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Embroidery's Voice & Vision

JANUARY 2011

The Growth Issue

Revamp
your business
this year

Smooth Operators
Million-dollar contract shops

Company Makeover
A decorator opens her doors

What Women Want
9 marketing ideas

Embroiderer to the Stars
Adam Lambert's decorator



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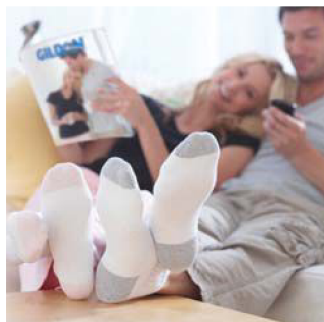
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GILDAN NEW 2011

COVER STORY

38 Roadmap to Success Your 2011 Growth Plan

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

BY DANIEL WALSH, ANDRAYA VANTREASE, SHANE DALE AND ERICA YOUNG

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49 Success Stories Smooth Operators

Want to know the secrets of decorators who started really small and ended up as million-dollar operations? We profile three profitable contract embroiderers who literally started with nothing and just followed the money.

BY ERICA YOUNG

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

BY DANIEL WALSH

56 Operations Makeover Race to the Starting Line

Just weeks before jumping from part-time decorator to full-time business operator, Jennifer Osborne didn't have all of her systems and processes ready for prime time. But with an industry veteran's advice and her own tireless effort, Osborne got Emages Embroidery where it needed to be as the doors opened.

BY ROBERT CAREY





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CORRECTION

In December's "Power 56" cover story, Madeira's website was printed incorrectly; it should be: www.madeiramart.com

About the Cover
Photography: Mark Pricsett
Design: Jim Lang
Digitizing and embroidery by Qdigitizing.com (asi/700501)
Visit Qdigitizing.com at The ASI Orlando Show on January 24-25 in Booth 222.

Join Us on Location

Stitches Staff Writer Daniel Walsh interviews business experts who share their top strategies for how decorating-business owners can expand and improve their firms in 2011. Go to *Stitches.com* to listen to the interviews.



Can't Get Enough of *Stitches* University?

Curious about how decorators are selling huge imprinted-apparel orders? Go to *Stitches.com* to read a "Stitches University" online-exclusive article highlighting five case studies in which end-buyers had a precise apparel need (even if they weren't sure what that apparel item should be) for a specific promotion, and how decorators rose to the challenge to make it happen.

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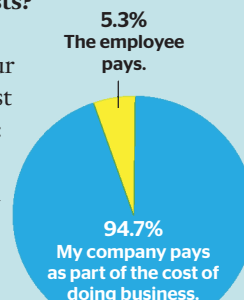
You can download lots of educational MP3 files at *Stitches.com* – so you can get valuable business-building tips while you're on the go. This month, download an exclusive interview that ASI editors, including *Stitches* Editor Nicole Rollender, conducted with former first lady Laura Bush, who discussed her efforts on behalf of Afghanistan women and education, the importance of volunteering and the pleasures of private life. Plus, as keynote speaker for The ASI Show Dallas from February 16-18, and at the Women's Summit on February 18, Bush previewed her talk by revealing her favorite promotional items. Visit www.asishow.com for information on her upcoming presentations.



Your Bottom Line

In a recent poll on *Stitches.com*, we asked decorating companies: **If a good employee makes a mistake that requires your company to replace garments, how do you handle the replacement costs?**

Almost 95% of you stand by your good employees – covering the cost of damaged apparel. Get educated: Turn to page 38 to read our "Your 2011 Growth Plan" special section – and learn the real costs of hiring a good employee (and when you should let someone go).



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

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contributors



Everyone's buying performance wear, and you guessed it, they want it embroidered. In this issue's "Technically Speaking" on page 33, **DEBORAH JONES**, owner of MyEmbroideryMentor.com, helps you navigate one of the toughest embroidery styles for this stretchy, thin fabric: the outlined fill. "While performance apparel is fabulous next to the skin, what's not so great is trying to embroider these wiggly, stretchy, thin fabrics," she writes. "Unfortunately, many decorators resort to using a too-thick backing that destroys the garment's appearance and comfort level." Jones' companion video on *Stitches.com* shows you how to embroider and finish performance wear to perfection.



In this issue's "On the Art Side," **GERI FINIO**, owner of Moorestown, NJ-based Studio 187, shows you step by step how she collaborated with an interior designer and a sewing professional to create a custom, machine-embroidered Roman shade for a client. Finio also offers insider tips for performing embroidery work on higher-end projects: "I adjust my tension completely by touch – this is where knowing how thread reacts to different fabrics is very helpful," she writes. "I rarely use the same settings as a default for every project – it's all determined individually based on visual and hand results during a test sewout."



In this month's "Ask an Expert" column, **ERICH CAMPBELL**, digitizer and e-commerce manager for Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (*asi/140730*), waxes poetic (and practical) on how to become a really skilled digitizer. "If you know of a master who does the sort of work you want to do, purchase their designs and watch them run, either on-screen or on-machine," he writes. "Make measurements of their work, and watch how they interpret their subjects. You'll find that some rules tend to hold true for all digitizers: For areas thinner than 10 mm, such as the lines in most lettering, a satin stitch is the norm." Be sure to read all of Campbell's great tips on page 64.

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

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Embroidery's Voice & Vision

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ONLINE

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



WEBINARS

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

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Join the *Stitches* Social Site

Join the 1,800 *Stitches* readers who are networking daily on the *Stitches* magazine Social Site, an active community of *Stitches* readers and other decorators who post photos of their work, blog entries and videos. The most recent blog, penned by



Erich Campbell of Black Duck Inc., titled "Slaves to the Status Update: Pushing Toward Proactivity," looks at working in a wired world.

"When we are bombarded at every moment by a world of e-mails, text messages, Twitter and Facebook updates and more, we can find ourselves simply wading in the stream of information, barely focusing on anything as the content flows by, let alone adding to the conversation," he writes. To read the entire blog, go www.stitchesmagsocialsite.com.

Get Educated

Classes Available Online

Working toward your BASI or MASI, but can't get out of the office? Then get on over to the ASI Education's Online Learning Center, where you will find a ton of courses that will help you in a number of disciplines, including:

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In this course, you'll learn about 12 of the most common rookie mistakes distributors make.

Wearables Crash Course

In this course, you'll learn about the top five best-selling wearable categories, along with decorating and selling tips.

Business-Building Strategies: Inside *Counselor's* SOI 2010

Receive a summary of the top sales, marketing and operations strategies included in *Counselor's* 2010 State of the Industry issue.

Improve Revenues and Margins With Green Products

Companies across a variety of industries are buying green ad specialty items and apparel. But, to succeed in this niche, you need to be well-versed in green terminology, know what products to sell and how to pitch them to the right buyers.

Sell More Made-in-the-USA Products

How can you tell if a product is really U.S.-made? What are the hottest

markets to target? A panel of experts discusses how red-white-and-blue products can get you the green.

