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Embroidery's Voice & Vision

DECEMBER 2011



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PEOPLE
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Industry**



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+ **Punching Sense: Digitize Stellar Stock Designs**



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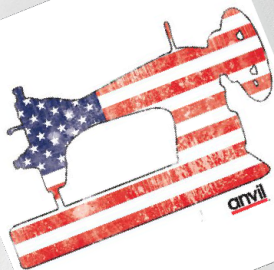
A man with short brown hair and a light beard is looking down and to the side. He is wearing a grey t-shirt. On the t-shirt is a graphic of a sewing machine with an American flag pattern. The word 'anvil' is printed in small letters below the graphic.

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All shirts from this collection are made right here in the U.S.A. with imported fabric knit from 100% U.S. cotton. By purchasing an Anvil American tee you are supporting American farmers and workers. All shirts from this collection can be tracked at TrackMyT.com, an interactive website where you can learn more about how your Anvil shirt was made.

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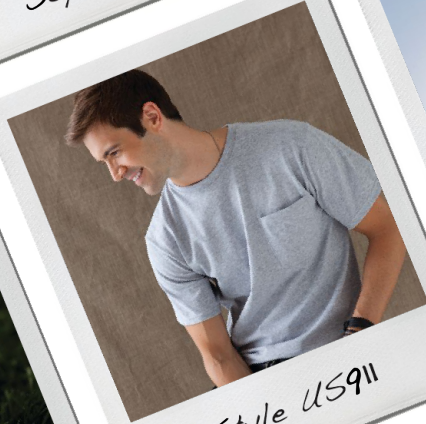
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NOT JUST A T-SHIRT

asi/36350

Brother™ introduces their **ALL NEW GraffiTee™** Series of Digital Garment Printers

Brother,™ one of the leading manufacturers of printers worldwide, is set to introduce their new GraffiTee™ Series of digital garment printers. The machines are priced to be extremely affordable. Brother is the only digital garment printer manufacturer who manufactures not only their own hardware, but also the critical print heads and inks. The new print heads used in the upcoming GraffiTee™ Series of garment printers deliver more efficient and higher quality printing than their current generation.

The new GraffiTee™ Series of digital garment printers consists of an initial lineup of three models. The uniqueness of this series is that they are built modularly, providing buyers a path to upgrade rather than one of obsolescence. This series of three machines offers a CMYK-only printer, a CMYK with two white print heads, and a CMYK with four white print heads for higher speed and performance. The GraffiTee™ Series will be priced very competitively, starting at under \$20,000.

Brother has had great success in the digital garment printing industry with

the GT-541 and GT-782 setting the standard for ease of use and reliability in the industry. Pete Holland, Sr. Director of Industrial Products Division at Brother, says “the reliability and long term durability

of our garment printers is based on Brother’s experience as a leader in the production of printers for the home, office and business community with our complete line of, inkjet and laser fax machines, printers and all-in-ones.”

Mr. Holland continues by saying “Brother integrates its core technology of printing into the new GraffiTee™

Series of garment printers by manufacturing the printer, the print heads, the ink, and also the controller to insure a fully integrated system versus many competitors who are ‘assemblers’ of garment printers.”

He continues by saying, “this ability to produce a product with all critical components designed and manufactured by Brother makes the GraffiTee™ Series of digital garment printers our finest product line yet.”

Advanced Features

(Subject to change)

- Up to 1200 dpi allowing photographic quality printing
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Brother will officially launch the new GraffiTee™ Series at the ISS Show in Long Beach, CA on January 20-22, 2012. You can see this new series at booth number 1601.

GraffitiTee™
series



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the amazing
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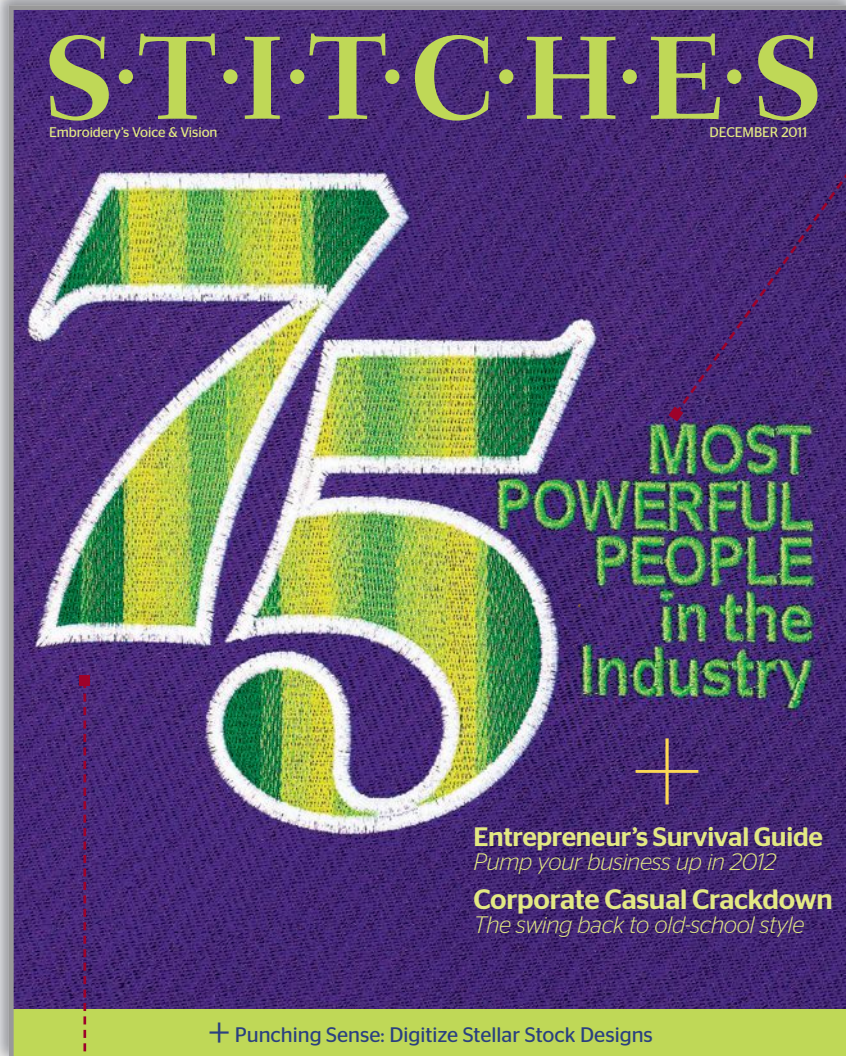
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FEATURES



28 The Power 75

Stitches reveals its second-annual list of the most powerful people and companies in the industry today. Ranked from one to 75, everyone on this list is influencing the direction the decorating industry will take in 2012 and beyond.

BY NICOLE ROLLENDER, CHRISTOPHER RUVO AND SHANE DALE

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THE ENTREPRENEUR'S
SURVIVAL GUIDE**
Covering business planning, choosing a space, marketing, selling and more, this entrepreneur's guide gives new embroiderers and screen printers what they need to know to establish a successful business.
BY CHRISTOPHER RUVO

56 **WEARABLES
CORPORATE CASUAL
CRACKDOWN**
Casual had its day in the sun, but now - thanks to new styles and advanced performance properties - corporate apparel is embracing its roots.
BY CHRISTOPHER RUVO



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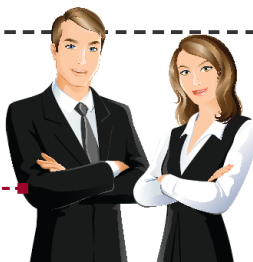
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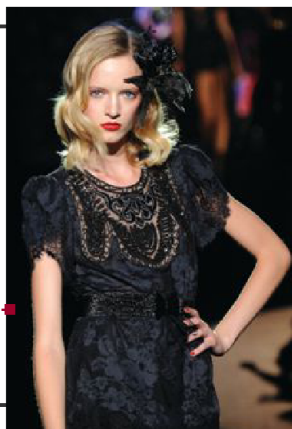
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About the Cover

Digitizing and embroidery by Cory Dean, Emerald City Embroidery, Tacoma, WA
Photography: Mark Prickslett
Design: Jim Lang
Photography: Mark Prickslett



Stitches ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT.
By using eco-friendly paper, *Stitches* magazine has saved the valuable resources below per year.

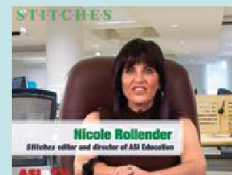
TREES	ENERGY	WATER	GREENHOUSE GASES	SOLID WASTE
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Environmental impact estimate were made using the Environmental Defense Calculator.
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Your *Stitches* Minute

Stitches Editor Nicole Rollender debuts *Stitches*' newest video series, "*Stitches* Minute," which gives you some of the latest trends here and abroad in the embroidery industry. Go to Stitches.com to watch the video.



True to Size

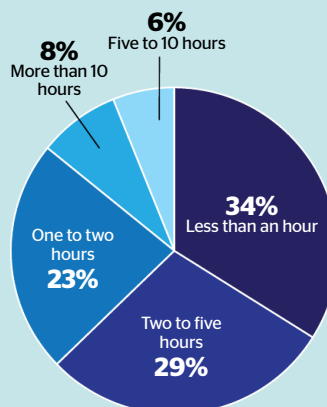
It's hard to look good without feeling good. Decorators who ignore that maxim will end up with disappointed clients. Visit Stitches.com to learn important sizing strategies that will get the right fit for clients every time.

Lights, Camera, Action!

Think you can produce a video to show off your decorating business and what kinds of imprinted apparel you can produce to prospects and clients in six easy steps? You absolutely can. Visit Stitches.com to learn how to get quality videos online quickly and inexpensively.

Your Bottom Line

In a recent poll on ASICentral.com, we asked industry professionals: **How much time per week do you dedicate to online social networking?**



Nearly two-thirds (57%) of you spend two hours or less per week social networking for business, with 29% spending two to five hours, and 14% devoting more than five hours a week to social networking. Get educated: Turn to page 49 to learn how to integrate social media marketing into your business plan.

28 NEW COLORS!
GILDAN'S PALETTE IS GROWING TO AN EYE POPPING **98** COLORS!

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contributors



In this month's "Think Tank," *Stitches* Editorial Advisory Board members offer their advice on the best ways for a decorator to improve customer service right away. **Cory Dean**, owner of Tacoma, WA-based Artwork Source (*asi/36901*), advises that the best way to immediately improve your customers' experience is to "only work with top suppliers," he writes. "Searching for rock-bottom prices leads to a lot of drama that's very complicated and causes too much stress, time and money to untangle. Prevent that and buy from the best blank suppliers, digitizers, transfer makers and thread suppliers. Use the time saved to market to customers who want a reliable and consistent experience."



In this month's "Punching Sense," **Bonnie Landsberger**, owner of Cannon Falls, MN-based Moonlight Design Ltd., tackles digitizing stock designs to meet that "one-style-fits-all" requirement for customers and also be a profitable run for production. One of her tips? Use a commercial machine format like DST or EXP to convert the file to all other machine formats. "Due to conflicts between software programs, it's best not to use a specific software's master object file, such as EMB, CLQ, OFM, EDF or CND to convert to other machine formats like JEF, HUS, VIP and especially PES, which has eight different versions for both domestic and commercial machines," she writes.



In this issue's "Ask An Expert," **Brian Burr**, an 18-year embroidery industry veteran and chief operating officer of WholesaleHats.com, advises decorators on when to recommend embroidery or screen printing for customers' designs. "We usually explain that embroidery is a representation of a design, while screen printing is an exact replication of the design, since screen printing allows us to produce small, fine details," writes Burr, who has been a lead machine operator, a chief mechanic for an embroidery manufacturer and the production manager for a custom embroidery factory. Turn to page 64 to learn other factors to consider when talking with a client about choosing an imprinting method.

Interested in becoming a *Stitches* contributor? Please send an e-mail to nrollender@asicentral.com.

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THE MAGAZINE



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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 25th year in 2011.**

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Embroidery's Voice & Vision

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Award for "Best Use of Social Media," the *Stitches* Social Site is an active community of *Stitches* readers and other decorators who post photos of their work,

blog entries and videos. Most importantly, members network with each other in live chats and in our many groups and forums, on topics from digitizing to mobile embroidery to sourcing products. What are you waiting for? Join us online today!

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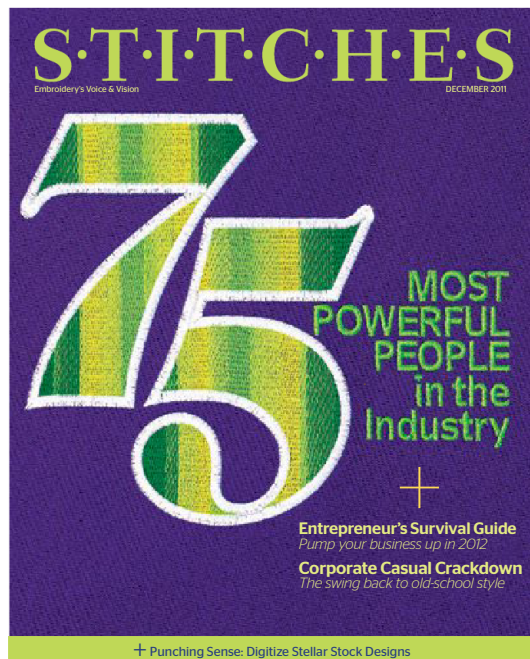
Gayle Zrelia, Founder and President,
EnMart

About the Cover

For Cory Dean and his team at Artwork Source (asi/36901), digitizing the cover of this month's issue was a cinch. Plotted using Wilcom Level 3 software, the design was digitized in about 30 minutes. "It's clean, straightforward line art," says Dean, noting minimal stops were required because only a few colors – mainly purple and green – complete the refreshingly simple design. Featuring about 180,000 stitches, the design was sewn on twill fabric over the course of about four hours on a Tajima C1501 single-head machine.

Dean says registration issues never reared on this project because twill is a strong fabric that doesn't stretch, and because the design was compact. He says: "The objects are close together; it's one big flowing design. Registration can be a problem when you have to go from one area all the way to the other side. But we didn't have that here."

Density never presented a problem on this design, either. "The easiest thing to deal with is stitching darker thread on a lighter fabric," says Dean, noting the design was sewn on white twill. "If this had to go on black leather, we'd have to try some things and adjust. But since we did it the way we did, we used an auto setting in the software for the best results on twill fabric, which will guarantee it looks good." – *Christopher Ruvo*



A whopping
82%
of Power 75
members say
that social
media's
potency will
increase
next year as
an effective
marketing tool.



Nicole Rollender
nrollender@asicentral.com

This special issue of *Stitches* reveals our second-annual Power 75 list of industry heavyweights who've effected growth and change in 2011 – and who we see influencing the direction the industry takes in 2012. They've weighed in on issues facing decorators and the industry now and into next year, projecting lots of opportunities – even in a tough economy (only 26% think the economy will improve in 2012; 64% say it'll stay flat) – for savvy shops to grow and be more profitable.

While the Power 75ers recognize that business owners face new challenges, they believe that decorators of all sizes can find ways to compete dynamically in an always-changing environment. Industry veterans recall that in the past decade, many production and digitizing enterprises have moved offshore, leading to more consolidation (and more smaller shops) in the U.S. Today, many budget-strapped customers are price-driven (and apparel and oil prices are rising) and want low-quantity orders at rush speed, causing hardships for smaller shops, for example.

On the upside, the Power 75 see many opportunities for decorators in the coming year, including diversifying imprinting offerings (think: budget-friendly digital decoration, including high-quality heat transfers and direct-to-garment printing; sublimation printing of apparel, promotional products and plaques; and more-affordable laser technology to create specialty looks) and going online to generate more business.

Cyberspace is where it's at for 2012 – decorators plan to use social networking to augment their businesses. A whopping 82% of Power 75 members say social media's potency will increase next year as an effective marketing tool. Some take this trend a step further by educating prospects and clients online with videos, podcasts, webinars, Web chats and more; plus, tech tools like QR codes and mobile apps are necessary to keep people (including your suppliers) engaged.

In addition, 69% of the Power 75 say online decoration business models that offer mass-personalization options will be key to competing in 2012. Decorators and digitizers who offer clients the ability to upload artwork, personalize designs, create virtual samples, and place and track orders online will prevail. Plus, "for decorators, made-in-the-U.S. mass personalization reduces lead time, costly overruns and delivery and hedges against currency exchanges and political interruptions that occur in offshore manufacturing," says Dean Shulman, senior vice president, Home Appliance and Industrial Products Division for Brother International Corp.

So, check out our second-annual Power 75 list of industry heavyweights in our big cover story, "The Power 75 ..." starting on page 26. Enjoy the issue!

Nicole Y. Rollender

We Asked You ...

What's the most creative way you ever thanked a client for their business?



Janet Bernasconi, Janet's Creative Pillows; www.janetscreativepillows.com; www.janetscreativepillows.blogspot.com: "I have a testimonial page on my website called 'What Our Customers

Say.' When customers are satisfied with their orders, I ask for a picture and a testimonial about our pillows; my clients are usually happy to do it. They love the acknowledgement and it makes them feel special."



Geri Finio, Studio 187 Custom Embroidery, Moorestown, NJ; geri@studio187.net; www.studio187.net: "Depending on the season, I make a small embroidered gift and include it with most orders: a bookmark,

a trick-or-treat goodie bag or an ornament. I love the acknowledgement from my customers when they add a gratuity and insist on it as a way of thanking me for my time and my gift of workmanship."



Pat Lambert, Embroidery by Pat, O'Fallon, IL; embroiderpat@att.net; www.embroiderpat.com: "For a special customer's birthday, I surprised them with a hand-delivered card that I printed

myself with a special message just about them, along with a hand towel with their favorite team name on it."



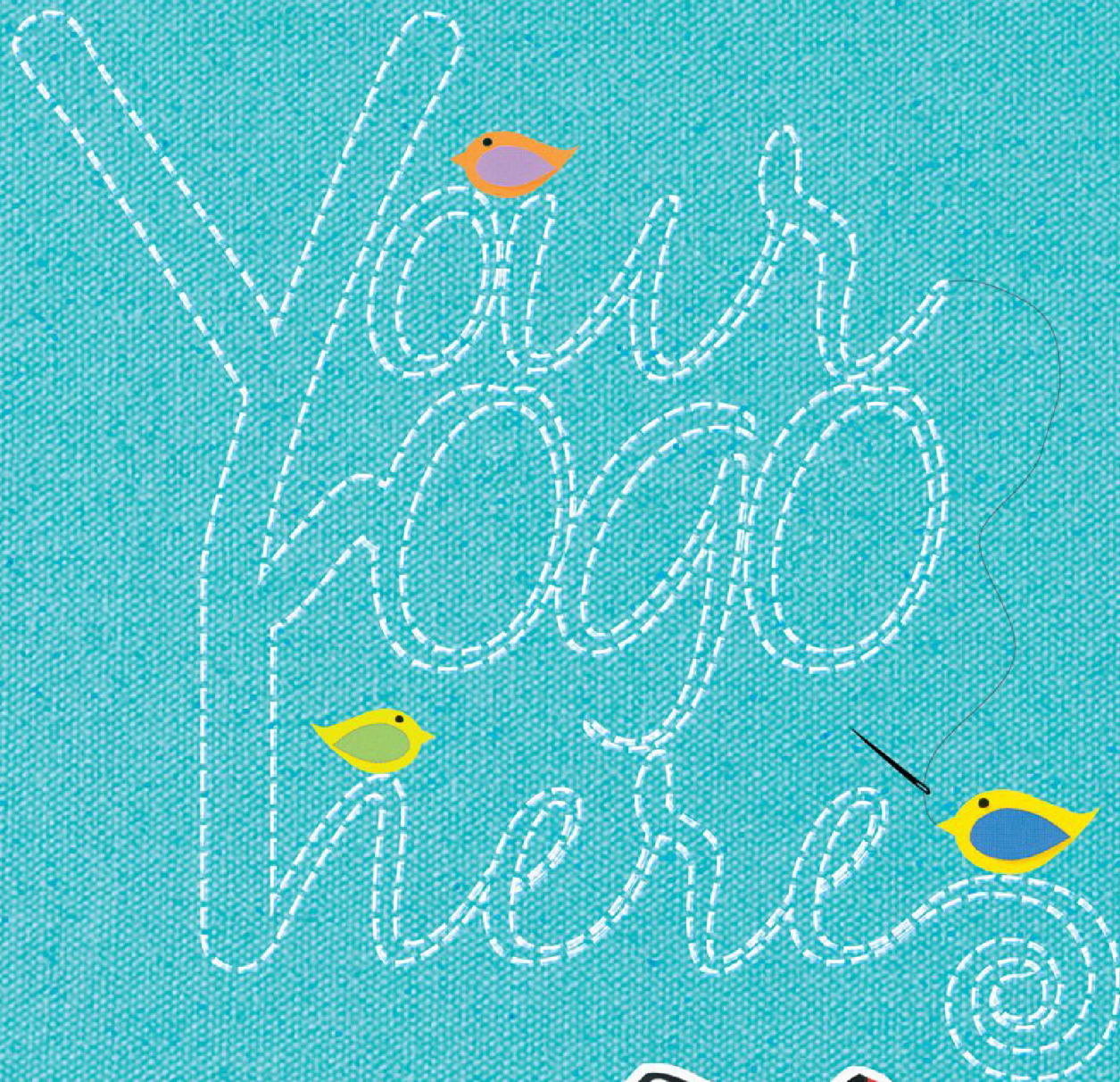
Rosane Sandberg, Gwinncraft Embroidery, Lawrenceville, GA; sales@gwinncraft.com; www.gwinncraft.com: "One of my favorite accounts is an independent plumber. I wanted to give him something different

to thank him, so I embroidered his logo on a roll of toilet paper and wrapped it with tulle. Since he's Irish, I added shamrocks around his business name and a green ribbon. He loved it, and we have since added the shamrocks to his logo."



