

S·T·I·T·C·H·E·S

Embroidery's Voice & Vision

February 2013

The **MACHINE**

Issue **New single-heads, multi-heads,
screen printers & more**

PLUS:
Amazing equipment advances

*Sparkle with
new attachments*

Deliver Local Orders

*Easy ways to boost your
profit power*

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Color of the year

5 Steps to Success

*Create a great digital
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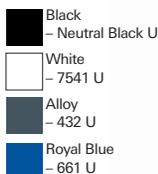
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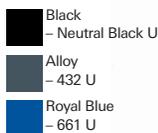
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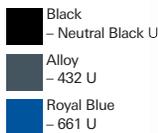
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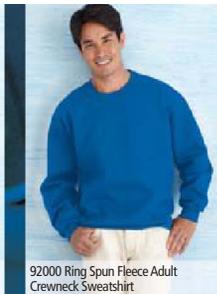
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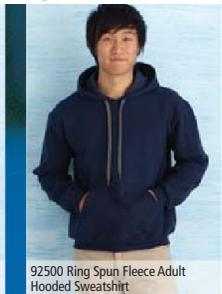
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FEATURES

COVER STORY

34 Innovation Generation

Greater efficiency and expanded decoration potential are at the heart of some of the most exciting innovations for different types of decorating equipment.

BY CHRISTOPHER RUVO

FEATURES

40 The Machine Guide

Ready to diversify your business? We'll feature the newest single-heads, multi-heads, digital printers, screen-printing equipment, heat presses and more - with real user reviews. Plus, learn about key new features you'll want to have.

BY SARA LAVENDUSKI AND
ANDRAYA VANTREASE

58 Shape Up Your Smaller Shop

From tips on controlling costs to pricing wisely, here are solid strategies for overcoming common hurdles facing smaller shops to achieving broader growth and greater profitability.

BY CHRISTOPHER RUVO





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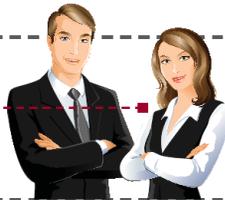
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COLUMNS

64 Ask an Expert
By Kristine Shreve



Get Your Stitch Report

Stitches Staff Writer Chris Ruvo offers expert suggestions about the right questions to ask yourself about which type of decorating equipment would be best suited to meet your business goals in *Stitches'* video series, "The Stitch Report," which gives you some of the latest trends in the embroidery industry here and abroad. Go to Stitches.com to watch the video.



FIRST THINGS FIRST

- 10 Contributors
- 14 From the Editor's Desk
- 16 Reader Threads
- 18 Ask Phil
- 22 5-Minute Wisdom
- 24 Stitch Report
- 27 Look Book
- 31 Decorating Solutions



Go The Extra Mile

Get ready to be inspired by decorated-apparel salespeople who went the extra mile for a client, and scored big because of it. Visit Stitches.com for great case studies (like the salesperson who sourced and imprinted 5,000 bags in a matter of hours for a stranger she'd met on the train), and for tips to earn blockbuster deals and long-term client relationships.

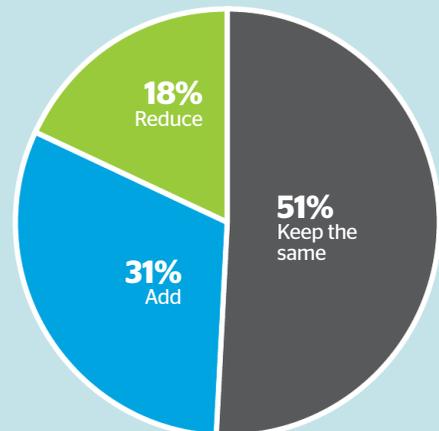
Trend: Discharge Printing

Stitches' sister magazine *Counselor* investigates the volatile nature of apparel prices and analyzes how raw materials and manufacturing costs will affect industry prices in the future. Visit Stitches.com to get the insider scoop.

Your Bottom Line

In a recent poll on Stitches.com, we asked industry professionals: In 2013, do you plan to add, reduce, or keep the same the number of employees you have?

A majority of respondents either plan to hire more staff (31%) or keep the status quo (51%).



BACK OF THE BOOK

- 61 B-to-B Classifieds
- 63 Advertiser Index
- 63 Coming Next Month

About the Cover
Design: Jim Lang



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contributors



In this month's "Problem Solved," **JIMMY LAMB**, manager of education and communications for Sawgrass Technologies, along with other industry experts, advises a shop owner recently caught in a hurricane to prepare for future natural disasters. One idea? Invest in the right insurances. For one, "if you depend on your business for a significant portion of your income, investigate Business Interruption Protection," Lamb writes. "It's a form of insurance, similar to unemployment in that it can provide funds to keep you going even if your business has come to a grinding halt, because of a natural disaster."



Check out "5-Minute Wisdom" for our interview with **HOWARD POTTER**, CEO of Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images. What's one challenge decorators will have this year? Shops should focus on selling quality, not undercutting others. "A huge challenge in 2013 will be the competition between quality decorators and those who spend their time undercutting them with lower prices," Potter says. "As long as companies keep cutting stitch count and price, the industry will have a hard time growing." Potter also talks about why his company focuses on hiring interns and exposing college students to the decorated-apparel market: "By taking on interns in your shop, you can show them what you do and find out if they could become employees."



For our February "Ask An Expert," **KRISTINE SHREVE**, director of marketing for EnMart and Ensign Emblem, tackles a top shop owner question: How do I get clients to stop submitting subpar artwork to me, especially for holiday or rush orders? "If you want quality art from your customers, you need to spend some time educating them about what good artwork is and how artwork quality can impact a finished product," she writes. "... Remember that you know what quality artwork is and why it's important, but your customer may not. Terms like 'vector art' or 'camera ready' may not mean much, and your customer might genuinely not see why the cool clip art logo they created in Microsoft Word isn't going to provide the quality they want for their T-shirts."

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Embroidery's Voice & Vision

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About the Cover

Machine attachments that empower embroiderers to create specialty embellishments are growing more popular. The reason is simple: Shops ranging from mom-and-pops to large contract enterprises are all trying to provide more embellishment solutions to clients and break into new markets. Specialty attachments help power that diversification effort.

In particular, sequin attachments – which can be used to create designs like you see on this month's cover – have been getting a lot of attention. Andrea Bommarito, embroidery and software specialist for SWF, says sequin attachments can help embroiderers break into and/or better meet the needs of clients in markets ranging from fashion and costuming, to spirit and dance wear, to home décor and personalized children's items. "You're really opening your doors wider when you can offer this," says Bommarito, noting SWF offers a variety of sequin solutions. "There are so many things you can do with sequins, from decorating apparel to pillows, drapes – even shoes."

Paul Gallagher, CEO of Hirsch International (*asi/14982*), notes sequin attachments can also help decorators develop more creative designs for customers in markets beyond those in which sequins may seem to have the most obvious appeal. Take the restaurant business, for example. Hirsch, which offers Tajima sequin attachments, has a client that recently did a sequin embellishment for a Hooters establishment. The design was different than a standard print or embroidery, providing a bit of bling and sparkle that impressed the eatery, which isn't shy about a bit of flashiness. "The sequins provided a means for the shop to differentiate from its competition and gain an edge," Gallagher says.

A sequin attachment could help you do the same. – *Christopher Ruvo*



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new balance

“This equipment investment allowed us to offer designs none of our competitors in the area could offer.”

Howard Potter,
A&P Master Images

Nicole Rollender
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Howard Potter invests in decorating equipment the smart way. For example, when Potter, CEO of Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images, had owned his business for two years with two single-head embroidery machines, he wanted to expand into tackle twill due to customer demand. “I wanted a way to make tackle twill profitable, without having to do it by hand,” says Potter, who came across the Ioline 300 machine, which cuts twill and vinyl more efficiently. “Our monthly payment at the time was \$168, so I knew that we only had to sell five to 10 hoodies a month to cover it – making this machine a low-cost investment,” he says. “Plus, we expanded our services and made the cutting process more precise. This equipment investment allowed us to offer designs none of our competitors in the area could offer, since we were the only ones who purchased this equipment.”

In our annual Machine Guide issue, we're happy to feature the newest and upgraded single- and multi-head embroidery machines, screen-printing equipment, direct-to-garment printers, heat-transfer equipment, laser bridges, dual-function machines and specialty machines/attachments from 17 industry manufacturers and distributors, along with user reviews for some of the machines. Plus, in Staff Writer Christopher Ruvo's cover story, “Innovation Generation,” starting on page 34, he talks with some of the industry's leading equipment vendors about the latest developments in today's decorating equipment, including embroidery machines that can also do multimedia and screen-printing equipment that really takes it up a notch.

Here are two more machine-investment tips from Potter and Marc Vila, national account manager at Pantograms Manufacturing Co.:

1. Before you decide what type of equipment to invest in, ask yourself some basic questions. “Which decorated apparel technique will generate more sales for my business?” Vila says. “What imprinting or niche void does my business need to fill? What machine will generate the most profit, long term?” Then, he says, delve into the numbers, and remember to consider the true cost of the equipment including the price of the machine, shipping, necessary software and accessories, and cost per piece during production.

2. Determine whether you'll make a profit over your monthly payment from day one. Potter says that what's great about imprinting equipment is that once you pay it off, you're looking at 100% profit. However, before that it's “smart to leave a nice cushion,” Potter says. “Factor in your learning curve or machine downtime, along with other costs like power, supplies and insurance.”

So, turn to page 40 to see the newest and upgraded decorating machines top vendors are offering. Enjoy the issue!

Nicole Y Rollender

We Asked You ...

on [Facebook.com/stitchesmag](https://www.facebook.com/stitchesmag)

What decorating equipment would you like to invest in this year?



Erich Campbell, Black Duck Inc.: Not only did we add a new multi-head Tajima machine to our lineup - we're finally bringing sublimation transfer printing in-house. We're starting with a package by EnMart featuring a Ricoh printer with low-hassle gel-based inks. We purchased an expanded bypass tray to allow us to do in-house transfers up to 13" by 19" with ease.



Bridgette Faye Harbor-Lindley: I'd love an automatic rhinestone machine.



Linda Joyce Minor: Bernina 780 with the works, about \$10,000. Know where I can get the money so I can get my business back up and running?



LaurelLee Roethel: We're looking at adding more fixtures for our Hoopmaster(s) and also adding Fast Frames. These will help speed up our hooping, especially on hard-to-hoop items, and also help to make the hooping consistent on multiple embroidery locations.



Krista Miller-Shifflet: I'd love to purchase a 10-needle machine, but we're looking at new presses.



JoAnn Straub: A heavy industrial sewing machine.



Jane Swanzy, Swan Marketing LLC: For 2013 on my wish list of new decorating equipment: 1. more Mighty Hoops, two each of every size that fits my machine; 2. sublimation equipment; and 3. Crystal Press II for rhinestone transfers. Number three is what I really want, but is the least likely to happen this year.



Rosemarie Ann Wolf-Hozjan: Thought about the DTG but then again an Okidata printer would be nice - I don't think there's enough biz for the DTG until the economy turns around.



Alice Wylie: I'd love the 10-needle machine with the built-in camera! But my husband would vote for a direct-to-garment printing system!

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The first two letters are in response to the following question: *What, if any, equipment will you invest in during 2013? What ROI do you hope to see on it?*

More Productivity

We're planning to invest in a two-head Tajima embroidery machine to add to our single-head that we bought this year. We're trying to branch out more in the embroidery part of our business and hope the extra machine will help turn our jobs out faster!

Andrea Poague

Monkey in a Dryer

Dear Mr. President ...

We're an "S" corporation, so if President Obama decides he's going to tax dividends at the same rate as regular income, I won't buy equipment until that tax law changes.

Chet Thompson

Del Mar Embroidery

"Recently I moved to a different city and had to start over. Your magazine is and has been a great help and inspiration."

Jutta Ramsey, Stitches
by Jutta

Moving Day

I have a small home-based embroidery business. Recently I moved to a different city and had to start over. Your magazine is and has been a great help and inspiration. Thank you!

Jutta Ramsey

Stitches by Jutta

Giving Back

We're a student-run business. ACE started as an opportunity for at-risk students

to learn about business ventures. We've grown into a full-blown sign shop with digital print, sublimation, screen printing and embroidery.

Nicole Baumgartner

ACE Premier Lettering & Design

New Ventures

I'm new to embroidery by machine. I've been doing things for family and friends and I'm loving it! I want to grow my business and your magazine is a big help! Thanks!

Elaine Pettit

A and E Product Design

Love Your Supplier List

I only have a two-machine hobby type of embroidery shop, but it gets to be quite busy at times with a variety of things to embroider, from baby items, bags and pocketbooks, to quilts and throws. Thanks for your interesting magazine with a great source of suppliers.

Mabel Martin

Martin's Sharpening

Diversification

We are a small screen-printing and embroidery shop that has been in business for over 10 years, with one full-time employee besides my husband and me. We just added dye-sublimation and I'm excited for it to take off.

Michele Warner

Warner Screen Printing and Embroidery

Arts and Crafts

I work with a small silk-screen and embroidery business where I am the embroidery machine operator. I also sew and sell crafty items at home. I love your publication!

Jonora Corns

Hilliard, OH

Recently Posted on Facebook.com/ stitchesmag



Stitches Magazine: For better or worse, the broader economy obviously has a substantial effect on the micro economy of our industry. As such, get the word on the latest in America's employment situation and consumer sentiment here: <http://goo.gl/C4gkX>.



Howard Potter: If companies in our line of work focused on quality and not on being the cheapest and cutting corners, they'd be doing just fine. Companies like ours are standing out because for a couple dollars more, you have a customized product that will hold up. Money can be tight, but it is cheaper to do it right the first time and with quality.



Stitches Magazine: Geez Louise, and then some! Check out these incredibly life-like embroidered portraits by stitching artist Cayce Zavaglia: www.visualnews.com/2012/11/29/embroidery-portraits.



Cathy Cattle: I've viewed these, almost makes me want to start hand embroidery! Almost ...

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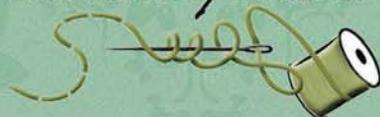
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Although I try my best, I can't always answer every request, so please continue your search on your own. Remember, if you contact the companies I mention, tell them you heard about them here!

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!

Hi Phil,

Can you help me locate denim vests for women with a square hem? They don't need to be a western-style vest. - *Meredith*

I've searched near and far and found that TYCA Corp. (*asi/92370*); (978) 612-0002; www.tyca.com; has a denim vest, product W71, that's cut just like its classic denim jacket, with a square hem. It should do the trick, as it's available in sizes small-7X. If you prefer a less fitted look, Apparelstar Inc. (*asi/36539*); (702) 269-4521; www.apparelstarimports.com; carries a men's denim vest (product SR-10) that may also be an option depending on the sizing you need.

Hi Phil,

I have a client who wants to order sweaters for their employees embellished with the company logo and moderately priced. I just want a simple pullover long-sleeve sweater with a crew neck. Any suggestions? Thank you so much. - *Evelyn*

Golly, it seems like most crew-neck sweatshirts have been replaced by V-necks in this industry, but there's hope. Pull over at Edwards Garment Co.

(*asi/51752*); (800) 253-9885; www.edwardsgarment.com: Product 665 is made of high-tech acrylic fiber with a low-pill performance feature. For the ladies, race to Dark Star Printing & Embroidery (*asi/48503*); (765) 759-4764; www.companycasuals.com/darkstarprint; for a women's classic crew-neck, item LSW283. And, if you're not opposed to shopping outside the U.S., Cottontex Canada Inc. (*asi/46775*); (905) 660-6925; www.cottontexcanada.com; is a great source for traditional sweaters. The supplier has just what you're looking for - a classic men's crew-neck sweater, product 50130, in black, charcoal, natural and navy.

Hi Phil,

I'm looking for a cotton, chenille or wool decorative throw for the home. If you could point me in the right direction, I'd greatly appreciate it. - *Heather*

Cuddle up with Kanata Blanket Co. (*asi/63723*); (604) 273-7002; www.kanatablanket.com; a well-known supplier that carries a wide variety of blankets and throws in different fabrics. Then pick from a large inventory of 100% cotton throws at Hudson

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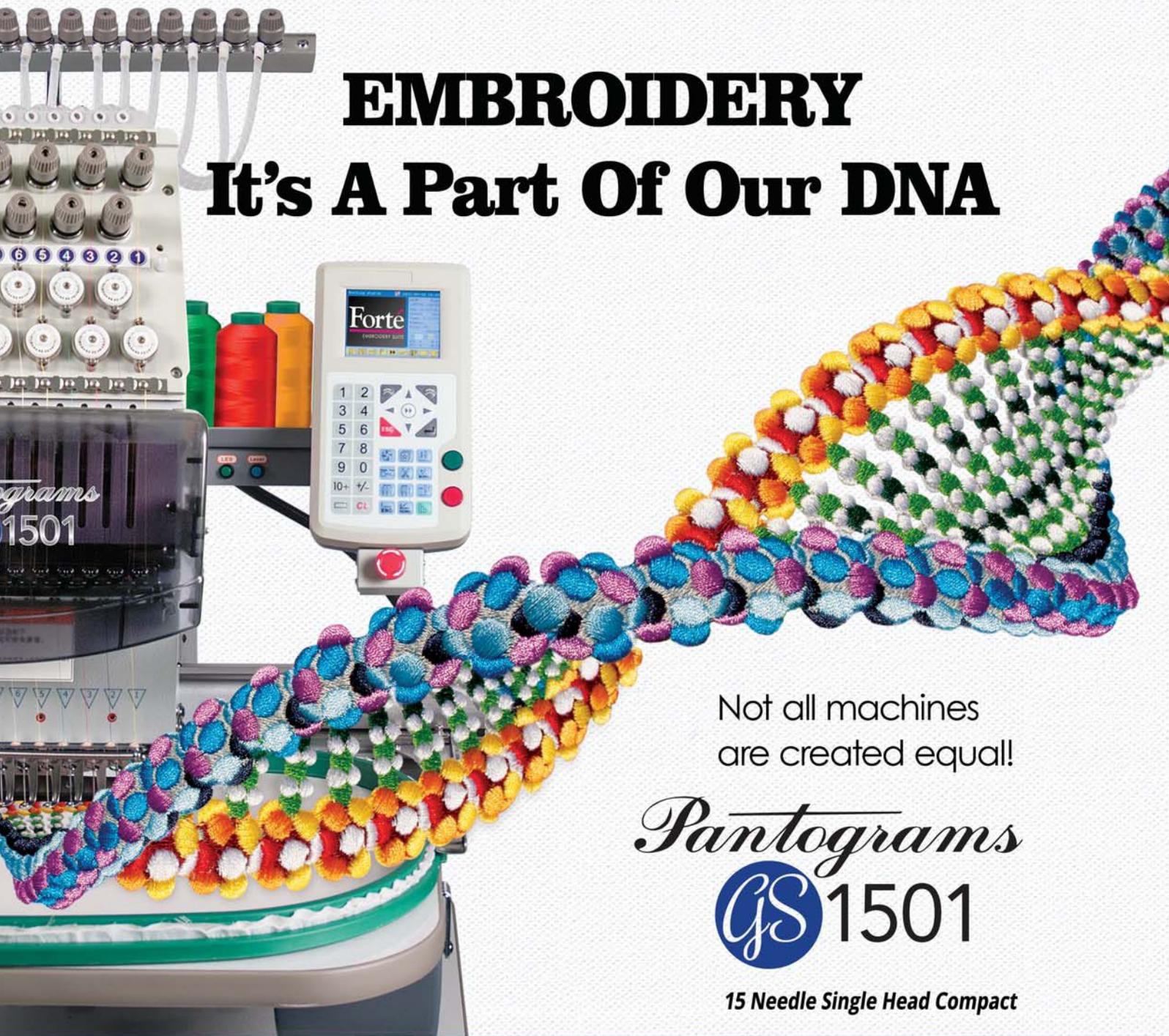
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& Co. (asi/61990); (916) 774-6710; www.HUDCOonline.com. To complete the search, visit KTP Design Co. (asi/63773); (212) 481-6613; www.symmetryline.com, for unique woven blankets in stock and custom designs.