Cold-Calling Clinic: Get More Appointments Now

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January is always touted as a time for new beginnings, resolutions and other fresh takes on your personal (lose those 10 holiday pounds!) and professional life (get 100 new clients in the first quarter!). Generally, I think resolutions are corny. You either are or you aren't a workout buff or a business builder, right?

The thing is, I'm a big believer in taking (smart) risks all year long in your personal and professional life. So, I challenge you (if you must resolve) to start 2011 boldly by taking a hard look at your business, setting new goals and deciding to work all year toward achieving them.

Recently, I've seen a trend in reader letters asking me to put together business-building articles for shop owners who want to take their companies to the next level. One such heartfelt letter came from David Cyphers, co-owner of Embroidery By Raggedy Patty Ann with his wife Patty Ann: "Nicole, you have a very loyal following and we'd all so much appreciate it if you could write a complete, from beginning-to-end, simple workable plan for us. ... For some of us, this could be the last ditch effort doing something to help pull ourselves out of this recession that we're all in. This is very important."

This letter got me – meaning I really relate to that idea of putting it all out there in tough economies, taking that chance, throwing it all to the winds and jumping. We want to help you grow your business in ways you might not have expected in 2011, starting off with our annual "The Growth Issue." We've packed it with ideas to help you revamp your decorating company this year, including a big "Your 2011 Growth Plan" cover story, chock full of ways to increase your cash flow, increase your sales, market your business, upgrade your software and find a new space for your business.

Plus, you'll meet three contract shop owners who started with literally nothing and grew their businesses into million-dollar powerhouses. And, yes, I get letters from people saying that they'd never take contract work, since just doing logos for promotional products distributors is plain selling out if you're an embroidery purist. Guess what? I disagree. I challenge you to open your minds to contract work. You can be both artist and savvy businessperson looking for opportunities that will fuel your business growth. In this issue, we also debut a new article series, "Operations Makeover," where our experts help a shop owner make some tough decisions: In this installment, we help a retail shop owner get ready to open her doors.

Here's to a profitable – and daring – 2011!

Nicole M. Rollender



Nicole Rollender
nrollender@asicentral.com

We Asked You ...

What area of your business are you going to really focus on improving in the first quarter?

David Collin, Busy Bees Embroidery, Screen Printing & Promotional Products, Kirkwood, MO;
bzybees@swbell.net: "Safety!

"We'll be facing a major overhaul, rearranging the machines, putting tons of stuff away and getting better organized. Tied with that on our priority list is to improve sales on our website."



Geri Finio, Studio 187, Moorestown, NJ; geri@studio187.net:

"My focus will be communicating the personal custom service I can offer that larger shops simply can't. With all the technology available, it's hard to get a live

voice on the phone anymore and one of the keys to my success is personal communication – the actual embroiderer who's doing the job talking with the customer. My customers know they're welcome to call me, and I'm happy to discuss their project with them."

Carolyn Milne, Computer Craft Designs of Oregon, Hillsboro, OR; carolyn@spiritone.com: "Short answer: adding to my knowledge

base and networking more by teaching and getting more exposure. I plan to revise my digitized quilt patterns so I can upload the completed designs and patterns to my website and also continue to sell to local shops in my area. I teach quilting and will also use my designs and patterns for the classes. Teaching has doubled my sales so I also intend to take on more classes. My second goal is to perfect my photo-stitch designs to add that to my digitizing bucket."



Michael Savoia, Villa Savoia Inc., West Hollywood, CA;
villasavoiainc@gmail.com:

"I've made plans to rework my workspace – the market is changing and I need to present

a solid front of new samples that showcase that change: fewer pillows and more borders.

"I've also started making outside calls – my clientele is national and in the past few months I've been visiting potential clients in Washington D.C., New York City and San Francisco. I need to develop more clients as most of my clients are spending less.

"I've also hired a public relations professional. Media exposure in my business is essential – I'm a very small, focused shop and having help in this area is important. I'm also increasing the time my bookkeeper spends on my financials, so I can be less distracted by paperwork."





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Every article in the November *Stitches* was of interest to me, but “The Hopeful Nichepreneur” article in the “Mentor for a Month” series really stands out. I could substitute my name for the mentee, Rosalie Hale-Richardson. Many of Rosalie’s issues are also mine. Mentor Joyce Jagger’s advice was spot on. I know I need to market myself. I’ve tried to do a lot of craft shows and have enough different products to sell that might please the masses, but now I realize I need to find my niche and stick with it.

On another note, I always look forward to the *Stitches* Golden Needle Awards coverage. The creativity of the entries is unparalleled. This year’s winner in the Embroidery, Design of the Year, Artistic, Fashion category, “Vivid Butterfly and Bee” by Cory Dean and Emily Cheney of Emerald City Embroidery (*asi/701536*), is a design that sings to me. I can’t even fathom how it was digitized to produce such personality in the butterfly and bee. The bee’s eyes are so real and expressive, and the color layering is outstanding. This design is awesome! I can’t put the cover of *Stitches* down – I’m enjoying the bee too much! Congratulations to these two thread artists!

Thank you for a fine publication that’s loaded with tips, tricks, educational tutoring and advice to help embroiderers excel at their craft.

Diane Burrows

Stitch It Embroidery

Readers respond to December’s “Stitch up the Big Screen” article. We also asked: Are your customers asking you to combine embroidery with other forms of decoration?

Yes, our customers are asking us to combine embroidery with other forms of decoration, and we’re also suggesting it to them. I’d estimate that we handle five to 10 orders per month that have a combination of screen printing and embroidery on



the same item. Typically, we do the screen printing first and then add embroidery or appliqué. Some orders require registration between the two media, but most are loose registration.

Dan Okelberry

Sales/Design, Shirts101.com (asi/179638)

Excellent article. I love the idea of combining screen printing, embroidery and rhinestones. My to-do list now includes finding a local screen printer who can help me produce this type of product.

Jane Swanzy

Swan Threads

Our customers haven’t increased their demand for multimedia to any great extent, but we’re seeing a steady increase in the complexity and the number of decorated areas per garment. Most of our requests have been for distressed appliqué over screen printing, something we’ve experimented with and have gotten comfortable turning out. We’re strong because we have all of our design and production capabilities, from raw art to digitizing to almost any kind of deco-

ration, under one roof. In our art department, we come together, develop a plan of attack and consult with our skilled printers and machine operators to get everything aligned in the setup phase so that they run smoothly in production.

Erich Campbell

Black Duck Inc. (asi/140730)

It’s best to use sublimation instead of screen printing as the base for embroidery, because it’s smooth. We’ve done many quilt squares in sublimation of portraits that became the centers for full quilts. The borders were embroidered. Pretty classy.