Jill Valentino, Appleback (asi/123011), Lincroft, NJ; jill@appleback.com; www.appleback.com: "We thanked our customers with faux suede jackets from Charles River Apparel (asi/44620); on the

inside lining we embroidered 'Thanks for your business' and 'Appleback.' We put the customers' logo on the outside. We didn't have our logo all over, but every time they grabbed the jacket, they remembered us."



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In last month's issue, we asked our readers to share with us the embroidery project of which they're most proud.

Rodeo Perfect

One job I was very proud of was helping to embellish shirts for Callie Martin, who was named South Carolina High School Rodeo Queen 2010-2011, and then competed for and won the title of National High School Rodeo Queen the same year. Our project spanned over a year when her grandmother asked us to help by embroidering the shirts and jeans for her outfits. We embroidered the flat pieces, which were then cut out and assembled. We helped create a total of 10 different shirts for her, and her grandmother completed the outfits by adding crystals. Callie was recently crowned the new Queen for this/next year, and she'll now serve as president of the National High School Rodeo.

Peggy Purdy

The Monogram Shoppe



very surprised to find out it's done with thread and embroidery floss!

Leisa Rich

Atlanta

Beginner's Luck

The project I'm most proud of dates back to 1997. I was a newbie; I had only had my machine for about six or seven months. I had very few fonts and very few designs – only those that came with the package when I bought my machine from Hirsch. Back then, designs and fonts were a lot more expensive than they are now, and after purchasing the machine, computer and whatever else I needed, there wasn't too much cash left.

It was then that I saw a contest from Great Notions called "Best Use of Stock Designs" – and they'd give you one free design just for entering. At that time, I was also making window treatments. So I thought, "What better way to use stock designs?" I put my thinking cap on and decided to make

something bright and visible using primary colors. I used a clown theme and, lo and behold, when I got to the Bobbin Show in Atlanta, I was informed that I had won! My prize was one half of their collection of designs. I had something I could work with, and have been embroidering ever since.

Joyce Herkner

New Joys Embroidery



Champion's Heart

I have a project that makes my heart sing when I see or think about it. "Women Ink Publishing Jacket Back" was the first piece I entered in a competition, and I won! It was the first national recognition of my work, and that started my love of embroidery competition.

Jane Swanzy

Swan Threads, a division of Swan Marketing LLC (asi/700627)

Kudos to Stitches!

I love your magazine! I look forward to every issue, and the price (free to commercial embroiderers) can't be beat! I have a small sewing/embroidery business in my home and I love to do unique custom things. *Stitches* provides so much useful information!

Robin Burch

Robin Burch's Sewing Nest

Home Sweet Home

One of my pieces, called "Snatched Away," depicts a wonderful piece of property, located near Tobermory, Ontario, Canada,



IT'S A FULL HOUSE!

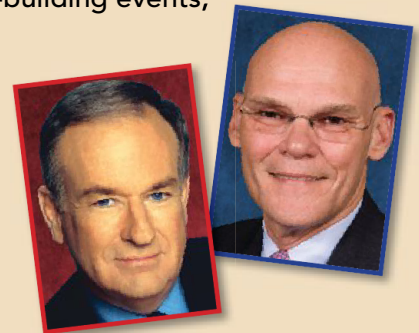
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What's the best way for a decorator to improve customer service right away?



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

The first, and possibly the hardest, thing you need to do is to put yourself in the customer's shoes. Really listen to what they're saying and respond in their best interest without sacrificing your own. If you follow that, the rest will come. If you feel like you're already there, but you really want a "wow" factor, increase your responsiveness. Answer quickly and honestly, and be personally engaged. It always pays off. Follow through and make things easy for your customer.



Cory Dean, Artwork Source (asi/36901)

The best way to immediately improve your customer's experience is to

only work with top suppliers. Searching for rock-bottom prices leads to a lot of drama that's very complicated and causes too much stress, time and money to untangle. Prevent that and buy from the best blank suppliers, digitizers, transfer makers and thread suppliers. Use the time saved to market to customers who want a reliable and consistent experience.



Jay Fishman, Wicked Stitch of the East

Experience and pricing don't matter if you can't provide outstanding customer service. Our current and prospective clients get the best quality in customer service. Whether it's a phone call or e-mail, they'll get a response and we make sure they're satisfied before we consider the problem or inquiry resolved. The reason our cus-

tomers come back to us is because of the relationships we foster with them – it's about people contacting people, and that's what they appreciate. When I consult with embroidery shops, I tell them to make each customer feel that they're important – in the long run, you're remembered for the service and helpfulness you provide. People are tired of automated phone menus and auto-responder e-mails – they want to know that they matter!



Steve Freeman, Qdigitizing (asi/700501)

You have to understand your customers, who may have a totally different idea about what makes for good service than you do. Your most valuable tool is your ears. If you're willing to listen to your customers, they'll tell you loud and

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- (*view speed and production rates live at www.dtgdigital/mseries)



clear what they need to have a successful relationship with your organization. It is up to you to check your ego at the door and realize that there's always room for improvement.



Joanna Grant, Affinity Express

Ensure you have capable, informed, knowledgeable team members on duty during hours your customers are likely to expect (not demand). If you provide such individuals with the system tools (order lists, status, etc.) so they can quickly and easily respond to customer service inquiries, your company will be viewed well by your customers. For the most part, customers are reasonable. They become unreasonable when they're faced with roadblocks such as customer service reps who can't answer their questions or give them the information they need.



Colleen Hartigan, Madeira USA (asi/32199)

1. Have a human answer the phone.
2. Train customer service reps so they can answer customer questions efficiently and thoroughly.
3. Never use the term "not our policy."
4. Put a smile on your face before you answer the phone; customers can hear it!
5. If you don't know the answer, don't fake it. Tell the customer you'll find out and get back to them, and always keep that promise!
6. If you can't give the customer your full attention, don't pick up the call.
7. Treat the customer as you'd like and expect to be treated: with respect, courtesy and honesty.



Jimmy Lamb, Sawgrass Technologies

A simple but effective practice is to respond to every

customer inquiry (good or bad) ASAP, especially those of a negative nature. Most unhappy people just want to be heard, and a quick phone conversation can really smooth things out. But many shop owners dread having to deal with problems, so they put it off. The longer you put it off, the worse it gets! Return every call/inquiry by the end of the business day on which it was received. The quicker you resolve customer service issues, the better. Often a disgruntled customer becomes a top advocate of a company simply because someone responded quickly, professionally and competently to their concern. Include (where practical) a thank-you note with each order, encouraging the client to contact you promptly with any questions they may have. ■

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



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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, Trevoze, 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!

PS: If you become an ASI Decorator Member with ESP, you'll have access to every item in the wearables and promotional products industry from 3,000+ reputable suppliers. Just call (800) 546-1388 to get started!

Phil,
I'm trying to find camouflage pants for steppers at our church - in youth and adult sizes. I can't seem to find the correct supplier. Hope you can help me. Love your private-eye work. - *Carolyn*

It's common to struggle with finding camouflage pants. They blend in so well. But I've managed to dig up some options. First, hunt for Codet Newport (*asi/45605*); (800) 992-6338; www.bigbill.com; this supplier carries camo pants in men's, women's and youth sizes, as well as tall sizes. Next, explore GameGuard (*asi/55758*); (940) 320-4900; www.gameguard.net; for youth ripstop pants (YPR4100), men's (MP200), women's (PM2000) and many other options. Finally, Rothco (*asi/83708*); (800) 645-5195; www.rothco.com; has kids' (66115) and adult (2366) sizes that will help your clients stand out while covering their tracks.

Dear Phil,
I'm looking for solid white painters' caps. Can you help me out? - *Patsy*

Paint the town red (or white, as the case may be) with Otto International (*asi/75350*); (800) FOR-OTTO; www.ottocap.com; product 109-146. Also, roll up to Nissun Cap (*asi/73979*); (909) 902-5050; www.nissuncap.com; and ask for product PSC, or drop by Anthony & Co. (*asi/36280*); (800) 548-3450; www.anthonycap.com; product 849 can keep your clients' promotions from drying up.



I have a customer who wants to purchase a "Snuggie-type" blanket. It's simple - a blanket with sleeves - but I can't find it anywhere! Can you help? Phil, you're the BEST! Peace. - *Glenn*

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Thanks. I feel warm and fuzzy inside. And, I've got a few solutions up my sleeve. Snuggle up to Simply Clever Solutions (*asi/47952*); (800) 250-7701; www.customsnuggie.com; this supplier has many products to choose from. Next, heat up sales with Binaco (*asi/40544*); (800) 660-0968; www.binaline.com; products BL98 and BL97 may help you out. Also try on RTF Accessories Inc. (*asi/82341*); (516) 577-3406; www.rtfacc.com; product OMG-10 for size. To wrap up, Max Sales Group Inc. (*asi/69712*); (877) SALE-MAX; www.maxsalesgroup.com; offers cozy options such as products NV-00396 and NV-00405.



Hi Phil,

I have some waitresses who used to buy bib aprons with front pockets that contained a waterproof material so they could carry damp towels to wipe the tables. They can't

find these anymore; now their aprons and clothing stay damp and start to mildew. I've searched and searched. I know you're a miracle-worker and I appreciate your expertise. - *Janice*

Serve these waitresses with something they can really use. Head to Ad-Line Industries (*asi/31977*); (800) 460-9777; www.adlineind.com; product AO-0110 is a PVC apron that comes in blue, orange and purple. It has a large divided pocket at mid-center and an adjustable cord. Also, Aakron Rule Corp. (*asi/30270*); (800) 828-1570; www.aakronline.com; has a non-woven water-resistant apron (product 59900) with a bottom pocket that's reusable and recyclable. It comes in blue, lime green, red and white. Finally, check out Caro-line/Bandanna Promotions (*asi/44020*); (800) 849-6644; www.bandannapromotions.com;

product A30GRO comes in many available colors and has a water-repellent option.



Phil,

I need Western shirts for adults and children for my Texas-based embroidery shop. I have requests from the Cowboy Church and trail ride groups. Can you help? - *Charmaine*

For the Texas theme, Rockpoint Apparel (*asi/63751*); (713) 699-9896; www.rockpoint-apparel.com; might be your best bet. This supplier lives and breathes Texas and offers many styles that could fit your needs. In addition, rope in Roper Apparel & Footwear (*asi/83580*); (800) 825-6555; www.erooper.com; and Apparel Star Inc. (*asi/36539*); (866) 204-4042; www.apparelstarimports.com; for plenty of men's, ladies' and kids' styles of Western shirts. Yee haw!



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Trends From **Paris Fashion Week**



photo: FPascal Le Segretain

EVENINGWEAR

Designers such as Elie Saab looked to diaphanous inspirations for their spring/summer 2012 collections. This eye-popping gold strapless dress features a sequined bodice, a skinny belt and layers of silk to create a sheer, elegant look. Tap into this formal style for your clients by adding embellishments such as intricate embroidery and multimedia paired with metallic threads to lighter, sheer fabrics. This trend is ideal for spring proms, bridal events and other formalwear markets.

Demure lace is making a comeback on the catwalks. Valentino showed this modest knee-length lace dress with long sleeves for spring/summer 2012. It has a simple silhouette with a retro flair, yet the cream color, matching skinny belt and floral pattern make it a perfect modern wardrobe piece for the spring. Suggest lace and floral accents to your clients for a timeless, yet modernized, look that's classy and fashion-forward – and is sure to attract attention.

LACE



photo: Victor Virgile



photo: Karl Prouse

HEADWEAR

Head coverings are coming back in a big way, notably at the Alexander McQueen show. The lace pieces suggested medieval wimples, but successfully complemented the fitted, minimalist dresses. Earwarmers, scarves and other headwear accessories are perfect for branding, including screen printing and sublimating, so pitch them to your clients as fashionable, wearable billboards. They're perfect for athletic teams, the outdoor industry and the juniors' market.



photo: Antonio de Moraes Barros Filho

METALLICS AND SHINE

Metallics and holograms made an appearance in Paris, including in the collections of Paul & Joe and Paco Rabanne, who designed this strapless, knee-length dress that's reminiscent of the Queen of Hearts from Alice in Wonderland. While metallics, foil, glitter and holograms have been popular recently in accenting promotional apparel for juniors' dance and cheer teams and even corporate wear, where they're sometimes used as all-over designs.

Jason Murphy, national sales manager at GroupeSTAHLS Sales Alliance, says demand for foil and bling continues to grow because increasing numbers of decorators are realizing that it's easy to do with a heat press. "There are a wide variety of foils available that can be applied over plastisol inks," he says. "There are also CAD-CUT materials that can give you a foil look. Foils have always been popular with the cheer and dance crowds, but we're also seeing foil used as accents on athletic uniforms and for corporate wear. It's a great way to dress up any logo and can be done in seconds with a heat press."

Feel free to go really wild with this trend. "The exciting thing now in the industry is that there are no rules," says Chuck Maulsby, screen territory manager at Kennesaw, GA-based Graphic Solutions Group (*asi/212953*). "We can do anything we want to when we decorate a garment. I really don't see foils and metallics going away any time soon."

BOLD PRINTS

From the large, colorful floral prints from Talbot Runhof, to the American Southwest-inspired lines from Paul & Joe, to the abstract designs and faces from Jean-Charles Castelbajac and Agnes B, vivid prints on uniquely shaped dresses played a significant role on the catwalks. Impasse de la Défense showed this thigh-length, sleeveless dress with a low neckline, dramatic feminine ruffles and a multicolored dye process suggestive of sponge painting. Other designers presented short dresses with bold prints and even a tunic printed with an all-over Mickey Mouse design.

"Patterns are proving to be a strong trend, especially among younger wearers," says Brian Burr, chief operations officer at Wholesalehats.com. "Oftentimes, young fashionistas pair patterned wholesale caps or hats with gloves and scarves in the same pattern." Burr adds that the pairing creates a pulled-together look and that popular patterns include plaids, argyles, Aztec designs and geometrics. "Some don't want the matchy-matchiness that comes with the same design, so they choose to pair a patterned hat with a solid color scarf and pair of gloves," he says.

Prints are perfect for the promotional industry, where a logo or custom signature design can be printed onto a garment to create a unique and eye-catching look.



photo: Victor Virgile



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look book

Turn On Your Brights

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, neons were used on almost everything, from ski jackets to caps to jeans. In the early 1990s, fluorescent blue, green, orange, pink and yellow were big in the youth apparel industry and even in adult apparel. However, when the neutral trend caught on, vivid colors were quickly deemed overly bright. While they've taken a break for the past couple decades, they're back in retail, on the catwalks and in the promotional apparel industry.

"Bright orange, lemon yellow, lime green and fuchsia pink can now be found on a number of wholesale garments," says Brian Burr, chief operations officer at Wholesalehats.com. "They're an easy, inexpensive way to ease into the neon trend."

This past year, American Apparel (*asi/35297*) introduced five new neon colors – heather pink, heather orange, heather blue, heather lake blue and yellow – to its wholesale line. Since then, these hues have appeared on more than just the supplier's tees, hoodies and tanks; in retail, for instance, it now carries the Leaf Flower Lace Sleeveless Dress in bright orange and yellow. Alan Sloane Co. Inc. (*asi/33380*) offers women's fishnet stockings (*9001*) in neon blue, green, orange, pink and yellow.

Meanwhile, Expert Performance T (*asi/53404*) carries a men's sleeveless singlet (AJ 819) in key lime, and Bodek and Rhodes (*asi/40788*) offers a unisex full-zip cotton/poly sweatshirt (8463) in six colors, including lime green and bright orange. And, for a little extra oomph for your kicks, Marathon Manufacturing/Prestige Lines (*asi/68707*) has



Hot Hue:
Violet

Bright colors are at the top of the fashion A-list this winter, and violet is no exception. Majestic and alluring, violet can be applied successfully to a wide range of promotional campaigns. Hovering between pink and purple on the color spectrum, violet commands attention and beckons the eye.

"Purple in general is very popular right now," says Barrie Cliett, national sales manager for Boxercraft (*asi/41325*). She cites violet as one of the most sought-after shades of purple in the apparel industry. "It's considered both a trendy sports-team color and a fashion hue," she says. Cliett lauds this hue for its adaptability across the promotional industry and asserts the importance of integrating it. "Purple is very versatile. Businesses looking for a fashionable color with appeal to both sexes are investing in it," she says, labeling it the "go-to fashion color." Boxercraft will introduce several new purple products in its 2012 lineup.

Lee Strom, senior marketing manager at SanMar (*asi/84863*), also notes violet's trendiness. "Violet is an excellent choice for any logo and presents a great knit, woven, fleece or outerwear option," he says. "It's a great shade to match with traditionally corporate neutrals such as black and gray, as well as more casual denims and khakis."

In addition, Strom says violet is a notable replacement for blue, particularly for suits because darker shades are appropriate for business wear. "It attracts attention, without being so distinct as to be a distraction," he says.

Expert Performance T (asi/53404; circle 151 on Free Info Card) offers this moisture-wicking singlet (AJ 819) for men in eight colors, including key lime.



Style Tip: Thermals

Yesterday's rendition of the thermal T-shirt – oversized, somewhat misshapen and designed to wear underneath regular clothing – has transformed into a fashionable and form-fitted garment, especially for the promotional products industry. Available in numerous styles, colors and fabrics, the thermal long-sleeved tee is hot this winter.

"Forget the traditional waffle-knit thermal," says Craig Smith, corporate sales manager for Rugged Outfitters Inc. (asi/84143). "Thermals have evolved greatly over the last 10 years." While thermals keep wearers warm without the bulk, now they also make a fashion statement. He cites polyester as his company's most popular thermal fabric. "It's both moisture-wicking and serves as an optimal odor guard," he says. As a result, polyester thermals are ideal for either outdoor or indoor activewear.

Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788; circle 152 on Free Info Card) carries a unisex full-zip cotton/poly blend sweatshirt (8463) with thermal lining in six colors, including bright orange and lime green.



imprintable shoelaces (68707-5840) available in a variety of colors, including hot blue, hot pink and hot green.

Neon is also coming back to haute couture. In his spring/summer 2011 collection, presented in London, designer Christopher Kane presented neon lace pieces in otherwise conserva-

tive styles, like collarless jackets and knee-length skirts, in a rainbow of hues ranging from fluorescent green to orange, pink and yellow. Some were paired with argyle sweaters in neutral colors to offset the fluorescent intensity. British model and TV personality Jade Parfitt called it "royal neon" and "Princess Margaret on acid."

Alternative Apparel (asi/34850; circle 153 on Free Info Card) distributes this unisex zip-front burnout hoodie (05295B6).



This stylish women's short-sleeve henley hoodie (6051) is available from Pima Apparel (asi/78820; circle 154 on Free Info Card).



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look book

Trend Spy: Athletic Tops

Athletic tops are an excellent way to stylize a sports team's appearance while simultaneously promoting it. Even the fashion industry has fallen in love with athletic tops; the garments were featured in recent collections by high-fashion designers such as Calvin Klein, Alexander Wang and Stella McCartney.



Find this flattering women's athletic tank (CWTT-100) at Jakroo (*asi/63104*; circle 157 on Free Info Card); it features AIR SURF fabric, a shelf bra and a zippered pocket.

Not only are they ideal promotional tools, but they're also applicable across the industry.

Danny Tsai, vice president of merchandising for Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*), says athletic tops have come a long way from being merely "basic uniform pieces, such as polos and woven button-down shirts." Part of the reason for this upgrade, Tsai says, is the changing tastes of clients and their customers. "End-users are demanding performance pieces with functional benefits," he explains, "and company activities now include sporting events and competitions like 5Ks and 10Ks, golf tournaments and basketball leagues." Tsai also suggests that the increased countrywide interest in fitness is fueling demand for athletic tops.

Encourage clients to implement athletic tanks into company-run gyms and for sports events. Pitch them to high school and university shops or use them as giveaway items for fundraisers.



Ash City USA (*asi/37143*; circle 155 on Free Info Card) carries this moisture-wicking women's long-sleeved athletic sports top (78079) in black/gray and navy/gray luster.

EVENTS CALENDAR

DECEMBER 2011

Dec. 4-7, Myrtle Beach, SC
Grand Strand Gift & Resort
Merchandise Show
(678) 285-3976; www.grandstrandgiftshow.com

Jan. 15-18, Marlboro, MA
New England Apparel
Club Show
(781) 326-9223;
www.neacshow.com

Jan. 21-23, Orlando, FL
Orlando Gift Show
(678) 285-3976;
www.orlandogiftshow.com

JANUARY 2012

Jan. 7-10, Oaks, PA
Philadelphia Gift Show
(678) 285-3976; www.philadelphiagiftshow.com

Jan. 16-18, Orlando, FL
ASI Show
(800) 546-3300;
www.asishow.com

Jan. 23-27, Boston, Long Island, Secaucus, Philadelphia, Baltimore
Advantages Roadshow
(800) 546-3300; www.asishow.com

Jan. 10-11, New York City
DIRECTION by Indigo,
International Exhibition of
Creative Textile Design
(646) 351-1942;
www.directionshow.com

Jan. 18-21, San Francisco
San Francisco International
Gift Fair
(678) 285-3976
www.sfigf.com

Jan. 28 - Feb. 2, New York City
New York International
Gift Fair
(800) 272-7469;
www.nyigf.com

Jan. 14-17, Seattle
Seattle Gift Show
(678) 285-3976;
www.seattlegiftshow.com

Jan. 20-22, Long Beach, CA
ISS Shows
(800) 241-9034;
www.issshows.com

Jan. 29 - Feb. 2, Toronto, ON
Toronto Gift Show
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NEWS BRIEFS

BITO is now offering pulsating laser heads that can be used with the LaserBridge, Spartacus and Niagara laser-cutting machines.