Phil,
I've been following you for years in *Stitches!* You are the answer man! Where will I be able to find wholesale acrylic embroidery blanks like mugs, cups, key chains, etc., that allow personalized embroidery insertions?
- Ramona

You sure know how to make me blush! The most common item that has inserts for embroidered logos are travel mugs. Gordon Sinclair (asi/57800); (516) 354-8888; www.gordonsinclair.com; offers products LS-56, LS-51, TM-71, TM-28 and more double-walled, acrylic travel mugs that allow inserts, as does Hit Promotional Products (asi/61125); (727) 541-5561; www.hitpromo.net; products 5812, 5817, 5826 and 5816. For other items,

you can get creative by buying blanks and inserting an embroidery patch yourself. Dard Products Inc. (asi/48500); (847) 328-5000; www.tagmaster.net; carries a line of acrylic keychains, specifically products DP-129 and DP-120, that can be sold unimprinted and ready for your branding ideas!

Hi Phil,
I need to find out if there's a place where I can buy Nike Elite Basketball Socks at wholesale or at least a lower price than retail. I need white socks with royal blue and white with forest green. Any ideas? - Linda
Locating the exact Nike sock was tough, but don't shoot the messenger yet. Driving Impressions (asi/50864); (888) 737-4864; www.drivingi.com; carries a variety of Nike socks, so I'd definitely contact it first. Then dribble over to Sports Solutions Inc. (asi/88876); (336) 368-1100; www.nosweatspecialties.com; since it carries several styles of sport socks - calf-high and knee-

high with multiple color combinations. Sometimes improvising leads to the best branding experiences!

Phil, can you help me? I have a restaurant chain that wants black with white polka dots skinny/slim ties for their managers to wear. I've had no luck finding them. - Angie
Sounds like you have a trendy client on your hands! I recommend tying the knot with Wolfmark (asi/98085); (920) 886-9227; www.wolfmarkties.com. It has custom print options and is one of the few suppliers that offer skinny ties at 1.75" width and 58" standard length. Also check out Spectrum Ideas LLC (asi/88638); (917) 239-6749; www.yourfashionsuperstore.com, for a variety of prints in the skinny tie department.

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5-minute wisdom ■ *shop owners' top secrets*

by Sara Lavenduski

LEARN IT LIVE!

Attend "Be A PR Powerhouse: Characteristics Of Natural Self-Promoters" on Friday, March 22, 10:15 a.m.-11:15 a.m., at *The ASI Show* Long Beach, and you'll learn how to create a powerful self-promotional plan for your business, using press releases and social media marketing tools. Visit ASIShow.com to register.

Howard Potter, CEO of Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images, shares his insights on building a top-notch team, why it's valuable to hire interns, and the importance of using diverse marketing methods.

Build your business one technique at a time. When I started my business, I did only design at first. I eventually looked into sublimation, embroidery, screen printing and even promotional products. I farmed everything out at first, except sublimation. After that it was a domino effect. We now offer embroidery, tackle twill, laser apparel, rhinestones, sublimation, screen printing and promotional products.

A staff with design experience keeps our shop moving forward. Our team is well-rounded. Eight of our 13 employees have been to college for design. A dominant design staff allows you to put designs/proofs out quickly, and they can push the limit of each process. I hired all the designers right after they graduated. It's easier to train from scratch than to break bad habits.



You can have business success with young employees. My wife and I started our business from nothing when we were in our early 20s, and now we have 13 people here working with us to keep everything moving in the right direction. And, our very young staffers take on a lot of responsibility.

Give your customers a reason to wear your items. I'm a firm believer that if we do our best, our customers will promote us and come back to us. We're excited when we see locals wearing our customized apparel. It's a great feeling.

Don't be afraid to get creative. We love doing laser apparel with sublimation, and screen printing and rhinestones together. The mixed media is fun to work with because there are no rules. We also do sublimated tackle-twill work. Customers love it!

Shops should focus on selling quality, not undercutting others. A huge challenge in 2013 will be the competition between quality decorators and those who spend their time undercutting them with lower prices.

As long as companies keep cutting stitch count and price, the industry will have a hard time growing.

Plan to keep up with your marketing results. The more marketing you do in several places, the more noticed you'll be. But make sure you can keep up with the resulting customer flood. We have radio and TV commercials, phone book ads, our website, our Facebook page, customers we do work for, and apparel donations to nonprofits and fundraisers.

Teach students that success isn't easy, but it's always possible. My alma mater, Mohawk Valley Community College, asked me to speak to the students about how I made it in entrepreneurship and why. I told the students that success isn't a cakewalk: You have to work at it.



Give young people the opportunity to check out the decorated-apparel industry. By taking on interns in your shop, you can show them what you do and find out if they could become employees. It also shows you how you teach your staff.

Don't limit yourself, even if you're a smaller shop. Be smart by knowing your numbers, believing in your product, always looking to perfect your customer service and quality and never being content. You don't have to be the biggest to become one of the best at what you do.



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SEW WHAT? The decorating dude opines

Fine-Art Embroiderer Leads RISD Embroidery Program Forward

By Christopher Ruvo

For more than 20 years, Michael Savoia has experienced the pride and fulfillment that comes with creating elegantly artful embroidery for top interior designers. He could easily sit in his studio and continue to produce his sought-after stitchery for the rest of his life.

But these days, Savoia desires something more. Passionate about his craft, the *Stitches* advisory board member is driven to inspire excitement for excellent stitchwork in the next generation of artists and designers. He couldn't have picked better protégés: Savoia is now spearheading the emerging machine embroidery program at the Rhode Island School of Design, the nation's leading fine arts college. "This gives me the opportunity to pass on what I've learned," says Savoia, who owns Villa Savoia. "And working with the students – their enthusiasm is infectious."

During the fall semester, Savoia taught tutorials that introduced students in apparel, textiles and fine art classes to machine embroidery and software. The tutorials, which provided a historical context for embroidery, whet students' appetites, helping to compel many to participate in the hands-on embroidery instruction labs Savoia taught three times a week through the autumn. Typically lasting two to four hours, the labs focused on familiarizing students with some of the basics of embroidery software. Groups were small and intimate, enabling Savoia to pay particular attention to each student. "The purpose was to help them gain some proficiency with the tools of machine embroidery and to see how the machine sews out," says Savoia, noting students created what he called "embroidery doodles."

The labs appear to have made a positive impression among the aspiring artists and artisans: Savoia's upcoming five-week-long winter session class filled up fast. During the winter class, students "were completely embedded in embroidery," says Savoia.

The tutorials, labs and winter session are the latest developments in the RISD embroidery program, the foundation for which was laid in November 2010 when *Stitches* helped engineer a partnership between RISD, Madeira USA and Hirsch International to bring embroidery to the prestigious school. By teaching digital embroidery, RISD hopes to give students another tool for bringing their most creative ideas to life.

While Savoia's winter session is a step forward in the evolution of embroidery education at RISD, he is hoping to expand the stitching curriculum even further, cementing it as a vital part of the school's offerings. As part of that process, he'd like to see investment in more computers, making it easier for students to work with embroi-

Reader Comments

Brenda: Please come to Oklahoma City! We'd love to have some schooling around here! Thanks!

Cathy Cattle: What a great way to give back! Thanks, Michael, for all your work in this field.

Art Frederick: They couldn't have picked a better person to teach this program.

Kabeer: A great way to impact the next generation in order to build that creative sense in them, so as to lead them to a career in embroidery. Well done! I wish this could be done in Africa through any form of an advocacy project to help eradicate poverty.

Bonnie Domeny: Michael is a talented artist and has a lot to offer students. With his help, computerized embroidery as an art form will continue to expand the limits of this industry.

dery software, as well as in more machines, including one with an extra-wide frame. "Embroidery could offer a lot within the broader curriculum to expand the base of what the students can do once they graduate and look for a career," Savoia says.

What's more, Savoia hopes to help bring machine embroidery education to other prestigious art schools. "I find it's the most important thing to do," he says. "No one is teaching machine embroidery at the best schools in the country. If we don't introduce it, then it's going to be relegated to the promotional market for the rest of its life. I don't see that as being the end-all for embroidery here."

By exposing talented students to the possibilities of machine embroidery, Savoia believes the creative palette that they have to work with will expand, while at the same time their vibrant artistic energy and unique perspectives can help breathe new life into embroidery. "I want to have students carry on the tradition of producing high-quality computerized embroidery," he says. "If they get this education, they'll end up creating new products we've never seen before. They'll be able to tap into markets we haven't even identified yet."

Scan this code to read more of *Stitches* Staff Writer Christopher Ruvo's Stitchwork blog, which spotlights embroidery and related apparel decoration, offering everything from tips to unique stories about people in the industry.



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PROBLEM SOLVER

Q: "I'm a New Jersey embroiderer and recently opened my shop in the fall.

Though my business was spared the ravages of Hurricane Sandy, it made me realize I need a back-up plan in the event of a natural disaster. Can you offer me some tips?"



Brent Bolm, owner, Eagle Activewear

A: "Inexpensive, online data storage is readily available. You Send It! and Drop Box are two popular companies

offering this service, but several others exist for small businesses. Many of these companies offer a small amount of storage for free so you can test drive each one and see which one you like before spending \$75-\$100 a year for unlimited storage. I'd also recommend adding an external hard drive that automatically backs up each file as you save them. This provides on-site and off-site backup options that should suffice for most small businesses."



Jimmy Lamb, manager of education and communications, Sawgrass Technologies

A: "I've been

through six hurricanes and numerous tropical storms. Too many times business owners get a wake-up call after a storm has affected them, so planning ahead is imperative. When dealing with destructive acts of nature, there are two issues you might face: damage to your facility that prevents you from conducting normal business operations, and a loss of income due to your customers being out of business, even if your facility is spared.

If you're home-based, ensure your business equipment is covered, some-

thing homeowners insurance doesn't do. Meet with an insurance agent and create a policy that covers everything, including equipment and software, clip art, stock designs, computers, supplies, tools, accessories and more. Also, discuss flood insurance.

Once you have policies in place and you fully understand coverage exclusions, deductibles and more, take inventory and document all overhead in your business in writing and with photos or video. Be sure to store that documentation off-site in a safety deposit box. Make up-to-date file backups. Try to run your business with laptops. That way, you have instant portability of all of your files, since you can grab them and take them somewhere secure.

If a natural disaster approaches, prepare your shop as much as possible. Remove what you can – items such as samples,

blanks and electronics. Turn off the power at your breaker box and unplug everything to help reduce damage from power surges. Give plenty of thought to the aftermath – even if you have no damage, how long will it take to get power back? What about your customers? Will you even have any business?

We invested in generators and fed them directly into our breaker box. A 6,000-watt generator running under a heavy load can burn up to a gallon of gas per hour, so plan on how much gas you need to last a week or more.

If you depend on your business for a significant portion of your income, investigate Business Interruption Protection. It's a form of insurance, similar to unemployment in that it can provide funds to keep you going even if your business has come to a grinding halt, because of a natural disaster."

OOPS... How I screwed up and what I learned from it Pencil Me In

Submitted by Mary Corbet, author and owner of Needle 'n Thread; www.needlethread.com

"The photo shown here indicates how one weekend went for me embroidery-wise. Have you ever had a weekend like that? I almost lost my determination to overcome this one. Starting over can be really painful!

I ripped out – picked out, I should say – the stitching I accomplished on this white linen pouch (with white embroidery, using *coton a broder* – cutwork thread). I just didn't like it at all. There were a number of reasons – one of which was that the pencil, for the first time ever, for me – picked up all over the white threads. I tried to tell myself it would wash out in the end, but I couldn't get over the sick feeling of 'What if it doesn't?' I stopped at this point, rather than finish the whole thing and find out the pencil markings wouldn't quite come out of the *coton a broder*. And so, I picked away.

It turns out the pencil lead I used was too soft – a hard lead pencil with an extremely fine line works better – there's not enough lead for the thread to pick up. In any case, I switched to a very sharp blue transfer pencil, which works better with white thread. It's always safest to use blue when working with white, because the white absorbs the blue. I should've known that. I did know it. But for some reason, I just didn't put enough weight on that thought ahead of time. Oh, the woes of the imprudent stitcher."



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Ever made a decorating or digitizing error that you solved in a creative way? Tell us all about it. E-mail nroller@asicentral.com with your story today.

by Julie A. Cajigas

hot FROM PHILIPPINE trends FASHION WEEK



Jeffery Maitern

Philippine Fashion Week was a festival of bright colors, beautiful patterns and some occasionally crazy couture. Some of the more avant-garde looks featured massive headpieces crafted of fabric flowers, feathers and beading, while others featured exaggerated proportions in the shoulders and sleeves that echoed '80s fashions. Designers more geared toward ready-to-wear fashion included some brights in their looks, but also explored the deeper, jewel-tone palette using black and deep gray as neutrals. Expect this summer's colors to veer away from the highly tropical hues from last summer, which focused on tangerines, turquoises and margarita greens. Though summer fashion will always have a tropical feel, this year we'll see more edgy black, and deep greens, navys and reds.

One of the collections that stood out on the spring/summer 2013 runway was Dax Bayani's swimwear collection. The suits featured colorful floral prints and stripes, both of which are hot 2013 summer trends, paired with statement accessories and neutral, nude footwear. The Bayani bikini shown is a great example of how designers are pairing traditional summer shades with black and deeper jewel tones this year. Bayani experiments with one- and two-piece suits, featuring a variety of cuts and neckline styles. One model wears a tube top with a high-waisted brief, while another sports a one-piece suit with long sleeves.

What are the takeaways from Philippine Fashion Week? Experiment with stripes and prints, both of which are preferred embellishments this season. Choose pieces and decorations that blend bright or neon colors with black, white and deeper tones like navy blue. Finally, offer your clients choices of different cuts and fits for their garments and suggest complementary headwear and accessories.

GET THE LOOK



SEXY SUIT

Swimwear can be a great giveaway, especially in the beverage industry, or for brands that appeal to beachgoers or spring break enthusiasts like sunscreen providers, sporting goods stores, hotels and motels, resorts and restaurants. This trendy string bikini features all-over sublimation printed on white, which is a great way to add branding or create a design that fits in with runway trends. Decorators can personalize suits with a small design or monogram in the front corner. Available from Bishop, The Garment Co. (*asi/40585*; circle 151 on Free Info Card); (604) 255-5461; www.bishopwear.com

ANIMAL INSTINCT

Dax Bayani's models accentuated their sexy swimsuits with bandanas, most of which featured animal print patterns. Get the look with these animal print bandanas from Brighter Promotions (*asi/42016*). The most popular prints on the runway and at retail are leopard print and zebra print. Instead of celebrating the animal's natural colors, many designers are using unique colors like teal, fuchsia and deep green to create the animal print patterns rather than the whites, blacks, browns and tans found in nature. Available from Brighter Promotions (*asi/42016*; circle 152 on Free Info Card); (800) 446-3200; www.brighterpromotions.com



BULKY BANGLES

Big bangles and other statement jewelry pieces are hot for spring/summer 2013. Traditional gold and silver are sharing the spotlight with fabric, glass and wooden jewelry. Get connected with socially responsible, grassroots businesses and get in on the chunky bracelet trend with these gorgeous brass cuffs, featuring an antique silver finish. Helping Hand Rewards (*asi/60465*) works with socially-focused businesses to help their beautiful products find a home. Available from Helping Hand Rewards (*asi/60465*; circle 153 on Free Info Card); (877) 502-6917; www.helpinghandrewards.com



HOT HUE

Emerald



Available from Tri-Mountain (asi/92125; circle 154 on Free Info Card); (800) 824-6464; www.trimountain.com

Pantone’s 2013 color of the year is Emerald. “Most often associated with brilliant, precious gemstones, the perception of emerald is sophisticated and luxurious,” according to Pantone’s site. “Since antiquity, this luminous, magnificent hue has been the color of beauty and new life in many cultures and religions. Also the color of growth, renewal and prosperity, no other color conveys regeneration more than green. For centuries, many countries have chosen green to represent healing and unity.”