David Collin

Busy Bees Embroidery, Screen Printing & Promotional Products



I’m constantly being asked to revise patterns to make them less labor-intensive. More often than not, after I review the design and materials required, I’m filling space using a combination of techniques. The graphic contrast that appliqué brings to the fabric surface looks rich and is an efficient surface-area cover. I’ve interpreted a number of my patterns in ways to make them sell – the key to cash flow. Here’s a photo (above) of a pattern I’ve created using hand-guided techniques and custom-dyed chenille – interpreted in two economical options, one in appliqué with satin stitching and one in satin stitching with a pattern overlay.

Michael Savoia

Villa Savoia Inc.

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BG7216



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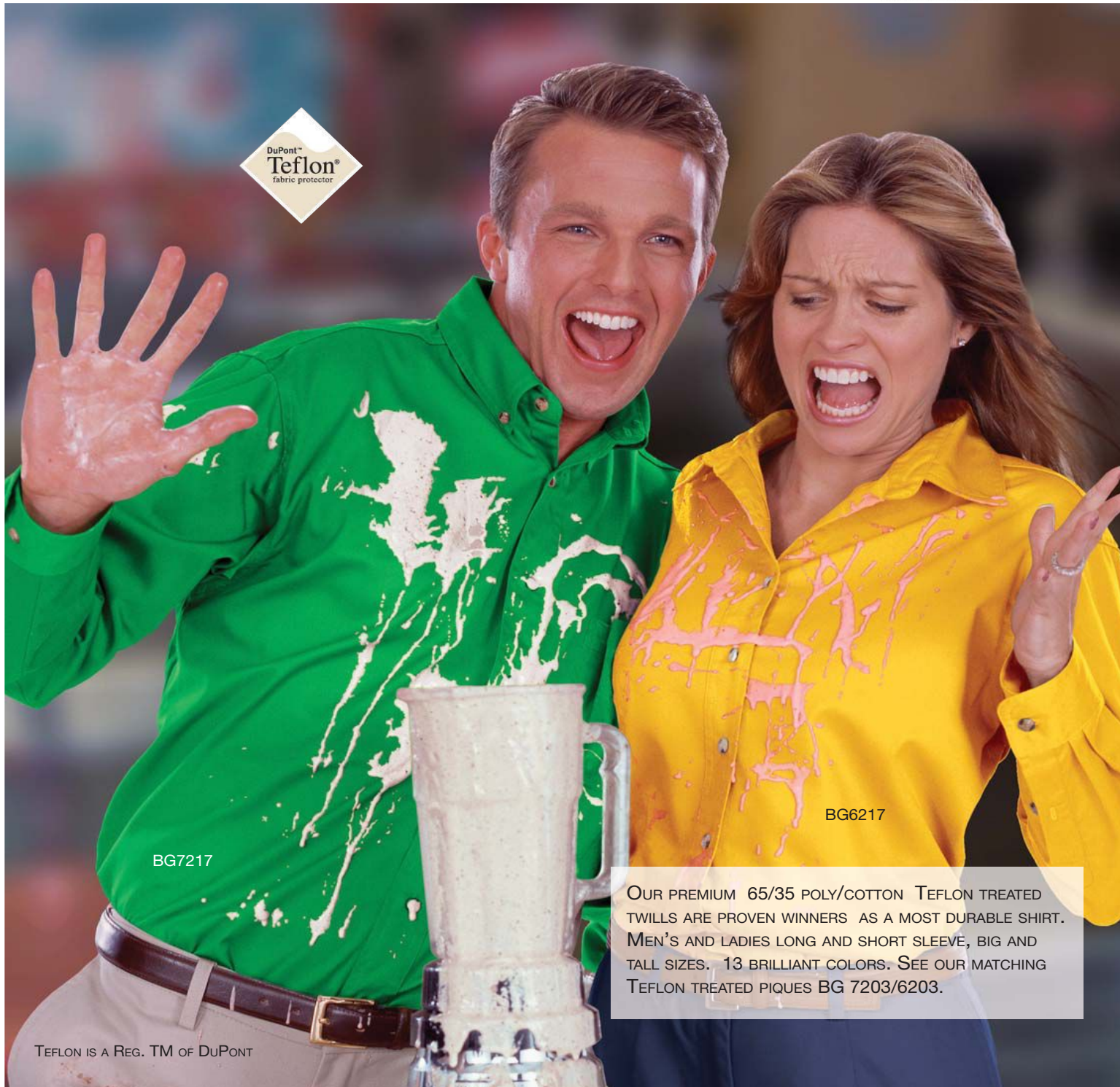
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Got a question for Phil?

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

Dear Phil,
I'm looking for long chef aprons in black -I need your help! - Jay

You can find an ankle-length black bib apron (2001882) with adjustable straps from Berghoff International (asi/40217); (727) 853-3355; www.berghoff-usa.com. Also try Two Lumps of Sugar (asi/92389); (212) 966-1303; www.twolumpsofsugar.com; this supplier carries dozens of coated aprons, including waist and bib styles in a variety of colors. Lastly, check out the black polyester chef apron (A16) from Country Line (asi/46764); (416) 740-3711; www.countryline.ca.



Dear Phil,
I'm looking for pullover hoodies that have shoestrings in the placket. Thank you for your hard work looking for items for everyone and me. You're so appreciated!
- Virginia

Boy, do I have some suggestions for you! There are a handful of suppliers that carry pullover hoodies with lace-up plackets. Start by checking out Arrow Hockey and Sport (asi/68887); (800) 343-5216; www.arrowhockey.com. It carries a 9.5-oz., heavyweight hoodie (TM-ESTLH) in gray with a white shoelace. Also try Sportco (asi/88793); (630) 544-3520; www.sportcousa.com; it offers a lace-up hoodie (SA104) in a cotton/polyester blend. And if neither of those tickle your fancy, go to Game Sportswear (asi/55752); (914) 962-1701; www.gamesportswear.com, where you can find a hockey hoodie (8200) with a large front pouch pocket that comes in several color combinations.



Dear Phil,
Is there a supplier that offers youth sizes in denim? - Georgianne

Of course, we can't forget the kids! Check out youth denim jackets at Apparelstar Inc. (asi/36539); (866) 204-4042; www.apparelstarimports.com. They're high-

end retail-quality and come in several washes and sizes for a range of ages. For youth-size, short-sleeve denim shirts (RS 501 BD) in 29 colors, go to *Tutti/Bowlingwear.com* (asi/92356); (800) 777-4284; www.2t2t.com. Lastly, for some youth head-to-toe denim options, check out the bib overalls (KOV11906) with adjustable suspender straps from A Design N Time (asi/30264); (719) 347-0166; www.dntproducts.com. Any child will look adorable in these items!



Dear Phil,
Do you have any suggestions for argyle sweaters (not vests), with choices for men and women in a moderate price range? - Kate

I found some argyle sweater styles that will keep your clients cozy and fashionable all season long. For a unisex, long-sleeve, button-down cardigan (77217) made of argyle wool, check out Hammacher Schlemmer (asi/59444); (866) 714-0530; www.hammacher.com. You can also try Skins Game (asi/87629); (949) 885-0143; www.skinsgameclothing.com. This supplier has a men's long-sleeve argyle sweater (SP04) made of an acrylic/tencel/wool blend; it's available in khaki and navy.