Brother International Corp. has introduced a host of new products and software, including the launch of the Quattro 2, the Entrepreneur Pro PR1000e (a 10-needle home embroidery machine) and the PR650e (a six-needle home embroidery machine). The company has also helped give a dream sewing room to a child suffering from Cystic Fibrosis through the Children's Wish Foundation International.

Charles River Apparel (*asi/44620*) announced that it has released its new 2012 catalog, which is available at www.charlesriverapparel.com.

Cintas (*asi/162167*) has announced that it increased its revenues by 101% in its most recent quarter, which ended on August 31.

The company's revenues in the quarter, the first period of its fiscal 2012, totaled slightly more than \$1 billion.

Dalco Athletic announced the release of its Basketball Game Balls dye-sub appliqué, which pairs a basketball with a team's name to create a full-front design.

Graphics One is launching a new, 100% green technology called GO OT Transfer Film, which is designed to be used with the GO EcoMax system and SEPIAX "green" ink.

GSG now offers classic rayon thread made of 100% viscose. This high-quality thread is color-fast and will hold up well even when washed at temperatures up to 203 degrees. GSG, a full-line distributor of equipment and supplies for the decorated apparel, graphics and sign industries, is preparing to open a new location sometime after January 1st in Baton Rouge, LA.

Imprintables Warehouse (*asi/58475*) offers Spectra Bling, a vinyl cutter material that is available in seven new colors for a total of 14.

L.A. T Sportswear (*asi/65948*) announced that it has improved its website (www.latsportswear.com) by adding a Distributor Locator. It provides inventory and contact information for each distributor that carries the product the customer is searching for.

Madeira USA (*asi/32199*) has announced that Graphics Solutions Group (GSG) will carry a full-color line of Madeira's Classic Rayon #40 cones and Fire Fighter spools.

Monarch Robe & Towel Co. (*asi/72025*) has announced that it has acquired its competitor Cypress Luxury Bath & Bed Amenities from Russell Newman Brands.

SARA LAVENDUSKI is an editorial intern for *Stitches*. Contact: slavenduski@asicentral.com.

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By Bonnie Landsberger



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designs

Punch Stellar Stock Designs

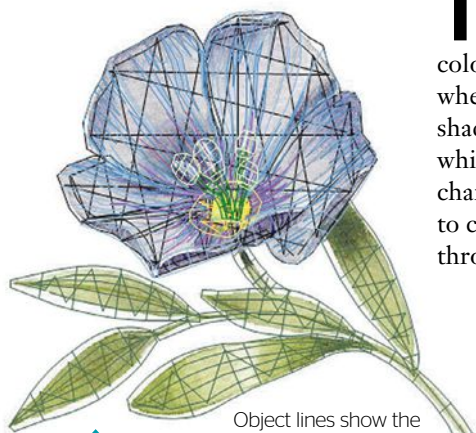
Follow a few basic rules to ensure your stock designs make the grade.

Your digitizing work turns out best when you consider your fabric's needs, but this isn't always possible when you're punching a design for stock sales. Embroiderers invest in a variety of stock designs to keep at hand for just the right

order, as well as for retail sales, so a stock design needs to meet that "one-style-fits-all" requirement and be a profitable run for production.

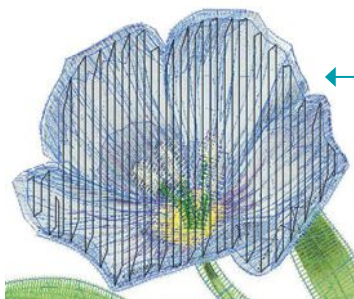
BONNIE LANDSBERGER is owner of Cannon Falls, MN-based Moonlit Design. Contact: moonlitdesign@aol.com.

1 Narrow your colors to a minimum. Excess color changes will slow production, so find ways to combine colors to create the illusion of another color, and try to keep each color sewing only once whenever possible. Here, it's broken down into four shades of purple (flower blues), one yellow, one white and one green that sews in two separate color changes. For digitizing, the colors have been adjusted to contrasting shades, so the artwork will still be clear throughout the punching process.



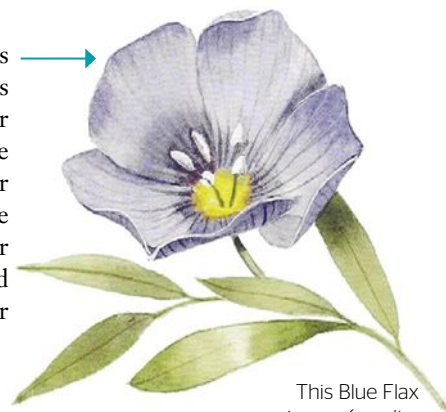
Object lines show the running stitches used as a base underlay.

2 Set in a base underlay of running stitches below every stitched area. All fabrics (and stitches in the design) require underlay for stabilization. Use an average underlay stitch length of 3 mm to 3.5 mm for small designs and 3.8 mm to 4 mm for large designs.

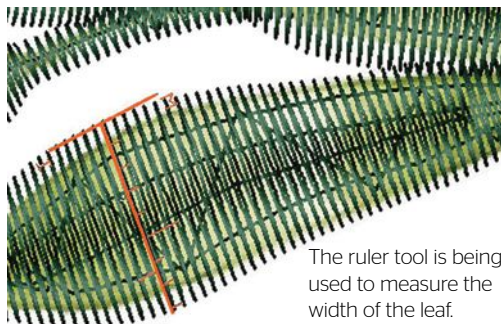


A section of light-density fill stitch (shown in black) is used as underlay.

3 Create flexibility in the design. First, stabilize the fabric with one object of a light-density fill stitch in a large, single-color area; then, punch the top stitches of each individual fill-stitch object, using a lighter density than you'd normally use. Sometimes two underlay sections can be used, crosshatched, allowing you to use an even lighter density for the top stitches. If a test-sew shows that more coverage is needed, make adjustments in the underlay sections. Layering stitches like this ensures coverage on most fabrics without sacrificing flexibility.



This Blue Flax image (royalty-free art from Wildflowers CD-ROM and Book, 996050, Dover Publications; www.doverpublications.com) has multiple shades of purple, green, yellow and white.

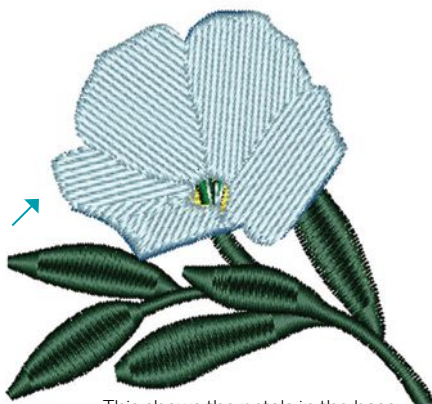


The ruler tool is being used to measure the width of the leaf.

D: 8.90mm < 294° Dc: 3.63 Dy: -8.13
D: 0.35" < 294° Dc: 0.14" Dy: -0.32"

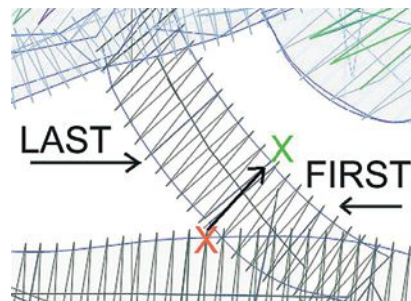
4 Observe your push-and-pull compensation – especially in areas that overlap, as in a satin stitch outline around a filled section to avoid gaps. However, don't make your satin stitch columns wider than 7 mm. Some machines won't jump across areas exceeding the limitation, so stitch at each side of the column, leaving an open area at the center. Change those wide areas to a column fill to ensure that all machines will read the data correctly. Here, we've used a split-satin column fill to achieve texture and ensure the column will stitch.

5 Use stitch types and angles to create texture and dimension. Flat fills are boring, so to add interest, use different angles for each filled section. For this design, varying angles distribute the stitches' pull, preventing puckering around the design, which can be caused by too many stitches on two sides pulling the fabric inward.

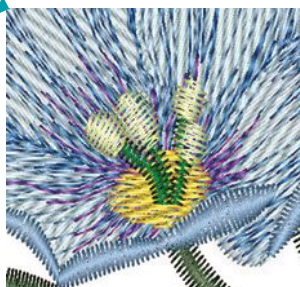


This shows the petals in the base color sewing at different angles.

This shows how the stem below the petals is divided to eliminate a jump stitch.



7 Don't include unnecessary elements. Definitely eliminate an element if it helps get rid of a color change or jump stitch. In this design, the additional stamen has no real importance, and because it would require a jump stitch before and after it sews, omitting it is the best option. The only jump stitch in the first design occurred between the two stamens on the left and the two on the right. Later, the sew-out showed it's possible to connect the two pairs by traveling near the top of the yellow center without being noticeable, which results in a no-jump design.



This shows the center of the flower where one stamen has been eliminated.

6 Eliminate unnecessary jumps. The first half of the column is sewn before the leaf. The leaf ends where the second half of the stem can begin sewing, and then ends where the colors change for the blossom. When mapping a path, choose the best route that will allow nonstop sewing. Choose a color sequence that will allow a color that's programmed later to cover the travel stitches that connect same-color elements. Always try to end a color where the next color begins.



The image shows the design sampled on felt.

8 Center the design before you convert it to a machine file and test-sew it. Felt is a fairly good test fabric because it's: vulnerable like denim, so it will reveal possible irregular edges that require more underlay; fuzzy like wool, so it reveals columns that might sew too thinly; and relatively lightweight like cotton, which might help determine any areas that pucker. However, whenever possible, it's best to sample designs on several different types of fabric to ensure the design will sew well in most situations.

9 Use a commercial machine format like DST or EXP to convert the file to all other machine formats. Due to conflicts between software programs, it's best not to use a specific software's master object file, such as EMB, CLQ, OFM, EDF or CND to convert to other machine formats like JEF, HUS, VIP and especially PES, which has eight different versions for both domestic and commercial machines. It's also very important to use a reliable stand-alone conversion program that will properly read a commercial machine format of DST and then write the data correctly with respect to sewing field limitations when converting it to other machine formats.

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The Power

75 MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE AND COMPANIES IN THE INDUSTRY

1 Marty Lott - SanMar (asi/84863)

2 Ted Stahl - GroupeSTAHL

3 Mike Hoffman - Gildan Activewear SRL

4 Martin Kristiaman - Wilcom International PTY. Ltd.

5 Paul Gallagher and Hitoshi Tajima - Hirsch International/Tajima Industries Ltd.

6 Mike Ernst and John Fryer - Hanesbrands Imagewear Inc. (asi/59528)

7 Tas Tsonis and Brian Goldberg - Pulse Microsystems Ltd.

8 Gerard Metrailler - Corel Corp.

9 Tom Myers and Hank Harrell - Broder Bros. Co. (asi/42090)

10 Dean F. Shulman - Brother International Corp.

11 Hajo Voeller - Madeira USA Ltd.

12 Mike Rhodes - Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788)

13 Craig Mertens and Jay Busselle - Digital Art Solutions (asi/14970)

14 Dov Charney - American Apparel (asi/35297)

15 Mike Angel - Melco

16 Garry Hurvitz and Dominique Au-Yeung - Ash City USA (asi/37127)

17 Tetsuji Yamaue and Bob Stone - Barudan/Barudan America Inc.

18 Jeff Adams and Paul Rohr - S&S Activewear (asi/84358)

19 Ira Neaman - Vantage Apparel (asi/93390)

20 Anna Wintour - *Vogue*

21 Edward Staton - Staton Corporate and Casual (asi/89380)

22 George Westphal - Dakota Collectibles

23 Cotton

24 Anthony Corsano - Anvil Knitwear (asi/36350)

25 Dick Ward - River's End Trading Co. (asi/82588)

26 Jimmy Lamb - Sawgrass Technologies

27 Rick Mouty - Profill Holdings (asi/300152)

28 Ray Titus - EmbroidMe (asi/384000)

29 Oil

30 Gene Feil - Dalco Athletic Lettering Co.

31 Phil Rubin and Eric Rubin - Blue Generation (asi/40653)

32 Owen Dunne - American & Efird Inc.

33 Scott Colman - ColDesi Inc.

34 Daniel Tsai and Jennifer Tsai - Tri-Mountain/Mountain Gear (asi/92125)

35 Susan Ritchie, Arch Ritchie and Jennifer Cox - National Network of Embroidery Professionals (asi/187622)

36 Josh Peyser - MV Sport/Weatherproof (asi/68318)

Stitches reveals its second-annual list of the most powerful people and companies in the industry today. Ranked from 1 to 75, everyone on this list is influencing the direction the decorating industry will take in 2012 and beyond.

By Nicole Rollender, Christopher Ruvo and Shane Dale

Power is influence. Power is the ability to challenge the status quo and inspire growth and change. The decorating industry itself is a powerful force, as embellishment touches nearly every industry and product out there.

Welcome to the second-annual *Stitches* Power 75, our ranking of 75 industry heavyweights, those with the most influence now – and into next year – over how companies operate and profit in the decorating marketplace.

Each person and company on this list is making an impact on how everyone in the industry operates – and setting a go-to-market course for the industry as it heads into 2012. Turn the page to learn who the most powerful people in the industry are, and their plans for the future. Plus, new this year, we surveyed our Power 75 members to gauge their outlooks on 2012, find out what their biggest challenges are and see where the best business opportunities lie. Check out their responses on page 48.

The Methodology



This year's Power 75 is made up of the heads of the top machine, software, thread and apparel suppliers and other industry vendors; decorators and digitizers; industry educators and heads of trade associations; others outside the industry who we felt were important; and, of course, newcomers and Power 75 veterans. On the following pages, you'll find the 1-75 rankings; rankings are partially based on a survey *Stitches* conducts, which asks the industry, the Power 75 members themselves and the *Stitches* Editorial Advisory Board to rate whether each person on last year's list has gained or lost influence over the past 12 months. In addition, we added top apparel suppliers from our first-ever Top 25 Apparel Suppliers List, which debuted in May 2011 *Stitches*. All of these efforts brought the list to the 75 people you see here.

37 Thomas Moore Jr. – Strawberry Stitch Co.

38 John P. Colman – Pantograms Manufacturing Co. Inc.

39 Jens Petersson – Cutter & Buck (asi/47965)

40 Chris Waldick – JCW Software LLC

41 Chase Roh, Ph.D. – AnaJet Inc. (asi/16000)

42 Dale Call – Virginia T's (asi/93917)

43 Richard Hirsch – Amann USA

44 Gary Schultz – Edwards Garment Co. (asi/51752)

45 Razgo Lee – Otto International (asi/75350)

46 Ryan Moor – Ryonet Corp.

47 Joyce Jagger – Embroidery Tips & More

48 Lee Caroselli Barnes – Balboa Threadworks Inc.

49 Smart Textiles

50 Mark Venit and Jay Malanga – Shopworks

51 Mark Wasson – Gunold USA

52 François Lesage and Jean-François Lesage – House of Lesage

53 Ed Levy – Digitize4u Inc./EmbForum

54 Niamh O'Connor – Urban Threads

55 Michael Robertson – Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA)

56 Christopher Bernat – Vapor Apparel (asi/93396)

57 Steve Garnier – Epilog Laser

58 Fred Lebow – Cotswold Industries

59 Michael Savoia – Villa Savoia Inc.

60 Erich Campbell – Black Duck Inc. (asi/140730)

61 Deborah Jones – MyEmbroideryMentor.com

62 Akira Ikeda – Mimaki Engineering

63 Michael Perich – Bernina of America

64 Vasilis Thomaidis – Compucon

65 Randy Carr – World Emblem International (asi/98264)

66 Joanna Grant – Affinity Express

67 Eric Withaar – Sportco Inc. (asi/88792)

68 Jack Ma – The Alibaba Group

69 Kristine Shreve – EnMart and Ensign Emblem

70 Frank Ma – Ricoma International Corp.

71 Edgar Huber – Lands' End (asi/250566)

72 Michael Stuart – MS Designs Ltd.

73 Jenny Hart – Sublime Stitching

74 Jay Fishman – Wicked Stitch of the East

75 Zu Yi Min – Sheens Embroidery Machines

1 Customer-Focused CEO

Marty Lott

SanMar (*asi/84863*)

For Marty Lott, spending his weekend operating heavy machinery in SanMar's (*asi/84863*) newest distribution facility in Robbinsville, NJ, is all in a day's work. Lott, who's been a hands-on leader since he founded SanMar 41 years ago, says he loves the operational side of the business, where he gets knee-deep in expanding the company's already huge reach across the U.S. – and serving terribly happy customers.

"I spent a weekend moving into our new facility," Lott says. "I worked 16 hours a day Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday – most of that time operating a pallet jack and moving products into a new warehouse. I thoroughly enjoyed it."

After selling printed apparel in the early '70s, Lott decided to go into the blanks

business. "Back then, a few people in the country were selling T-shirts year-round, and the challenge with them was that, to put it bluntly, they weren't honest," he says.

Lott, who is ASI's 2011 Person of the Year, founded SanMar in an effort to prove he could do things better than the competition after he placed what should have been a simple order of yellow 100% cotton Hanes tees from a company that's no longer in business. "They shot me some 50/50, some cotton, some Fruit of the Loom – and none of the colors matched," he says.

He called the company to inform it of the numerous errors. "Their answer was, 'You're COD, we have your money, you've got the shirts, and the deal is over with,'" he says. "I decided that, if that was



1. Marty Lott, President

SanMar (*asi/84863*)

2010 Rank: 3 See profile above

For 40 years, Lott has headed up SanMar, the second-largest apparel seller in the market, and has raised its revenues by more than 25% over the past five years. Just one day after SanMar celebrated its anniversary, the supplier launched its mobile-enabled site, *m.sanmar.com*. (Decorators who download the free app can check prices and stock and browse products from their smartphones.) The announcement carried a message: At four decades old, SanMar hasn't stopped finding new ways to serve its customers. Often cited as the apparel supplier of choice in the decorated apparel industry because of its top-notch customer services and deep breadth of inventory, the supplier's more than 4 million square feet of inventory houses 17 retail and private apparel brands (with new products and brands always being added) – 84% of the country can get goods the next day. And on top of that, the company has a heart, launching eco initiatives, green products and community-outreach programs and adhering to its commitment to social responsibility.

2. Ted Stahl, Executive Chairman and Founder

GroupeSTAHL

2010 Rank: 12



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-printing products and services that complement embroidery and screen printing, with 25,000 customers. Stahl has recognized that decorators want faster, easier and more profitable ways to imprint garments, so he introduced the CAD-PRINTZ line of full-color digital transfers, along with many other cutting-edge, high-quality, affordable embellishment options. (Stahls' free online art-creation software, *CadworxLive.com*, now has 15,000 users.) In November, Brian Sukarukoff, former president of

Jokab Safety North America, was named CEO of GroupeSTAHL, with immediate goals to improve operational processes, and promote global development of technology and product innovation.

3. Mike Hoffman, President

Gildan Activewear SRL

2010 Rank: 7



The world's largest manufacturer of T-shirts, sports shirts and other casual apparel, Gildan sold 600 million T-shirts last year, and has at any given moment 150 million wholesale garments in inventory ready to ship. Hoffman, who directs U.S. operations, says the mill, with over 60% share in the U.S. screen-printing and embroidery channel, received the FUNDHRSE Seal for Social Responsibility for the fourth straight year; gained the renewal of its stringent Oeko-Tex Standard 100 certification for its entire product line; and employs a rigorous Environmental Code of Practices in all its manufacturing centers. In addition to adding 12 new styles, Gildan is adding 28 colors to its line for a total of 98. In 2010, Gildan's



the competition, I can compete. That's what got me on the track that I'm on today – that one order of yellow shirts.”

And since SanMar's inception, accuracy has been Lott's number-one priority. “Our business is based on the fact that our customers know exactly what they want, they know exactly how many they want, and they know when they need it – and if you can't take care of that value proposition, you can't take care of the customer,” he says. “There are a tremendous number of people in our organization who are involved with getting that inventory accurate, because without that accuracy, we can't tell the customer the truth.”

While Lott admits that orders aren't always 100% accurate, he makes sure that SanMar does what's necessary to make things right, every time. “My people make honest mistakes, but it's because we grabbed the wrong shirt, not because the inventory was incorrect,” he says. “When we say we have it, we have it. We were the first

in the industry to develop systems that gave us inventory accuracy.”

Another key component to SanMar's success is that it is and always has been family owned and operated; Lott and his two sons run the show. “I'm 62 now. Most people my age are looking at what their exit strategy is. My exit strategy is my sons,” he says. “I can work as long as I want, and that gives me a different perspective, and it gives them a different perspective. Not being for sale makes a huge difference.”

Lott plans to be right in the middle of SanMar's operations in whatever role he plays – from producing long-term growth strategies to operating pallet jacks. It's this hands-on approach that gives him a special relationship with his employees. “We've never laid anybody off,” he says. “If the economy is going down, we've found ways to keep people working. We take it a little more personally. That's a family perspective vs. the perspective of a publicly-held company.” – *Shane Dale*

“We've never laid anybody off. If the economy is going down, we've found ways to keep people working.”