The color isn’t just about luxury, though. Pantone explains that while last year’s color of the year, bright Tangerine Tango, was full of energy to help us move forward through difficult times, Emerald is more about insight, balance and harmony. “Symbolically, Emerald brings a sense of clarity, renewal and rejuvenation, which is so important today,” says Leatrice Eisman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute.

Emerald is a jewel tone, and likely sets the stage for more jewel tones to move into the color palette throughout the year. The lush shade pairs well with most neutrals, including shades of brown, which also echo the deep green’s natural roots. A green with bluish undertones, Emerald also pairs well with a variety of shades of blue, including navy blue and turquoise. This versatile color should be flexible as it moves through the seasons, pairing with different hues in each.

SOCIAL SHADES

If you’re looking to get emerald-inspired, Pantone’s Pinterest page is the perfect place to visit. The color expert pins products, fashions and inspirational images to help get your creative juices flowing. And, if you want to join the conversation about fashion’s hottest colors, follow Pantone at @Pantone on Twitter and use the hashtag #coloroftheyear, or visit its Facebook fan page: www.facebook.com/pantonecolor.

RETAIL INSPIRATION

Luxe Brand Aglini

Luxury Italian shirting brand Aglini launches in the U.S. market this spring, and along with 40 years of experience in shirt making, this sought-after brand has some haute hints about what’s hot for spring. Focused on stripes, lace and haute tunic styling, the Aglini line offers lots of fashion inspiration. Of the three trends, stripes are the easiest to pull into looks for the wholesale market.

Aglini isn’t just about luxury – it’s also about customization and decoration. Each season, Aglini presents options for a unique, tailor-made experience where clients can create their own looks from a selection of collars and cuffs with embroidered details, fur trims, sequins or simple buttons for customization on standard bodies. Buyers can customize shirt plackets with collars, cuffs and elbow patches, including the thread color used for buttons. Fabrics, trims, buttons and sequined detailing evolve each season for a truly specific collection unique to each market and region.

With more luxury brands offering customization, fashion-forward clients will be looking for that personal touch. Who better to offer customization than a decorator? Take a cue from Aglini and show your customers how you can “customize” their apparel and accessories with gorgeous logos, monograms and designs in embroidery, appliqué, transfers and rhinestones. In the meantime, keep an eye on Aglini, especially when you’re working with corporate clients. Understanding a luxury corporate-focused brand can translate directly into knowing the wants and needs of your corporate customers.



Key elements of Aglini’s spring line are stripes, lace and tunics.



Stripes may be corporate chic, but they can also go casual. Tote available from MV Sport/Weatherproof (asi/68318; circle 155 on Free Info Card); (800) 367-7900; www.mvsport.com





TREND SPY

Oversized Tees

Oversized tops have been trending in fashion for the past several years. With the rise in popularity of leggings, skinny jeans and jeggings, long, flowing tops have also become even more mainstream. Though the advertising specialty market is often focused on more classic, corporate-friendly pieces, many wholesale brands have integrated trends and fashion-forward looks into their lines. Thinc Actionwear (*asi/91120*) brings you this elegant twist on the oversized tee. Crafted with a cotton/polyester viscose, the top has a silky look and a soft hand that goes great with skinny jeans or a favorite yoga pant. Wearers can dress this oversized tee up with a slim belt and a sexy pair of boots, or dress it down and take it to their Zumba class.

WHERE TO PITCH THEM: Clothing boutiques, service establishments seeking an alternative uniform, stores with a distinctive bohemian vibe, spas and gyms.

Available from Thinc Actionwear (*asi/91120*; circle 156 on Free Info Card); (800) 452-1200; www.thinactionwear.com

New Must Have Styles

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 with mesh back panels



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FASHION IMPRINT INNOVATION

TruEmbroidery Software

The number of Mac users has increased exponentially over the past decade as Apple's profile has increased with the release of the iPod, iPhone and iPad. Mac computers have long been the computer of choice for many creative professionals, and with the introduction of a new software program called SVP Worldwide's TruEmbroidery, embroiderers can finally design on a Mac.

"SVP Worldwide is responding to an industry demand for a product that gives sewers who own Mac computers the opportunity to enjoy comprehensive embroidery software that has been designed specifically for them," says Katrina Helmkamp, CEO of SVP Worldwide. "TruEmbroidery software is compatible with most leading brands' embroidery machines so sewers who love their Mac computers and the art of embroidery can create personalized embroidery designs with features developed for the Apple operating system. This will unleash a new level of creative possibilities for a large segment of today's sewing consumers."

TruEmbroidery software comes with three modules. First, TruE Studio allows users to adjust, personalize and combine hundreds of embroidery designs, frames and flourishes. Second, TruE Modify transforms embroideries using morphing options, allowing users to automatically add basting stitches and trim commands, and optimize designs for stitching out. Finally, TruE Create allows users to create designs from pictures with easy specialty effects and thousands of stitching effects including 250 fill patterns.

JULIE A. CAJIGAS is a contributing writer for *Stitches*.



TruEmbroidery Software by SVP Worldwide (circle 157 on Free Info Card) for Mac computers is the industry's first embroidery software designed specifically for Mac users. TruEmbroidery will be sold for an MSRP of \$2,299. To learn more and find a certified retailer, visit www.truembroidery.com.



Circle 50 on Free Info Card or visit www.stitches.com/freeinfo

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coldesi.com

decorating *solutions*

tips & tricks to increase your productivity

By Tonia Kimbrough

saving 9

Secure Thread Cleanly

While securing the loose ends of thread may not seem like a huge time-zapper, it's a tedious, albeit necessary, function that adds up throughout the course of a day. Madeira USA simplifies the task with its Mini Snap Cone (MSC), which holds **1,100 yards of thread**. The genius design of the MSC is a **built-in snap lock** at the base that enables embroiderers to simply clamp the thread-end at the bottom of the cone rather than performing a "two-finger tie-off." Sarah Westfield, senior creative and media coordinator for Madeira USA, explains, "When storing thread, embroiderers simply need to wind the ends of the thread into the groove of the MSC's base, and the thread will be held securely and can be easily retrieved." Another advantage: The MSC's **cone-shaped core** allows layers of thread to cling together better, reducing the risk of thread pooling at the base due to machine vibration. This saves time - and tangles.



Madiera USA; circle 159 on Free Info Card

Quicken Your Color Matching

Reduce the amount of time you spend color matching with VersaWorks 4.8 RIP Software, which features new built-in Pantone libraries and other advanced color-management tools. Roland DGA Corp. has added six libraries from the Pantone Plus and Goe product lines to its newest version of VersaWorks. These libraries allow users to automatically convert a specific Pantone spot color in the design file to a CMYK value that can be produced on a Roland inkjet device, enabling a quick output of specific colors when you're working with properly profiled media. "Using the new Pantone libraries can eliminate the typical file preparation time that's involved before printing," says Hiroshi Ono, group product manager for Roland DGA Corp.



Roland DGA Corp.; circle 158 on Free Info Card

QUICK TIPS

➔ **Brighten up lettering with new Neon Colors in Dal-Plus cutter material.** The Neon Pink and green have a look and feel similar to screen-printed graphics. They have a matte finish, a soft hand and an easy-to-position sticky backing. Available from www.dalcoatbletic.com.

Dalco Athletic; circle 160 on Free Info Card



Transfer Express (asi/91804); circle 161 on Free Info Card

➔ **Help customers visualize the design they want.** The 2013 Marketing Kit from Transfer Express (asi/91804) offers hundreds of clip art designs in an attractive binder, also filled with ideas, sample layouts and an apparel-printing color selector. In addition, get access to Easy View, an online designer. To learn more, visit www.transferexpress.com.

➔ **Choose mixed-media chenille patches for added texture.** Using chenille embroidery machines, Pacific Emblem Co. can mix media using felt, tackle twill and embroidery all on one finished patch. For more information, contact www.pacificemblem.com.



Pacific Emblem Co.; circle 162 on Free Info Card

Product Pick

Ready your business for short runs and full colors without a learning curve - all for under \$13,000. The new Diamond Business in a Box Heat Applied Graphics package from Digital HeatFX makes it easy to add on-demand printing of light and dark garments, hard surfaces and a variety of other textiles. "The Diamond Business in a Box package is unique in that it offers those solutions, and it does so with a process that is simple and easy to learn, without any of the mess and maintenance issues found in comparable decorating methods. That means a quicker return on investment, without the headaches," says Digital HeatFX National Account Manager Joe Smalley. The package includes a Stahls' Fusion Heat Press, an OKI 11" x 17" Laser Printer CMYW, and five boxes of laser transparent and laser dark, plus teflon sheets. To learn more, visit: www.digitalheatfx.com/silver.



Digital HeatFX; circle 165 on Free Info Card

5 STEPS

Get A Better Digital Underbase

According to graphic designer Dane Clement of Great Dane Graphics, a high-quality dark shirt print with a digital direct-to-garment printer relies on your ability to create a good-quality underbase.

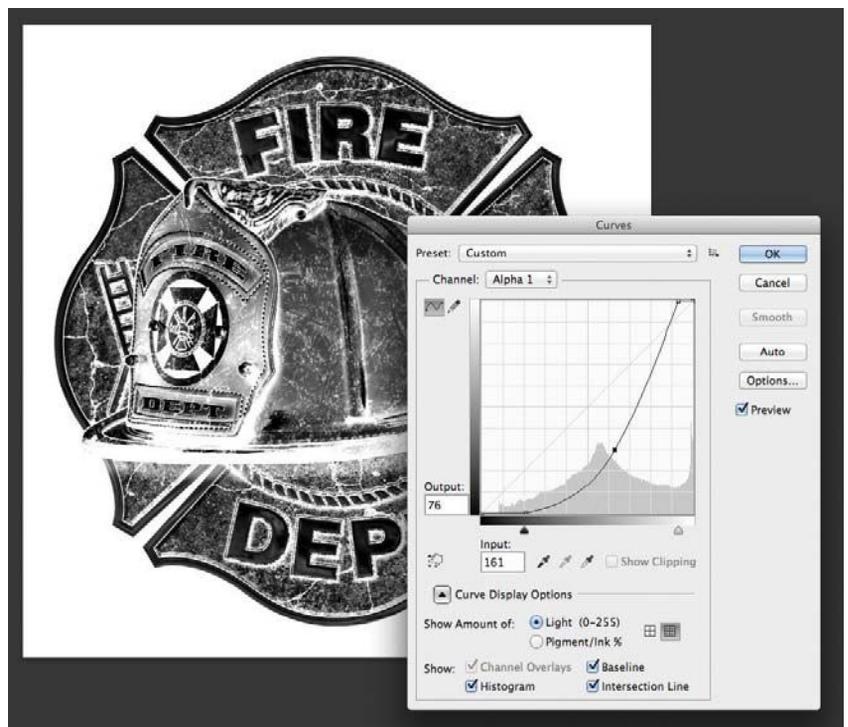
STEP 1: Open your design in Adobe Photoshop.

STEP 2: Using an image file with a black background, work in RGB mode and duplicate the file you're working on. For example, name the duplicate file NW for "New White." You won't be keeping the file; you're just cutting and pasting an element from it.

STEP 3: Change your work mode from RGB to LAB, and then open your channels panel. Click on the window's tab – the name of the file at the top of the window – to create two side-by-side working windows. Drag the "lightness" channel from the new document over the window of your working document and let go.

STEP 4: Double click the (Alpha 1) channels icon, and change the channel mode to "selected areas." The background of this channel should be black. Now that you have the Alpha 1 channel selected, hit Command-I (on a Mac) or Control-I (on a PC) to invert the channel.

STEP 5: Go to the Image menu > Curves to pull up your curves dialog box. Make the adjustment to the diagonal line, as shown in the example image. Look at the grayscale bars below and to the left. One side affects your image's dark areas, and the other side affects your highlights. Yours may be reversed. Move the ends to reflect what's shown in the illustration.



GET EDUCATED

For additional detail on how to print the digital underbase successfully, read Great Dane Graphics' Dane Clement's blog post "How to Create a Digital Underbase for a Direct-to-Garment Printer" at www.greatdanegraphics.com.

Decoration Insider Chrystalina Crash Course

While some decorators achieve sparkle with rhinestones or glittery heat transfers, screen printers have a few tricks up their sleeves. One option is chrystalina. Decoration insider Mary Poissant of Buffalo, NY-based Apple Imprints Apparel explains several options this specialty ink provides: "It can be added into an ink to give a subtle glitter effect. It can be printed on top of a flat ink to glitter more intensely or can be printed on a high-density ink, with a shimmer ink or pretty much any other specialty ink to give it a vibrant luster." For example, Apple Imprints added flair to a simple, one-color design by printing chrystalina on top of a liquid gold ink for maximum shimmer.

Think of this ink for any fabric or garment that can be screen printed. Though, textiles with stretch require special consideration. For example, Poissant advises, "If you're printing a 2x1 rib-knit tee or tank, there should be stretch additive in the ink so the elasticity of the ink follows that of the shirt."



Apple Imprints Apparel; circle 163 on Free Info Card

EQUIPMENT TIP



Hotronix; circle 164 on Free Info Card

Heat-press platens come in myriad shapes and sizes. Having the right platen for your job greatly simplifies the application of heat transfers. One of the biggest challenges for heat-press decorators are threading smaller women's and children's apparel. The new MVP Platen from Hotronix solves the problem. MVP is short for "Most Valuable Platen," measuring 11" by 15". Not only does the MVP work well for smaller garments, but it allows for longer names and designs thanks to its length.

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INNOVATION GENERATION

Greater efficiency and expanded decoration potential are at the heart of some of the most exciting innovations.

By Christopher Ruvo



Michael E. Porter, an author and Harvard Business School professor, is a world-renowned leading authority on economic development and competitive strategy in business. And as far as Porter sees it, “Innovation is the central issue to economic prosperity.” In the decorated-apparel industry, equipment and machine manufacturers have recently released a bevy of innovative products designed to help shops achieve greater efficiency and profitability.

Here, we examine some of these offerings, from shop-changing advancements like laser attachments for embroidery machines and a digital printer that attaches to a screen-printing carousel, to a new system for networking single-head machines, an adaptable stand for heat presses, a groundbreaking screen-printing press, and more. With these

innovations, “The end result,” says Paul Gallgher, CEO of Hirsch International (*asi/14982*), “is more efficient production of more unique and differentiated product selections.”



MULTIMEDIA MADE EASIER WITH NEW MACHINES

In a highly competitive marketplace, being able to offer a variety of decorating treatments and to combine them expertly into unique multimedia designs at cost-effective prices can help you expand into new markets and capture more of your current clients’ spend. Recognizing that decoration diversity is becoming increasingly integral to shops’ success, machine makers are coming to market with products that facilitate combining different embellishment mediums. Bowker Printing is one of the apparel decorating firms taking advantage of those offerings.

Serving a virtual who’s who of inter-

national brands that include Adidas and Ralph Lauren, Bowker’s clients demand apparel prints that are cutting edge in terms of design and quality. To continue to meet those expectations, Bowker late last year invested in the Kornit Paradigm 933, an industrial-grade digital apparel printer that fastens to a screen-printing carousel. The add-on solution, which just recently debuted in the U.S., enables Bowker to combine traditional screen-printing methods with digital printing technology, facilitating the creation of unique mixed-media printing applications.

Compatible with manual and automatic screen-printing presses, the Paradigm can reduce labor in the screen-printing process, eliminating, for example the need to prepare multiple screens for different colors as required as part of a design. The machine’s efficiency and ability to help Bowker create unique fashion-forward prints can aid the Hong Kong-based decorating firm in



THE HOTTEST DECORATING-EQUIPMENT ADVANCES

Here are the latest and greatest innovations you can look forward to seeing available to you in the decorated-apparel equipment and machine arena. All of these machine advancements are covered in detail in this article, along with case studies of shops that have already benefited from each.

1 The Kornit Paradigm 933 - This digital printer that attaches to a screen-printing carousel reduces labor in the screen-printing process and facilitates the creation of unique mixed-media designs. Available from Hirsch International (*asi/14982*); www.hirschinternational.com.

2 Complimentary Lasers - Manufacturers like Proel and Seit offer laser machines that work in conjunction with single-head embroidery machines to streamline the appliqué process and open the door to more elaborate and trendy appliqué designs. Proel products

are available from Bito (www.bitousa.com); Seit is available from Hirsch International.

3 The GS1501-2 - This new networkable modular embroidery system allows for the networking of multiple single-head units, allowing for greater shop efficiency. Available from Pantograms; www.pantograms.com.

4 mPower Series - The mP5 and mP10 direct-to-garment digital printers feature enhancements that contribute to speedier, easier production of crisper, more colorful prints. Available from Anajet (*asi/16000*); www.anajet.com.

5 Heat Press Caddie - The Hotronix Heat Press Caddie features a patented time-saving feature that can ratchet up heat-printing productivity by 40%. Available from Stahls’ ID Direct (*asi/88984*); www.stahls.com.

6 sRoque You - Just released in North America, the “You” automatic screen-printing press registers consistently at .001, making it “the most precise press on the market,” says Ryan Moor, CEO of Ryonet Corp. (*asi/528500*). Available from Ryonet; www.silkscreeningsupplies.com.

keeping its competitive edge, says company Director William Mok. “Managing the production of complex print, gradient look and photo-realistic images has been integral to making Bowker Printing ahead of its competitors,” he says.

While the \$105,000 price means only larger decorating businesses will be in a position to purchase the Paradigm, don’t think manufacturers have forgotten about small-shop embroiderers when it comes to multimedia machine combinations. Companies like SEIT and Proel have developed laser-driven decorating tools that work in conjunction with single-head embroidery machines to streamline the creation of appliqué, making it easier to create retail-inspired distressed and reverse appliqué looks and to combine those elements into designs that also include traditional embroidery and other embellishment media.

While the Proel E-Laser and SEIT single-head laser have been available for several years, interest in them is starting to surge as decorators increasingly look to diversify to gain an upper hand on competitors. Compatible with any make or model machine, the E-Laser attaches to the first needle and uses the embroidery frame movement to guide the laser, allowing for an appliqué creation process that nixes time

spent cutting out designs, eliminating the need for spray adhesives and the manual task of positioning the appliqué in the hoop.