Dear Phil,
Do you know any suppliers that carry made-in-the-USA denim shirts? Please help! - Rick

It's all about the denim these days! I found some great "born-in-the-USA" denim shirts available in men's and women's short- and long-sleeve styles. For a shirt (RS 500BD) with 29 color choices, go to *Tutti/Bowlingwear.com* (asi/92356); (800) 777-4284; www.2t2t.com. Two shirt styles (W11 and W13) with front pockets and flaps can be found at TYCA (asi/92370); (800) 522-5387; www.tyca.com. Another option is the 8-oz. 100% washed cotton denim shirt (women's, 10419; men's, 10068) available from Union Line/Graybear (asi/92508); (800) 632-2308; www.unionmadeclothing.com.

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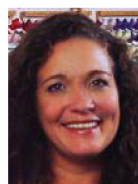
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think tank ■ ask the Editorial Advisory Board

For embroiderers who want to revamp their businesses in 2011, what area would you tell them to focus on first?



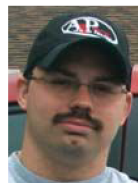
Samanta Cortes, Fashion Design Concepts Inc.

Personalization is one of the industry's rapidly growing market sectors. Make your buyers feel that they're part of the creative process. That's essential to growing that side of your business.



Steve Freeman, Qdigitizing.com (asi/700501)

I'd tell embroiderers who want to revamp their businesses to first look at their marketing strategies and do a "gut check" on what they're doing to market their firms. Even the most successful shop is subject to the whims of cyclical business patterns. To combat downturns, a shop owner must be constantly building his brand. No business is too small for this concept. Marketing is where it's at, so you need to constantly be promoting yourself and your services to keep top of mind.



Howard Potter, A & P Master Images

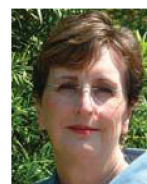
Embroiderers need to focus first on customer service and quality. These things go hand in hand. Think about the small things you can do to serve your customer better: When a client comes into your shop, do you keep her waiting? Don't. Make her the center of your attention. When she places an order, give her an in-hand date and stick to it – or be early. One thing customers can't stand is missed deadlines. Also, show your client around your shop and show her how you produce your product. Customers love when you take time out of your day to do that.

Quality is the most important revamp you should look at in 2011. There are a lot of small ways to improve overall quality

that decorators often overlook. For example, when you cut your backing, do you cut as close to the design as possible? Don't ever leave loose threads. Don't skimp on stitch count just to speed the job up. When you box the finished product, do you fold the items neatly and then label it with what's inside in detail by size and item number? Again, try to make it a goal to get as many orders done one day ahead of the in-hand date.

These all might be small things, but they add up to much bigger things. From my company's experience in the past year, I can tell you this is how we've acquired and kept large clients, such as 12 local Home Depot stores, a Walmart distribution center and the American Heart Association, among others. So, pay attention to the smaller details. You'll find that a lot of your competitors don't.

Jane Swanzy, Swan Threads



Embroiderers should consider how they can become more efficient and cost-effective, and that means taking a look at their processes. For example, investing in new equipment can save them time in the long run – and make them more money because they can produce larger quantities. Magnetic hoops are a good example of this. Hooping heavy garments is difficult and time-consuming for most decorators. With the magnetic hoop, the process takes a fraction of the time as regular hoops, so you can decorate more items in the same amount of time. Remember, more items going out your door means more money coming in your door.

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

By Andraya Vantrease

Stitchers to the Stars

Costume designer Jennifer Bryan has a dream job: She outfits the characters on the hit CW television series, *The Vampire Diaries*. How does she get started? "Once I get the script for the episode, I break it down character by character as to what they're doing" and tailor each look to that character's role in the episode, she says. To make things even more challenging, "We've got photo and stunt doubles, so even though you're seeing only one outfit, I probably have made five to six duplicates of it," she says.

The Jamaican-born designer says she uses her embroidery and screen-printing resources when she's creating logoed and other decorated shirts, uniforms and "placeholder" garments for the show. "Look, you're not going to find a Mystic Falls historic T-shirt at J. Crew, so I work with outside embroiderers and screen printers," Bryan says.

Bryan also incorporates other types of embellishment into her costuming

work. "We've been using studding quite a bit, with metal 3-D pyramids and dome studs," she says. "I've moved away from the reflective, shiny stuff because the palette for the show is dark. If I use the studs, I use oxidized metals to achieve raised texture, but not necessarily all-out bling."

Bryan got her start on Broadway before working her way up to design for Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas*, NBC's *Las Vegas*, James Cameron's *Dark Angel*, plus *Northshore*, *The Agency*, *Barbershop 2: Back in Business*, *G* and *Major Payne*, among others. She often designs costumes from scratch, something she enjoys because it takes her back to her theater beginnings. "For example, I just did an episode set in 1600s Bulgaria, where I needed to create a peasant costume," she says. "When I start from scratch, research is so important. I had to find a trim that's new in terms of durability, but distinctively like the embroidery trim from that time period."

Photos courtesy of Warner Bros.



Get the Look

When *The Vampire Diaries* actress Nina Dobrev "went to Australia this summer to do a promotion for the show, her female fans showed up wearing her 'look,' with a scoopneck T-shirt, a leather jacket with the sleeves pushed up, skinny jeans and boots," says Jennifer Bryan, costume designer for the hit show.



The Vampire Diaries actress Nina Dobrev at the Lia Sophia Upfront Suite at The London Hotel in New York City.



Want to help your clients pull off this style? Pair this purple perfect-fit tee (T15ACD) from Boxercraft ([asi/41325](#); circle 152 on Free Info Card) with a pair of their favorite jeans and boots, then top it off with this plush leather jacket (LJ9665-O) from Ashlin BPG Marketing. ([asi/37138](#); circle 153 on Free Info Card).

Glitz, Glam and Adam Lambert

There was quite a stir in the embroidery world when *American Idol* judge Simon Cowell received a monogrammed handkerchief as a parting gift from the show. And in recent seasons of the show, more contestants have been sporting embroidered, appliquéd and screen-printed duds while they perform on stage. Making the most of embellishments, glitz and glam is 2010's runner-up, Adam Lambert, who rocks out-there apparel during his performances and in his music videos.

Jonny Cota, designer and founder of Los Angeles-based Skingraft, designed costumes for Lambert's Glam Nation Tour, which began in June in Pennsylvania and ended in December in Los Angeles. Cota, who has designed costumes for Fergie, Rihanna and Marilyn Manson, says that Lambert was interesting to work with because he was so open to new ideas. "Adam's style differs from most of the artists out there," says the 27-year-old Cota, who launched his career by designing costumes for performance art. "That's because he's very willing to take chances and to push his appearance to embellished extremes. He's quite visionary in that way."