Marty Lott, SanMar (*asi/84863*)

sales were just above \$1.3 billion, representing an increase of more than 30%, and per its third-quarter earnings, the company is projecting 2011 sales revenues in excess of \$1.7 billion.

4. Martin Kristiaman, CEO Wilcom International PTY. Ltd.

2010 Rank: 2



Kristiaman's industry vision includes continuing to increase decorators' competitive multi-decorating and “mass personalization, quantity one” capabilities, while decreasing their costs to produce that order. To that end, Wilcom continues to evolve its embroidery-related software (EmbroideryStudio, DecoStudio and TrueSizer) and software for the general custom decorator market, DecoNetwork, an online e-commerce solution for decorators who offer embroidery, direct-to-garment printing or heat transfers. In January, Wilcom launched EmbroideryStudio e2 and DecoStudio e2, which incorporate a fully integrated CorelDRAW X5 and introduce a variety of practical embroidery design and

production tools and additional multi-decoration techniques such as rhinestone and sequins. Wilcom has 250,000 software licenses in use worldwide, 120,000 of them in the U.S.

5. Paul Gallagher, President and CEO, Hirsch International; Hitoshi Tajima, President, Tajima Industries Ltd.

2010 Rank: 1



Paul Gallagher

With more than 500,000 embroidery heads in operation in North America, Gallagher and Tajima fuel the 35-year partnership between Hirsch and Tajima that has solidified the companies' spot as the number-one embroidery machine provider in the U.S. In addition, Hirsch, which has raised its revenues by 35% over 2010, continues to provide cutting-edge software and equipment for embroidery, screen printing, digital printing and laser printing. This year, Tajima released

the TFMX-C1501S embroidery machine with the market's largest sewing field (21.5" by 23.5") and a full line of shuttle-hook machines.

6. Mike Ernst, CEO; John Fryer, General Manager Hanesbrands Imagewear Inc. (*asi/59528*)

New

Under Ernst's and Fryer's leadership, Hanesbrands reigns as a major supplier of T-shirts, sport shirts and fleecewear to the decorated apparel industry under the Hanes, Hanes Beefy-T, Champion and Outer Banks labels. Hanes, which has 55,000 employees in 25 countries, is a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2010 Energy Star Partner of the Year and ranks No. 91 on *Newsweek* magazine's Top 500 greenest U.S. company rankings. In 2010, the company's global revenues were \$4.3 billion, an increase of 11.2% over 2009.

Bootlegger to Industry Giant

14 **Dov Charney** American Apparel (asi/35297)

Dov Charney is proud to announce that he's gone from street vendor and bootlegger to industry giant in 25 years. "I love to wear my own garments and watch them be created and built," says the Canadian-born Charney, founder and CEO of American Apparel (asi/35297). "I'm a manufacturer. I'm turned on by the industrial experience."

Charney started selling T-shirts on

the street in the mid-'80s as a teenager. "I was supplying Hanes T-shirts that I was importing from the U.S. to Canada for my friends," he says. "I was a supplier of American T-shirts, which is why it's called American Apparel."

Eventually, Charney was arrested for illegally distributing shirts as a street vendor – something that he enjoys publicizing. "The judgment against me is on the Internet at Dovcharney.com," he says.

continued on page 33

“I’m like a virus.”

Dov Charney, American Apparel



7. Tas Tsonis and Brian Goldberg, Co-CEOs Pulse Microsystems Ltd.

2010 Rank: 10

As a technological leader in apparel-decorating solutions, Pulse's software consistently receives Microsoft certification, and in 2011 received 15 patents, for embroidery software. Under Tsonis' and Goldberg's 30 years of leadership, Pulse's products now span the apparel-embellishment spectrum. In addition to supplying the Tajima Pulse DG/ML by Pulse software that's used in more than 100 countries, Pulse in 2011 created design software for the two largest manufacturers of digital printing equipment: Brother International and Kornit Digital. Pulse also introduced a tablet-based digital-printing solution, Expressions T-shirts Designer for Apple's iPad.



Tas Tsonis



Brian Goldberg

8. Gerard Metrailler, Senior Director, Product Management, Graphics Corel Corp.

2010 Rank: 4



CorelDRAW remains the number-one graphics application in the apparel and garment space, with more than 100 million users worldwide. In 2011, Corel Corp. and partner Wilcom International released the latest versions of Wilcom DecoStudio e3 and Embroidery Studio e2 integrated with CorelDRAW Graphics Suite x5. The enhancements, Metrailler stresses, are designed to improve efficiencies in multi-decoration design, customer approvals and production.

9. Tom Myers, CEO; Hank Harrell, Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing

Broder Bros. Co. (asi/42090)

2010 Rank: 14



Tom Myers

Myers heads up the largest *Stitches* Top 25 Apparel Supplier firm in the ad specialty industry, with net sales in 2010 up 21% at \$368.7 million, thanks in part to Harrell's leadership. With eight distribution facilities, Broder is able to deliver next-day to 92% of the U.S. and carries 39 brands and more than 1,400 products, including 165 new styles and

continued on next page

Charney from page 32

Since then, Charney has been a self-described troublemaker in the industry. “They used to throw me out of trade shows when I was 20, 25, because I’d go meet with vendors in the hallways, but I wouldn’t get a booth,” he says. “I was a bootlegger at industry shows. I was a complete nuisance.”

Then, Charney began to make his own T-shirts in 1989. “When Hanes didn’t want to work with me, I started manufacturing my own thing,” he says. And, while American Apparel has certainly changed the industry for the better since then, it’s fair to say that Charney hasn’t changed, even though he keeps raking in the accolades – including being named 2004 Entrepreneur of the Year from Ernst & Young, ASI’s Person of the Year in 2004, and one of the 100 Most Powerful People of Southern California by the *Los Angeles Times*.

It may sound cliché, but to Charney, American Apparel is a lifestyle, not a job. “I don’t really go into work each day,” he says. “I just walk around with my cell phone in my factory, I work in hotel rooms, and I travel around the world. I’m continuously innovating. I’m like a virus. I try to keep getting stronger, and optimize operations and product lines that we’re making for distributors and decorators.”

American Apparel recently underwent a shakeup in upper management, as Adrian Kowalewski, who moved from CFO to executive vice president of corporate strategy in February, resigned in October to become CFO at Kellwood Company. John Lutrell, former executive vice president and CFO of Old Navy and Wet Seal Inc., took Kowalewski’s place as American Apparel’s CFO. “Adrian was an amazing part of this company,” Charney says. “He’s part of the alumni now, and this company wouldn’t be what it is without him.”

In the meantime, American Apparel hasn’t missed a beat. Charney has his company focused on producing “more and more retail-oriented products for the wholesale market,” such as collared shirts and cardigans. “We manufacture in the United States, we manufacture products that we love, and we manufacture products that our customers love,” he says. “We’re very committed to that.”

The most important thing that this former street vendor and bootlegger from the Great White North has learned is that hard work and continued education never go out of style. “Customers want retail, consumer-oriented products,” Charney says. “They’re not willing to settle for second class like they did 20 years ago. Watch your quality. Watch your service. You’ve got to make sure you have the right colors and stay on top of the trends. You’ve got to work twice as hard to lift the same brick. That’s what it’s all about.” – SD



Hank Harrell

two new brands (Ashworth and Hook & Tackle), in 2011. In addition to offering customers full-line distribution of some of the industry’s most popular brands (Gildan, Anvil, Bella and Fruit of the Loom), the supplier launched the “Selling What Sells” educational series, which teaches how to sell 26 apparel categories.

10. Dean F. Shulman, Senior Vice President, Home Appliance and Industrial Products Division Brother International Corp.

2010 Rank: 6



In the last five years, Shulman has positioned Brother as the technology leader in the home sewing and embroidery business, as well as introducing the Entrepreneur Pro PR1000e, the first 10-needle embroidery machine for hobbyists rather

than for commercial use. That technology innovation has allowed Brother’s sewing and embroidery business to grow 20% in a mature market. Along with sewing and embroidery equipment (1.6 million units sold in the last three years), Brother offers garment and laser printers and laser and inkjet multifunction products, which include scanning, digitizing, lettering and monogramming software, thread accessories and downloadable embroidery designs. Shulman hints that in 2012 Brother will enter a brand-new sphere and will introduce features in products that have never been available on sewing or embroidery products before.

11. Hajo Voeller, President and CEO Madeira USA Ltd.

2010 Rank: 16



With the most specialty threads (including rayon, metallics, wool and fire-retardant) available, Voeller ensured in 2011 that Madeira received the highest Oeko-Tex Certification possible, along with other international certifications for eco-friendly practices. In addition, Madeira had a laser-like focus on improving its 24,000 customers’ experience: revamping its educational websites (Madeirausa.com and Exeebacking.com) and its e-commerce site (Madeiramart.com); adding a customer service center in Birmingham, AL, allowing the company to deliver product to 89% of its customers in one day; and weekend customer service.

12. Mike Rhodes, President and CEO

Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788)

2010 Rank: 19



Bodek, which is number four on *Stitches’* Top Apparel Suppliers list, markets 38 brands to the wholesale industry (more than any other supplier), with its five warehouses touting a 99.5% accuracy rating on getting customer orders right the first time. Under Rhodes’ leadership, the supplier continues to enhance its efforts in the areas of social responsibility, product safety and CPSIA compliance by hiring a new quality and safety expert. Rhodes leads his staff in customer-focused efforts, including offering the cloud-based Apparel Design Studio, which allows decorators and distributors (and their customers) to create ready-to-decorate artwork and advanced virtual samples (designs on sides, sleeves and backs of apparel).



15 Personalizing the World

Mike Angel Melco

For Mike Angel, it's all about innovation through personalization.

Angel, who has been the vice president of sales and marketing for machine and software provider Melco since 2005, loves being at the forefront of new and improved decorating, digitizing and e-commerce processes. "We're always innovating and coming up with new and better ways to produce and decorate goods," he says. "Mass personalization is the next big thing – we've been pursuing it, and now it's becoming common" in the industry.

Angel defines mass personalization as a decorator's ability to make thousands of uniquely-decorated products for its customers. "That's much different than contract decorated-apparel production,

which could be thousands of the same item," he says. "We've developed solutions so that thousands of individual pieces can be made. It's very exciting to be able to actually deliver and produce those products; that's what we're striving to do."

This kind of individualized product offering is essential to satisfy customers who are used to getting just about anything they want from online sources, Angel says. Melco offers that through LiveDesigner Fusion, which allows companies to incorporate Melco's personalization capabilities through their retail websites. "More and more technology, especially Internet technology, allows users to shop online, and it gives customers the ability to deliver ways to express themselves – to

13. Craig Mertens, President and CEO; Jay Busselle, General Manager Digital Art Solutions (*asi/14970*)

2010 Rank: 20



Craig Mertens



Jay Busselle

Digital Art Solutions' President and CEO Mertens and General Manager Jay Busselle seemed to be everywhere in 2011 – at all the major industry trade shows, its eight DAS Roadshows, and training more than 10,000 companies on multi-decoration techniques. This year, Mertens added two new decorating processes, the Rhinestone Decal System and Stone Stencil Sequin System, to its already diverse product line of digital art content, graphics software (upgraded Smart Designer add-on graphics software for CorelDRAW X4 and X5), apparel decoration systems and training. DAS has had average annual growth of more than 10% over the last four years, and serves over 60,000 clients.

14. Dov Charney, CEO American Apparel (*asi/35297*)

2010 Rank: 24 See profile on page 32

15. Mike Angel, Vice President of Sales and Marketing Melco

2010 Rank: 17 See profile above

16. Garry Hurvitz, Owner; Dominique Au-Yeung, Executive Vice President Ash City USA (*asi/37127*)

New



Garry Hurvitz



Dominique Au-Yeung

Known for its extremely fashion-forward and eco-friendly styles, Ash City ranked number five on *Stitches'* Top 25 Apparel Suppliers list with \$132.5 million in 2010. Led by Hurvitz, who spends more than half his time in Asia and educates the industry about overseas manufacturing and Au-Yeung, the company produces orders of polo shirts at 48-piece minimums in as little as three weeks through its EZECUSTOM program. With EZECUSTOM, decorators and their clients can use an online tool at Ash City's website to form thousands of different looks.

17. Tetsuji Yamaue, CEO, Barudan; Bob Stone, Vice President, Barudan America Inc.

2010 Rank: 11



Tetsuji Yamaue



Bob Stone

Under Yamaue's and Stone's leadership, Barudan, which has eight offices worldwide and serves more than 100 countries, including factories in Japan, France and China, continues to provide customers with rugged, reliable embroidery equipment and award-winning customer service. Earlier this year, Barudan introduced its new X-Series multi-head embroidery machines, which are designed to sew faster. Barudan builds networkable embroidery machines from one to 56 heads in nine-, 12- and 15-needle configurations.

18. Jeff Adams and Paul Rohr, principals S&S Activewear (*asi/84358*)

New

Adams and Rohr lead S&S Activewear, which ranked fourth on *Stitches'* Top 25 Apparel

choose exactly the products they want,” he says.

Angel, who has worked in the embellishment industry since 1998 and was formerly the director of sales and marketing for Pantograms, has been at the forefront of software innovation since the last part of the 20th century. “In 1998, I was looking for a company that was developing its own Windows-based software. I used to sell the first computer-based video editing software,” he says. Then, Angel says, when Pantograms was writing its own Windows-based embroidery software, he took a training position, and eight months later, got back into sales.

Today, Angel makes sure Melco remains on the cutting edge of apparel-decoration technology, offering, for instance, a series of machines that have a unique way to deliver thread, called Actifeed. “The machine actually feeds the thread out instead of the thread being pulled into the machine,” he says. “The machine stitches at very high speeds, and it eliminates the issue of thread tension.”

This reduces the training curve to consumers by 70% to 80%, Angel says. “It’s the only machine like this. It’s something we’ve promoted, and it’s really making a lot of sense to people,” he says.

Angel also ensures Melco is considered a leader in industry education through webinars and its own social network, *Mymelcoworld.com*. “It’s a Bing-based social community, and it has about

“When people have the ability to personalize, to customize and order a product to their liking, it increases the value of that product to them.”

Mike Angel, Melco

2,000 members from around the world,” he says.

It’s the personalization angle – Melco’s slogan, after all, is “Personalizing the World” – that will allow Melco to always have a place in consumers’ minds when they plan to purchase their next piece of decorating equipment or software, Angel believes. “When people have the ability to personalize, to customize and order a product to their liking, it increases the value of that product to them, and the only limitation in the past was how to produce individual orders like that in mass quantities,” he says. “We felt that if we could bridge that gap, consumers would be drawn to that. And they are.” – SD



Jeff Adams

Suppliers biggest-growth list – its revenues rose 13% to \$130 million in 2010. In August, S&S partnered with InkSoft, allowing its customers to access InkSoft’s online design tool, Design Studio, to download production-ready graphics and develop e-mail proposals of their designs to end-buyers. S&S offers decorators a customizable website tool to display what’s available in the imprintable apparel market to their clients. The supplier, which ships from a central location near Chicago, offers 60 industry and retail brands and 1,500 styles, including organic, recycled and sustainable products.

19. Ira Neaman, President Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*)

2010 Rank: 13



apparel guru Neaman’s leadership, the company

The largest contract decorator in the industry, ASI Five-Star Supplier Vantage Apparel offers unmatched capabilities: embroidery, sequin embroidery, screen printing, digital printing, laser appliqué, laser-etching and reverse appliqué. Under

constantly innovates in its decorating techniques, such as adding heat transfers to its mix and its new CTS (computer-to-screen) screen-printing machine, which eliminates screens.

20. Anna Wintour, Editor-in-Chief Vogue

2010 Rank: 9



driving fashion trends by featuring new designers in *Vogue*, along with shaping 2011’s nod toward allover prints, ethnic embellishments and wider-spread use of embroideries and appliqués on the runway.

21. Edward Staton, CEO Staton Corporate and Casual (*asi/89380*)

New

Celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2011, Staton is giving away a brand-new Chevrolet Camaro to a client. This fun approach to customer service

Wintour, who has been described by director RJ Cutler in his *The September Issue* documentary as the “commander of the \$300-billion global fashion industry,” continues to reign as the most famous fashion journalist in the world,

is a key ingredient in how Staton has positioned his company; for example, the supplier’s monthly online newsletter, *Lea’s Retail Corner*, updates customers on fashion trends, and its marketing materials customers can use include branded-apparel flyers, videos and the chance to work with a Staton graphic artist to create ads, box stuffers and e-blasts. Debuting on *Stitches’* Top 25 Apparel List at number eight with \$117 million in 2010 revenue, the company has four warehouses and serves 16,000-plus wholesale customers.

22. George Westphal, Co-Founder and CEO Dakota Collectibles

New

Twin brothers George and Jerry Westphal, who were retail embroiderers, started Dakota Collectibles Embroidery Design Center in 1988. The Westphals saw the need in the commercial and home embroidery marketplace for a supplier to provide a large variety of high-quality, reasonably priced stock designs. Now, Westphal drives the growth of a company that’s the largest supplier of stock embroidery designs in the world. Featuring a design library with a diverse collection of 35 design family themes, Dakota has climbed to the top position in the stock design market by emphasizing customer service and speedy product delivery.

23. Cotton

New

Soaring costs of cotton, labor, electricity, oil, dyes and transportation are among decorators' challenges in selling apparel this year. The good news is that cotton costs have retreated from their historic highs; December cotton futures were at \$1.10/lb, a far cry from March's \$2.29 price. Still, relative to the traditional level, cotton prices are still high. That reality, combined with double-dip recession fears, creates considerable uncertainty about apparel prices in 2012 – suppliers say it's difficult to gauge which of their items' prices will increase, decrease or stay flat. Suppliers contacted by ASI believe cotton prices will end up between 90 cents and \$1.20 per pound, maintaining a price position analogous to gasoline, which peaked at a U.S. cost of roughly \$4 per gallon in 2008, before steadying at around \$3 the last 18 months. While most expect cotton prices to stay above \$1 per pound for some time, suppliers anticipate promotional apparel price hikes in 2011 will be capped at around 15%. Market analysts estimate cotton production will increase approximately 10% in the 2011/2012 crop year – this would result in the largest crop harvest ever recorded. However, while they predict a decrease in cotton prices, how big of a decrease is still up in the air.

24. Anthony Corsano, CEO Anvil Knitwear (*asi/36350*)

New



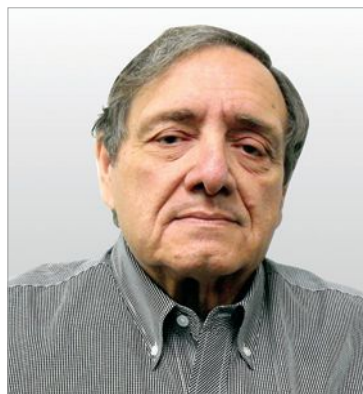
Under Corsano's leadership, Anvil is making a global impact with environmentally friendly initiatives. Recently, the Organic Exchange ranked the mill sixth on a list measuring brands and retailers that use the most organic cotton, and The Foundation for Social Change and the United Nations Office for Partnership recognized it as a leader in sustainability efforts. Anvil carries eco styles made from certified organic cotton and other eco-friendly materials. Corsano also developed a website (www.trackmyt.com) that chronicles the environmental impact of a T-shirt, from cottonseed to consumer. Efforts are paying off: Disney gave Anvil a "Most Sustainable Vendor" award, and 2011 sales were up double-digits.

25. Dick Ward, CEO and President River's End Trading Co. (*asi/82588*)

New

Ward leads River's End, which ranked second on *Stitches'* Top 25 Apparel Suppliers biggest-growth list – its revenues rose 17.7% to \$93.2 million in 2010. In August, River's End announced the merge of its River's End and Page & Tuttle divisions to form a single catalog

30 Decorated Apparel Game-Changer Gene Feil Dalco Athletic Lettering Co.



Gene Feil learned early on how important it was to follow his own business instincts.

"I was selling sporting goods for a chain in Dallas," recalls Feil, president of Dalco Athletic Lettering Co. "The owner died and his son came in, and his son and I disagreed on where the newest store location should be. So, I went out on my own because, realistically, the problem was I couldn't get anything lettered in town at the time."

It didn't take long for Feil's decision to be validated. "Eight months later, they went out of business," he says. Soon thereafter in 1969, Feil created Dalco – an acronym for Dew (his wife's name) Athletic Lettering Co. – in his single-car garage. Today, Feil enjoys a multi-million-dollar empire, a 30,000-plus-square-foot warehouse and 50 employees. "I enjoy creating new products – having the potential to do something new every day," he says.

Dalco revolutionized the decorated apparel industry with its water-jet cutting ability – which Feil says is his company's biggest accomplishment. "Back in the '80s, if you wanted to make a design for a customer, you had to go make a dye, you had to go get somebody to make it, you had to edit it and hope it was right and you had to start cutting it," he says.

Water-jet custom-cut lettering has, well, cut a massive amount of time, energy and stitching from that process. "We can take a design, create it and deliver it within a day or so," Feil says.



