each individual question.

Looking Forward

In the next issue we're going to talk about how to choose the best stitch types for different types of designs.

See you then!

Q I'm a relatively new embroiderer – and frankly, I'm a little intimidated by all the thread choices out there. I'm looking for a quick thread primer. Can you help?

A There are four important thread terms you should know up front: weight, tenacity, denier and elasticity. Thread weight is based on the thread's length, not on its heaviness. The weight of the thread is determined by how many kilometers in thread length it takes to equal 1 kilogram in thread weight. For example, if a thread is designated as "40 weight" it's because 40 kilometers of the thread will weigh 1 kilogram. The higher the weight number, the lighter the thread. Weight also roughly translates into how many stitches it'll take to cover the area that you're embroidering.

Tenacity essentially equals breaking strength; a higher-tenacity thread will be less likely to break easily. Denier measures a thread's fineness, so a higher-denier thread will be thicker and stronger than a thread that has a lower denier. Elasticity measures the amount of stretching a given thread will withstand; a higher elasticity means the thread will have the ability to withstand a great amount of stretching.

Most embroiderers are familiar with the fact that there are two main types of machine embroidery thread: rayon and polyester. Rayon was, for years, the standard by which other embroidery threads were judged, particularly when it came to shine. It's still the thread of choice for many people, and is gaining increasing popularity with those who are interested in "green" embroidery; however, this is a bit misleading since, strictly speaking, rayon isn't a natural fiber. Rayon is created from naturally occurring cellulose, but requires a great deal of processing to become rayon fiber. Generally, it's classified as a manufactured fiber.

Rayon also has a reliable shine, but isn't known for being colorfast or wash-fast. The color of rayon thread can be bleached, and rayon thread colors can run when washed in extremely hot water or with harsh detergents. In general, it's best to treat any embroidery done with rayon thread as fragile. A good rule of thumb is that if the embroidery you're sewing is going to be subjected to an everyday wash, or undergo an industrial wash, rayon may not be the wisest choice.

Polyester is a manmade fiber, and is primarily known for its strength, colorfastness and ability to withstand frequent washings. Some polyester thread brands are becoming known for their shine, which rivals that of

rayon. The secret to the increased shine of certain brands of polyester thread is trilobal polyester fibers. These fibers are triangular in shape, rather than round. The triangular shape increases the refraction of light when it hits the fibers; this creates the vibrant shine.

Cotton is a natural fiber, so it's a good choice if you're interested in creating "green" embroidered goods. Cotton thread is soft and relatively durable. It doesn't offer the same sheen as rayon thread nor is it as strong as polyester thread. The quality of cotton machine embroidery may also be a concern to you, as low-quality cotton thread may be linty and cause problems with your embroidery machine.

Regardless of whether you prefer cotton, rayon or polyester thread, do some investigation before choosing a brand and type of thread. Get a sample of the thread brand you're investigating and run it in your

The secret to the increased shine of certain brands of polyester thread is trilobal polyester fibers.

machine. Keep track of breaks or birdnesting and other thread problems. Take note of how much time it takes to run a standard design. Ask these questions: Do you have to slow down the machine for the thread to run its best? Do you spend a lot of time rethreading your machine after thread breaks? Then after you've gathered this data, look at the color and sheen of the thread. Finally, keep in mind that saving money on the original purchase price doesn't really save you money if you lose production time.

Another thing to consider is the effect you want the thread to produce. For embroidery that sparkles, metallic thread should give the desired effect. If you want variations in color and shade, variegated thread may be the best choice. Color-changing embroidery thread can be a unique decoration for garments that will spend a lot of time in the sun. ■

KRISTINE SHREVE is director of marketing for EnMart and Ensign Emblem, and regularly writes about embroidery, sublimation, decoration, social media and business. Besides her DecQuorum blog on *Stitches.com*, she also writes for the EmbroideryTalk Blog at <http://blog.myenmart.com> and the SubliStuff blog at www.subli-stuff.com. Contact: kristine.shreve@myenmart.com.

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