Lambert, who sports a lot of dark colors, such as black, purple, green

and blue, never leaves home without his leather jacket. Cota designed several leather jackets for Lambert's international tour, using a number of different techniques to achieve the final look. "First, we hand-painted the stripes to give the leather an organic and worn feel," Cota says. "We also sewed on numerous layers of intricately cut leather appliqué, all of which was hand-painted and antiqued. The entire jacket was covered in metal studs and small jewels, including Swarovski crystals. We finished the piece by aging each individual seam with a black mixture of paint and dye to give it an antiqued and aged look."

Many Skingraft designs go hand-in-hand with Lambert's style. "He loves intricate leather designs and embellishments," Cota says. "Adam wanted something haunting and ghostly, but also something with a lot of structure and emboldened by color. His favorite color at the time was blue, so he was very excited to incorporate it with more neutral colors like black and bone."

Inside Info

"Adam Lambert's personal style just so happens to match the current trend of big, bold shoulders, detailed embellishments and a formfitting silhouette," says Jonny Cota, founder of Skingraft and costume designer for Lambert's Glam Nation Tour.



Photos courtesy of Lee Cherry

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Decorations That Perform

Performance wear is the latest craze because of its stretchy, smooth feel and highly technological features. With increased customer requests for performance wear, decorators are adapting to the polyester fabrics when adding logos and embellishments to the garments. Although these fabrics aren't new to the industry, some decorators are finding it difficult to deal with the flexibility of the fibers.

Glenn O'Young, vice president of marketing at Tri-Mountain/Mountain Gear (*asi/92125*), agrees that these fabrics are harder to decorate, but that it shouldn't stop anyone from decorating them. "Embroiderers definitely need to take a look at a performance garment and get a feel for how difficult it is due to the stretch," he says. "Most performance items are 100% poly – and not all polys behave the same. It comes down to the garment's weight and the texture, so there are a lot of things that make decorating polys more of an art than a science."

O'Young suggests that decorators play around with different backings to mini-

mize puckering, or try heat transfers. "We've started to do a lot of heat transfers on performance fabrics because it looks great," he says. "And, you don't deal with puckering. Wearers don't feel the transfer against their skin, either. I think heat transfers are going to become a more common way to decorate performance items that are either poly or poly blends."

Ronnie Alschuler, sales manager at Sierra Pacific Apparel (*asi/87224*), notes a few other decoration problems: "If an embroiderer doesn't use the right needles on some of these treated fabrics, you'll burst the fabrics. If you're a screen printer and you use the wrong amount of heat on these polyester fabrics, you can shrink the garment tremendously."

Most performance outerwear items are easier to decorate than the popular, thin, one-layer polos. "We really haven't had much trouble with decorating outerwear with embroidery," says Jessica Strain, marketing manager at Dri Duck Traders (*asi/50835*). "We're also using laser burning and laser etching with our fleece. With this technique, it doesn't make a difference whether you have an undershirt on or not because it is soft. It's also cost-effective, which makes a big difference" to buyers.



With its water-repellent, 100% SoftCool performance-fabric shell and fleece-lined body, the Starter (988) jacket is designed to suit athletes playing any sport. The jacket features contrast colorblocking on the sleeves and underarm and fashionable striping on the cuffs and bottom hem. Available from Tonix Corp. (*asi/91440*); circle 154 on Free Info Card.



This long-sleeve mesh shirt (3405) is made from anti-pill, fade-free performance fabric with wicking properties and UV protection. Available from Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*); circle 155 on Free Info Card.



Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*; circle 155 on Free Info Card) offers this lime mesh polo (2601) with colorful left-chest decoration for women who want to brighten up their wardrobe.

Expert Decorator Tips

Heat transfers and laser etching work well on performance fabrics. "Heat transfers are a full-color option that works on mostly all colors and fabrics, but it isn't as soft and pliable as etching," says Rob Dubow, owner of St. Cloud, MN-based Dubow Textile Inc. (*asi/700107*). "Laser etching is a tone-on-tone decoration technique, working best on mid-color fabrics."

When it comes to cost, the two are about equal. "Actual time and labor costs are less for laser work than for heat transfers," Dubow says. "However, startup costs for laser equipment are substantially more than for heat transfers."

Dubow also says not to rule out embroidery for performance fabrics. Of course, "The digitizing, backing and operator experience in handling can make or break the appearance, but the same goes for heat transfers and laser etching," he says.

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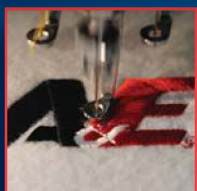
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The Coolest Patches

If you don't carry patches and badges in your product line, you could be missing opportunities to tap a whole host of markets. Among these are police, fire, EMTs, motorcycle owners, truckers, surfers, skateboarders and snowboarders, says Rich "Dr. Patch" Soergel, president and creative director of Pacific Sportswear & Emblem Co. Soergel says Pacific Sportswear has even broken into the children's patch market.

However, the two most popular markets for patches seem to be cops and bikers. So why not combine the two? "I did an order for a motorcycle club consisting of police officers," says Erich Campbell, digitizer and e-commerce manager for Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (*asi/140730*). "This job consisted of custom, waving-banner top and bottom rocker patches with a large center patch of a skull sporting a cowboy hat." The patches were custom-shaped and satin-edged.

The only hiccup in the order process, from Campbell's perspective, was that the officers wanted to do small runs and add to their order as new members entered the group. "So, we really couldn't have the patches made traditionally," he says.

Campbell used an appliqué plotter to cut pressure-sensitive twill for the base before stitching the logo on the cut pieces. He also used a water-soluble backing so that any remnants left after the initial removal



Patches come in all shapes, sizes, colors and silhouettes. Custom patches available from Pacific Sportswear & Emblem Co. (circle 157 on Free Info Card).

Patches, like this custom one from Black Duck Inc. (*asi/140730*; circle 156 on Free Info Card) are big with motorcycle clubs due to their inherent need to identify themselves and their members.



of the backing could be easily melted away.

By the completion of the project, Campbell's crew had managed to create a large overall design area with few stitches, while preserving the detailed and subtly dimensional look of the original artwork through the use of satin-stitch carving on the skull portion.

One of the more interesting elements of the badge, according to Campbell, was the "99%" text in the middle of it, "denoting the oft-referenced literature stating that 99% of motorcycle riders are law-abiding citizens, and openly rejecting the '1%' patches worn by the grittier segment of motorcycle clubs," he says. — *Shane Dale*

NEWS BRIEFS

Charles River Apparel (*asi/44620*) has earned the 94th spot on *Boston Business Journal's* "Area's 100 Largest Private Companies" annual list.

Floriani Commercial Embroidery has introduced Floriani Total Control with features that include custom thread charts, emboss lines, image fading, an inside-out text option, the ability to save designs as .jpgs, a trim button, and the ability to insert a needle change for quickly adding a color change to an element.