Tommy Hilfiger and IZOD: its private-label brand contains more than 100 styles of sport shirts, jackets, fleece, T-shirts and more.

and website destination for customers, including three new brands: Page & Tuttle, Jockey and Forsyth. River's End, which offers embroidery and screen-printing services, is known for its selection of retail brands, including Lacoste,

26. Jimmy Lamb, Education Manager, Consumer Division Sawgrass Technologies

2010: 33



To be in the decorated-apparel industry is to know Lamb, who has been a prolific industry educator for more than 20 years and delivers 50 seminars at industry shows a year. At Sawgrass, which provides digital printing solutions for customizing and personalizing

One of Dalco's watershed moments was when it demonstrated the efficiency of the water-cut process for a jacket that was used in a major feature film in 1991. "One of our customers in Chicago had a set price to sell a jacket for the movie *Backdraft*, and he couldn't get them delivered in time," Feil says. "There were more than 135,000 stitches in the design. We created the parts, cut the parts, and when we were done, the customer was able to sell it and only do about 28,000 stitches on the item. So, it

“I enjoy creating new products – having the potential to do something new every day.”

Gene Feil, Dalco Athletic Lettering Co.

embroiderers to pick from a series of style options, simply place precut letters on a piece of apparel, and let the automatic stitch file do the rest of the work.

One of Dalco's newest offerings is its dye-sublimation fabric printing, which allows for the creation of dye-sublimated letters. Dalco prepares finished dye-sub prints, customized or stock, on 100% poly-twill fabric. Applied by heat press or by sewing down the edges, the prints feature elaborate, full-color lettering, which sets the school, team or business apart from the crowd, says Mike Carter, Dalco's vice president of sales. "Graphics and colors are only limited by what the customer supplies or what we create for them," he says.

Ideas like StockStitch, water-jet cutters and other concepts that decorators have demanded have allowed Dalco to grow while many other industry players have come and gone – just like Feil's former coworker in the sporting goods store. "If you present a product that people want, meaning our artists or customers or whomever, we try to figure out which way to make it, and then make it usable to others," he says. – SD

consumer products, Lamb instructs upward of 4,000 people annually via his 40-plus webinars and other live training; more than 2,000 people have downloaded his e-book, *The Complete Guide to Sublimation Printing Success*. Also this year, Lamb perfected a multimedia decorating technique combining digitally printed fabric and appliqué for a unique, time-saving look.

was a big wide-awake moment for them, and of course, it was interesting to see our stuff on all the crew. We were at a sporting goods show in Chicago when they were filming it, and we got to see the product."

Dalco has made its mark in the decorated-apparel industry many times, such as with the creation of StockStitch in the mid-'90s, which empowers

27. Rick Mouty, CEO Profill Holdings (TSC Apparel and Wear Magic) (asi/300152)

New



It was a busy year for Mouty and Profill Holdings, whose subsidiaries include TSC Apparel (asi/90518) and Wear Magic (asi/95765). Profill, ranked 10th on the *Stitches* Top 25 Apparel Suppliers list, generated double-digit

revenue growth, acquired Houston-based All Star Activewear and expanded its lines of T-shirts, fleece, polos, wovens, outerwear and headwear.

That followed a 2010 in which net sales – \$76.5 million – increased 8.2% over 2009. With a five-year growth rate of 27%, 20,000 clients and a 4.8-out-of-5 ASI Supplier rating, it's clear Mouty and his team of 40 sales reps, 151 production workers and 23 customer service employees are doing something very right.

28. Ray Titus, CEO EmbroidMe (asi/384000)

2010 Rank: 5



The world's largest embroidery franchise chain, with 1,470 heads in operation, EmbroidMe under Titus' leadership boasts nearly 10 straight years of growth since the company began, has operated 400 retail locations since 2009

in 12 countries and serves 400,000-plus clients. While having hundreds of retail locations has been a crucial element of EmbroidMe's success, offering products online is also an important part of the company's draw for end-buyers who want screen printing, garment printing, decorated apparel and uniforms, promotional products and personalized gifts. EmbroidMe offers extensive training for new franchisees, and 44 individuals have completed training in the last year.

29. Oil New

Higher oil prices have affected the cost of synthetic fabric production on outerwear, polos, and even basic layering pieces. As the cost of petroleum-based polyester yarn rose in the wake of crude-oil increases and growing demand, some polyester items started to cost more, too. Decorators paid 10%-15% more for polyester apparel in recent months. Then there are freight costs, which have been driven up by increasing fuel prices – an approximate 30% increase in the per-gallon cost of gas between March 2010 and March 2011. In fact, shipping prices accelerated rapidly in recent months; one decorator, for example, was slapped with a \$600 shipping charge not long after being quoted \$293 for the same shipping. Polyester prices, already heightened, are also difficult to predict, as they're contingent on demand and oil prices that are affected by market speculation and stability in notoriously unstable oil-producing countries. For now, decorators are weathering the storm as best they can, banking on a brighter 2012.

30. Gene Feil, President Dalco Athletic Lettering Co.

New See profile on page 36

46 Punk Rock CEO

Ryan Moor

Ryonet Corp.

In seven years, Ryan Moor went from a punk-rock guitarist who washed windows to make ends meet to the founder and CEO of Ryonet Corp., an online screen-printing equipment and supply company poised to generate \$25 million in sales in 2011. Even more impressive, the still spiky-haired father of young twins is only 30 years old. However, the entrepreneur is quick to deflect praise from himself to his devoted team of 75 employees, whose commitment to customer service is the engine powering the company's success. "We've gotten where we are because we're customer-centric and team-centric," Moor says. "It's all come from being fanatical about our customers."

Those efforts have paid off. Ryonet's projected revenue for 2011 marks a 25% increase over the prior year. The company estimates it has sold more than 25,000 screen-printing presses, 20,000 screen-printing packages and 40,000 educational DVDs in the U.S. In the last six years, Ryonet has taught over 4,000 people how to screen print in hands-on classes in Los Angeles, Washington state, Arkansas and New York. The number of people Ryonet has educated skyrockets when you consider that the company's online tutorial and tip videos are watched by millions; the business' YouTube channel (YouTube.com/user/Ryonet) had no fewer than



31. Phil Rubin, CEO; Eric Rubin, President Blue Generation (asi/40653)

2010 Rank: 22



Phil Rubin



Eric Rubin

Blue Generation, which is best known for its incomparable color and size selection, offered 60 color combinations for 2011, as well as sizes up to 10XL and Tall. In 2011, the ASI Five-Star Supplier launched a new customer-focused website, which allows them to order online, check inventories and shipping information and use marketing tools. The Rubins run a family-owned multinational company with production facilities in Egypt that handle all aspects of the apparel manufacturing process, from spinning thread to dyeing fabric. Since the supplier runs a totally vertical operation, it's able to restock its inventories quickly and efficiently.

32. Owen Dunne, Director Robison-Anton Division, American & Efird Inc.

2010 Rank: 25



Dunne oversees the Robison-Anton division of American & Efird, a leading threadmaker serving 10,000 customers. Robison-Anton's newest product is Signature Fine Embroidery Thread for fine-detail lettering. Dunne ensures his products are Oeko-Tex Certified and made in the U.S. A&E's sales exceeded \$300 million last year; the company was set to be acquired in the fourth quarter of 2011 by KPS Capital Partners LP, a family of private equity funds with over \$2.7 billion in assets. "We are impressed by KPS' commitment to manufacturing excellence, which will enable us to continue to provide our customers with industry-leading products and superior service," says A&E Chief Executive Fred Jackson.

33. Scott Colman, CEO ColDesi Inc.

2010 Rank: 18



Formerly SWF East, Colman renamed the company this year to ColDesi Inc., which as of 2011 became the exclusive North American importer of DTG direct-to-garment printers and CAMS automated rhinestone setters, and remains the eastern U.S. distributor of SWF embroidery machines. Under Colman's leadership, the company supplies 5,000 customers with apparel-decorating equipment and suppliers and focuses on education by hosting five Apparel Decorating Extravaganzas annually.

34. Daniel Tsai, Owner; Jennifer Tsai, Vice President Tri-Mountain/Mountain Gear (asi/92125)

New



Daniel Tsai

The Tsais lead a forward-thinking company that ranks 11th on *Stitches'* list of top 25 apparel suppliers in the advertising specialty industry.

“We’ve gotten where we are because we’re customer-centric and team-centric. It’s all come from being fanatical about our customers.”

Ryan Moor, Ryonet Corp.

5,700 subscribers and 4.9 million upload views as of press time.

Beyond delivering top-notch customer service, Ryonet’s success has been spearheaded by robust marketing efforts and a concentrated focus on filling a niche – that of being a one-stop online shop for screen-printing supplies, equipment and education. “We figured out how many customers equaled how many dollars, and we put a lot of energy into getting people to our website,” Moor says. He says search engine optimization, fueled in part by online videos and aggressive link swapping, helped ramp up Ryonet’s sales. He also credits word-of-mouth marketing with vaulting the company from one plateau to the next. The positive talk often comes from customers who are satisfied with the products and service they get from Ryonet and attracted to the company’s fun, youthful culture.

Indeed, while Moor no longer plays rock shows, he and his team keep the company vibe rock ‘n’ roll. “We hire cool screen printers, people who were in bands,” Moor says. “The energy is attractive to a lot of customers. People flock to it.” That energy was evident at a recent Imprinted Sportswear Show. The Ryonet booth featured a live guitarist, blaring AC/DC tunes and \$10,000 worth of giveaways

that were tossed out to attendees. “Something like that can be just as much fun as playing a concert,” says Moor, some of whose online videos are, for customers’ pleasure, irreverently comedic.

Music and screen printing are inextricably twined in Moor’s life. He started screen printing to make T-shirts for his band. Eventually, he started building screen-printing press kits and selling them on eBay. Early success encouraged Moor to launch a website – Silk-screeningsupplies.com (the same he runs today) – and hire a buddy to help him. In 2004, with his band hitting a “rough patch” while on tour and orders pouring in from the website, Moor had an epiphany. “At that point, my passion changed from music to building a business,” he says.

Moor has turned that passion into reality with the help of a staff he can barely go a sentence without complimenting. Amped by a cool company culture and commitment to great service and products, Ryonet’s sail is poised to catch wind for a long time to come. “It’s just been amazing to be part of helping our customers grow, and we’re thankful to them every day,” Moor says. – *Christopher Ruvo*



Jennifer Tsai

In 2010, net sales increased to \$61 million, a 20.6% spike over 2009; 2011 will be up 15%-20% over 2010. Tri-Mountain continued the positive momentum in 2011, launching 200 new products this year, including items in the popular Lilac Bloom line, which features trendy corporate casual attire for women. The company also deepened inventory and invested in technology upgrades that improved efficiency.

35. Susan Ritchie, Arch Ritchie and Jennifer Cox, Co-Founders
National Network of Embroidery Professionals (NNEP) (*asi/187622*)
2010 Rank: 27



Susan Ritchie

The Ohio-based trade association that’s often the gateway for new embroiderers into the industry boasts more than 2,600 members; through its events, advice and logistical assistance, as well as member benefits and savings, NNEP continues to be an asset to the



Arch Ritchie



Jennifer Cox

36. Josh Peyser, President
MV Sport/Weatherproof (*asi/68318*)
New

Peyser has spearheaded growth at MV Sport/Weatherproof, whose net sales topped \$60 million in 2010. Ranked 12th on *Stitches*’ list of leading apparel suppliers, MV Sport/

commercial embroidery industry. NNEP recently launched two online services: Supplier-Finder.net, an online directory of industry suppliers’ websites, and EmbWebsites.com, an affordable website solution for decorating businesses. The Ritchies and Cox answer more than 4,000 decorator questions a year, including pricing, embroidery-specific techniques, product design, logo placement, product sourcing and bid development.



Weatherproof built on last year’s success in 2011, with sales surging 10%. Offering trendy windshirts, hoodies, vintage tees, piqué polos and more, the supplier’s line appeals to many audiences. Powered by an in-housing decorating setup with 240 embroidery heads, 12 automatic screen-printing presses and a large domestic laser-cutting operation, MV Sport/Weatherproof recently added oversized printing machines. In 2012, MV Sport/Weatherproof is adding soft-shell jackets, fashion fleece styles, and fresh colors and patterns in its best-selling sweatshirt blanket.

37. Thomas Moore Jr., President
Strawberry Stitch Co.
2010 Rank: 36

Moore is considered one of the most influential digitizers in the industry because of his punching work (he’s won over 40 digitizing and design awards) and dedication to educating digitizers. Strawberry Stitch’s Embroidery Design School teaches computer graphics with a decorated-apparel focus, combined with digitizing theory centered on Moore’s widely-referenced manual, *Digitizing 101* (*Digitizing 210* debuts next



month). He recently launched Tees 4 Tuition (www.ts4tuition.com), a college sales initiative tapping the campus apparel market, mentoring college students and providing tuition to sales reps. Moore has a client base of 12,000 and works with manufacturers Williams-Sonoma, Pottery Barn, Chambers Bedding, Eddie Bauer and Lands' End.

38. John P. Colman, CEO and President Pantograms Manufacturing Co. Inc.

New



Under Colman's 30-plus years of leadership, Pantograms has become a leading equipment supplier to the garment embellishment industry. The company carries top brands – everything from Expert and Meistergram embroidery machines to DTG direct-to-garment printers and Colman's proprietary Forté Lettering, Editing and Digitizing software products. This year, Pantograms introduced the Digital Heat FX department, which carries Drucktech heat-press equipment, Graphtec line cutters and Forever digital transfer application papers. Through its Embroidery Academy, Pantograms has trained thousands of commercial embroiderers.

39. Jens Petersson, CEO Cutter & Buck (asi/47965)

New



Petersson drove Cutter & Buck's 9.3% year-over-year sales growth in 2010. Sales were up in all channels this year, positioning Cutter & Buck to pass last year's \$55 million tally. In 2011, the corporate and lifestyle wear company expanded its apparel programs and moved to a new Web architecture (www.cbcorporate.com). The Seattle-based supplier will embrace its regional heritage with a new brand identity: "Genuine Spirit of the Pacific Northwest," introducing a denim-based fashion line and unveiling a modernized logo. Cutter & Buck serves 3,500 clients and ranks 13th on *Stitches'* Top 25 Apparel Suppliers list.

40. Chris Waldick, Founder and President JCW Software LLC

2010 Rank: 23



Waldick's company created FastManager, which has become the most-used business-management software for small and mid-size decorators. With technology lowering the barriers to entry into this business each

Embroidery's 'Evil Genius'

54 Niamh O'Connor Urban Threads

Niamh O'Connor's job title – art director/evil genius – is quirky, playfully dark and irreverent.

Those same adjectives apply to the refreshingly offbeat embroidery designs O'Connor and her team create at Urban Threads, a division of Embroidery Library Inc. From skulls and gothic-styled aces of spades to haunted castles, monsters and ghosts, the designs are an intentional departure from what's found in traditional stock libraries. O'Connor is among those leading the way in creating designs that appeal to an alternative sensibility that many feel has long been underserved.

"It really spans ages," O'Connor says of the 10,000-plus hand and machine embroiderers using Urban Threads' designs. "Everyone from young, hip moms to people in their sixties tell me they've been looking for these kinds of designs for years and are so glad to have found them." Having such an expansive customer demographic has helped fuel growth each year since Urban Threads was founded in 2008. Plus, O'Connor and her team have generated customers by encouraging crafters and artists to explore the potential in embroidery. "We've worked hard to capture the imagination of the growing DIY community, and to offer fresh designs in tune with today's contemporary trends and fashions," O'Connor says.

A child of the new media generation, 26-year-old O'Connor is a leader among decorators when it comes to capitalizing on the market-



ing power of social media, blogging and online video. As of press time, Urban Threads' Facebook page (Facebook.com/urbanthreadsembroidery) had nearly 7,500 followers. The "Stitchpunk" blog on Urbanthreads.com covers a variety of topics, including a piece called "Urban Entrepreneurs," which features "stitchy sellers of any kind who have decided to take the plunge (with the help of some Urban Threads designs) and start their

“Everyone from young, hip moms to people in their sixties tell me they’ve been looking for these kinds of designs for years and are so glad to have found them.”

Niamh O’Connor, Urban Threads

own small biz,” O’Connor says. The online tutorials Urban Threads creates appeal to a crafty, alternative audience. “We’ve shown everything from creating boots out of an old sweater to teaching people how to use their machines to make steampunk accessories,” says O’Connor, referring to a neo-Victorian aesthetic that has inspired a subculture.

Terms like “steampunk” and abstract skull art may make some uncomfortable, though Urban Threads’ designs are more akin to Tim Burton-esque animation than they are the genuinely macabre. O’Connor is heartened when Urban Threads helps inspire

embroiderers who initially may balk at a piece that features, say, the Grim Reaper. “Someone from a traditional embroidery background may not be into skulls, but it’s exciting when you see them accept those styles and get interested in trying something different,” O’Connor says.

While O’Connor is a trendsetter in the embroidery world now, the self-described “kid who was always drawing and bleaching designs into my jeans” knew nothing about the medium until her internship at Embroidery Library a few years ago. “I was studying illustration and took the internship because I’d get to draw every day,” she says.



“When I got here, I was fascinated by this whole new world.”

After graduating art school, O’Connor worked for Embroidery Library full-time. She discovered there was a dearth of the type of designs she wanted to stitch on her clothes —

such as gothic skulls and steampunk art. Only six months into her first job, she pitched the concept of Urban Threads to Embroidery Library President Debra Munding, who gave the green light. Since then, O’Connor has led Urban Threads’ charge to push the boundaries of embroidery and its applications. “From fine-art pieces using machine embroidery to involving our customers in community support to pushing the boundaries of fashion, we’re constantly reevaluating where machine embroidery can be used in a wide range of styles, communities and industries,” O’Connor says. — CR

year, embroiderers and screen printers are able to enter the marketplace; FastManager now has over 2,500 users, more than double from 1,200 last year. The company upgraded FastManager in 2011, with a planned April 2012 release of all-new FastManager 5 and a move toward housing most, if not all, data on the Web and compatibility with mobile devices.

41. Chase Roh, Ph.D., Founder and Board Member AnaJet Inc. (asi/16000)

2010 Rank: 32



Roh founded the 27th-fastest-growing private company in the U.S. With 3,000 customers, it holds the largest market share in direct-to-garment printers in America and recently expanded into 45 countries. This year, AnaJet released the lightning-fast mPower printer, which prints a 12"x 10" light shirt graphic in about 16 seconds. Earlier in 2011, Chicago Growth Partners, an investment capital firm, made a substantial investment in AnaJet, intending to continue the company's growth, which has exceeded 30% for the past four years. Roh oversaw the capital due diligence and the vetting and installation of a new CEO, Greg Nathanson.

42. Dale Call, CEO Virginia T's (asi/93917)

New



Call leads an apparel supplier with a 27-year history that carries a wide range of apparel types from about 60 brands, including Gildan, Hanes, Reebok and Mossy Oak. In 2010, net sales for the Petersburg, VA-based company topped \$51.7 million, a 36% increase over 2009. Backed up by three warehouses, Call heads a workforce that serves 10,000 clients. Virginia T's ranks 15th on *Stitches'* list of the top 25 apparel suppliers.

43. Richard Hirsch, Managing Director Amann USA

New



Hirsch leads a company whose share of the polyester embroidery thread market stands at an impressive 60%. Amann laid the foundation for attaining that majority when it introduced the first polyester thread capable of doing high-quality work in 1987. Due to innovations Amann spearheaded under Hirsch, polyester thread accounts for a 60% share of the marketplace.



56 Always Going Greener Christopher Bernat Vapor Apparel (asi/93396)

A northeastern transplant who grew up in New Jersey, Christopher Bernat has made himself at home in the South. Bernat, chief revenue office and co-founder of Vapor Apparel (asi/93396), has lived in South Carolina for about 12 years.

Bernat and his business partner, Jackson Burnett, founded Vapor Apparel seven years ago, but they've only been in the wholesale market for the

last two. "Jackson and I were both working in the digital-print space," he says. "He spent a lot of time in the apparel and yarn business, so we started making performance apparel engineered specifically for sublimation printing, which is a pretty fast-growing digital print solution in the marketplace."

Bernat says this sublimation-specific apparel is "particularly powerful" in the wholesale arena

“We’ve grown through the Lehman Brothers collapse, through the real estate bubble, and we were one of the 20 fastest-growing companies in South Carolina last year.”

Christopher Bernat, Vapor Apparel (asi/93396)

44. Gary Schultz, CEO Edwards Garment Co. (asi/51752)

New



Schultz heads an apparel supplier with 12,000-plus clients, 40 sales reps, 80 production employees, 20 customer service workers and two warehouses. His leadership drove Edwards' 8.4% sales increase in 2010,

when the Kalamazoo, MI-based supplier netted \$47.8 million; sales are up 15% year-over-year. Ranked 17th on *Stitches'* list of top 25 apparel suppliers, Edwards is a leader in career, casual and uniform apparel. Schultz educates decorators on product design and construction and on various market opportunities, including lodging and hospitality. In business since 1867, Edwards' new products include a men's high performance polo, a women's V-neck sweater and a women's soft-touch blended polo.

45. Razgo Lee, President Otto International (asi/75350)

New

Lee leads "America's largest cap source," a supplier with a dizzying array of cap styles, from flat-bills with flipped fronts to military-style caps and five and six panel hats featuring a host

of embellishments (which Otto decorates). Otto also supplies jersey knit T-shirts and piqué knit sports shirts. In 2010, Otto's net sales increased 2% to \$25.5 million. Lee oversees five sales reps, 22 production workers and 67 customer service employees who power a company with over 30,000 customers. Ranked 22 on *Stitches'* list of top 25 apparel suppliers, Otto won a bronze in the caps/headwear category of the 2011 Promo Marketing Supplier Excellence Awards.