The SEIT works similar magic, following the first needle but cutting instead of stitching. The pantograph guides the laser to programmed coordinates, cutting out designs in, if desired, multiple layers of diverse fabrics. Howard Potter, owner of Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images, invested in a SEIT single-head laser about a year ago. Since then, he says, the device has helped generate high-margin work that has resulted in an additional \$30,000 in sales, despite the fact that the decorating firm, which was on course to earn revenues of around \$1 million in 2012, hasn’t heavily marketed its laser capability. “We can offer those appliqué looks that our competitors can’t,” Potter says.

What’s especially new and exciting for embroiderers regarding the SEIT single-head is that its compatibilities include the NEO Plus Wide Frame—a Tajima machine brought out just last year that features an extra-wide 23”-by-21” hoop that enables stitchers to sew on oversized jackets, jerseys and fleece with giant designs. Nicknamed the Sumo, the machine’s broader stitching field can help embroiderers expand into non-apparel markets, facilitating decorat-

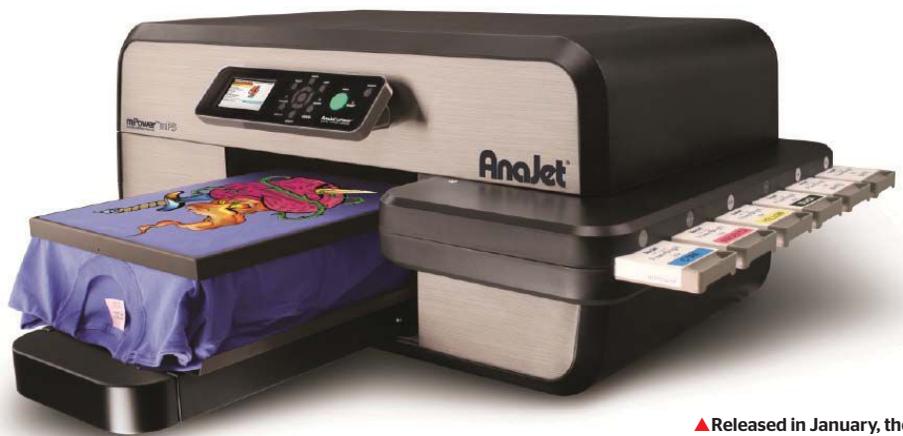
ing on big totes, banners, and luggage, as well home décor items like curtains, table runners, and bedspreads. “The common themes,” says Gallagher, CEO of Hirsch, which distributes Tajima and Kornit, “are all about continued advancement of technologies that facilitate the combining of disciplines and increases in productivity.”

JUST-DEBUTED SYSTEM NETWORKS SINGLE-HEADS FOR EFFICIENCY

Revved-up productivity and efficiency was, indeed, on the minds of the innovators at Pantograms when they developed the GS1501-2 networkable modular embroidery system. Released in November, the system allows for the networking of multiple single-head units. From one computer, embroiderers can send a single job to and control the networked machines, essentially turning them into a multi-head – but with perks.

Whereas all heads stop for a thread break on a multi-head and a finished job requires a hoop change on each head at the same time, “there’s just no stopping the GS1501-2 system. If one head stops for thread breaks, or hoop changes or anything else, the others keep on stitching,” says Joe Smalley, Pantograms national account manager. He adds that this allows for higher output than a traditional multi-head machine while providing cost, space, and maintenance savings. Additionally, each single-head within the network can be made to work on separate orders, allowing stitchers to tackle different jobs at once.

When Antonio Pinzari, owner of Palm Beach County, FL-based All-Star Embroidery, invested in a Pantograms single-head machine late last year, he did so with an eye on the future. Pinzari says a major draw of buying the single-head was that, as his business grows, he’ll be able to purchase more Pantograms machines and create a multi-head network. “We want to build the business slowly and ultimately have four to six machines,” says Pinzari, who just entered the embroidery industry last year after a



▲ Released in January, the 2013 versions of the mPower mP5 and mP10 printers from AnaJet (asi/16000) feature key improvements in ink-delivery and maintenance-specific components.

successful career building and selling five other businesses.

Of course, Hirsch's Sumo and Pantograms' network system aren't the only new offerings in the embroidery machine category about which decorators are amped. Owners of Brother's PR-Series of multi-needle machines were excited to learn about a new software upgrade kit that allows them to progress to four-needle cutwork, which empowers decorators to embroider and appliqué cut designs without stopping to change needles. Meanwhile, Melco's ingenious Scan & Sew technology is winning raves, too. With the system, embroidery orders come in on a barcode accompanied by a visual design image. The machine operator scans the barcode, and the design is automatically loaded into the machine, ready for production. Scan & Sew has helped the clothing brand Burt's Bees Baby maximize productivity when it comes to personalizing bibs, burp cloths, blankets and more with embroidery. "It helps us be as automated as possible, which reduces time tremendously," says Operations Manager David Kidd.

ENHANCED DIGITAL PRINTER PRODUCES COLOR-POPPING PRINTS

The church was always pleased with the print quality on the shirts Chris Parker digitally printed for its youth group. But after Parker delivered one particular batch, his clients were more impressed than they had ever been. "They said, 'What did you do differently? These designs look so amazing,'" Parker says.

What the owner of Bakersfield, CA-based AmazinX did was create the prints on the shirts using the newly upgraded mPower mP5 direct-to-garment digital printer from AnaJet (*asi/16000*). This year's version of the mP5, along with its sister the mP10, features key improvements in ink-delivery and maintenance-specific components that result in enhanced color and fidelity to the source image, making solid blues, bright yellows



► The Kornit Paradigm is a digital add-on solution that enables screen printers to combine traditional screen-printing methods with digital printing technology. Check out a video here: <http://goo.gl/AwKZa>.

and other hard-to-hit colors more vibrant. And that's making Parker a bigger hit with customers. "When the upgrades came through, my reds really started to pop," he says. "The prints really jump off the shirt."

Not only does the mP5 produce crisper, colorful prints thanks in part to larger ink dampers that reduce the likelihood of ink starvation, it also helps Parker be more efficient by saving him time and aggravation on upkeep, which means he can handle more orders, generating additional revenue. The new Teflon-coated print head plate and an enhanced maintenance station, which includes an improved wiper blade, are some of the features that contribute to the machine's better overall performance and reduced cleaning times. "It all makes a world of difference," Parker says.

"Innovation is the central issue to economic prosperity."

Michael E. Parker, Harvard Business School

HEAT-PRINTING PRODUCTIVITY INCREASED BY ADAPTABLE STAND

Job time reduction, better productivity, and increased sales were something Maureen Maloy was after. The owner of Ames, IA-based Thunder Road Embroidery got all that with the help of the Hotronix Heat Press Caddie from Stahls' ID Direct (*asi/88984*) – an adaptable stand for heat presses that makes it faster and easier to heat print garments with custom heat transfers.

Compatible with the Hotronix Auto Open and Maxx Clam presses, the Caddie features a patented time-saving feature – threadability – that can increase productivity by up to 40%, according to Stahls'. With the Caddie, which came out in 2012, decorators can load garments and heat print the front, back or sides without having to remove the apparel from the threadable platen. That platen design enables decorators to drop seams, zipper fronts, and button areas off the press, providing a smooth, even print surface. Thanks to such advantages, Maloy says, the Caddie makes heat-printing reversible orders

► The GS1501 from Pantograms is built so that it can be grouped into a networkable modular embroidery system, creating a multi-head operation that overcomes some of the drawbacks of multi-head machines, Pantograms says.



of uniforms easier, while also decreasing the time it takes to center garments and reduce wrinkles. “The ability to work on the front and back of a garment without having to remove it from the heat press has been very helpful,” she says.

Featuring self-leveling casters, the Caddie is adjustable and portable. Not only is the device easy to move around the shop, it also frees up counter space, leaving more room for layout and heat-printing accessories. “I love the ability to easily move the heat press to an area when I’m working on a large job and have the garments spread out,” Maloy says. “I’m not confined to a specific work area where the

work space and lighting may not be adequate for what I’m working on.”

While her mainstay business is embroidery, Maloy says the Caddie has given her the confidence to expand her heat-printing operation. And expand that business has, rising between 50% and 75% in 2012.

CUTTING-EDGE SCREEN-PRINTING MACHINE

While Alpha Omega performs digital and pad printing, the lionshare of the shop’s sales center on screen printing apparel. As such, it’s critical that the Buckinghamshire, England-based business has a state-of-the-art press that can crank out prints quickly and

with consistent high quality. The shop got such a press when it invested in the “You” from sRoque, according to Alpha Omega’s Matt Hart. “The print quality is good and the machine runs as quickly as you can use it,” he says. “Setting up has become quicker with the registration system, although even manual setup is remarkably quick.”

Now, screen printers on this side of the Atlantic will have a chance to benefit from what the You automatic screen printing press has to offer. Ryonet Corp., a leading provider of screen-printing equipment and supplies, announced in late 2012 that it’ll distribute the You – and two other sRoque presses – in the U.S. “It runs smoothly and quietly with good consistent results and no pallet variation,” Hart says. “The machine is extremely well-made and easy to keep clean.”

Ryonet founder and CEO Ryan Moor says those are key reasons why he wanted to make available in the states the press from sRoque, the second-largest manufacturer of automated screen-printing presses in the world. Noting the You registers consistently at .001, making it “by far the most precise press on the market,” Moor says the press is loaded with innovative, efficiency-enhancing features. They include high-lift print heads with a natural peel in the head movement that allow printers to run multiple jobs on one press.

► The Hottronix Heat Press Caddie from Stahls’ ID Direct (asi/88984) can help increase heat-printing productivity by up to 40%. Check out a video on the Caddie here: <http://goo.gl/FvDtI>.



LEARN IT LIVE!

Attend "Stand Out From The Competition And Grow Your Business" on Friday, March 22, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., at *The ASI Show* Long Beach, and you'll learn insider strategies for becoming the go-to resource for your clients, allowing you to move higher-end products at higher-end prices - with higher profits for you. Visit ASIShow.com to register.

"The natural peel in the print movement allows for a better release of screen from the printed garment for higher-definition prints, especially with halftones," Moor says. Additionally, the press pallets don't move up and down like traditional presses do, reducing wear and making it easier to load. "The press also has a laser system

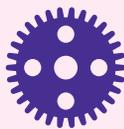
that allows the operator to easily see center and print placement on the press," says Moor, noting all parts of the press can be controlled through a PLC touch screen and that the press system will remind operators when maintenance is due and what needs to be done.

From Hart's perspective, the You is a

good fit for both experienced screen printers looking to upgrade and those just venturing into screen printing. "All machines take a bit of getting used to," he says, "but we were up and running the same day it was installed." ■

CHRISTOPHER RUVO is a staff writer for *Stitches*; contact cruvo@asicentral.com

► Recently debuted in the U.S. market, the sRoque You Automatic Screen Printing Press is loaded with industry-leading, efficiency-enhancing features. Available from Ryonet, check out a video on the press here: <http://goo.gl/Cxstj>.



A GOOD TIME FOR A LOAN?

Late last year, Federal Reserve officials said that interest rates will be kept near zero until the U.S. unemployment rate falls below 6.5%. The decision means short-term interest rates - which affect mortgages, loans and credit cards - will likely remain historically low until at least 2015. Given that, now may be one of the best times ever to secure a low-interest loan to help you invest in that piece of equipment you think can take your shop to the next level. Here are some things to consider regarding loans.

1 Loans can be a good financing option if you lack cash to pay for equipment outright and eventually want to own the equipment.

2 Even if you have the cash to buy, consider taking out a loan. This can allow you to maintain your operating budget to cover unexpected costs, while enabling you to use revenue from the business you're generating with the new machine to pay for the loan.

3 Loans can be tricky: Make sure you understand the terms before you sign. You must know exactly how interest will be calculated, what penalties you'll pay for missing a deadline, whether there are penalties for early repayment, and if you can renegotiate terms in the future.

4 Bank loans offer tax benefits. The percentage of profits used to repay the loan, for example, is exempted from tax.

5 You don't have to get a loan from your current bank.

6 Don't be afraid to shop around a bit to ensure you get the best terms.

7 There are downsides to loans, of course. If your credit score is mediocre or worse, they can be hard to obtain. The application process can be lengthy. And in addition to possibly compelling you to put forward collateral, loans can negatively impact your balance sheet and reduce your credit line.

THE MACHINE GUIDE

Ready to diversify your business? We'll feature the newest single-heads, multi-heads, digital printers, screen-printing equipment, heat presses and more with real user reviews. Plus, learn about key new features you'll want to have.

By Sara Lavenduski and Andraya Vantrease

Single-Head Embroidery Machines



Elite XLII-BEVT-S901CAII

Company: Barudan America Inc.; Solon, OH; (800) 627-4776; www.barudanamerica.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: This compact, single-head, nine-needle embroidery machine features a 250mm x 400mm sewing field and stitches at 1,200 stitches per minute (spm) on flats and 1,000 spm on caps.

What's new:

- SmartHead sewing head allows for higher performance, easier maintenance and increased durability.
- Servo Motors provide increased production, more power and accurate stitching.
- Open Frame Design makes embroidering bags and heavy items easier.
- Improved access to lubrication points

Key features:

- Increased strength in a smaller size (portable at 154 lbs.)
- Network-ready

Buyer's note: This compact, single-head, nine-needle machine is perfect for sewing samples before production or small-quantity runs. It's ideal for a variety of company sizes, from home-based businesses to large shops, with multiple single-head machines in a sophisticated network order-entry system.



Entrepreneur Pro PR1000e

Company: Brother International Corp.; Bridgewater, NJ; 800-4-A-BROTHER; www.brothersews.com

Cost: \$14,499.95; Optional Upgrade Software Kit, \$449.95

What it is: This single-head, 10-needle home embroidery machine features the new InnovaChrome LED thread-color system, a large sewing area of 14" by 8" and an extra-large worktable for larger projects like blankets and jackets.

What's new:

- InnovaChrome LED thread-color system: LED lights under each spool indicate the closest thread color, and correlate to the thread colors on the LCD screen. Brighter, with more uniform color than before.
- Advanced Super View (ASV) HD LCD touch-screen display by Sharp Corp.: features 16.7-plus million possible colors with little or no color shifting and an enhanced viewing angle of 176°
- Optional Upgrade Software includes: a scanning feature so users can view a real-time scan of the embroidery field on the LCD display to ensure proper design placement; a color-shuffling function so users can change the design color palette easily; and an on-screen auto-density

adjustment so that when users resize designs, the stitch count is automatically recalculated to 100% so the resized design looks like the original.

Key features:

- InnovEye Technology and Snowman Embroidery Positioning Marker: similar to a built-in camera above the needle for precise positioning of designs
- Eyelet Threading System promises virtually perfect thread tension every time
- Built-in automatic needle-threading system
- Three built-in USB ports allow users to import designs, use peripherals and download machine updates from www.brother.com.

Buyer's note: This machine is ideal for larger projects and for outputting multiple items quickly.

User input

Sue E. DeWeese, owner of Pratt, KS-based Sue's Ultimate Embroidery, has been embroidering with Brother machines for the past decade and has no plans to use any other brand. "My decorating business is mostly embroidered company logos on shirts, jackets and caps," she says. "We also do a variety of other items, such as towels, blankets and baby clothes. I love my PR1000 because I can embroider designs with more colors without changing thread as often. It's also easy to operate. The lights stay on when you start to embroider, which allows you to get a good view of how it's stitching."



ZSK SPRINT

Company: Graphic Solutions Group; Dallas; (800) 366-1776; www.gogsg.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: The SPRINT 5 is a compact, single-head embroidery machine that stitches at 1,200 spm and offers the same precision and quality as a larger industrial embroidery machine. The SPRINT 5, which has a 7.2 million-stitch memory, is low-noise and lightweight, optimal for 24/7 shop use and speedy, mobile use.

What's new:

- Windows-based networking, automatic error analysis and an integrated design editor
- Automatic reverse-embroidering function
- Soft tension head technology for stitching small, high-quality lettering

Key features:

- Contour tracing
- Adjustable presser foot
- Automatic thread cutter
- Accepts all industry embroidery codes

5 INVESTMENT QUESTIONS

Deciding what types of machines to invest in can be tricky, so it's best to break down your business objectives - and make sure your investments match your goals. Ed Levy, director of software products at Hirsch International and owner of Montoursville, PA-based Digitize4u, suggests important questions that decorators should ask before purchasing a new machine.

1. What's my average order quantity?
2. What types of items, such as caps and bags, will I embellish?
3. Will I require any special attachments?
4. What's my largest anticipated design size?
5. How will I network the equipment?



AMAYA XTS Single-Head Embroidery Machine

Company: Melco; Denver; (800) 799-8313; www.melco.com

Cost: Contact distributor for price.

What it is: This single-head, 16-needle embroidery machine includes automatic thread tensioning controlled by Melco's AMAYA operating system.

What's new:

- DesignShop V9 Lite now included with AMAYA OS 10, which gives users additional lettering and editing capabilities that streamline production

Key features:

- With speeds up to 1,500 spm, its Acti-Feed system feeds the thread smoothly, automatically adjusting thread tensions.
- Automatically switches to the backup needle and continues to sew in the event of a thread break. Color backup system can easily be configured for both multi- and single-head production.
- Features the smallest cylindrical lower arm in the industry, providing the largest cap stitch field available

Buyer's note: This is an industrial machine, meant for high-speed commercial production. It's great for users looking to start an embroidery business, or take their current embroidery hobby to the next level. Melco offers on-site training and financing, and operates www.shopmelco.com, where users can buy machine parts, accessories and consumables.



GS1501 Single-Head Embroidery Machine

Company: Pantograms Mfg. Co. Inc.; Tampa, FL; (800) 872-1555; www.pantograms.com

Cost: \$8,995

What it is: This single-head, 15-needle commercial networking modular machine has a 360mm by 500mm sewing field, sews at 1,200 spm and comes with a five-year warranty. A 270° fast-change cap attachment allows a user to sew a 14" by 2.9" field and change from flats to caps in minutes.

Key features:

- Automatic thread trimmer and color change
- LCD display showing real-time stitching
- USB port-ready
- Thread break detection and pre-sew design trace capable
- Memory capacity of 2 million stitches or 200 designs

Buyer's note: A quality sample machine for a large shop, this single-head is also a good fit for startups, uniform shops and mobile embroiderers, especially those who are price-conscious and still want the reliability of more expensive embroidery machines.