Image Apparel Solutions (*asi/62291*) in Wheeling, IL has joined ASI as a supplier decorator member.

Imprintables Warehouse (*asi/58475*) has promoted Adam Yukish to national sales manager.

Pulse offers bar coding for Automating Embroidery Production at every level of Tajima DG/ML by Pulse software.

SanMar (*asi/84863*) has hired Nick Eshkenazi to the newly created role of chief information officer.

Stahls' ID Direct has introduced Cad-Cut Flock heat-transfer material that features a soft, suede-like texture that applies to uniforms and fashion wear.

Wilcom International and Corel have announced the latest versions of Wilcom DecoStudio e2 and EmbroideryStudio e2 integrated with CorelDRAW Graphics Suite X5. The enhancements to these versions have been explicitly designed to improve efficiency in multi-decoration design, customer approvals and production.

CALENDAR

Jan. 3-6, Marlboro, MA
New England Apparel Club Show
(781) 326-9223; www.neacshow.com

Jan. 3-7, Boston; Long Island, NY; New Jersey; Philadelphia; Baltimore
Advantages Roadshow
(800) 546-3300; www.asishow.com

Jan. 8-11, Oaks, PA
Philadelphia Gift Show
(678) 285-3976; www.philadelphiagiftshow.com

Jan. 8-11, San Francisco
San Francisco International Gift Fair
(678) 285-3976; www.sfigf.com

Jan. 11-12, New York City
DIRECTION by Indigo, International Exhibition of Creative Textile Design
(646) 351-1942;
www.directionshow.com

Jan. 17-21, Raleigh, NC; Charlotte, NC; Atlanta; Nashville, TN; Memphis, TN
Advantages Roadshow
(800) 546-3300;
www.asishow.com

Jan. 19, Atlanta
Stitches Roadshow
(800) 546-3300; www.asishow.com

Jan. 21-23, Long Beach, CA
ISS Show
(800) 241-9034; www.issshow.com

Jan. 22-24, Orlando, FL
Orlando Gift Show
(678) 285-3976; www.orlandogiftshow.com

Jan. 23-25, Orlando, FL
ASI Show
(800) 546-3300; www.asishow.com

Jan. 29-Feb. 3, New York City
New York International Gift Fair
(914) 421-3200; www.nyigf.com

Jan. 31-Feb. 4, Seattle; Portland, OR; Sacramento, CA; Concord, CA; San Jose, CA
Advantages Roadshow
(800) 546-3300;
www.asishow.com

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



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By Geri Finio

About the Project: Custom Roman Shades

Beth Kelleher, interior designer and owner of Moorestown, NJ-based A Different Color, had a challenge: Her client wanted a unique, custom window treatment to match the theme of family-heirloom furniture, which Kelleher had refinished and reupholstered with updated fabrics. Kelleher found inspiration in a photograph of a hand-embroidered shade from the Van Gestel Clé home located in Malines, Belgium, and featured in Stephanie Hoppen's *The New Curtain Book*.

The client was drawn to the hand-embroidered shade in Hoppen's book, so Kelleher suggested adding an embroidered Roman shade to draperies she had already designed. One challenge was keeping within the budget, since a hand-embroidered shade would be cost-prohibitive. That's when Dana Schroll, owner of Moorestown, NJ-based Dana Schroll Interiors, suggested that she and Kelleher work with me, a skilled custom machine and hand embroiderer.

Custom window treatments present unexpected challenges such as assembly/construction details and, in this project, embroidery layout. We needed to ensure that the embroidery design remained the focal point whether the shade was up or down, so we had to really focus on proper design size and layout. For an embroiderer to be a true partner in a higher-end design project such as this, understanding fabric hand, weight, density, thread, seam allowances and more are all required skills to ensure a beautiful outcome.

The Team

Interior

Designer: Beth Kelleher, owner, Moorestown, NJ-based A Different Color

Embroidery

Artist: Geri Finio, owner, Moorestown, NJ-based Studio 187

Sewing Professional:

Dana Schroll, owner, Moorestown, NJ-based Dana Schroll Interiors



Photography: Tom Sheckels, Sheckels Creations Photography





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Required Skillsets

- Interior design
- Machine embroidery
- Embroidery digitizing/editing
- Sewing/assembly
- Installation

Step 1:

We team up. I've known Schroll for more than 16 years, and she's worked with Kelleher for many years doing window treatments/installation, upholstery and home accessories. When Kelleher brought Schroll on board for this particular project, she recommended that they include me, a skilled embroiderer, to execute the digitizing and stitchery portion of this project. We each bring a specific talent to this project: Kelleher's talent is interior design; she can put together a room from start to finish with creative flair. Schroll can sew with detail and precision like no one else. And, I've blended my hand embroidery and computer skills to produce machine embroidery with a distinct, refined look.

Tip: I recommend all machine embroiderers learn basic hand-stitching techniques and familiarize themselves with the different cultural styles and types of embroidery stitches. This will improve your embroidery craftsmanship – and allow you to take on higher-end projects with ease.

For example, with experience in hand embroidery, understanding digitizing becomes inherent. You'll learn and understand pathing, stitch direction, tension, fabric reaction and needle use with the exercise of hand embroidery. The moment you manually start stitching with needle and thread, you're digitizing and embroidering. If you're new to digitizing, you'll learn about programming needs, and then you can learn a digitizing program. When I watch a sewout of a design, I immediately recognize the skill of the digitizer by how the sewout is pathed; I can see the foundation stitching (or underlay) and how it was programmed, and the overall use of density.

Step 2:

We select the design. A stock design called Mexican Tole Art from Great Notions

(www.greatnotions.com) was perfect for the effect we wanted to achieve, since the elements in the design picked up on some of the natural motifs in the client's area rug. We decided to tweak the design and select a color palette specific to the room.

Step 3:

We select the colors. Since the original stock design was programmed for seven colors, we were able to choose a larger palette; we wanted the colors to be a gradient from one to the next. We referred to our inspiration photograph of the Van Gestel Clé home, and also to the existing colors in the client's room. We started with a monochromatic palette of yellows and golds for the main design area, and then Kelleher introduced copper, green and red as accent colors – these accents became the treatment's primary focal element. We actually laid the spools of thread directly on the drapery fabric

to assist us in our color-compatibility decision.

Step 4:

We plot the design. Here's the basic process: Before programming your design for window shades, measure the width of your design area, or sew field. Next, measure your embroidery design dimensions carefully, keeping in mind the seam allowances that you'll add later. Working with pencil and paper, use these variables to design your layout. It helps to print out the design and lay the printouts on fabric before embroidery to get a good visual.