46. Ryan Moor, CEO Ryonet Corp.

New See profile on page 38

47. Joyce Jagger, Owner Embroidery Tips & More

2010 Rank: 28



Embroidery Tips & More, Jagger's busy 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 200 how-to videos), numerous DVD series, monthly webinars and live phone chats, e-newsletters and a blog (EmbroideryBusinessSuccess.com). Jagger, who

has 250 students at any one time, estimates she has trained more than 2,500 decorator business owners. She will launch a new, advanced training site called *EmbroideryExpertsAcademy.com* and has recently been instrumental in incorporating embroidery into Rhode Island School of Design's Textile Department.

48. Lee Caroselli Barnes, Owner Balboa Threadworks Inc.

2010 Rank: 41



Besides being recognized as one of the industry's top digitizers, since 1987 Caroselli's company has amassed 50,000 clients who purchase Balboa's stock embroidery designs that now incorporate graphics and bling, digitizing software and training services. Recognizing the trend of embroiderers and graphic artists embracing each others' disciplines, Caroselli introduced low-contrast backgrounds to complement embroidery designs. In the near future, Balboa will unveil a franchise online storefront for clients to use for their businesses, and Caroselli is penning a book on digitizing.

because there's no minimum order and no limitation on color in the graphics. "So, we basically sell mass-customized performance apparel," he says.

And while this Clemson graduate tends to bleed orange, Bernat has pushed his business toward green territory. "All of our facilities in North America and our main corporate offices are in a LEED-certified building, which verifies that the building is green," he says. "Light sources and the removal of bad materials are ways you get points, and we have low-water-use facilities."

Vapor Apparel's fastest-growing line is its apparel made of recycled plastic. "We have a strategic partnership with a company called Unifi, which has a yarn that's 50% recycled that we put into our performance garments," he says. "Our inks are also green. Sublimation inks are aqueous, or water-based. We also buy recycled transfer paper. We're always adding to our layer of green."

Bernat is all about convincing his clients that green is the way to go – not just for

the environment, but for the sake of corporate image. "If corporate customers can say, 'We're outfitting ourselves in recycled clothing,' it can help develop their own green strategy," he says.

By capitalizing on the eco-friendly trend, Vapor Apparel has bucked the American recession and increased sales by 25% this year compared to 2010. "We've grown through the Lehman Brothers collapse, through the real estate bubble, and we were one of the 20 fastest-growing companies in South Carolina last year," he says. "I'm sure we're going to make that 20 list again with this year's growth. We've grown from two to 25 employees in seven years."

In the past year, Vapor Apparel added an allover-print program, expanded its women's line, and won two awards in the digital print division at the Imprinted Sportswear Show in Fort Worth, TX. "What I really like is that the guy who won first place and had some great promotional content was

actually using a Vapor Apparel blank, so we kind of ran the category anyway," Bernat says.

But Bernat's biggest success in the past year also happens to be his biggest passion – preserving the environment. "At the end of the day, I make clothes that are made out of petroleum-based materials," he says. "I'm not going to pretend that's not the case, but we do it as sustainably as possible."

The Garden State transplant is determined to make his family's future a happy and healthy one. "I've got kids. I live in a beautiful place. I see what happens when things go wrong. The BP oil spill drove me nuts," he says. "We have a factory in Colombia, the 10th-greenest country on the planet according to the Yale Environmental Performance Index. Over 70% of Colombia's entire power grid is renewable energy. If we can get to, say, 10% around here, we'd be doing windings. That, to us, is a comprehensive green strategy." – SD

49. Smart Textiles

New

Smart textiles go beyond the ABCs of performance apparel, which traditionally refers to features such as wicking ability or antibacterial qualities. A new generation of wearable technology is unfolding with innovations in microelectronics that can power devices, monitor health or light up the wearer. MC10, a Cambridge, MA company, has created "conformal electronics platforms" – highly flexible, bendable electronics like wiring, microchips and electrodes that can be embedded, for example, in a spandex shirt. In May, four students from Denmark's Aalborg University won the Future Textiles International Prize Competition 2011 for their smart textile project, Powertex: a nano-powered material that automatically charges mobile phones and computers when the devices are placed on the fabric. Philips Research is leading a team of institutes and companies via a project called PLACE-it. These researchers have explored the use of lightweight, flexible optoelectronics systems that could, for example, integrate light therapy into a baby's blanket or create illuminating jackets to safeguard children while cycling or walking in the dark.

50. Mark Venit, Chairman; Jay Malanga, President Shopworks

2010 Rank: 35



Mark Venit



Jay Malanga

ShopWorks is primarily known for its industry-specific OnSite software that handles marketing, pricing, sales, administration, accounting and finance. Venit and Malanga's other products include OrdersLink, a Web-based order-status application; and PromoStores, a Web-based e-commerce system to streamline order fulfillment. The team is working on offering touch-screen interfaces and adapting their products to mobile devices. Currently, 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 also recently released a book: *The Business of T-shirts*.

51. Mark Wasson, President Gunold USA

New



The "go-to" embroidery supply source for Lands' End, New Era, Polo and even the Boy Scouts, Gunold USA has introduced many products that have become industry standards. Those include Sulky rayon embroidery thread, the first embroidery spray adhesive, the original self-adhesive stabilizer and Solvy, the landmark water-soluble embroidery topping for which Gunold gained a trademark under Wasson's leadership. The company also offers Sulky rayon and other specialty threads and backings, along with Sierra Stitch Era digitizing software. Through the "Learn and Touch" education series initiated under Wasson, Gunold, partnering with industry educators such as Deborah Jones, has trained hundreds of embroiderers nationally.



66 One-Stop Solutions Provider

Joanna Grant Affinity Express

Joanna Grant and her husband founded Affinity Express because – well, it just made a lot of sense.

“We had an embroidery company, and we were doing embroidery for a client that also had digitizing in-house, as did we, but we weren’t supporting that area,” says Grant, who’s also Affinity’s vice president of graphic production and support services. “They came to us one day and said they were being crushed in one area of the business: They could sew everything they needed to sew, but couldn’t get anything on the shelves in time because of the backlog in the digitizing area.”

So, the company asked Grant if Affinity could start hammering out designs for them. She explained that this was easier said than done. “We said, ‘You can’t just switch on digitizing on that level by snapping your fingers,’ ” she says. “So, they said, ‘Why don’t we explore a partnership

whereby we build a digitizing unit? This problem isn’t just going to go away.’ ”

That partnership was formed in 1992, and it led to what Grant believes to be the first-ever outsourced digitizing model. “We brought people to North America, trained them for a year and sent them back overseas,” she says. “We had just a handful of people at that point, and it’s just taken off since then. We’ve since grown and have numerous digitizers, artists and designers.” Affinity now has two facilities: one in Manila, Philippines, and a bigger one in India. “We’re running at just under 1,000 employees,” Grant says.

At the end of 2006, Ayala Corp., the Philippines’ oldest business house (founded in 1834) acquired Affinity Express. “It’s been a wonderful change. They’re very supportive of our growth plans,” Grant says. “They want to

52. François Lesage and Jean-François Lesage, Founders House of Lesage

2010 Rank: 15



François Lesage



Jean-François Lesage

François Lesage is often regarded as the greatest living embroiderer. Now in his 80s, Lesage’s hand-embroidery has been prized in France’s haute couture for decades. He’s been called the “king of embroidery” and “the last embroiderer.” France’s top designers still seek Lesage’s work; Chanel acquired his fashion house, Lesage Paris, nine years ago, and new designs continue to emerge from there. Lesage’s family has been in the trade since the 1800s, and his son, Jean-François, opened the House of Lesage in Madras, India, where much of the world’s embroidery work has migrated. The world’s only retail Lesage store is located in Paris.

53. Ed Levy, President Digitize4u Inc./EmbForum; Director of Software Products, Hirsch International

New



Not only has digitizing guru Levy trained thousands of embroiderers and digitizers, he started the first and largest online, independent professional industry group for embroidery software users (that just celebrated its 10th year). Among the first to use webinars and other video-based training to educate decorators and digitizers, Levy, an expert in specialized techniques like 3-D foam, appliqué, multimedia and small lettering, extends his influence by routinely penning informative articles for leading industry publications. Throw in his role as director of software for Hirsch International, and you have a man whose positive guidance reverberates to all corners of the embroidery world.

54. Niamh O’Connor, Art Director Urban Threads

New See profile on page 40

55. Michael Robertson, President and CEO Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA)

2010 Rank: 49



SGIA has experienced dramatic change, driven by the introduction of digital imaging and other technologies. Robertson realizes the success of his members isn’t based on a single technology, but on their ability to serve clients. In the last year, SGIA emerged as the leading association for wide-format digital imaging and specialty imaging applications. SGIA represents 3,000-plus companies and 15,000 imaging professionals. In 2011, its membership grew – and now incorporates companies with no prior print background. The SGIA Expo was recognized by Trade Show Executive’s Gold 100 Awards as the trade show with the ‘most dramatic growth’ among the 100 largest trade shows in 2010.

56. Christopher Bernat, Chief Revenue Officer and Co-Founder

Vapor Apparel (asi/93396)

2010 Rank: 51 See profile on page 42

see us succeed and will do everything they can to see us get there. And that's helped us step up into markets that, as a player, you have to be very strong in."

That support has led to Affinity becoming a multidimensional company that satisfies much more than apparel needs. "Because we have a very wide range of skill sets, we can apply those skills to whatever our customers require," Grant says. "I may be asked to be a digitizer for a cap company. Then, they'll learn that we're also a marketing company, and we'll sell them brochures. We'll do the pre-press type of work."

Grant says the marketing programs Affinity creates are particularly successful. "We do e-mail blasts, website development, and different ad types, such as banner ads, social media ads and higher-end Flash ads," she says. "That's where our biggest growth is at this point in time."

Affinity's sales are projected to far surpass those of 2010 because of its constant "evolution," according to Grant. "To be staying still in this day and age for us or for anyone is a mistake," she says. "We've really moved into other areas because very like-minded designers can handle a wide range of capabilities."

With the roller-coaster economy and "the stresses on everybody globally for the most economically viable solutions across the board, there's resulting pricing pressure and competition right

“To be staying still in this day and age for us or for anyone is a mistake. We’ve really moved into other areas because very like-minded designers can handle a wide range of capabilities.”

Joanna Grant, Affinity Express

now," Grant says. "But for many years, it's been a great ride. We've enjoyed it immensely."

And it all began as a simple, common-sense partnership nearly 20 years ago. "It was kind of an unmet need that we had and our clients had, and we took it from there," she says. "It's been a lot of fun, I must say." — SD

57. Steve Garnier, CEO

Epilog Laser

2010 Rank: 42

Epilog Laser has led the way in providing CO2 laser-engraving systems to everyone from businesses to home craftsmen since 1988. Garnier has spearheaded the innovation and sales efforts that have enabled Epilog to build a client list of nearly 30,000 in Europe and the U.S. Epilog continued its record-breaking sales success of recent years in 2011, selling more units in August than any previous August and moving a record number of systems in a single week in September. Innovation continued apace too; Epilog secured a patent for its Waveguide laser tubes, the core component of the company's heralded laser system.

58. Fred Lebow, Consultant and Developer

Nonwovens, Cotswold Industries

2010 Rank: 40



Lebow, who has worked with Cotswold for 20-plus

years developing its entire line of stabilizers, is so well-known in the industry as an educator and the go-to person for stabilizer help that his name has almost become synonymous with backings.

Considered the guru of stabilizers for the embroidery industry, 30-year veteran Lebow's most recent success was with Cotswold's new Eco Stick, a biodegradable tearaway stabilizer that's been received enthusiastically in the market.

years developing its entire line of stabilizers, is so well-known in the industry as an educator and the go-to person for stabilizer help that his name has almost become synonymous with backings.

59. Michael Savoia, Owner

Villa Savoia Inc.

2010 Rank: 31



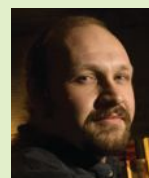
Savoia is well-known for using hand-guided and computerized embroidery techniques to create trendsetting embroidery and appliqué work for the high-end interior design industry. In 2011, the Hollywood, CA-based trendsetter, whose Fortuny pillows are sold exclusively in New York and Venice, Italy showrooms, branched out into hands-on mentoring, guest-teaching an embroidery class at the Rhode Island School of Design.

60. Erich Campbell, Digitizer/E-commerce Manager

Black Duck Inc. (asi/140730)

New

Campbell has established himself as a leading digitizer, winning numerous awards for his punching work. His growing industry influence is



compounded by oft-updated educational Black Duck Inc. and *On Links and Needles* blogs that have won rave reviews, and an insightful bi-monthly column in *Stitches*. A true Renaissance man with a passion for technology, Campbell is a leader among

decorators in religiously using social media to generate business, and in designing, maintaining and leveraging e-commerce capabilities (building wildly successful online company stores for Black Duck clients) to spur greater profits.

61. Deborah Jones, Owner

MyEmbroideryMentor.com

2010 Rank: 50



Jones is an embroidery author, educator and sought-after lecturer with more than 30 years of experience working with computerized embroidery techniques for apparel and accessories. This year, as part of her extensive efforts to teach embroiderers through in-person classes, Jones launched, with Gunold USA, a program that offers a certificate of proficiency in embroidery for those who complete her interactive embroidery education sessions. Jones' articles, 25,000-subscriber newsletter, and private consulting, videos and seminars earned her a

Floriani Lifetime Achievement Award. She'll be the headline speaker on embroidery topics at 2012 Imprinted Sportswear Shows.

62. Akira Ikeda, President Mimaki Engineering

2010 Rank: 39

Ikeda spearheads a company at the forefront of providing high-speed inkjet printers and cutting plotters to the decorating industry. This year, Mimaki increased consolidated employees from 842 to 889, grew sales by an estimated 10% and introduced a number of new products, including new printers, like the UJF-3042, and the TP250 textile pigment ink, which allows print service providers to eliminate steaming and washing in the finishing process, reducing pollution.

63. Michael Perich, Interim President/CFO Bernina of America

2010 Rank: 45

Bernina, which estimates several hundred thousand of its machines are running in U.S. businesses, offers sewing and embroidery machines, sergers and embroidery software and has grown consistently since its 1969 inception. Replacing President Martin Favre, Perich's hopes to expand the company's reach to the industry's next generation. The company launched a blog to provide a forum for sewers, embroiderers and quilters to connect, share ideas and get expert insight; www.WeAllSew.com offers tutorials, product information and stitching ideas. In 2011, Bernina released 4,000 B 830 LE embroidery machines, and its latest Bernina 5 Series includes higher-end embroidery and sewing features.

64. Vasilis Thomaidis, President and CEO Compucon

2010 Rank: 34



Since 1982, Thomaidis' Greece-based firm has produced a variety of embroidery and laser-engraving software under its own brand as well as OEM brands. Over 5,000 Compucon systems are installed in more than 60 countries. The systems combine digital technology and image processing, automated design and production (CAD/CAM), design of electronic systems and artificial intelligence, to create state-of-the-art solutions. Compucon began work on lasers to serve the needs of embroiderers in 1999, but has since expanded to develop and distribute complete laser systems for different industries, including leather manufacturing, promotional products, advertising material producers, furniture decorating processes and more.

65. Randy Carr, CEO World Emblem International (asi/98264)

2010 Rank: 53



When Carr took over World Emblem International 12 years ago, it was a local embroidery company. Now, it's an international company with hundreds of employees whose core customer base is in patches and industrial uniforms. This year, World Emblem opened manufacturing facilities in Toronto, Canada and Lawrenceville, GA. To its offerings, Carr's company added print emblems and reflective striping on apparel. Additionally, World Emblem developed a website for its Name Badges International division, which allows users to design their own badges for free, manage designs and place orders online. Carr says the site is a valuable tool for resellers in the advertising specialty world.

66. Joanna Grant, Vice President of Graphic Production and Support Services Affinity Express

2010 Rank: 52 See profile on page 44

67. Eric Withaar, President Sportco (asi/88792)

New



Ever since founding Sportco in 1989, Withaar has been at the heart of building the company into a thriving apparel/decorating provider with more than 5,000 clients and average annual sales revenue gains of 15% to 20% over the last five years. In 2011, Sportco, which offers embroidery, screen printing laser cutting/etching, and chenille patches, acquired the Gabrielle Rhode Royce, GabiSport and Rohde Royce for Men labels of Rhode Royce Inc.; expanded its sales force; and launched a new website that features online ordering and a tool that enables customers to design graphics and stock designs online.

68. Jack Ma, Chairman and CEO The Alibaba Group

2010 Rank: 38



The Alibaba Group oversees the world's largest product-sourcing website, targeted toward small manufacturers and based in Hangzhou, China. Alibaba.com had 39.9 million registered users and 3.6 million suppliers in June 2010 - those numbers soared to 68.9 million users in 240 countries and regions and 9.2 mil-

lion suppliers as of March 31.

Despite U.S.-based decorators' proclivity to purchase goods stateside, many turn to Ma's network to source hard-to-find embroidery supplies. Alibaba.com's total first-half 2011 revenue increased 22% year-over-year to \$485.5 million. At the 8th Entrepreneur Summit in September, Ma said the Alibaba Group aimed to do \$156.5 billion in transactions in 2012 in China.

69. Kristine Shreve, Director of Marketing EnMart and Ensign Emblem

2010 Rank: 54



Atireless blogger and Web networker, Shreve continues to be among the pack leaders when it comes to industry professionals who use social media to forge relationships that lead to business opportunity. With her ability to disseminate information about embroidery, sublimation and badges, Shreve educates thousands while increasing awareness for EnMart, which offers machine embroidery and sublimation supplies to commercial decorators, and Ensign Emblem, which offers garment decoration solutions for the industrial uniform and rental garment industry. In the last year, her widely-read blog *DecQuorum* on Stitches.com has addressed a variety of topics, from emblems to taking your business online and capturing media attention.

70. Frank Ma, CEO and President Ricoma International Corp.

New

Shenzhen, China-based Ricoma International Corp. is a manufacturer of commercial embroidery machines and attachments, garment printers and laser-engraving and cutting equipment, and with the help of a huge international network of facilities and distributors, the Ricoma brand is gaining a global presence. The company has more than 1,000 U.S.-based customers, with \$15 million in U.S. revenues. Overall, the company's embroidery machine and software sales are up 30% over last year, and Ma wants to continue to expand Ricoma's presence in North America.

71. Edgar Huber, President Lands' End (asi/250566)

2010 Rank: 56

In August, Huber was appointed president, taking over for Nick Coen of Lands' End, which has a massive retail outlet for decorated apparel. Most recently available figures show that the company's outfitters division, which works with more than 100,000 B-to-B customers, embroidered and/or monogrammed more than 6 million units in 2010. That's a point of concern for embroiderers, for whom Lands' End's powerful decorating arm, with access to a huge audience, presents a powerful competitor. Indeed, the direction Huber, a former

Liz Claiborne and L'Oreal executive, decides to take Lands' End could have significant impact on the embroidery industry in the years to come.

72. Michael Stuart, Owner MS Designs Ltd.

2010 Rank: 46

Since 1981, Stuart's New York City-based firm has been bringing haute couture hand and machine embroidery to the center of the fashion world. Stuart's



work has been worn by A-list celebrities from Jennifer Lopez to Julianne Moore, and he has created pieces for top designers Calvin Klein and Oscar de la Renta. Sort of a man-behind-the-curtain for top designers, Stuart's team creates full hand-embroidered pieces, such as skirts and tops, which are incorporated into iconic designers' collections every year.

73. Jenny Hart, Founder and Owner Sublime Stitching

2010 Rank: 55

Bridging the gap between embroidery, high art and alternative fashion, Hart is a



stitching luminary whose work has been used by rock bands like the Flaming Lips and featured everywhere from *Vogue* to *The New York Times*. This year, Hart relocated her business from Austin, TX to Los Angeles and expanded her pattern catalog and offerings. In September, her embroidery artwork was featured in a solo show at Galerie LJ in Paris, and hip clothier ModCloth named a dress after her. Hart publishes books about embroidery and teaches stitching classes.

74. Jay Fishman, Owner and Digitizer Wicked Stitch of the East

New



For years, Fishman has not only digitized innovative designs; he has trained hundreds of embroiderers and digitizers on everything from sales, software use and machine repair to the art of creating ornamental techniques using specialized manual machines. A go-to source for specialty clothing manufacturers for complex digitizing designs, Fishman also works on collaborative projects with artists and interior designers – a creative effort that has included partnering with book publishers to produce six project books.

75. Xu Yi Min, CEO Sheens Embroidery Machines

New



Based in Zhejiang, China, Zhejiang Sheen Electromagnetic Manufacturing Co. Ltd. manufactures Sheens brand computerized embroidery machines up to 120 heads and sequin, cording and chain stitch attachments

chiefly for the Chinese and South Asian commercial embroidery market, and boasts sales of \$200 million (RNB). Its GG758 line of embroidery machines has been awarded 19 patents. In addition, Sheens has expanded into 20 countries and regions. Currently not selling into the U.S. market, Xu Yi Min would like to expand sales in the North American market. ■

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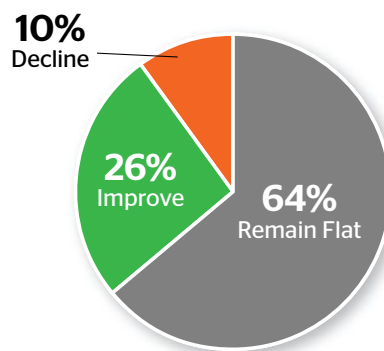
Members of the *Stitches* Power 75 offer their outlooks for business in 2012, technology, future profitability, and even their predictions for the presidential election. Check out the group's responses.