Single-Head Embroidery Machines



HAPPY HCD2-1501

Company: Texmac Inc.; Charlotte, NC; (877) 335-5206; www.happyemb.com

Cost: Contact Texmac Inc. for price.

What it is: This single-head, 15-needle embroidery machine features a 520mm by 400mm sewing field (with an option to expand to a 1,200mm by 400mm sewing field) and sews up to 1,200 spm. The machine, which weighs 233 lbs. and includes a cast steel frame, networks with all current HAPPY machine models; this allows operators to manage multiple HAPPY machines from a single PC. Training and support are included with machine purchase.

What's new:

- New touch-screen control panel features reduced average learning time compared to previous HCD generation
- Improved mechanical and electronic system over previous models results in gains in speed and smoothness
- Improved thread path, including inline check springs and inline break sensor, resulting in smoother thread feed over previous models
- Customizable front screen icons (like a smartphone or tablet) and custom screen saver
- More settings and reporting functions over previous HCD, including individual needle speed setting and better networking

Key features:

- 7" touch-screen control panel with onboard help and auto error correction. In training, it has proven faster to learn compared to previous models.
- 3" by 14" cap sewing field allows

sewing of front and sides of cap in a single hooping

- Built-in networking and USB connections for PCs
- Dual set of hoops included with each unit, including the cap-sewing system
- Production and error reporting functions display histories of production and error codes so operators can monitor production and machine health.

Buyer's note: This machine is ideal for small production shops wanting a maximum production and sewing field from a single-head machine, as well as embroiderers looking for large production capability combined with the flexibility of networked single-head machines. It's also ideal for large shops needing a single-head sample machine and/or a wide-field embroidery machine. The HCD2-1501 comes standard with a wider field than a standard HAPPY machine.

User input Kevin Frangenberg, co-owner of Lesterville, SD-based Stitchin Corner and More, has operated a home-based embroidery business for the past decade and offers T-shirt transfers, vinyl transfers, signs, in-house digitizing and graphic design. "My HCD2-1501 machine has run perfectly every time for the several months we've had it," Frangenberg says. "It's very easy and straightforward to understand the color touch-screen control panel. We were used to operating a control panel with extremely limited information, and with no color, no picture and no automatic tracing or hoop centering." When Frangenberg did have to call Texmac's tech-support department, he says they were very accommodating. "I've known my salesman for over 10 years and he was helpful with issues we had with our previous machine," Frangenberg adds. "I'd recommend both Texmac's sales and service departments to anyone."

User input Marian McClanahan, manager of the Atlanta Sewing Center in Marietta, GA, says the customer service from Texmac can't be beat. "The service and support are phenomenal," she says. "Everyone is always willing to answer my questions. I know I can make one phone call, ask a question and immediately be in touch with the correct department." McClanahan says she embroiders anything she can hoop, and has even done banners for Atlanta-area churches. "Some of those projects required that I rehoop the fabric in order to complete the design," she says. "Rehooping with the HAPPY Voyager is easy when I use the 12" hoop, which is included with the machine purchase. I've also used it to embroider on more sports equipment than I can count, from golf bags to baseball/softball bags and more."



STITCHING SENSE

What are four features you should look for in a new single or multi-head embroidery machine? Bob Stone, vice president of sales for Barudan America Inc., weighs in.

- 1. Stitch quality:** How well does the machine sew short stitches and detailed designs? How well does it sew caps?
- 2. Ease of operation:** Is the machine easy to operate? Is the control panel intuitive and easy to understand?
- 3. Parts/service:** Are parts readily available? Does the company have nationwide service techs and support?
- 4. Vendor reputation:** How long has the company been in business? Is it a reputable brand? What's the resale value of the machine?

HAPPY HCS2-1201 Voyager2

Company: Texmac Inc.; Charlotte, NC; (877) 335-5206; www.happyemb.com

Cost: Contact Texmac Inc. for price.

What it is: This single-head, 12-needle embroidery machine includes a 320mm by 290mm sewing field and cast steel frame, sews up to 1,000 spm and features compact dimensions (88 lbs., with a 11" by 17" base). Training and support included with purchase.

What's new:

- New touch-screen control panel has dramatically reduced average learning time compared to previous generation
- New network system for 2013 with improved file sharing and lettering and editing capability
- Improved motor electronics improve performance, including faster operation over previous model
- Customizable front screen icons (like a smartphone or tablet) and custom screen saver

Key features:

- 7" touch-screen control panel with onboard help and auto error correction. In training, it has proven faster to learn compared to previous models.
- 2.7" by 11.5" cap sewing field allows sewing on front and sides in a single hooping
- Built-in networking and USB connections for PCs allow operators to connect by PC by USB cable or through a network cable
- Networks with current and previous generation Happy machine models. Allows operators to manage multiple Happy machines from a single PC.
- Completely open area around sewing arm allows direct sewing on large objects
- Built-in bobbin winder; operators can also wind their own bobbins independently of machine operation

Buyer's note: This machine is ideal for home embroiderers who want more production or speed, those looking for a starter production machine and those who need portable production.

Cost: Contact distributor for pricing.

What it is: This single-head commercial embroidery machine, which offers a 19.5" by 14" sewing field and sews up to 1,200 spm, is an arm and cylinder bed-type machine and has a Windows CE-driven operating software with standard USB and LAN ports for easier networking. The machine includes a color LCD control panel and a patented thread-break detection system. Laser, sequin, lochrose, cording, pocket and border frames are available options.

Key features:

- MicroSmart "M" Technology and stitching accuracy to within .001mm
- Automatic design rotation (180°) in cap mode
- 2 million-stitch memory
- Patented safety beam sensor
- Frame forward or back in 1/3/5 stitch increments or by color or to any designated stitch count within a design



Tajima TWMX-C1501 (SUMO)

Company: Hirsch International; Hauppauge, NY; (800) 394-4426; www.bic.us

Cost: Contact distributor for pricing.

What it is: The Tajima SUMO commercial embroidery machine has all the great features of the Tajima Neo Plus embroidery machine, plus the SUMO's wide embroidery area (23.5" by 23.5" sewing field). This arm and cylinder bed-type machine, which has a 2 million-stitch memory and sews to 1,200 spm, features MicroSmart "M" Technology and Windows CE-driven operating software with standard USB and LAN ports for easier networking. Laser, sequin, lochrose, cording, pocket and border frames available.

Key features:

- Stitching accuracy to within .001mm
- Automatic design rotation (180°) in cap mode
- Patented safety beam sensor and thread-break detection system
- Frame forward or back in 1/3/5 stitch increments or by color or to any designated stitch count within a design

Buyer's note: This machine provides a solution for any design application that requires a larger embroidery field. It uses a 23" by 21" hoop that makes it possible to sew on oversized jackets, jerseys and fleece with giant designs or appliqué, but also home decorations such as tablecloths, table runners, curtains, bedspreads and more.



Tajima TEMX-C1501 (Neo Plus)

Company: Hirsch International; Hauppauge, NY; (800) 394-4426; www.bic.us

Multi-Head Embroidery Machines



BEXY-S1506CII

Company: Barudan America Inc.; Solon, OH; (800) 627-4776;

www.barudanamerica.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: This multi-head embroidery machine is available with two, four, six or eight heads. The height of the machine's sewing heads and table have been raised 4" for better ergonomics, and the X Automat features a larger 8.4" LCD display, 100 memory locations and 20 million-stitch capacity.

What's new and key features:

- SmartHead sewing head allows for higher performance, easier maintenance and increased durability
- Fewer oiling points with better access means less downtime for servicing
- Servo Motors provide increased production, more power and accurate stitching
- Mark 7 Trimmers provide improved performance and durability, and provide a shorter throat plate for better cap embroidery
- Three USB ports for loading designs or adding devices
- Standard LAN connector for Barudan's networking software
- Larger standard sewing field at 18" by 17". Provides user with versatility in the marketplace with one of the largest field sizes in the market.

Buyer's note: This six-head compact bridge machine is a workhorse that produces large-quantity orders with amazing accuracy and power, regardless of the size of a decorator's business or number of sewing heads a user may need. With this machine, a decorator gets a stronger, reinforced steel frame that's standard on all Barudan machines, allowing higher speeds and greater noise reduction.



AMAYA XTS Multi-Head Embroidery Machine

Company: Melco; Denver; (800) 799-8313; www.melco.com

Cost: Contact distributor for price.

What it is: This modular multi-head embroidery machine runs up to 30 heads simultaneously in multiple configurations.

What's new:

- V9 Lite now included with AMAYA OS 10, which gives users additional

lettering and editing capabilities that streamline production

Key features:

- Users can start with one head and add heads as the business grows.
- Machines stitch independently of each other, but together on a network. If you need to stop one head for any reason, the others will keep sewing.
- Heads can sew different products simultaneously; for example, sew a hat on one head, a shirt on another.

Buyer's note: This modular system allows users to personally configure it for their business. You can run a high-volume shirt order on four heads and shut down one to run a short order of five hats without stopping the other three heads. This system is meant for decorators interested in building a business with a manufacturer and equipment that will grow along with them.



Prodigy PM-1202 CSX

Company: Prodigy Embroidery; St. Louis, MO; (877) 724-6400; www.prodigymb.com

Cost: Contact vendor for pricing – different packages available, from machine-only to business turn-key packages.

What it is: Designed with the industrial business and operator in mind, the PM-1202 CSX provides advanced production capabilities, giving the user the ability to produce two garments at a time. The Bridge Style construction allows for maximum utilization of sewing fields. This two-head has a 10" color touch-screen control panel with USB input for easy operation and advanced features. It also includes a 270° cap frame system, which provides ear-to-ear embroidery capability.

What's new:

- 10" touch screen: Prodigy's Smart Controller is a computerized interface outfitted with a full-color touch screen that makes embroidering items easier than ever. Load designs and then choose from large color thumbnails. Once the design is selected, assign colors to sections with a touch of the screen and then digitize names and letter patterns while the machine is running. Also control fonts, text paths, size and spacing.
- Quiet Drive noise-dampening technology allows the machine to run more quietly while still using high-speed sewing heads.

Key features:

- Machine has 12 needles per head, a 400mm by 450mm sewing field and a 1 million-stitch memory capacity; sews at 1,000 spm
- Complete hoop assortment including caps
- Three color change modes and on-board lettering and design editing

Buyer's note: This machine is ideal for those who want to start an embroidery business and would like to choose from low-priced startup packages. Prodigy offers machinery, design software, all embroidery frames/hoops, supplies, training, support, warranty and more.



Prodigi PM-1206 CSX

Company: Prodigy Embroidery; St. Louis, MO; (877) 724-6400; www.prodigymb.com

Cost: Contact vendor for pricing – different packages available, from machine-only to business turn-key packages.

What it is: Prodigy's six-head embroidery machine provides the dependability needed for long hours of operation and maximum production. The bridge-style construction allows for maximum utilization of sewing fields. It's equipped with a 10" color-touch screen control panel with USB input for easy operation and advanced features. It also includes the 270° cap frame system, which provides ear-to-ear embroidery capability.

What's new:

- 10" large touch screen: Prodigy's Smart Controller is a computerized interface outfitted with a full-color touch screen

that makes embroidering items easier. Load designs and then choose from large color thumbnails. Once the design is selected, assign colors to sections with a simple touch of the screen and then digitize names and letter patterns while the machine is running. Also control fonts, text paths, size and spacing.

- Quiet Drive noise-dampening technology allows the machine to run more quietly while still using high-speed sewing heads.

Key features:

- Machine has 12 needles per head, a 400mm by 450mm sewing field and a 1 million-stitch memory capacity; sews at 850 spm
- Complete hoop assortment including caps
- Three color change modes and on-board lettering and design editing

Buyer's note: This machine is ideal for those who want to start an embroidery business and would like to choose from low-priced startup packages. Prodigy offers machinery, design software, embroidery frames/hoops, supplies, training, support, warranty and more.



RiCOMA RCM-1501TS-12H

Company: RiCOMA International Corp.; Miami; (888) 292-6282;

www.ricoma.us

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: This all-in-one multi-head embroidery machine is designed for both home and commercial use. The machine, which sews up to 1,200 spm and has a 10.5" touch screen with no complicated menus, offers users auto color-change and auto-trimming features and a 270° wide cap system. With a standard sewing area of 22" by 14" (expandable up to 48" by 14"), the machine is quiet, quick and easy to learn. Support is available via the touch screen with Team Viewer.

What's new:

- User-friendly touch-screen PC control system with Multi-Touch Technology
- Built-in digitizing, lettering and editing software; digitizing can be done even while machine is running.
- Pre-set hoops, cap frames and special hoops, so operators won't hit the frame
- Machine won't start embroidery if selected design is bigger than selected frame
- Auto-centering of designs and one-step tracing
- Universal power supply (110-240V self-adaptable worldwide)
- 8GB hard drive allows users to store unlimited designs and unlimited stitches



RiCOMA RCM-1504CH-W

Company: RiCOMA International Corp.; Miami; (888) 292-6282; www.ricoma.us

www.ricoma.us

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: This is a four-head, 15-needle industrial embroidery machine that's suitable for flat, cap and finished garment embroidery. The machine, which sews up to 1,000 spm and has a 1 million-stitch memory, is USB port-ready and offers an automatic color change and thread trimmer, and thread break detector.

What's new:

- 500mm by 450mm embroidery area
- Servo motor for more precise embroidery and quiet operation
- Newly developed small arm is only 70% of the old design, which guarantees a wide range of embroidery materials, such as shirt pockets and pants
- Newly developed small arm guarantees better embroidery quality on caps with 2mm space reduced between the cap device and the needle plate

Key features:

- 270° wide cap system
- LCD display shows real-time stitching and pre-sew design trace-capable

Buyer's note: This machine is fast, quiet and easy to operate. It's a great solution for embroidery on large items, such as jacket backs, towels, table runners, flags, bags and more. The machine also comes with a five-year warranty.

Multi-Head Embroidery Machines



Tajima TFMXII-C1506/436WCT (Standard Field Six-Head)

Company: Hirsch International; Hauppauge, NY; (800) 394-4426; www.bic.us

Cost: Contact distributor for pricing.
What it is: This is a multi-head embroidery machine with a standard 17" by 12" sewing field. The bridge and cylinder bed-type machine features MicroSmart "M" Technology and Windows CE-driven operating software with standard USB and LAN ports for easier networking. The machine has a stitching accuracy to within .001mm, sews to 1,000 spm and has a 2 million-stitch memory. Sequin, cording, pocket and border frames available.

Key features:

- Automatic design rotation (180°) in cap mode
- UniSash Quick-Change Drivers for tool-less changeover (cap to tubular or vice versa) by one person
- Increased (steeper) head angle for maximum sewing field on caps
- Patented safety beam sensor and thread-break detection system
- Frame forward or back in 1/3/5 stitch increments or by color or to any designated stitch count within a design



Tajima TFMXII-C1508/450WCT (Stretch Field Eight-Head)

Company: Hirsch International; Hauppauge, NY; (800) 394-4426; www.bic.us

Cost: Contact distributor for pricing.

What it is: This is an eight-head, high-output embroidery machine available with a stretch field for large, bulky garments. The bridge and cylinder bed-type machine features MicroSmart "M" technology and Windows CE-driven operating software with standard USB and LAN ports for easier networking. This machine, which has a heavier body construction, has a 17.5" by 16.5"

sewing field and a 2 million-stitch memory, and sews to 1,000 spm. Sequin, cording, pocket and border frames available.

Key features:

- Stitching accuracy to within .001mm
- Automatic design rotation (180°) in cap mode
- UniSash Quick-Change Drivers for tool-less changeover (cap to tubular or vice versa) by one person
- Increased (steeper) head angle for maximum sewing field on caps
- Patented safety beam sensor and thread-break detection system
- Frame forward or back in 1/3/5 stitch increments or by color or to any designated stitch count within a design

User input

"The service from Hirsch is excellent," says Tim Wiygul, vice president and manager at CW Companies in Rienzi, MS, which specializes in golf and other sports-related ad specialties. "We run over 400 Tajima heads and we've always had great communication with them when learning this machine as well as all machines in our plant."

Screen-Printing Equipment



sRoque Print You Automated Screen-Printing Press

Company: Ryonet Corp.; Vancouver, WA; (800) 314-6390; www.silkscreeningsupplies.com

Cost: Starts at \$34,995; contact vendor for complete pricing.

What it is: This screen-printing press is available in a six- to 16-color formation, and can print more than 1,000 pieces per hour.

What's new:

- Machine is brand-new to U.S. and Canadian markets
- Faster printing, with larger print areas (16" by 20" on the six- and eight-color M and up to 28" by 40" on the 10-16 color)

Key features:

- Print peel: an automatic press that prints like a manual press
- Honeycomb aluminum platens
- Integrated flash, foil and flocking systems with single-point electric and computer controls

Buyer's note: The sRoque Print You is ideal for small shops looking to expand into screen printing. It provides an affordable, high-performing solution for just about any business.



MHM Synchroprint X-Type

Company: Hirsch International; Hauppauge, NY; (800) 394-4426; www.bic.us

Cost: Contact distributor for price.

What it is: Released in 2013, the MHM Synchroprint X-Type is an automatic screen-printing press that offers faster production and the flexibility to print any size from a chest print to an oversize or all-over graphic. It comes in eight-, 10- and 12-station models in a variety of color combinations to suit the needs of your shop. It takes its name from the X-shaped machine base, which, apart from the smart and creative design, makes the machine extremely sturdy

and sets new standards for the stability of carousel printing machines. The machine comes with new, intuitive software.

What's new:

- AC indexing system and high-power AC electric print head drive for fast printing speeds
- Separate squeegee and flood blade air-pressure regulators for squeegee pressure control
- Screen holders are flush with every screen. No U-clamps means the off-contact adjustment can be controlled from a 0 position.
- Easy-to-see 15" touch-screen monitor with an inlet mode, outlet mode, sample mode and water-base/plastisol mode, which help reduce setup times
- Runs on Linux-based software, well-known for its dependability and performance
- Rugged control unit can be regulated in the most comfortable position for the operator
- Each printing station is equipped with its own individual control unit, enabling fast, easy adjustments during setup.