Because of our project's large window size (71 inches wide by 81 inches long), we wanted to manipulate the layout, filling empty space for added simplicity and flow. The design presented me with some sewing restrictions and scaling obstacles, based on the fabric width (54 inches wide). For example, when the shade was folded,

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The Pricing Question

I price my higher-end work based on the stitch count of the test and final sewouts, plus an hourly fee for consultation and editing the design. Kelleher bills hourly for working out the design of the treatment, including fabric selection, layout and color design, along with any meetings incurred with Schroll and me throughout the process. The client was supplied a bill that included the cost of the embroidery, the work room and fabrication costs, and the billed hours from Kelleher.

we wanted the embroidery to remain front and center. We also wanted each element of the design to look visually balanced, so I had to edit the design file by deleting some small elements and repositioning the center crosshatch for each hooping. We played with different colors until we hit on the right combination.

Then, I further tweaked the design elements in the embroidery file (and machine settings) to accommodate the density, underlay, fabric and thread we had chosen. Always select the stabilizer and needles that best support your stitch count and layout, so the hand of your fabric doesn't change dramatically in the final sewout. I prefer Costwold Industries' No-Show Mesh stabilizer in peach because it doesn't show through. I used Isacord and ARC 40wt polyester with an 11 BP uni-

versal needle. Also, I adjust my tension completely by touch – this is where knowing how thread reacts to different fabrics is very helpful. I rarely use the same settings as a default for every project – it's all determined individually based on visual and hand results during a test sewout. ("Hand" is a term used to describe the drape or feel of fabric. With embroidery, I like to keep the hand of fabric intact as much as possible.)

Tip: Keep in mind the future laundering and use of your product. Our drapes are dry-clean only, so all the materials we selected were compatible to that process.

Step 5:

We prepare the fabric for stabilization and embroidery. We discussed assembly and the sewing process, as well as the finished piece's visual appeal. Since the overall width of this Roman shade was wider than the 54-inch fabric width, we decided to create two horizontal seams that could be concealed under the panel when they were rolled up, enabling the design to run across one width of fabric. We also had to raise the design's center point to accommodate the bottom hem that we added later. Using a paper template, we marked the center point for each hooping. Then we visually reviewed the layout by printing out templates of the design and pinning them to the fabric. We re-pinned, replaced, rear-

ranged and mirrored the designs until we were pleased with the look.

Step 6:

We do a test sewout. In any project, always do a test sewout before the final run. With embroidery, there's no room for error – in this case, our shades had many yards rolled and covered on the table while the embroidery was running. That's a lot of fabric to be responsible for, so we test-sewed by wrapping the extra yardage in a waste fabric to avoid spoilage.

Tip: A test run of any embroidery design helps you confirm that the colors work well with the fabric, and that the thread weight, needle type, density and tension setting are all appropriate for that project. This is the time to tweak any tension or machine settings, thread colors, layout and backing choice. For us, it also served as a final guide to look at the visual balance of the embroidery design and the window.

Step 7:

We install the shades. We constructed the shade in three pieces, using Hanes Interlining; we also used Bella Note black-out lining so the sun wouldn't outshine the embroidery. Plus, we decided to have Schroll sew the take-up rings higher than usual, 12 inches up from the hem with 6-inch vertical ring spacing, allowing the embroidery to be front and center when the shade is pulled up. Schroll sewed the vertical seams behind the panels to hide them and create the sewing field for the embroidery in the center piece. Then, I embroidered the design's center piece, locating it 8 inches from the bottom of the fabric edge to allow enough room for a 1½-inch double hem. We added the side sections after the embroidery sewed, completing the width to 71 inches. The embroidery filled the full 54 inches of the shade in the center.

GERI FINIO, owner of Moorestown, NJ-based Studio 187, is a lifelong hand-embroiderer and sewing enthusiast. Contact: geri@studio187.net

Customer Review

"We were so excited when we saw the breadth of color and intricate detail of the custom embroidery. It's the room's conversation piece."



By Marie Zinno

Diva (and Dude) Babies

Create a lucrative niche for yourself by offering top-quality baby bundles that customers can have personalized and give away as stunning gift packages.

Tip: Hooping Help

Children's wear can be difficult to find the center and to hoop successfully. There are many hooping aids on the market, but one of the simplest and most foolproof is the Children's Perfect Placement Kit. The kit contains 16 templates for a variety of items in a range of sizes: baby through youth XL, target stickers and two embroidery fonts. (The Children's Perfect Placement Kit is available from *Designs in Machine Embroidery* magazine; www.dzgns.com; (888) 739-0555; circle 151 on Free Info Card.

Unique custom gifts are the backbone of many embroidery businesses. Profitable items such as baby blankets, onesies (bodysuits), burp cloths and diaper bags are practical products used by all new parents. With the help of five-month ultrasounds, most new parents know the sex of their baby ahead of the due date, so these products make perfect shower gifts. If you create a “theme” for your baby bundle package and incorporate as many different items as possible, you can sell lots of these. For example, you can display a leopard- or safari-theme bundle and embellish all the individual items with personalized lettering.

Standard baby items such as onesies, blankets and diaper bags are available from a variety of suppliers. The products used in this article are available from S&S Activewear (*asi/84358*) and SanMar (*asi/84863*). My sales have increased due to the fact that my products are always in stock for last-minute gifts – and the quality will be consistent.

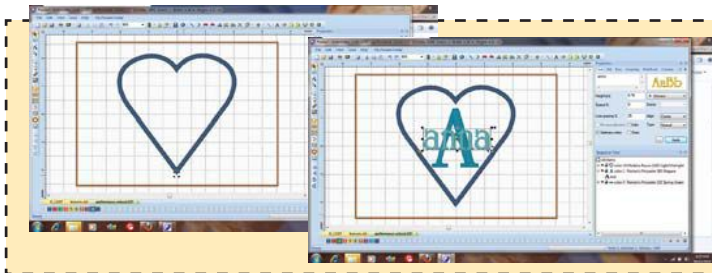
A small home-based business can produce custom burp cloths that feature ribbon and fabric sewn on the



bottom edge. The technique is simple but adds dimension when used on other items in the bundle. Appliqué is another quick way to add some punch with embroidery, as the overall design can be larger and the stitch count is low.

The selection of embroidery designs on the market today is endless. Guide your customers to a few categories.

Create an Appliqué for Baby Items



1 Create an embroidered appliqué design with embroidery software. Select a generous size (3 inches was used for this project). Insert the text or monogram into the center of the appliqué shape. The design in the sample is a “layered” monogram style. Digitize the large initial to stitch after the heart appliqué is complete. Use two contrasting thread colors. Save your design to the computer.

2 Use a no-show mesh cutaway backing for the stabilizer on the onesie and knit bib.

3 Select an interesting print fabric for the appliqué. Iron on a fusible interfacing to the wrong side of the appliqué fabric; this step keeps the fabric from fraying when laundered.



4 Use the appropriate template form from the Children's Perfect Placement Kit. Mark all items with the target stickers (burp cloth, blanket and onesie templates were used for this project).



5 Hoop your item centered in the embroidery hoop and remove the target sticker.

6 Embroider the appliqué heart design. The first color will stitch the placement stitch.



Remove the hoop from the machine and trim the excess fabric around the heart shape.