By Joan Chaykin

Because of their influence and standing, *Stitches* asked the 2011 Power 75 members for their opinions on important topics facing the industry today. These are the people who stand out due to their business savvy and creativity; they're the ones who design new strategies that others follow; and they're the leaders of some of the most successful companies in the industry.

So, in October, *Stitches* sent a brief survey to this year's Power 75 members to gauge their outlooks on the 2012 economy, find out their views on topics such as technology and product safety, and discover what challenges they think will be most pressing for their businesses in 2012. For example, Craig Mertens, president and CEO of Digital Art Solutions (*asi/14970*), says the industry is experiencing convergence. "Companies are beginning to position themselves as

What direction do you think the U.S. economy will take in 2012?



graphics companies, rather than being defined by their production equipment," he says. "We see companies expanding into new areas including promotional products, rhinestone decoration, wide-format digital printing and direct-to-garment printing. The key to the future for

companies is to offer a greater range of products and services to open new markets and sell more to existing markets."

Check out more responses, as well as views on pricing and profitability, in the charts on the following pages.

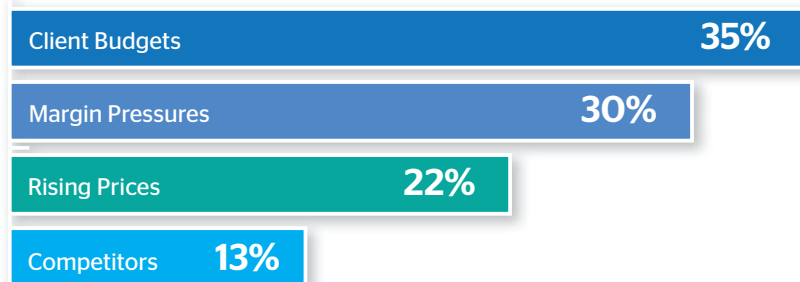
ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

A majority of the industry's power players believe the economy will remain flat, while a little more than a quarter are optimistic that it'll improve. "Although the outlook seems dismal when you see the news, I see our industry rebounding," says Lee Caroselli Barnes, co-owner of Palm Desert, CA-based Balboa Threadworks Inc. "People are tired of being scared and are beginning to buy again."

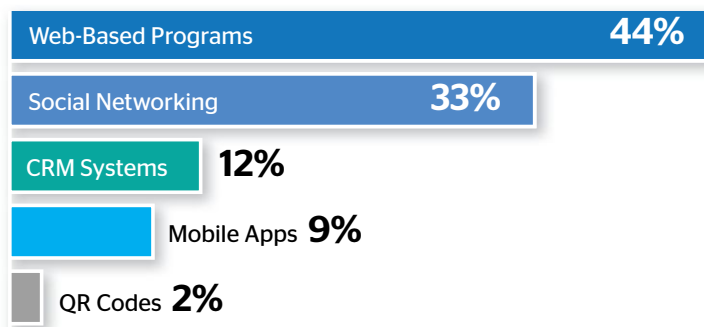
Michael Savoia, owner of West Hollywood-based Villa Savoia Inc., says the perception of value is the crux of much of the economic situation. "A well-known interior designer was at a conference not long

article continues on page 50

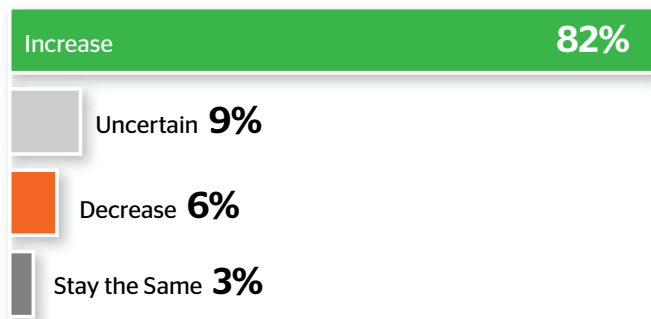
What's the biggest factor affecting decorating businesses now?



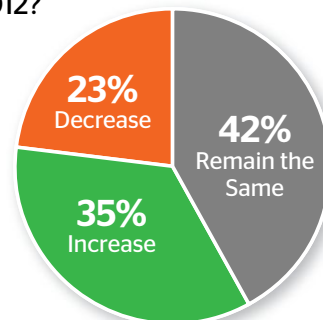
Which technology will be most important to business in the decorated apparel market in 2012?



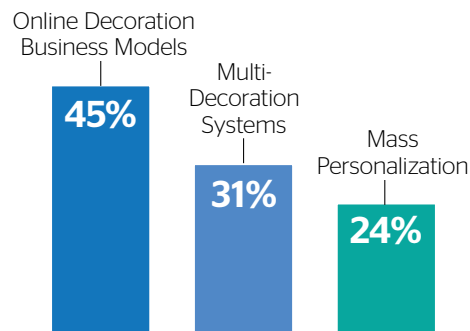
In the decorated apparel industry, how will social media's use as an effective marketing tool change in 2012?



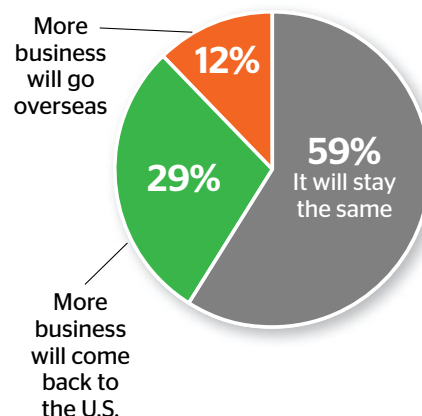
What will happen to the price of cotton in 2012?



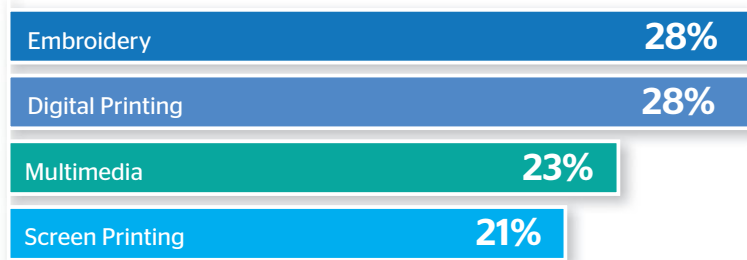
What trend do you think decorators will capitalize on in 2012?



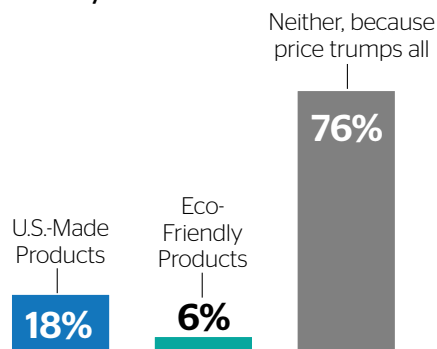
How will decorators' and digitizers' overseas competition affect U.S.-based businesses in 2012?



Which decoration method will be most popular with end-buyers in 2012?



Which trend will be more important to end-buyers in 2012?



from page 48

ago, and the participants were broken into groups to discuss their issues in the industry,” he says. “The number-one issue from the groups was unanimously the perception of value. It’s something that’s affecting all of us in the entire economic range of business in the U.S. today.”

TECHNOLOGY

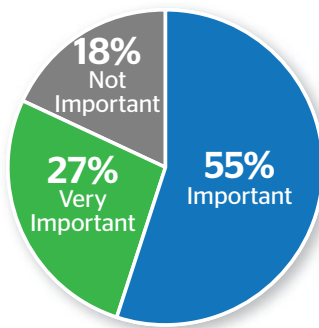
Cloud computing, smartphones, QR codes and Twitter – these are concepts that were widely unknown just a short time ago. Now, there’s no denying the rise in the use of technology and social media. A study by small-business consulting firm Constant Contact shows that 73% of small businesses now use social networking sites, and 81% of those using them plan to increase their online presence this year. Ed Levy, president of Montoursville, PA-based Digitize4u Inc./EmbForum and director of software products for Hirsch International, sums it up like this: “Social media provides a captive and current media, and companies will invest more heavily in this concept.”

DECORATING TRENDS

Creating one-of-a-kind, expressive, personalized decorating and messaging is

the short-term future, says Dean Shulman, senior vice president, Home Appliance and Industrial Products Division for Brother International Corp. “With the use of digital garment printers and other embellishment tools, mass personalization will provide the environment to say, ‘I wear what I feel and I feel what I wear.’ For decorators, made-in-the-U.S. mass personalization reduces lead time, costly overruns and delivery and hedges against currency exchanges and political interruptions that occur in offshore manufacturing.”

How important are product safety initiatives in the decorated apparel industry?

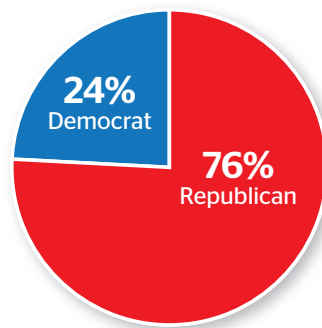


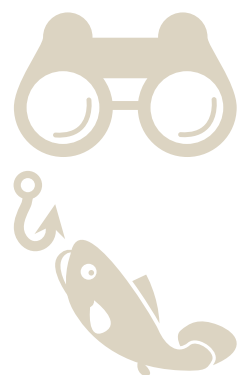
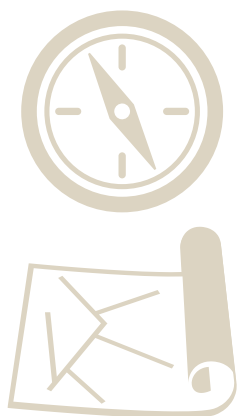
POLITICS

The majority of respondents believe a Republican will win the presidential election. Among the comments was the idea that Republicans are more pro-business, though a few feel it’s too early to determine and say that both parties have a lot of work to do to turn things around.

JOAN CHAYKIN is a managing editor for ASI.
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Which political party will win the 2012 presidential election?





THE ENTREPRENEUR'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Whether you're about to launch your commercial embroidery business or you're a sole decorating-shop proprietor who wants to pump things up in 2012, we've got the goods for you. Covering business planning, choosing a space, marketing, selling and more, this entrepreneur's guide gives new decorators what they need to know to establish a successful business.

By Christopher Ruvo

Survey statistics contained in this article are from ASI's recent Wearables Sales Forecast, conducted in October by Larry Basinait, executive director, research, for ASI. Respondents included apparel distributors and decorators across the U.S.



1. CREATE A BUSINESS PLAN

The first thing any potential business owner needs to do is write a solid, well-thought-out business plan.

Avoid Startup Mistakes

New decorators can avoid common first-year mistakes by adopting the following habits:

- 1 Keep business and personal finances separate.** If you don't, distinguishing between the two down the line could become difficult.
- 2 Keep spending in check.** Don't get in over your head; spend on the essentials you need to run your business well and then build from there.
- 3 Be ready to hustle.** If you're starting an embroidery business to "escape the daily grind," your attitude is in the wrong place and failure is probably not far away.

When he was preparing to launch an apparel decorating firm, Howard Potter sat down and wrote a business plan. The exercise compelled Potter, CEO of Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images, to analyze what markets he wanted his firm to serve. In so doing, Potter discovered that scores of competitors were targeting schools and local athletic teams. As a result, he decided to go after small and large businesses.

Potter clearly articulated his goals in his

business plan, planting the seeds for what has blossomed into a rapidly growing business. Potter's story highlights the pivotal role a good business plan can play in helping drive a new decorating company's success. "A business plan is one of the most important things you can create," says Joyce Jagger, The Embroidery Coach and owner of Embroiderytipsandmore.com. "A business plan is mandatory. It helps you figure out what you're going to do and how you're going to create future growth."

According to the U.S. Small Business

LEARN IT LIVE!

Would you like to have a pack of ideal prospects practically beating down your door to work with you? Learn how to turn that dream into reality in an impactful education session called "You're the Expert: Attract Clients, Build Your Reputation and Grow Your Business" on Monday, Jan. 16, at 1:30 p.m. at the ASI Show Orlando. In this fast-paced, entertaining and idea-filled program, you'll learn how to attract warm calls, clone your best customers, infiltrate your niche and get published easily. Visit ASIShow.com for more information.

Administration, a quality business plan contains a description of your company and your vision for its expansion. This section of the plan should include your short- and long-term goals and objectives and a mission statement that outlines what your business is about. Raleigh, NC-based Qwik Stitch has a mission statement that reads, in part, "Qwik Stitch is dedicated to providing top-quality embroidery and embroidery design services. We promise to always take pride in our work. Our desire is to achieve 100% customer satisfaction."

A good business plan should also describe the market you plan to serve, articulating how the decorating services you provide will help meet the needs of potential customers. "You need to find and identify your niche market," Jagger says. "Then, you can create a message to target that market, which is so important." Indeed, your plan should state how you'll market to and attract your target clients, and also address pricing. Some decorators annually revise their marketing strategies. Says Jagger: "You can break it down by month-to-month planning. So, you know in February there is Valentine's Day and you can plan what you need to do to take advantage of that."

Additionally, outline the services that you'll offer. Anton Dell'Orefice began with just embroidery at his Cheyney, PA-based Delightful Detail, but as he added new imprinting options – such as heat press and sublimation printing – he revised his business plan to reflect the additions, describing how he intended to use the new services to grow his company. "You need to keep your business plan current and analyze what you're actually doing against what you have in there," says Dell'Orefice.

The plan should also describe your firm's legal structure – proprietorship or partnership, for example – and identify licenses or permits you may need to operate your business in your state. Larger decorating firms have plans that feature organizational charts, and the SBA says it's not a bad idea for businesses to include brief biographies of key executives or managers.

Last but not least, it's critically important to incorporate a financial management section. The SBA says this should include estimated startup costs and projections on what your income, balance sheet and cash statement will look like a year out. "The biggest thing when you're writing a business plan is to sit down and look at

EMBROIDERY AND SCREEN PRINTING

are the most popular decorating methods. Nearly **94%** of decorators and distributors say they sell embroidery, while **86%** sell screen printing.

57% of decorators and distributors say they sell apparel with **HEAT-TRANSFER EMBELLISHMENT**.

the numbers," Potter says. "Every year you need to see what your actual costs are," and whether what you bring in covers those costs and allows you to make the profit you want. In a recent cost analysis, Potter realized he was overpaying for screen-printing supplies, which compelled him to switch vendors. "We made the change recently and we've already saved more than \$1,000," he says.

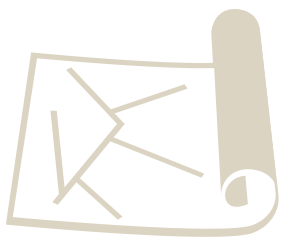
While creating a business plan may seem intimidating, Jagger says there's no reason to feel overwhelmed. "It doesn't have to be long – five to 10 pages is plenty," she says. Of course, assistance is available. The SBA has a business plan template you can use to create your plan (<http://web.sba.gov/busplantemplate/BizPlanStart.cfm>), or you can pay a consultant.

Sometimes, local chambers of commerce or even government entities offer free or low-cost training that can help you develop a plan. When preparing to start Lightning Ridge Screen Printing and Embroidery in Ventura, CA, Paul Heully attended an "entrepreneur academy" offered by the county. "It was about the ins and outs of starting a business," says Heully, who found the course helpful in his planning process.

For those still unsure if they need a business plan, the SBA has this message on its website: "Sitting down and writing out a business plan could spark your creativity and lead you to new business strategies you may not have considered previously. You'll also find that having your business goals written down enables you to refer to them at any time. This will ensure you don't lose sight of your original focus once you do start your business."

"A business plan is mandatory. It helps you figure out what you're going to do and how you're going to create future growth."

Joyce Jagger, The Embroidery Coach



2. CHOOSE A SPACE

While there are advantages to having a storefront, most new, small-scale decorators should consider working from home initially.

When Lorelei Hancock decided to start an embroidery business, she was faced with the question that confronts all new commercial embroiderers: Should she work out of her home or rent a retail space? Hancock opted to work from home because doing so afforded her flexibility and minimized expenses when she was getting her footing. “My children were small at the time, and if they were sick, I could stop working and take care of them and not have to worry that a customer came by my store and it was closed,” says the owner of Cricket Stitches in Clermont, FL. “It was also less of a financial commitment. If I was unsuccessful, I could close the door and not worry about paying rent on a lease for the next year or two.”

The decision to work from home or rent a store when launching an embroidery business is ultimately based on the particulars – financial and otherwise – of a decorator’s situation. But Joyce Jagger, The Embroidery Coach who has trained countless new decorators, says Hancock’s decision to work from home was wise – and often the correct choice for solo or small-scale embroiderers. “Unless you have clients and three months’ worth of expenses saved up, you’re probably going to sink,” says Jagger, a 32-year industry veteran. “You have to pay for rent, utilities, another phone line and still cover all your supply and machine expenses. Without something in reserve, it’s very risky.”

Once you build a foundation of stable clients and a steady revenue stream, you can consider moving into a retail space. Hancock decided to stay home-based because she enjoys the flexibility and current size of her business. But Howard Potter,

CEO of Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images, began decorating part-time from his home and moved into a space once his business reached appropriate levels to support the additional expense. “My suggestion is to start small and grow into it,” Potter says.

While increased expenses are the downside of having a storefront, there are also distinct advantages. Jeff Houck, owner of a Cherry-Hill, NJ-based affiliate of EmbroidMe (*asi/384000*), gets about 30% of his total business from customers who walk into his store, which is located in a strip mall in a busy area. “A lot of times we have landscapers and contractors come by and say they need T-shirts and sweatshirts for their crew,” he says. Houck also notes that you can find good deals on storefront rentals. “With the economy the way it is, you can get a decent rental inexpensively, and many landlords will give you incentives to move in if you ask for them,” says Houck, who pays \$1,500 for his 1,000 square feet in a prime location.

Beyond benefitting from walk-in business, Linda Weldy, owner of Lindstrom Embroidery in Bloomington, MN, says the showroom in her store helps her win customers. Not only does Weldy feature logoed apparel in the showroom, she also has approximately 20 humming embroidery heads. “People like to come in and see what we do, and that we can do what we say we can,” she says. Weldy says her store gives her much more space than she’d have at home, and she also likes having a loading dock. “It’s been very useful in the last two years because we’ve been bringing things in by pallet.”

When looking for store space, consider whether the location is in an area that’s conducive to walk-in traffic. Is there enough parking? Is the landlord friendly? And, be sure to take note of who your neighbors will be; the wrong business next door could dissuade customer traffic and cause you recurring headaches.

54% – The percentage of decorators and distributors who expect sales of **PERFORMANCE APPAREL** to increase in the next 12 months.

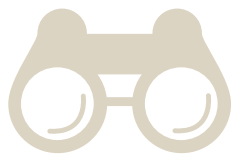
82% – The percentage of decorators and distributors who say **MOISTURE-WICKING** is an important feature for buyers of performance apparel.

33% of decorators and distributors say it’s important to their clients that wearables be **MADE IN AMERICA**; only **6%** say they consider it very important.

Do My Customers Dictate Where I’m Based?

Decorators that sell strictly to resellers, like promotional apparel distributors, won’t need a storefront unless they are considering branching out into sales directly to consumers and end-buyers. Reseller-only decorators can consider renting an industrial space if they need more room. Keep in mind, however, that such a move should only come when revenue levels justify the expense.

Plus, when just starting out, decorators may find it best to fulfill orders for anyone from distributors to the local laundromat as part of an effort to spark their business. “There are a lot of levels between embroidering or screen-printing in a garage and operating a 1-million-square-foot industrial facility,” says Andy Shuman, general manager at Tipton, PA-based Rockland Embroidery (*asi/734150*). “You have to find what works for you and only make moves that you can afford.”



3. MARKET YOUR BUSINESS

Networking and understanding your target clients are keys to marketing success.

Online Marketing Made Easier

Marketing online is also critical. You should establish a website and a presence on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Know, though, that doing so isn't going to trigger business automatically. "Just because you build it, doesn't mean they'll come," says Dana Zezzo, vice president of sales and marketing for Pro Towels Etc. (*asi/79750*). After establishing a decent website, increase the chances it will rank highly in Google search results by populating the page with keywords pertinent to your target clientele and relevant content written in paragraph form. You should also swap links with other businesspeople and companies (link to them on your website and ask them to do the same for you) to get more exposure for everyone involved. As for social media, join groups and connect with people on LinkedIn. Use Facebook to match up with friends and, as business grows, customers. Then, post Facebook content that's a mix of entertaining, informative and tastefully promotional material.

For example, you could include images of recent embroidered works or a short video of the embroidery process to demonstrate what you do. Facebook-only specials are often a hit. "Coupons are always popular," says Joyce Jagger, The Embroidery Coach. Twitter is another helpful tool. Lee Romano Sequeira, co-owner of Sparkle Plenty Designs (*asi/88442*), has nearly 5,000 followers on Twitter. Recently, a simple tweet about how her company decorates shirts for NASA caught the attention of a follower, who re-tweeted the message. The re-tweet was seen by a dental group's office manager, who contacted Sequeira, sparking what ultimately grew into a sale for Sparkle Plenty.

While some say that you should avoid paid advertising, particularly because it can be expensive, others have had success with it. Online pay-per-click advertising played a part in helping screen-printing supplier Ryonet Corp. grow, while radio advertising and putting an ad in the phone book has behooved Howard Potter, CEO of Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images. The bottom line for decorators is that your initial marketing efforts are crucial to laying the foundation upon which you'll build your business. "You have to get out there and connect with people," Zezzo says.

48% - The percentage of decorators and distributors who expect **T-SHIRT SALES** to increase in the next 12 months.