Key features:

- Generous 20" by 23" print area; oversized version has a 32" by 40" print area
- Individual off-contact front and rear adjustments, critical when printing high-density or other specialty inks
- Preregistration screen system featuring the MHM pinlock saves setup time
- Configurations range from four up to 12 pallets, all with a printing area of up to 50cm by 60cm. An oversize machine is available with a jumbo printing area of 80cm by 100cm and is available up to eight pallets, dive stations.
- Each print head can be easily lifted, giving total access to the screen, squeegees and flood bars during setup.
- No shirt button on both load and unload stations
- Individual front and rear off-contact adjustment on all stations
- Fast, single-lever angle adjustment in 5° increments
- Individual squeegee and flood bar height adjustment



Mach Manual Textile Screen Printing Press

Company: Workhorse Products; Phoenix; (800) 778-8779; www.workhorseproducts.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: The six-color, four-station Mach Manual Textile Screen Printing Press is light enough for daily use, but solidly welded to provide a rigid platform for life. The large-diameter, full-length center shaft combined with print-station support struts maximize rigidity. The precision machined cast aluminum print heads and center wheel provide the tightest registration. Combined with the tool-free X, Y and Z micro-registration system for tighter registration, this machine also comes in a variety of sizes to fit a decorator's printing needs.

What's new:

- Single-point pallet bracket allows for faster loading and unloading of pallets
- All-over platen and low-profile caster set

Key features:

- Cast-aluminum print heads and print wheel are lightweight for daily operation, while solidly welded steel construction provides a rigid platform.
- Large-diameter, full-length center shaft with tapered bearings and print station support struts
- Choose from a variety of optional cap, jacket, sign, can koozie and pocket attachments.

Buyer's note: This press is designed for the printer who makes her living behind a squeegee. The Mach printers are ideal for growing and high-volume shops producing sophisticated designs. With the optional cap, jacket, sign, sticker and pocket attachments, this machine is the do-it-all answer for any shop.

User input

Kelvin Bailey, owner of Calhoun, LA-based Tees 'N Things, has been screen printing since the 1980s. Now, he uses all Workhorse products in his shop. "We use our Mach Manual Textile Screen Printing Press for samples and one-offs," he says. "I had another brand before, but I really like this one. I've had no problems with it." With eight employees, the shop prints about 5,000 shirts a day and has 12 automatic presses, two of which are kept constantly operating. "I've had some minor problems with the automatic presses, but when I have a question, I just call Workhorse and they overnight whatever I need. They provide great service and they're good people to work with."

Screen-Printing Equipment



User input "I have three manual presses in my shop, and two of them are Riley Hopkins six-color, four-station with joystick registration," says Ryan Cole, owner, lead printer and designer at Cole Ink in Vancouver, WA. "With my previous press, I needed to trap or stroke out all of my artwork to get registration tight, but with the joystick registration I'm able to butt-register all my prints. It makes for a cleaner print and I'm able to register multiple color jobs in minutes." Cole adds that the machine is sturdy and well-made, with aluminum hardware and powder-coated metal. "All of the action components are really smooth," he adds. "I set it up once, grab screens and go. This press is a great value for the money."

Riley Hopkins Six-Color, Four-Station WIN Manual Press With Joystick Registration

Company: Ryonet Corp.; Vancouver, WA; (800) 314-6390; www.silkscreeningsupplies.com

Cost: Starts at \$2,895; contact vendor for complete pricing.

What it is: The six-color Riley Hopkins press has several benefits over a standard four-color press. In addition to being able to print six solid colors, users can print full four-color process prints with the possibility of a white or discharge plate and highlight white for darker-color garments. It also offers versatility and room for expansion, and allows the user to easily set up multiple color jobs without having to adjust micro registration knobs.

What's new:

- New production procedures have increased the construction stability and ease of assembly/maintenance. Lasts longer, prints more accurately and is easier to set up.
- Aluminum platens now available

Key features:

- Comes standard with 16" by 16" MDF

platens (with a neck cutout) and a one-year manufacturer's warranty

- Six-color, four-station press takes up 7' square; six-color, six-station press takes up 8' square

Upgrade options:

- Six-station press gives you two additional cool-down stations that can up your production speed by up to 30%. Cost: \$900
- All Heads Down Press allows you to print in multiple stations simultaneously. Most companies decide to automate before spending the time to train and orchestrate more than one printer on a press at a time. Upgrade is available. Cost: \$2,600
- The Riley Hopkins Pro Upgrade features a 10-year warranty and aluminum pallets. Designed to improve the press' performance; eliminate part replacement. Includes four 16" by 18" aluminum pallets vs. wood (\$700 value) and 10-year warranty vs. three-year (\$600 value). Cost: \$595 or \$645 for 18" by 20" pallets (6/6 Press upgrades are priced differently). Package value: \$1,196.



Javelin Pro Automatic Textile Screen-Printing Machine

Company: Workhorse Products; Phoenix; (800) 778-8779; www.workhorseproducts.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: This automatic printer offers durable construction, a user-friendly setup, an advanced controller and high index speeds. Combined with the patented FlashBack, the printer can print and flash on all print heads without sacrificing a color. It's available in six-, eight- and

10-color models, as well as eight, 10 and 12-station models.

What's new:

- Chopper squeegee and floodbar system now available on all Javelin Pro automatic presses. The chopper system was added to enhance the Javelin machines and to bring parity and consistency across the range of Workhorse automatics.

Key features:

- Available with the latest software, which ensures maximum production speed and high print quality
- Double-index speeds move twice without lifting between strokes
- Multiple print stroke is more rapid with the table staying up, and you can increase the number of strokes up to nine passes
- Real-time production data, including shirt counting, allows the operator to judge the length of a run and increase accuracy in scheduling

Buyer's note: This machine is ideal for printers stepping into automation or for printers currently running high-production shops.

User input Steve Burke, CEO of Lexington, KY-based Zimmzang.com (asi/365880), says the Javelin Pro had almost no learning curve for him. "Within an hour of the machine assembly completion, we were in full production," he says. "The completely intuitive digital control touch pad makes setting up and running jobs easier than any machine I've used." Burke adds that the menu options have also allowed his team to discover and be creative with new printing techniques. "Also, the quick-release pallets allow us to switch from sleeves or shorts to youth to adult in seconds," he says. "Because sleeves are so easy, we've been up-selling sleeve prints with great success in the last few months."



mPower Digital Apparel Printer

Company: AnaJet LLC (*asi/16000*); Costa Mesa, CA; (877) 626-2538; www.anajet.com

Cost: mP5: \$27,950; mP10: \$37,950

What it is: This fast, industrial-component, single-platen garment printer is available in two models, the mP5 and mP10. Both use stainless-steel print heads that, with regular maintenance, offer a long lifespan. The mPower has a 14" by 18" print table and can print on cotton, cotton blends and poly garments, bags or other flat surfaces, with up to 3" of auto height adjustment. A closed-loop ink-delivery system and recirculation uses airtight cartridges and runs two channels of white ink and four channels for CMYK.

What's new:

- A major release of the proprietary AnaRIP software has unique TrueView WYSIWYG capability.
- AnaRIP software also includes an ink cost calculator and underbase adjustment sliders for optimal image fidelity.

Key features:

- At production speed, light garments print in under 30 seconds; dark/black garments in under 60 seconds.
- Closed-loop ink delivery reduces clogging and streamlines regular maintenance
- Includes fully integrated AnaRIP software, free training and lifetime live technical support
- Youth, sleeve and pocket tables available; hat table pending

Buyer's note: The mPower is a step-up printer for a shop that's comfortable with inkjet printing and maintenance. Priced between modified Epson and other purpose-built direct-to-garment printers, it lowers the barrier to entry for owners who want industrial-strength without the hefty price tag. The mPower is a good fit for a high-volume garment decoration or imaging business that prints shirts daily.

User input

Chuck Northcutt, owner of Creative Promotions and DTG Ready, both based in Seattle, says he bought an mP5 for his shop nine months ago for the increased print speed, larger print size, new industrial print head and the improved ink handling. "It's always ready to go at a moment's notice," says Northcutt. "Because we can print small quantities with little to no lead time, and I don't need color-separated art or to charge for setup, I can get a much higher average resale per garment." In addition, the printer holds up to 8 GB worth of images so it stores commonly used images and prints without a PC. "I can train just about anyone in less than 30 minutes," says Northcutt. "Since the ink circulates in a closed-loop system, the printer requires significantly less maintenance than earlier models. We love it."



User input

Mike Williams, owner of AirmenFamilies.com, based in Fairfield, CA, says the SPRINT has been a tremendous asset to his business, in which he and his team design custom apparel for families with loved ones entering the Air Force. "We're a startup company and prior to purchasing our SPRINT, we had very little experience with customized apparel items," Williams says. "The SPRINT was very easy to learn and is reliable. We've had very few problems with it and when we do have technical questions, the AnaJet Tech Support team has been quick to answer. The SPRINT really is the core to our business - we've grown tremendously and it wouldn't have been possible without having it as part of our equipment."

SPRINT Digital Apparel Printer

Company: AnaJet LLC (*asi/16000*); Costa Mesa, CA; (877) 626-2538; www.anajet.com

Cost: \$18,450

What it is: The SPRINT has a maximum resolution of 1,440 dpi with 1,440 nozzles. It has a 12.5" by 16" print table and can print on cotton, cotton blends and poly garments, bags or other flat surfaces. A closed-loop ink delivery system uses airtight cartridges and runs four channels of white ink and four channels for CMYK.

What's new: Extended media kit enables printing on wood, glass, metal and other surfaces

Key features:

- White/light garments print in under one minute; dark/black garments in about two minutes
- Closed-loop ink delivery reduces clogging and streamlines regular maintenance
- Includes fully integrated RIP software, free training and lifetime live technical support
- Youth and pocket tables available

Buyer's note: The SPRINT has a small footprint and its 85-lb. weight makes it compact and portable for events. This entry-level printer is best for a small garment-decorating or imaging business that doesn't print in high volumes, but uses the machine daily.

Low-cost inks reduce the cost of ownership.

Direct-to-Garment Printers



Graffiti Series Garment Printers

Company: Brother International Corp.; Bridgewater, NJ; 800-4-A-BROTHER; www.brothersews.com; www.graffitee.com

Cost: CMYK-only model starts under \$20,000.

What it is: This digital garment printer series is available in three models: CMYK only, CMYK with two white and CMYK with four white

What's new:

- Unique modular construction allows machine to grow with a business
- CMYK base machine with option to add up to four white print heads for future expansion
- More compact size for greater versatility in different environments, including storefronts

Key features:

- Up to 1,200 dpi, allowing the user to print photographic-quality printing
- One-pass printing with both CMYK and white-ink printing simultaneously for higher productivity
- USB memory stick compatibility for greater flexibility
- Front-loading ink-cartridge system for smaller footprint
- Simple user interface without the need for RIP software
- Inks certified by Oeko-Tex Standard 100
- Up to eight print heads for faster throughput
- Ink-cartridge system designed to provide consistent, high-quality printing

Buyer's note: This garment printer is ideal for a variety of businesses, including retail storefronts looking to provide customization and personalization; small promotional companies; supplement screen-printing businesses; and as part of production at a large promotional products production facility.

User input

"The Brother GT 381 is very easy to use," says Tim Hughes, vice president of WOW Image Group in Millersburg, OH, which does screen printing, embroidery, digital signs and digital shirts. "Push a button and it prints. Follow all the on-screen prompts for cleaning and maintenance and you'll get spectacular results." Hughes adds that the art results are noteworthy, even for a beginning user. "With a few lessons and some good clip art, even a novice can print impressive shirts. The machine also does a great job with pre-treatment; once the proper number of treatment grams is dialed in, the process is a breeze."



Kornit Storm II 931

Company: Hirsch International; Hauppauge, NY; (800) 394-4426; www.bic.us

Cost: Contact distributor for pricing.

What it is: The Storm II is a dual-pallet, industrial-grade digital inkjet printer for light and dark garments. Printing at a rate of up to 156 shirts per hour, it allows for high-volume production for custom print runs. Its advanced, fully-automated system is designed to be operated by one operator, yet provides full control of the design and resolution for each layer with its improved capabilities for positioning different media types of up to 5cm.

What's new:

- Advanced machine controller that enables multifunction operational reliability to improve speed
- Vibrant process color prints for light and dark garments featuring a large color range

Key features:

- Capable of handling a large variety of textile applications and finished garments
- Capable of printing on large areas of up to 50cm by 70cm, optimal for XXL garments and cut pieces
- High-quality non-contact printing over seams, pockets and more
- Nonstop production workflow that enables file loading while printing
- Optional interlace printing mode for producing solid surfaces and vivid images
- Integrated degassing system that enables an uninterrupted print flow
- 1.5 liter industrial bulk ink system for high-volume production
- Automatic pre-treatment system integrated into the machine

Buyer's note: Kornit's Storm II is an ideal option for high-level production and direct-to-garment businesses and traditional screen printers that are looking toward hybrid apparel-decoration enterprises. It's designed to better meet your need for high production and control while ensuring smooth and seamless production.



DTG M2 Direct to Garment Printer

Company: ColDesi Inc.; Tampa, FL; (877) 793-3278;

www.dtgprintermachine.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: The DTG M2 is a large-format direct-to-garment printer designed for production. The DTG can print four small, two standard or one oversized garment at a time. White Ink Management System (WIMS) provides a stable platform for a dark garment printer.

What's new:

- Higher productivity rates than previous DTG models
- Purpose-designed and -built direct-to-garment printer; not a repurposed Epson desktop printer
- Highly efficient, intuitive RIP Pro C5 software

Key features:

- WIMS prevents white ink from settling, minimizing downtime while saving money on wasted ink by not requiring scheduled head cleanings
- Extensive range of platen options available
- All critical components of machine are easily accessible for both maintenance and service.
- Same two-year warranty as all previous DTG brand printers



G2 Garment Printer

Company: Melco; Denver; (800) 799-8313; www.melco.com

Cost: Contact distributor for price.

What it is: The G2 is a versatile, portable and easily maintained garment printer with new features and improved speed that allow for greater ROI. With a large 16.5" by 23.6" print area, the printer produces high-resolution photo-quality prints at 1,440 dpi.

What's new:

- Print white and color simultaneously on dark garments

Key features:

- Print on light cotton, dark cotton and cotton blend fabrics
- Easy-to-learn and -use MelcoRIP software allows users to tune and print basic logos or photos; interface is intuitive and user-friendly

- Youth, sleeve and infant size platens available

- No-mess 220ml ink cartridge system

Buyer's note: This machine is designed for one-off and short-run orders, and there are no screens involved. This is a sealed inkjet system that uses clean, environmentally friendly, water-based inks. The machine and software have a very short learning curve, with a user being able to learn the basics in about an hour.

User input

"My overall experience with the Melco G2 printer has been exceptional," says Annette Wagner, owner of Brag-ur-Biz in San Diego, where she specializes in digital printing, embroidery, heat-applied graphics, rhinestone graphics and multimedia. "With proper maintenance I've had no clogged lines or printer problems. I've had the G2 for over a year, and it hasn't needed any repairs or problems that a technician needed to come out for." Wagner adds that the machine is user-friendly and she's been able to create designs for her customers that would have been much more difficult to do with conventional screen printing. "One of the best features is being able to size an image in the software before printing," she says. "When a customer needs a design on men's, women's and kids' apparel, you resize your image, change the platen if needed and print. With the capabilities I have now, my sales have easily doubled in the last year."



Hotronix Auto Open Clam Heat Press

Company: Imprintables Warehouse ([asi/58475](tel:8003470068)); Carmichaels, PA; (800) 347-0068; www.imprintables.com

Cost: Contact vendor for current pricing.

What it is: This 16" by 20" heat-seal press is designed with features that make it easy to use and reduce operator error. This machine, which has dual time settings, also has digital time and temperature controls, a 3/4" Teflon-coated upper platen and a wide opening for easy layout. Each machine comes with 24/7 Blue Ribbon Support.

What's new:

- Perfect Pressure, a digital pressure display function, allows decorators to accurately set their machines to the exact pressure needed for each job. Includes single-digit LED readout that measures inner platen pressure.

Key features:

- Auto pop-up capability means that the operator can start a job and walk away to do another task. When the time is up, the upper platen automatically opens, for production efficiency.
- Quick-release interchangeable platens allow this machine to print for a wide range of applications and substrates, including shirt labels, pockets, tote bags, caps, shirts and more.

Buyer's note: This heat press is ideal for any business that offers decorated apparel or graphics and wants to expand its offerings with a heat press.

Heat-Transfer Equipment



Hotronix Fusion Heat Press

Company: Imprintables Warehouse (asi/58475); Carmichaels, PA; (800) 347-0068; www.imprintables.com
Cost: \$1,850

What it is: This is a U.S.-made, 16" by 20" dual-motion heat press made of high-quality cast aluminum framework with baked-on powder coat finish with chrome accent. It comes with a 3/4"-thick heat platen and cast-in tubular heating element every 2" to ensure there are no cold spots. There's a lifetime warranty on the heating element.

What's new:

- Touch-screen technology and unlimited programmable settings
- Swings or draws for easy layout
- Easy-on, quickly interchangeable bottom platens

Buyer's note: The Hotronix Fusion is designed with dual-motion capabilities, touch-screen display and unlimited programmable settings. Its patented design allows it to perform in swing and draw motion to accommodate user and work space requirements. The easy-on platen can be dressed with any garment that has easy threadability.

User input

"Our experience has been great with the Hotronix heat press," says Bill Pupplio, an owner of Keelyn Kreations in Clarksville, TN. "Setup is simple and it's user-friendly. We love the dual-loading capabilities, and we use the drawer most of the time, but occasionally benefit from the swing top. Its performance has been spot-on with no issues." Pupplio adds that the machine paid for itself with its first order, when he made company sweatshirts for an Army unit leaving for Afghanistan. "Imprintables has been good to us," Pupplio adds, "and we continue using them as a vendor for printing supplies."