54% - The percentage of decorators and distributors who say **EDUCATION** is the top market for selling apparel.

Try as she might, Joyce Jagger simply couldn't picture herself attending a local chamber of commerce meeting. Just the thought of it terrified her. But, a friend forced Jagger to attend one. Decades later, Jagger is still thankful she went, as the relationships she forged through the chamber built up her client roster, powering sales and profit growth. "I couldn't believe the difference it made," says Jagger, The Embroidery Coach. "I did a ton of business through the chamber. People want to do business with people they know and who belong to the same organizations as they do."

Indeed, the takeaway from Jagger's anecdote for new apparel decorators is that networking locally should be at the heart of your startup marketing initiatives. Jimmy Lamb, manager of education and communications at Sawgrass Technologies, suggests you write down a list of everyone you know well enough to approach and engage in conversation. After listing what those folks do, rank them in terms of how good of a prospect they'd be, and then connect with them. "Anyone with a heartbeat is a potential customer," says Dana



"You have to get out there and connect with people."

Dana Zezzo, Pro Towels Etc. (*asi/79750*)

Zezzo, vice president of sales and marketing for Pro Towels Etc. (*asi/79750*). "Start asking them questions about what they do and see what you do can help them."

Zezzo says it can also be beneficial to narrow the focus by marketing to an industry or demographic with which you have been involved. "If you were a teacher, go after education," he says. "If you were in corporate sales, target that. You're comfortable with the language and you'll have common ground." Also, some decorators may be in an area where a certain industry predominates. Whether it's tourism, manufacturing, banking, universities or something else, Zezzo says new embroiderers should identify the industry and create marketing materials that appeal to those organizations.

When beginning to build Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images, CEO Howard Potter sent direct mailers to nearby businesses he thought would make good clients. About a week after the mailing, Potter called the prospects. He just asked if they had received the flyer and expressed the hope that he could help the person out someday soon. Potter generally scored two or three new clients per mailing. Those clients became repeat customers and referred new clients, creating a profitable domino effect that was generated by relatively inexpensive mailers and tactful phone call follow-ups.



4. SELL YOUR SERVICES

Selling may seem intimidating, but it doesn't have to be.

Embroiderers and screen printers often start their businesses because they'd like to earn a living doing something they love, but they're daunted by the idea of selling their services. Whether this generalization applies to you or not, the fact is that new decorators either need to learn to sell or hire someone who can. Since the latter option will cost you, it behooves many decorators, especially those on tight budgets, to be their own salespeople. Doing so successfully starts with embracing the fact that you are now in sales. "You have to admit to yourself that you're a salesperson, and then look at yourself in the mirror every day and say you're going to be the best salesperson you can be," says Dana Zezzo, vice president of sales and marketing for Pro Towels Etc. (*asi/79750*).

At its most basic, successful selling centers on understanding your prospective customers' wants and needs, providing viable solutions and, ultimately, having the guts to ask for the sale, says Steve Freeman, owner of Qdigitizing (*asi/700501*). Being a good listener and understanding how to approach a prospect are essential to the selling process. "You'll be surprised how much excellent information you'll get if you just put your ego in check and listen," Freeman says.

Freeman put his advice into practice on a recent deal. He was one of several vendors that a large Internet retailer approached to do digitizing work. Freeman quickly got a sense that the corporation was staid and formal. "I knew I was going to have to use

corporate-speak," says Freeman, who e-mailed the retailer a polished, professional letter of interest. The tone of the letter spoke to the culture of the company, and Freeman immediately received a response saying they'd like to have further conversation. During the meeting, he listened attentively to what the company wanted, subtly directed the conversation to find out what they needed (which is often different than what clients want) and then told them how his digitizing services could help them. He did land the lucrative deal.

Jimmy Lamb, manager of education and communications at Sawgrass Technologies, often dealt with the fishing and boating community when running his embroidery business. When approaching tackle shop owners, he would entice them by saying he had a way to get their customers to advertise for them. "That shows an immediate benefit to the prospect and gets them interested," says Lamb, adding decorators should have sample kits they can show clients. Lamb would then explain how customers of the fishing shop would buy caps or T-shirts as long as the wearables featured "a killer fish design," he says. "So what we do is come up with a great design, and 'Joe the shop owner' gets to put his business headline on there, and his customers are paying him to advertise for him."

It may seem difficult to get the conversation going on a sales call, but Lamb says the important thing is to find common ground. While corporate settings may require greater formality, it's often advantageous to "take the focus off the fact that you're on a sales call and turn it into a pleasant chat where you are leading the conversation," says Lamb, who notes a simple look around the office could provide clues for icebreakers.

One thing all sales pros agree on is that if you want business, you have to ask for it. To close well, Lamb suggests that you succinctly sum up the deal you've discussed, repeating the client's needs and how you plan to address them. Then, ask for the order. "If they're just not ready to commit, set up a time to follow up with them and ask if there's anything else you can do to make the decision process easier," he says. Freeman doggedly follows up until the prospect makes it plain he doesn't want to buy. "If you want the business, you have to go after it and you have to ask for it," he says. ■

CHRISTOPHER RUVO is a staff writer for Stitches. Contact: cruvo@asicentral.com.

Quick Tips for New Salespeople

- 1 Listen to your prospects; understand their needs.
- 2 Emphasize the value of your service/product, not the price.
- 3 Don't argue; give prospects information that will help them develop a positive opinion of you and your services.
- 4 Put simply, if you want to close, you've got to ask for the order.

SALES TIP: Now may be a good time to establish business relationships with apparel distributors in your area; **63%** of distributors expected sales growth in 2011.

The Price Discussion

Approaches to discussing pricing while on a sales call differ among the experts. "If you mention price first, the only way to go is down," says Steve Freeman, owner of Qdigitizing (*asi/700501*). "If they ask you what it'll cost, you can come back with, 'Well what's your budget?'"

Jimmy Lamb, manager of education and communications at Sawgrass Technologies, however, developed a flat-rate system so he can offer on-the-spot quotes, which helps him close sales quicker. "People want to know what something is going to cost," says Lamb, who adds that if a prospect haggles aggressively over price, it's important to refrain from lowering the cost immediately. "You'll have just trained them to always haggle," he says, noting one alternative is to offer the requested pricing if the prospect buys more pieces.

If you're willing to drop your price without a quantity increase but don't want the prospect to know, you could also try a little smoke and mirrors. Lamb has had situations where he told prospects that he'd make quick phone calls to see if he could get the apparel they want on special. He then pretended to call suppliers before announcing to the client that he found a special - but with a catch. "I'd tell them it's only good through Friday, so there's a time condition and it motivates them to act," he says.



Corporate Casual **Crackdown**

Casual had its day in the sun, but now – thanks to new styles and advanced performance properties – corporate apparel is embracing its roots.

By Christopher Ruvo

When it comes to corporate apparel, the pendulum has finally swung away from casual. Danny Friedman, vice president of Northbrook, IL-based Added Incentives (*asi/106725*), points to a client he has been serving for more than a decade to illustrate the point. Before the dot-com boom, the company favored logoed wovens and crisp polos. But then the Silicon Valley explosion ushered in an age of casual excess. Jeans and tees became *de rigueur* for employees of Friedman's client, which makes industrial bar codes and safety labels for commercial products. "By the middle of the decade, employees weren't even required to wear anything logoed," he says.

That's not the case anymore with professional work wear. These days, the company requires employees to don logoed polos that have performance features. "Casual Friday is still alive and well, but this trend has slowed and in many instances is reverting back to a more dressed-up look," says Lonnie Morris, regional manager for The Apparel Group Ltd. (*asi/52487*), which makes dress shirts, sports shirts, pants and more.

The fact that the polos Friedman's clients now wear have anti-wrinkle, antimicrobial features is representative of an important facet of the trend away from extreme casual. "We tend to see a return to more formal styles during a time of financial hardship, but companies are adding more performance features to those classic looks," says Shelly Renning, general merchandise manager at SanMar (*asi/84863*). This applies to a number of corporate apparel suppliers — everything from The Apparel Group's non-iron wovens to Cutter & Buck's (*asi/47965*) Edge Performance Overknit collection, which includes woven button-downs with performance attributes. "Polos and woven shirts continue to be our number one and two categories, with the focus being on performance items," says Joel Freet, national sales manager for Cutter & Buck.

The marriage of old-school style with cutting-edge properties continues to be a winning proposition for decorators and promotional products distributors. Recently, a client in the energy industry came to Mike Beckman, a marketing specialist for Atlanta-based Proforma-BPM (*asi/300094*), looking for shirts that would help employees look classy while also standing up to the rigors of a trade show. "They wanted to get away from the standard booth golf shirt and have something they didn't need to iron," Beckman says. After doing research, Beckman came through with a wrinkle-free, antimicrobial, long-sleeve button-down from Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*). The shirt suited the company's tastes for

something distinguished and manageable. "People are starting to dress better to set themselves apart, and they want performance features that help them do that," Beckman says.

The cycle back to a more polished corporate appearance isn't limited to woven shirts and polos. Edwards Garment Co. (*asi/51752*), for example, has experienced a steady rise in sweater sales since introducing the wearable in 2009. "What we find is that sweaters, sweater vests or sweater twinsets give the wearer additional variety for how their image is portrayed," says Taraynn Lloyd, director of marketing for the supplier. Anita Brooks has found success with sweaters and sweater sets with the female end-users at one of her clients — a credit union. "There has been positive feedback on buttoned cardigan types that can be layered over shirts; they're a nice complement that gives a professional finish," says the president of Mississippi-based Geiger-affiliate ASB Marketing LLC (*asi/202900*).

While the trend in corporate apparel is toward polishing up, don't count on a full return to formal business attire. "I haven't had a lot of interest in blazers and ties," Friedman says. Still, that doesn't mean demand for the dressy isn't out there. Executive Apparel (*asi/53418*) has experienced an upsurge in items like blouses and crisply tailored navy blazers. "We have noticed a big change recently because casual moved over the line to sloppy," says CEO Donald Singer.

Additionally, outerwear that projects a casual yet professional image is increasingly on the radar of corporate clients. It can take more upscale features like half-zip jackets, or something unique like a houndstooth check pattern on one particular Ashworth jacket from Alpha Shirt Co. (*asi/34408*). "Items like quarter-zips, bonded soft-shells and fleeces are all doing really well in the corporate apparel segment," notes Glenn Oyoung, chief operating officer for Tri-Mountain/Mountain Gear (*asi/92125*).

THE RETAIL LOOK

Not only do clients increasingly desire performance apparel with a professional appearance, but they also want those garments to mirror what's available in retail. Beckman tells of a recent customer in the transportation industry that specifically asked for OGIO golf shirts. "They wanted that brand name displayed because of the higher perceived value," he says. Further illustrating the appetite for retail is Bodek and Rhodes (*asi/40788*), which frequently gets requests for name brands like Van Heusen or items that look similar to the apparel of leading labels, says Marc Held, national sales manager.

"Casual Friday is still alive and well, but this trend has slowed and in many instances is reverting back to a more dressed-up look."

Lonnie Morris, The Apparel Group Ltd. (*asi/52487*)

“We can’t assume what clients are looking for. We have to ask them. We have to understand what they’re trying to put out there as far as the personality of the company.”

Gregg Emmer, Kaeser & Blair (*asi/238600*)

To meet the tastes of fashion-forward professional women, suppliers are pushing female-specific lines, which are soaring in popularity. Tri-Mountain’s Lilac Bloom, for example, features popular sellers like Meredith, a shirt whose attributes include a higher spandex count for comfort. Then there’s designer Gabrielle Rohde Royce’s line from Sportco (*asi/88792*), which contains fashionable sweaters that come in flyaway and swing styles. Other pieces include the femme-cut sweatshirt with a shawl collar. “It’s more tailored than regular hoodies, so it’s comfortable but classy,” Royce says. “It’s perfect for corporate branding.”

Color diversity is another crucial element in meeting retail tastes, and suppliers are using more of the spectrum in their offerings. SanMar, for example, provides the popular Port Authority ladies’ performance fine Jacquard shirt in vine green. “Trends are all about color: vivid and bold looks, saturated tones, deep berries and vivid blues,” Renning says. To further mirror retail’s variety, suppliers are offering a broader range of apparel that includes interesting features. Looking forward, decorators can expect the penchant for cleaned-up casual to continue, with performance features and retail-influenced styles at the heart of the trend.

UNDERSTANDING THE CLIENT

While there are garments that are considered classic corporate staples, in reality a company’s culture will determine what exactly “corporate apparel” is. For example, many of the wineries that work with Santa Rose, CA-based Sonoma Design, Apparel & Promotions (*asi/329869*) want to project a young and hip image through their brand apparel. To satisfy the vintners, Sonoma pairs them with clothing from fashion-forward brands like Bella (*asi/39590*) or SanMar’s District Threads. Recently, one winery’s apparel included a zip hoodie and a fitted tee.

It’s critically important that you understand your clients and their particular needs and goals. You have to know the identity clients want to project through apparel and how that image advances customers’ goals. “We can’t assume what clients are looking for,” says Gregg Emmer, chief marketing officer for Kaeser & Blair (*asi/238600*). “We have to ask them. We have to understand what they’re trying to put out there as far as the personality of the company.”

The pros at Dallas-based Bob Lilly Professional Promotions (*asi/254138*) begin by getting to know clients through a series of qualifying questions that address everything from recipient demographics and budget to whether the apparel will be worn at an event, on sales calls, around the office, etc. Discussions with one recent client revealed that the company CEO wanted logoed apparel that key executives would enjoy wearing while at work and play. Bob Lilly Jr., president, recommended and implemented a program in which executives receive a new shirt monthly. To meet management-level tastes, Lilly has delivered everything from upscale polos to dress shirts. The executives

enjoy the apparel, and the CEO likes that his brass wants to wear company-branded clothing. “You have to know your client and lead them to the best options,” Lilly says.

Through similar means, Kaeser pleased a bank client by taking the time to learn that the financial institution wanted to project a more relaxed and approachable image to customers. “They wanted to connect with the community and appear more relatable when discussing loans and mortgages,” Emmer says. To help the bank, Kaeser tracked down logoed high-performance polyester microfiber shirts in men’s and women’s styles. Periodically, the bank issued new, similarly-styled shirts in different colors to employees. Initially, the bank instructed employees to wear only the new shirts after they were received. But after a while, the bank opted to allow employees to don any of the shirts they’d been given. “The bank loved it because they got more value out of the shirts,” Emmer says, “and the employees were happy because they got to wear their shirt of choice.” Most importantly, the relaxed yet professional shirts – and the fact that employees wore different styles – conveyed the desired image to customers. “The public accepted it because they were talking to someone who was in corporate-identity apparel but who was still an individual,” Emmer says. “The individuality made them more comfortable.” ■

CHRISTOPHER RUVO is a *Stitches* staff writer. Contact: cruvo@asicentral.com.

QUICK TIPS FOR SELLING CORPORATE APPAREL

1 Get to know your client: One size doesn’t fit all. A shirt that works for one client could be a flop for the next. You need to understand your customers, what they want a garment to do for them, and the image they want to portray in order to match them with appropriate apparel.

2 Be the expert: Knowing your client will be for naught if you fail to understand how different apparel, clothing trends and embellishment styles convey different images. Attend trade shows, talk to trusted suppliers and keep a keen eye on retail trends. If you do, you’ll become an apparel expert, best positioned to advise – and please – clients.

3 Be practical: A logoed leather bomber jacket may convey the polished image a corporate client wants to project, but will miss the mark if the garment is meant to be worn at an outdoor event in Arizona. Make sure the apparel matches the context in which it is to be worn.





4 “Good, better, best”: Present clients with apparel options at different price points. Clients may very well drop the cash on a higher-end shirt after seeing how it’ll better portray their business. When talking about higher-price-point items, take the discussion away from price and emphasize how the garment can propel the client’s brand.



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Coming Next Issue

What's coming up in January *Stitches*

By Nicole Rollender



A Look Back, and Forward

■ We'll take a look at the top trends that affected decorating businesses in late 2011, and how decorators can contend with or capitalize on those trends in 2012. Plus, see what you can expect in the new year in terms of cotton prices, new fabrications and more.

Portrait of a Contract Shop

■ Learn everything you need to know about life in top contract shops: how the owners got started, how the shops became profitable and some of the pros and cons of going contract.

Plus ...

- How to become even more customer-focused
- How to add bling to your designs
- Business resolutions for 2012

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. Mail or fax it to us at **Stitches, Attn: Needle Patrol**, 4800 Street Rd., Trevose, 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 31. 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 Goes Geometric

In the September/October issue, Slick hid in the "2012 Fashion Trends" article next to the Proenza Schouler geometric print dress on page 50. **Mary Hedden** of Latrobe, PA-based **Hedden's Creative Embroidery** was chosen at random from a grand total of 30 responses. As this issue's winner, Mary will receive Madeira USA's gift certificate. Keep your eyes peeled for the industry's favorite game of hide and seek!

By Brian Burr



Got a decorator dilemma?

E-mail your question to nroller@asiscentral.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.

LEARN IT LIVE!

Simply put, being able to provide clients with great-looking logos will make or break your decorating business. Learn how to deliver knockout logos in "Create High-Quality Vector Artwork Today: Adobe Illustrator for Beginners," an education session that will be held Monday, Jan. 16, at 8:30 a.m. at the ASI Show Orlando. In this information-rich course, you'll learn step-by-step how Adobe Illustrator Creative Suite 5 can help you create high-quality logos and other custom artwork for clients. Visit ASIShow.com for more information.

Q I work at a shop that offers embroidery and screen printing. Often, customers ask me what imprinting method would be better for their particular design. What should I tell a customer when they ask if they should use embroidery or screen printing?

A This is a common question, and I applaud you for looking out for your customers' best interests. Customers demand professional-looking products, so you need to know whether embroidery or screen printing will be best for the design they present to you. Let's review the basics.

Many customers automatically assume screen printing is the less expensive option, but this isn't always true. An embroidered design is priced by how many stitches are in the design, while a printed design is priced by how many colors are in it. Remind clients that even different shades of the same color count as an entirely new screen, something that can exponentially increase the cost of a screen-printed design.

In my shop, we're often approached by clients who want us to produce a design we know will have issues during the production process. This is often because of the design's fine details, such as lettering that's less than a quarter-inch tall, or embroidery on the bill of a hat. We usually explain that embroidery is a representation of a design, while screen printing is an exact replication of the design, since screen printing allows us to produce small, fine details. Here are three other factors to consider when talking with a client about choosing an imprinting method:

1. What kind of fabric are you using? The fabrics you use as your canvas have a lot to do with the professionalism and appearance of your finished product. One of the most common types of tricky fabric is polar fleece. If your client is set on this, it's more practical to embroider it. Polar fleece typically shouldn't be screen printed, but if you're a master screen printer working with a very thin version of polar fleece, you might be able to achieve a great finished design. If you do go the screen-printing route, I recommend (as with all work) showing your customer a sample print to verify they're pleased with the final look.

Again, with polar fleece, we recommend to customers that they choose embroidery over screen printing. Expert digitizers recommend a background fill stitch behind any letters or fine details to help mat down the fabric and give you a clean, smooth surface. If it's not possible to put a solid fill stitch behind the letters, use all three underlay options. A center underlay, an edge-walk underlay and fill underlay behind the letters to mat down the polar fleece will help the letters to not sink into the fabric. And again, run a sample first to fix any imperfections. This important step can help you save money by limiting damages before running the entire order.

2. What's the client's budget? While you're probably worried about the fabric, the logo and other details, your client is probably thinking price. Price is a big consideration, whether you're doing an order of 50 or 5,000 pieces. If your client has a tight budget, screen printing is probably your best option. To save

One of the most common types of tricky fabric is polar fleece.

customers even more money, suggest they use a one-color imprint instead of a full-color embroidered logo.

3. What do they want the logo to look like? Lastly, what the client wants the finished product to look like will determine whether you use embroidery or screen printing. If your customer wants a high-end look, embroidery is usually the better choice. However, consider the garment's limitations. If you're working with a hat, for instance, the maximum embroidery space is 2-1/2 inches tall and 5 inches wide, while screen printing will give you an extra 1/4 inch of vertical space. If you're embroidering already-constructed hats, it's not possible to embroider the bill (the bill of a hat has a cardboard or plastic insert the needle will not go through), but it's possible to screen print the top or bottom of the hat bill. If you're using a shirt or a jacket as a canvas, you're in luck — shirts and jackets rarely pose an issue since they have a large area for the decoration, embroidery or print. ■

BRIAN BURR, an 18-year embroidery industry veteran, is chief operating officer of WholesaleHats.com. Before joining the company, Burr was a lead machine operator, a chief mechanic for an embroidery manufacturer and the production manager for a custom embroidery factory. Contact: brian@wholesalehats.com.

Avoid Production Issues

Safeguard against potential issues during the embroidery production process so you won't need to redo an entire order. Here are some tips:

1. Slow down. A machine that runs too fast makes mistakes. Slow down and do it right the first time.

2. Watch your hoop. If you improperly hoop your garment, your logo could end up crooked or misshapen. Make sure everything is straight and centered before you start the machine.

3. Check the thread tension and bobbin. Make sure your thread tension and bobbin aren't too loose or too tight.

4. Keep your needle sharp. A dull needle can lead to sloppy stitches. There's no one-size-fits-all answer to how often a needle should be changed, so keep a close eye on it.

5. Digitize your logo. Have your logo punched by a good digitizer, which will ensure a more professional finished project. Also, have the logo digitized for the specific fabric and frame, as tubular and flat frames have different pull compensations.

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