Model 228 Digital Swing-Away Heat-Press Machine

Company: Insta Graphic Systems; Cerritos, CA; (800) 421-6971; www.instagramph.com
Cost: \$1,875

What it is: The Model 228 features a 15" by 20" swing-away upper platen, which allows users to have complete access to the lower platen while loading garments and placing transfers. The machine, which is made of cast metal, has a pressure source that's strategically placed over the center of its upper platen and uses struts to drive that pressure out to all corners; this results in even, heavy-duty distribution of pressure.

What's new:

- Interchangeable lower platens: A simple pin system allows user to easily change out the lower platen and drop in smaller accessory platens for printing on pockets, sleeves, pant legs, yokes and more.
- Sleep mode and auto off: Energy-saving feature allows the machine to go into sleep mode after the specified time has elapsed or automatically shut off after two hours of non-use.

Key features:

- Cast-in tubular heating element is cast into the aluminum upper platen, heating the metal from within. The element is coiled throughout the upper platen to provide even heat circulation.
- Built-in digital controller for regulating time and temperature
- Sliding pressure scale for adjusting pressure settings
- Lower cut-away base for ease of loading and unloading garments
- UL-, CuL- and CE-approved; RoHS/WEEE-compliant
- Lifetime warranty on upper heating element

Model 158 Digital Manual Clamshell Heat-Press Machine

Company: Insta Graphic Systems; Cerritos, CA; (800) 421-6971; www.instagramph.com

Cost: \$1,695

What it is: The Model 158 digital manual clamshell heat-press machine can be used to apply traditional heat transfers as well as curing digital prints. Its compact design and sleek profile make it ideal for use in areas with limited work space. The machine's many features include a 60° opening for easy placement and garment removal and digital time and temperature controls.

What's new:

- Interchangeable lower platens: A simple pin system allows you to change out the lower platen and drop in smaller accessory platens for printing on pockets, sleeves, pant legs, back neck and more.
- Energy-saving auto-off feature shuts the machine off after two hours of non-use.

Key features:

- Auto-open: With the use of an electromagnet, the upper platen automatically releases at the end of the time cycle, without an air compressor.
- Over the Center pressure distribution: Pressure source is strategically placed over the center of its upper platen and uses struts to drive that pressure out to all corners.
- Tubular heating element is cast into the aluminum upper platen, heating the metal from within.
- UL-, CuL- and CE-approved; RoHS/WEEE-compliant

Buyer's note: This machine was developed to meet the demands of the expanding digital marketplace. It offers one of the major benefits of an automatic machine, the auto-open feature, in the lightweight, lower-cost, ergonomic design of a manual clamshell heat press. It's a practical solution to use as a post-curing agent for the expanding digital marketplace.



Stahls' Hotronix Air Fusion Heat Press

Company: Stahls' Hotronix; Carmichaels, PA; (800) 727-8520; www.hotronix.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: The Stahls' Hotronix Air Fusion is an auto-open, auto swing-away heat press. Its stand is height-adjustable, making it ergonomic even when used by more than one person. With 120 PSI, this press makes the most of demanding heat-transfer applications that require firm pressure. For direct-to-garment applications, the pneumatic heat press compresses and flattens the fibers and provides a smooth, even surface for the inks to adhere to, resulting in a crisp, vibrant print.

What's new:

- Comes with a stand, which makes the press threadable. Garments are positioned on the lower platen and can be quickly rotated from front to back and side to side.
- Powered by an air compressor, this push-button heat press is designed to increase production while decreasing operator fatigue.
- With patented Auto Adjust Pressure, up to four pressure and time settings can be programmed, allowing a user to select the appropriate application based on the garment and switch between garments of different thicknesses, such as T-shirts and hoodies.
- Foot-pedal operation controls the auto-open, swing-away of the upper platen and provides a heat-free work space for safer two-hand operation. With the touch screen the operator can digitally set the time, temperature and pressure.

Key features:

- Temperature readings are in Fahrenheit or Centigrade
- UL/ULC/CE RoH-compliant and comes in 110v and 220v models
- Lifetime warranty on the heating element, five-year warranty on the framework, two-year warranty on the circuit board and one-year warranty on parts and labor



Stahls' Hotronix Heat Press Caddie

Company: Stahls' Hotronix; Carmichaels, PA; (800) 727-8520; www.hotronix.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for complete pricing: Heat-Press Caddie: \$299; Heat-Press Caddie and Hotronix Auto-Open Clam: \$1,149-\$1,749; Heat Press Caddie and MAXX Clam: \$924-\$1,349

What it is: The new Heat Press Caddie turns any Hotronix Auto Open or MAXX Clam into a threadable heat press. Its adjustable stand can be raised or lowered

to enhance individual operator comfort. The threadable heat press makes it easier to load a garment and spin it right on the platen to print the front, back or sides.

What's new:

- Threadability allows you to load your garment on to the press and decorate the front, back or sides without having to remove it from the platen.
- Threadable platen design allows user to drop seams, zipper fronts and button areas off the press, providing a smooth, even print surface. Reduces the need for additional accessories such as pillows or pads.
- Features heavy-duty self-leveling casters to move the press easily

User input

"From the moment I opened the box, I was impressed with the heat-press caddie," says Janel Martin, owner of High Class Horse in Folsom, LA, where she offers embroidery, digital printing and rhinestone transfers. "Its heavy construction supports the heat press' weight and the base is large enough to prevent tipping when clamping. Plus, the casters make it easy to move the machine where you need it. At \$300, it's a terrific value for what turns out to be an essential piece of equipment."

Laser Bridges

Seit Performa 500

Company: Hirsch International; Hauppauge, NY; (800) 394-4426; www.hic.us

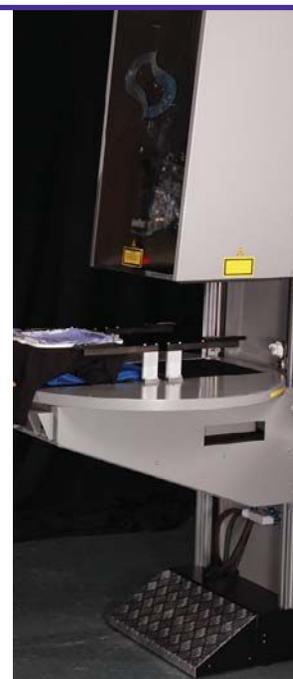
Cost: Contact distributor for pricing.

What it is: The Seit Performa 500 is designed with galvo technology for ultra-speed processing. The Performa can be used to speed up appliqué production by cutting in the hoop, which can then be transferred to a multi-head embroidery machine. It can also be used to etch graphics and photographs on a variety of materials. As a self-contained unit, the machine, which comes with a PC and design software as well as installation and training, can be positioned in different parts of almost any shop for a variety of applications.

Key features:

- Cutting area of 500mm by 500mm for large applications
- Textile applications; can also etch wood, paper, textiles, anodized aluminum, nontoxic polymers, Plexiglas and leather
- Water-cooling system ensures consistent performance throughout a run
- Offers 80 watts of power for maximum performance

Buyer's note: This machine is ideal for apparel decorators, trophy and award shops and promotional products distributors.



Laser Bridges

Proel E-Laser

Company: BITO USA; Oceanside, NY; (818) 427-1215; (866) 248-6872; www.bitousa.com

Cost: Single-head laser: \$25,000; two-head laser: \$35,000; four-head laser: \$65,000 (not including embroidery machine)

What it is: The E-Laser is a single-head laser attached to a single-head embroidery machine. This system uses the embroidery machine frame movement to guide the laser, and it can be attached to any model single-head machine. You can work with traditional appliqué, distressed appliqué, reverse appliqué and multiple layers at greater speeds than with traditional methods.

What's new:

- Ability to decorate headwear with the E-Caps attachment
- Fiber optics send laser from power source to substrate. Superior to traditional mirror method because mirrors



build up smog and require frequent cleaning as well as periodic professional realignments. Fiber optics require no maintenance.

- Machine can be hooked up to more than a single head. One configuration can be hooked up to one to two heads. A second configuration can serve three or four embroidery heads.

Key features:

- Laser head is mounted 1 1/2" above the

fabric and cutting is accurate to within 1/100th of an inch. Power can be adjusted to match a range of fabric thicknesses and design needs by rotating the laser power knob.

- Small 12" by 15" footprint
- E-Laser can be removed from the old machine and put on the new one.

Buyer's note: The E-Laser is relatively affordable for just about any business. It's very flexible because the embroidery machine can be used for just embroidery when the laser isn't needed. It makes low-volume production of appliqué much faster and easier than traditional methods with the added enhancement of being able to do multiple layers, distressed appliqué, reverse appliqué and caps. These capabilities give a small to mid-size shop a competitive advantage in terms of faster turnarounds and better pricing on appliqués and new looks; it's also ideal for a large-volume shop to use to create samples and spec pieces.

Proel Spartacus

Company: BITO USA; Oceanside, NY; (818) 427-1215; (866) 248-6872; www.bitousa.com

Cost: From \$50,000 to \$80,000

What it is: The easy-to-transport Spartacus is an affordable stand-alone laser cutter that allows any embroidery shop to dramatically increase its appliqué production as well as offer additional services, like cutting or etching on a wide range of apparel and promotional products.

What's new:

- New software allows a user to queue up multiple jobs for continuous production
- Jobs processed at enhanced pace because of natural speed of a galvanometric laser. Easily keeps up with a multi-head embroidery machine. Multiple operators can send designs to the machine and pick them up when done, and the next job is started automatically.
- Double-frame shuttle bed allows an operator to load one side of the bed while the other side is being cut. Once the cutting is done, the bed is shifted over and the operator unloads the cut pieces and reloads while the laser cuts the other side.

Key features:

- Interchangeable embroidery frame system makes it easy to transfer an embroidery hoop from the machine to the laser to cut any number of fabric appliqué layers.



- Ability to do distressed, reverse and multilayer appliqué
- Cut and mark a wide range of other substrates including wood, paper, textiles, anodized aluminum, nontoxic polymers, Plexiglas and leather
- Equipped with a CO2 laser source of 50, 100, 200 or 400 watts
- Uses a galvanometric laser beam movement system and has an adjustable-height cutting plane of 300mm by 300mm or 400 mm by 400mm, 12" and 16" respectively.
- Focuscut III software allows user to change a variety of parameters including laser power and speed to obtain optimum performance. The laser can be adjusted for products of varying thicknesses by adjusting the cutting bed height.

Buyer's note: The Spartacus is ideal for a mid-size to high-volume decorated-apparel shop that does a lot of appliqué or wants to get into appliqué for team, spiritwear and/or fashion markets. Not only does it dramatically speed up the production process – it also allows the user to offer a wide range of new looks. In addition, a shop could expand the services it offers by etching promotional product items such as leather portfolios, keychains, CD cases, aluminum mugs, pens and more. It also engraves on a variety of trophy and award materials such as Plexiglas, wood and anodized aluminum.

Dual-Function Machines



Seit Single-Head Embroidery Laser

Company: Hirsch International; Hauppauge, NY; (800) 394-4426; www.hic.us

Cost: Contact distributor for pricing.

What it is: The Seit single-head laser speeds up appliqué production on single-head embroidery machines for better productivity and profitability. It eliminates the labor and cost of cutting appliqué and reduces the time it takes to position appliqué on garments, as well as consumables such as spray tack.

Key features:

- Programmed to cut fabric to specification, and the embroidery machine sews it down. The laser can cut one or multiple layers of fabric with extreme accuracy, opening the doors to greater creativity and innovation.
- Can be attached at the factory or retrofitted to a Tajima M series machine, dramatically increasing its capabilities. The laser is programmed via software to follow the first needle, essentially cutting instead of stitching. The pantograph guides the laser to the programmed coordinates.
- Decorator can use a wider range of appliqué fabrics than ever before. Embroiderers can experiment with more delicate fabrics than is possible with traditional appliqué. There's also no need for backing or messy adhesive sprays.
- Cuts at the speed of the embroidery machine to 1,000 spm. This machine can also be mounted on multiple head models of the M-Series machines.

Buyer's note: The single-head embroidery laser is ideal for smaller shops that want to broaden their markets with the ability to do appliqué and a wide range of new looks.



DreamWeaver XE Innov-is VM6200D

Company: Brother International Corp.; Bridgewater, NJ; 800-4-A-BROTHER; www.brothersews.com

Cost: \$8,499

What it is: This quilting, sewing and embroidery combination machine with a 10" LED illumination for brilliant, full-spectrum lighting includes new features, such as the V-Sonic Pen Pal, MuVit Digital Dual Feed, Droplight Embroidery Positioning Marker and more, to make it easier to create complex projects. It stitches up to 1,050 spm.

What's new:

- 11" chassis provides 56 square inches of work space, perfect for a king-sized rolled up quilt
- V-Sonic Pen Pal for sewing uses ultrasonic technology to allow you to control several functions right on the quilting and sewing bed so you can reduce the need to look away from your project. Use it to tap on the sewing bed and easily make adjustments to needle position, set stitch width and position, select sewing end point and set laser guide position.
- V-Sonic Pen Pal for embroidery uses ultrasonic technology to allow you to control design positioning on the embroidery field.
- Sew straight laser vision guide displays a perfectly straight line.

Key features:

- Large 3.6" by 6.0" LCD touch-screen display: View up to 260,000 colors.
- Automatic height-adjuster feature
- Pivot function to turn perfect corners

User input

Angela Wolf, owner/president of Benton Harbor, MI-based ABO APPAREL LLC, is a fashion designer who started her business in 1994. "I recently launched a pattern collection for the home sewer, so I use the machines for sewing and embellishing apparel, including jeans," she says.



SWF K-UH 1504D-45

Company: SWF Central; St. Louis, MO; (877) 724-6400; www.swfcentral.com

Cost: Contact vendor for pricing; there are different packages available, from machine-only to workflow solutions.

What it is: SWF's four-head, dual-function, multi-head machine allows for maximum versatility along with increased productivity; it sews at 1,000 spm and offers a 400mm by 450mm sewing field. This 15-needle machine, which has a 2 million-stitch memory capacity and a five-year all-inclusive warranty, allows the user to run two separate designs/jobs (two garments per design) at one time or as a traditional four-head (four garments at a time). Other models available are the two, four, six and eight heads.

What's new:

- Automatic tensioning system produces high-quality designs while minimizing tension errors.
- Touch screen and interface are more intuitive and user-friendly; new features include true-trace settings and appliqué.
- New Networking System (NNS), the newest technology from SWF's line of embroidery equipment, links embroidery equipment with IT throughout the entire production and manufacturing cycle. Designs can be sent directly from any peripheral device with all pertinent design information.
- Control panel on-board videos

Key features:

- Quick Change Cap System allows user to quickly change to cap embroidery
- Two USB inputs, a floppy drive input, and serial and mini USB connections
- Automatic appliqué mode and on-board lettering and design editing

Buyer's note: This machine is ideal for shops that want to offer vinyl heat press and sign decoration, screen printing, rhinestones and multimedia.

Specialty Machines/Attachments



CAMS 1V-6P Automatic Rhinestone Machine

Company: ColDesi Inc.; Tampa, FL; (877) 793-3278;

www.rhinestonecamsmachines.com

Cost: Contact manufacturer for price.

What it is: This high-speed, six-color automatic rhinestone-setting machine sets up to 170 stones per minute and works with six colors and sizes of rhinestones, rhinestuds and nailheads.

What's new:

- Accurately sets up to 170 stones per minute
- Handles designs up to 15.75" by 15.75"
- Works with six colors or sizes of rhinestones, rhinestuds or nailheads

Key features:

- Easy setup and operation, with on-site installation and training
- Full, one-year, 100% trade-up value toward CAMS 4H-3P multi-head, six-color automatic rhinestone-setting machine

SWF E-T 1501 Sequins (SQ30)

Company: SWF Central; St. Louis, MO; (877) 724-6400; www.swfcentral.com

Cost: Contact for pricing; there are different packages available, from machine-only to workflow solutions.

What it is: This 15-needle, single-head sequin and embroidery machine, which sews at 1,200 spm and offers a 520mm by 360mm sewing field, is a versatile single-head with an all-new color touch-screen control panel. With this 2 million-stitch memory machine, use sequins alone or combine it with embroidery for maximum decoration. Machine comes with a five-year all-inclusive warranty.

What's new:

- Automatic Tensioning System produces high-quality designs while minimizing tension errors. Reduces manual thread tension settings and allows the user to save favorites for different garments
- Touch Screen & Interface includes a more intuitive and user-friendly interface as well as new features, including true-trace settings, appliqué and improvements in machine control
- New Networking System (NNS) links embroidery equipment with IT throughout the entire production and



manufacturing cycle. Designs can be sent directly from any peripheral device with all pertinent design information such as tension settings, color order and any other control data

- Control panel on-board videos

Key features:

- Quick Change Cap System allows user to change to cap embroidery in under a minute
- Touch-screen color-control system with networking ability
- Two USB inputs, a floppy drive input, and serial and mini USB connections

Buyer's note: This machine is recommended for start-up embroidery businesses as well as any size embroidery shop. Not only does this equipment provide embroidery decoration, but it also allows for a wide range of sequin embellishment. It's ideal for decorators who want high-fashion capability.



Roland VersaStudio BN-20

Company: Imprintables Warehouse (asi/58475); Carmichaels, PA; (800) 347-0068; www.imprintables.com

Cost: MSRP \$8,495; contact vendor for current pricing and specials.

What it is: This Eco-Solvent-based inkjet printer/cutter has the ability to print and cut designs for heat transfers, signs, decals, wall graphics and much more. It was developed to provide custom print/cut jobs on demand without a large equipment investment. The machine creates graphics for just about any fabric including nylon, spandex and leather,

as well as a wide range of indoor and outdoor durable graphics. Its bundled software includes Roland VersaWorks RIP software, R-Works design software, Windows driver and Roland OnSupport online production monitor.

What's new:

- 20" print/cut system (standard industry sizes are 30", 54" and 64")
- The 20" desktop printer uses Eco-SOL MAX ink in CMYK or CMYK plus metallic silver, which allows user to print striking text and special effects in metallic hues and pearlescent colors.
- Equipped with a new simplified media feed system that automatically aligns roll media in the printer.
- Supports roll media from 6" to 20" in width, weighing up to 13 lbs.
- Automated ink circulation system reduces metallic silver ink waste for lower running costs, ensures exceptional

image quality over the long term and minimizes maintenance requirements.

Key features:

- Compatible with Windows 7, Vista and XP operating systems and supports popular Windows design software including CorelDRAW and Adobe Illustrator.
- USB interface
- Maximum media width: 20"; max resolution: 1,440 dpi; max speed: 58/101/126 sq. ft./hour at 360 dpi by 720 dpi

Ink type: Eco-SOL MAX with metallic and white option; ink capacity: five cartridges

Buyer's note: The affordable BN-20 with leasing options available is ideal for any type of decorated-apparel shop. It can also be used to create small signage, POP displays, posters, window decals and bumper stickers with metallic inks.

MACHINE GUIDE COMPANY LISTINGS

All machine vendors with machines included in this guide are listed here.

AnaJet LLC (*asi/16000*)
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(813) 832-2896
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www.coldesi.com

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www.prodiemb.com

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Stahls' Hotronix
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general manager
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SHAPE UP YOUR SMALL SHOP



From tips on controlling costs to pricing wisely, here are solid strategies for overcoming common hurdles facing smaller shops and achieving broader growth and greater profitability.

By Christopher Ruvo

The entrepreneurial backstory behind each small embroidery business is unique, but they share many of the hurdles that impede growth and profitability. From not knowing how to price correctly and missing the mark on customer service, to failing to manage costs and consistently connect with new clients, a range of issues can stilt

shops' success. The bright side, however, is that there are a bevy of proactive steps every decorating business can take to roar past these common roadblocks and achieve success. "You don't have to reinvent the wheel," says Joyce Jagger, an industry consultant known as The Embroidery Coach. "You can see what works, and adapt that to your situation." Here industry veterans weigh in with advice and success strate-

gies that smaller shops can start working on today.

CONTROL COSTS, SPEND SMARTLY

It's that kind of day. Your machines are humming with an order that has to be out the door pronto. You're e-mailing back and forth with a picky client about artwork. You're trying to check an order of shirts to

ensure the colors and sizes are correct, but thread breaks, ringing phones and e-mail keep interrupting.

In this daily whirlwind that often plays out at busy smaller shops, it's easy to lose track of your expenses. But managing costs – which entails tracking them assiduously and making smarter purchasing decisions based on what you find – is essential if you want to build profitability at your shop. If you fail to do so, you'll end up bleeding cash, leaving you barely in the black or worse. "Costs can't be taken lightly," says Andy Shuman, general manager at Rockland Embroidery (*asi/734150*), a Topton, PA-based contract decorating firm. "It's easy for things to get out of control quickly."

To keep that from happening, Shuman suggests starting by identifying all of your operating costs. Make sure to examine every expense, even the small ones. You may find that you're squandering cash on expenses that don't help bolster your business. Consider eliminating those unnecessary extras. With your costs identified, consistently create reports – weekly, if possible – that compare your revenue and expenses. Using QuickBooks accounting software or creating an Excel spreadsheet can assist in keeping your numbers organized, and help you identify which expenses need to be reined in order to be kept in line with revenues.

When you know your company's operating numbers, you can start comparative shopping for better deals on expenses. Perhaps you can get a better deal on insurance or find different threads that offer comparable quality at a lesser price. Maybe you can refinance your equipment payments to get a lower interest rate.

At Rockland, careful cost management has led to significant expense control, including saving tens of thousands of dollars on technology costs over the years. The savings were realized after the company discovered it would be less expensive in the long run to have a technology company, with which it had been working, custom-build computers for its network of 20 inter-linked computers, rather than to purchase computers at retail and pay for maintenance and upgrades. "Costs are common but not

uniform," Shuman says. "It's important that you analyze your shop's specific situation."

PRICE FOR PROFIT

When it comes to pricing, decorators need to create a structure that supports their business expenses – and turns them a profit. Otherwise, the consequences can be fatal to a business. Jagger knows that too well. Before experience turned her into a consultant who trains shops for success, Jagger nearly lost the embroidery business she used to own because of underpricing. "I did what most embroiderers do: I gathered everyone else's price lists and averaged them out to create my own price list," she says. "Sometimes I'd give the customer the lowest price around just to get the business, and this was a huge mistake."

If you don't price carefully, you could price yourself to the unemployment line. And, the experts say, there's more to pricing than simply charging \$1 per 1,000 stitches or finding out what your competitors charge and undercutting them – both common mistakes.

Correct pricing starts with knowing your business' total overhead – all of your expenses. Once you understand your costs and have ensured the physical layout of your shop is organized for maximum efficiency, start tracking your average production and setup times, Jagger says. A charge for these times should be built into your pricing structure. That structure, Jagger says, can be developed with the help of a pricing list prep sheet, which should detail the costs of running different jobs at different stitch-count levels. Prepping and finishing expenses should be part of the pricing; after all, Jagger says, they're services, so charge for them.

Working from your prep sheet, you can create a finalized price list based on your expenses and all aspects of the service and stitching you provide. If you do contract and end-user direct work, you'll want to have different price lists for each. "Once your pricing structure is in place, you can create as many different lists as you want," Jagger says.

A price structure specific to your shop can help you determine if you can offer a

flat rate for certain work. Jordan, MN-based Thread Logic has implemented a flat-rate price for all left-chest logos, which comprise the lion's share of the shop's work. When clients consider buying, say, logoed shirts, the cost of the embroidery is already built into the apparel's price. This saves time for clients and makes purchasing easier for them – a benefit that attracts customers. Owner Jeff Taxdahl developed his flat-rate price following an analysis that included looking at the stitch-count range left-chest logos tend to fall in, along with his expenses and the gross margins he needed for healthy profit-making. "I'm not worried about what the guy down the street charges," Taxdahl says. "I provide a valuable service, and I'm interested in establishing lifetime value with clients who desire that."

STEP UP CUSTOMER SERVICE

Some shops say they "go the extra mile" for customers. Creative Promotions Inc. does so literally. The Seattle-based shop personally delivers orders within a 75-mile radius of its front door, saving clients money on shipping and ensuring decorated apparel arrives ahead of schedule. "We have a van that makes deliveries daily," says company President Chuck Northcutt Jr. "Customers appreciate the personal touch."

Making deliveries is just one facet of Creative Promotions' customer service strategy, which has been a primary driver of success at the shop. Indeed, decorators who fail to deliver outstanding service risk running themselves out of business. "You have to give your customers an experience that makes them want to come back," Jagger says.

Good customer service starts with the basics: Have an upbeat, positive attitude when you and your staff interact with customers, and keep a clean and well-organized shop space that makes it inviting to do business. From there, Northcutt says, service centers on understanding clients' specific needs and goals, and then using your decorating expertise to deliver a solution that works. This often entails taking time to educate clients. Northcutt tells how clients may come with preconceived ideas of what they want – ideas that won't work out in reality.

For example: Instead of just screen printing 140 polo shirts to fill a corporate client's request, Northcutt advised the buyer about why embroidered logos would be a better, more business-like option for the apparel. "Be willing to explain not only what's the best decorating method, for example, to your client, but also why it is," Northcutt says.

Service is more than consulting, though; it's also about making ordering and delivery as easy as possible for customers. As part of accomplishing that end, Creative Promotions has a computer-generated work order form that outlines all the details of a job. Before Northcutt starts stitching, customers review and sign off on the form, thereby ensuring everything is

clear and correct. "It saves us from errors and makes everything easy and upfront for them," Northcutt says.

As Northcutt suggests, client-pleasing service is massively contingent on completing an order accurately and before deadline. At Endicott, NY-based Pro Lettering, accuracy begins with thorough inspections of blank apparel for an order to ensure sizing and colors are correct and that there are no flaws in the goods. Not a stitch is sewn until this is complete. "Make sure what goes out the door is perfect," Jagger says.

If a mistake occurs, how you handle the situation may determine whether you keep the customer or not. Service-centric shops like Creative Promotions honestly acknowledge their errors, explain how they'll make good, assess what went wrong, and even convey to customers steps they'll take to ensure such mishaps don't occur again. "If you're honest and apologize and do everything you can to make things right," Northcutt says, "you build credibility."

Of course, when a decent-sized order goes well, it's part of good customer service to say thank you. Some shops send handwritten notes. Others e-mail or call with an appreciative follow-up. And some give buyers gifts. On a recent deal, Yorkville, NY-based A&P Master Images gave a free embroidered jacket to a buyer in the education market who had purchased 150 shirts. "She was appreciative of the gift and the job we did on the shirts," says CEO Howard Potter. "She recommended us, which helped us to start doing teacher and booster club apparel at the school."

BECOME A CLIENT CREATOR

Beyond demonstrating good service in action, Potter's generosity and the new business it led to is an excellent example of how to grow your customer base proactively. A major impediment smaller decorating businesses face is that "they don't know how to attract new customers effectively," Jagger says.

So how can you connect with more customers? Not surprisingly, it starts with satisfying customers by providing a positive purchasing experience and the delivery of superbly stitched garments. Happy customers may tell friends about you, and there's

no better or more inexpensive marketing than positive word-of-mouth. "I had a customer who was so happy with an order we did that he recommended us to his friend, who placed a \$3,000 order for embroidered polo shirts," Potter says.

Networking is another proactive way to connect with new customers, Jagger says. While running her embroidery business, she had great success drumming up customers through connections she made at her local chamber of commerce. "I even did work for the chamber itself," she says.

In the increasingly digital business environment, social media platforms are invaluable – and free – tools for attracting clients, too. Shop owners across the country are successfully generating hot sales leads with the help of everything from images they post on Pinterest to connections they make through LinkedIn. And, of course, there's Facebook – the social media site decorators say helps them the most when it comes to engagement.

Potter, for example, runs contests on A&P's Facebook page that result in people he has never worked with before "Liking" the business page. Once they do, many are impressed by images and videos of A&P's work they see posted. This leads to conversations with Potter that end in sales. "You need a strong website because so many people look up businesses online," says Potter, whose site, www.masteryourimage.com, includes images of his work, customer testimonials, videos of the decorating processes he offers, and much more.

To connect with new customers, start a referral program. Pro-Lettering offers discounts of 10% to 25% to clients who refer others that become customers. "Referral programs bring in more business than anything else," Jagger says.

If you have the budget, consider paid advertising. Potter has drawn in a bevy of new clients through spots on a local radio station. "Radio and TV can work really well," he says, "but you have to commit. I do about \$14,000 a year with radio – half cash, half trade. If you can't commit, don't waste your money."

CHRISTOPHER RUVO is a staff writer for *Stitches*; contact him at cruvo@asicentral.com.

PROFIT-POWERING TIPS

Here are a few more suggestions for achieving greater growth and profitability:

1. Develop Good Economies of Scale:

"Keep your machines busy, but busy with the right blend of high and low margin work that will promote growth," says Joe Thompson, marketing manager at Louisville, KY-based Stitch Designers (asi/741145). "Balancing the high-volume/lower-margin work with the more sporadic low-volume/higher-margin jobs is the key to growth."

2. Consider Partnering Up:

Says Thompson: "Find a great source for your overflow – someone who already has the capacity to handle every job that you can sell, but can't produce yourself. Also consider finding like-minded companies and forming a sort of buying group to negate the larger companies' buying power advantage. But, show care with whom you create alliances, as you could empower an unscrupulous competitor."

3. Manage Expansion Wisely:

It's pivotal that you have a business model that's scalable so you can grow successfully. "In business be cognizant of your growth model and ask questions like, 'How will we handle and be able to fulfill orders when our sales reach two times the current levels? Four? Ten?'" says Matthew W. Swyers, a business advice contributor to Inc.com who founded The Trademark Co., a Web-based law firm that protects the trademark rights of businesses. "Management must also be able to grow and adapt with the new requirements of a business as it flourishes."

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Dalco Athletic	160, 31
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Helping Hands Reward	153, 27
Hotronix	164, 33
Madeira USA	159, 31
MV Sport/Weatherproof	155, 28
Pacific Emblem Co.....	162, 31
Roland DGA Corp.....	158, 31
SVP Worldwide.....	157, 30
The Garment Co.....	151, 27
Thinc Actionwear	156, 29
Transfer Express	161, 31
Tri-Mountain	154, 28

Advertiser Index

ADVERTISERS/SUPPLIERS

COMPANY NAME	RS#	PG#
American Apparel	5	1
Anvil®	92	11
Blue Generation	10	2-3
Bodek & Rhodes	22	15
Broder Bros., Co	25	7
Cotton Fruit Inc.	16	21
Discount Embroidery Blanks	90	17
Game Sportswear LTD	83	18
Gildan®	26	4-5
Hanes/Champion/OuterBanks	28	IFC
Jerzees	24	BC
New Balance®	27	13
Next Level Apparel	87	25
Outdoor Cap Co	36	29
Sunstar USA Inc	13	IBC
SWF East	49, 50, 68	20, 23, 30
Toyota/Pantograms	53	19
Transfer Express	55	33
Wilcom America	21	9

CLASSIFIEDS

COMPANY NAME	RS#	PG#
Pizzazz	102	61
Whispering Pines Sportswear	117	61
Mazama Inc	120	61
Applied Pressure INC.	48	61
A-B Emblem	119	61
Bc Supply Co	110	61
Pacific Sportswear & Emblems	107	61
World Emblem	96	61
Express Digitizing.com	131, 132	61
Ideas Plus Inc.	126, 133	61, 62
SGI International (Pvt) Limited	141	61
Shamrock Design	101	62
Fawn Embroidery Services Inc.	105	62

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RS No. 67

Chl Inc	106	62
Bitto	128	62
First Street Graphics	29	62
Howard Sportswear		
Graphic Express ++	72	62
DJS LABELS INC	77	62
Groovy Holidays	54	62
Mesa Distributors	67	63
Freehand Graphics Inc.	104	63

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What's coming up in March/April *Stitches*

By Nicole Rollender



Henry Bernstein, S.M. Cristall Co.

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■ Learn how the experts deal with clients who want the lowest price, constantly come in with rush orders, or change their minds after the proofing process.

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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 February 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 February needle are due by February 28. 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 May issue.

Slick Is Very Fashion-Forward

In the December issue, Slick hid in the "Next Level Fashions" section of "Look Book" on page 24, next to the Next Level shirt images, available from Bodek and Rhodes (*asi/40788*). **Ken Webber** of Chelsea, MA-based **Krazy Kat's Embroidery** was chosen at random from a grand total of 35 responses. As this issue's winner, Ken will receive Madeira USA's gift certificate. Keep your eyes peeled for the industry's favorite game of hide and seek!



ask an expert ■ *your most pressing business dilemmas solved*

By Kristine Shreve

LEARN IT LIVE!

Attend "Create High-Quality Screen-Printing Artwork With CorelDRAW" on Sunday, March 24, 12:15 p.m.-1:15 p.m., at The ASI Show Long Beach, and you'll learn how the quality of your clients' graphics can impact your production - from simple one-color designs to multicolored graphics. Plus, you'll discover how to prepare your artwork for top-notch screen printing. Visit ASIShow.com to register.



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

QA lot of the consulting time that I spend with clients is dealing with the poor artwork they provide me. Can you advise me on how I can minimize the time I spend having to fix subpar artwork and educate clients on what kind of art they should have ready for me when they call, especially with holiday or rush orders?

A When you work with other people's artwork on a daily basis, you learn quickly that high-quality art makes things easier and poor-quality art makes things more difficult. Because it's so obvious to you as the decorator, it's easy to think the importance of good artwork is as obvious to your customers as well, but that's often not the case. People who don't work with decoration often don't understand the constraints of material, imprinting techniques or computer programs. If you want quality art from your customers, you need to spend time educating them about what good artwork is and how artwork quality can impact a finished product.

One educational option is to appeal to a customer's vanity. Everyone wants their decorated items to look as good as they can possibly look. Let your customers know that poor-quality artwork isn't going to result in a product of which they can be proud. Your goal is to create a product that you'll be proud to say you made, and the customer will be proud to wear or display or give as a gift. Poor-quality artwork isn't going to get either of you close to your goals. You don't have to go into tons of detail, but simply pointing out a few ways where quality art can improve the finished product may be enough to get your customer to provide the high-quality graphics you need.

Another way to help ensure you get good artwork from your customers is to hit them in their wallets. The hard truth is that poor-quality art will often add extra expenses to a project. Most shops do, and should, charge additional fees for recreating artwork or for formatting artwork so that it can be used for the intended decoration. If your customers understand there will be extra charges as well as extra production time if you have to spend time and effort rendering their artwork usable, they might pay more attention to the quality of artwork they're offering to you.

While you're educating your customers about artwork, don't forget to define what artwork is and what it isn't. A stick figure and some scribbles on a napkin

Most shops do, and should, charge additional fees for recreating or formatting artwork.

stained with the remnants of someone's morning coffee and doughnut isn't artwork; it's a concept. If a customer comes to you with a concept, you have two choices. You can either tell them what you charge to take their concept and change it into quality artwork, or you can suggest a quality graphic designer who could do that, if you don't. The main thing here is to make it clear what's quality artwork and what isn't, and to not get stuck trying to make a concept function as something it's not.

Finally, remember that you know what quality artwork is and why it's important, but your customers may not. Terms like "vector art" or "camera ready" may not mean much to them, and your customers might genuinely not see why the cool clip art logo they created in Microsoft Word isn't going to provide the quality they want for their T-shirts. Taking a few minutes to educate your customers can save you many headaches. If you have a website, create a page that describes what good artwork is, including details like acceptable file formats, limitations of whatever decorating technique you're using, and even examples of bad artwork with a small description of why the artwork doesn't work. If you have a brick-and-mortar store, do the same sort of thing in a binder, or simply on a sheet of paper, and give a copy to each customer who comes in.

The main thing to remember is that your customers need to understand how poor-quality artwork impacts their finished product, not how it impacts you. If you can show them how poor-quality artwork will cost them more, interfere with the quality of their finished product and cause delays in production time, they may be much more likely to provide acceptable artwork for future products.

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

Looking Forward

In the next issue, you'll learn how to hire your shop's first digitizer. See you next issue!



Read more about this topic in Kristine Shreve's DecQuorum blog on *Stitches.com*.

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