Lay the fabric square on top of the outline. The second color will "tack" down the fabric square.



Replace the hoop to the machine and complete the stain stitch and text.



7 Follow these directions for the remaining items. Alternate the lettering and fabric colors to add interest.



8 Iron on soft fusible interfacing to the wrong side of the bobbin stitches for all baby and children's clothing.



When you're creating a baby bundle gift, it's important to embroider the designs or lettering in the appropriate area.

ries of designs and fonts for each theme. The majority of the public is overwhelmed with choices; don't place your catalog of 10,000 embroidery designs on the counter. Print out a selection of designs and fonts and organize them in a binder. Sew out a few samples and use these in your display area along side of a diaper bag, blanket and other products.

Adding appliqué designs to baby items is a relatively simple process. Most embroidery software has an icon for appliqué shapes. There will generally be three separate color stops for each design, regardless of the shape. The first color is a run stitch, which shows you where to place the fabric. The second color is the tack down, which will attach the appliqué fabric to the item. You'll need to remove the hoop from the machine and trim around the design. Don't unhoop the item. Replace the hoop to the machine and finish the satin-stitch color. At the computer, you'll need to merge the name or monogram to the inside of the appliqué design (*to see the steps turn to page 32*). Add the personalization at the very end of the design after the satin stitch is complete. To use the "layered" lettering, as in the

sample for Anna, select two different colors of thread. Use a light color as the base with a large initial and sew the top lettering in a darker thread.

When you're creating a baby bundle gift, it's important to embroider the designs or lettering in the appropriate area. When embroidering a group of identical items, the monogram or embroidery design should be placed in the exact same location. The Children's Perfect Placement Kit can help with this: Choose the labeled template and position it on top of the garment; then place a "target" sticker in the center hole of the template. (A target sticker is included in the kit and has a crosshair in the center.) Remove the template and hoop the item with the target sticker still in place. The target sticker will enable you to line up the crosshair with the centering lines of the embroidery hoop.

MARIE ZINNO is the author of *Machine Embroidery for Babies and Tots* and *Machine Embroidered Monograms for the Home*. She also teaches embroidery events across the country and runs her commercial embroidery business, Sew Creative Embroidery, in Canton, OH. Contact: www.sewcreativeemb.com; mariezinno@gmail.com.

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By Deborah Jones

Peak Performance

Achieving impeccable outlined fills on thin, wiggly performance fabrics is a tough challenge, but it can be done with the proper programming and stabilizing.

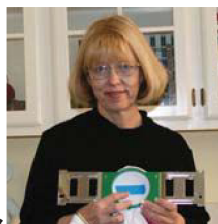
While performance apparel feels fabulous next to the skin, what's not so great is trying to embroider these wiggly, stretchy, thin fabrics. Unfortunately, many decorators resort to using a too-thick backing that destroys the garment's appearance and comfort level.

One of the most challenging embroidery styles for this stretchy fabric is the outlined fill, which is covered in this column. Even very experienced digitizers have nightmares about getting outlines to hit the mark on fill areas. Without the proper densities and underlay stitches, you get wrinkles, pooching and poor registration on performance fabrics.

Most performance fabrics stretch more horizontally than vertically. This gives you the first clue about how to approach this unique material. The stitch direction of the underlay and top stitching should use gentle angles for ideal stabilization. ■

Tip

Purchase a test garment made of a performance fabric to build your skills - it's almost inevitable that your clients will be asking you to embroider this garment type more frequently.



Stitches.com/deborah
Performance fabrics need a little tender loving care. In the companion video to "Technically Speaking," Deborah shows you how to embroider and finish performance wear to perfection.

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

Soft Fusible Sources

Two choices for the soft fusible covering for the back of embroidery:

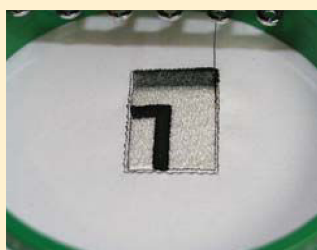
- Cover The Back, available from www.gunold.com
- Tender Touch by Sulky, available at JoAnn's Fabrics and Crafts stores and sewing machine stores that carry Sulky products

STEP 1

Program your design. Since the outline fill is one of the most daunting embroidery style for this fabric type, digitizing veteran Ian Perry of Bakersfield, CA-based imprimeo stepped in to share the pattern fill settings he used for this particular design:

- Underlay at 30 degrees (zero being at 3 o'clock)
- Stitch length: 3.3 mm
- Stitch spacing: 7 (1.4 lines per mm)
- Top fill stitch angle at 99 degrees off 3 o'clock. At an angle of 90 degrees, the steil stitch would pull apart the fill.
- Fill stitch length: 3.6 mm
- Fill stitch spacing: 0.2 (five lines per mm)

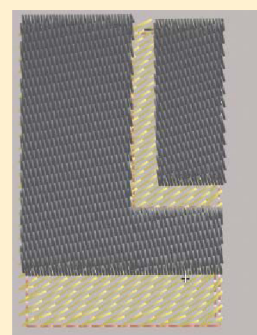
"Originally, my angle was slightly off horizontal and my stitch length was 4 mm - the absolute worst settings for this fabric," Perry says. "After seeing what I was working with, I figured that closer to vertical (less flex) and a shorter stitch length (less pull) would work better." As he did several sewouts, Perry also noticed that because the performance fabric was quite fine, it tended to push a lot. "To compensate for this, I lowered the density of the top stitching and added a bit more to the underlay," he says.



This illustrates an impeccably laid edge-walk underlay laid next to a rectangular fill. Digitized by Ian Perry, the edge-walk was placed in preparation for a steil stitch border. (If you aren't familiar with the term "steil," it's a satin stitch of even width.)



Here's the final steil outline that lies perfectly along the edge of the fill area.



This shows the relative angles of the fills.

STEP 2

Stabilize your garment. Another key to achieving a top-notch stitched result is your stabilizer choice.

I've seen some embroidery by a large manufacturer of performance apparel done with multiple layers of heavy cutaway stabilizer. I've also seen manufacturers use seemingly no stabilizer for a very small logo. My choice, and the one that I used in this example, is a fusible no-show polymesh. Some embroiderers use spray adhesive to adhere standard no-show polymesh stabilizer to the fabric, but in my experience, nothing substitutes for the bond achieved by using a fusible version of this super-stable lightweight stabilizer.

Performance fabrics are a bit heat-sensitive, so use care when applying. Fusible polymesh products have a low-melt adhesive, so keep your heat setting low to avoid damaging the fabric. Remember that you'll be taking an extra step to fuse the stabilizer in the embroidery area on the reverse side of the garment, but the bond greatly reduces fabric shifting.



Round the corners of the fusible stabilizer to prevent lifting so it'll remain adhered for the life of the garment.

Without the proper densities and underlay stitches, you get wrinkles, pooching and poor registration on performance fabrics.

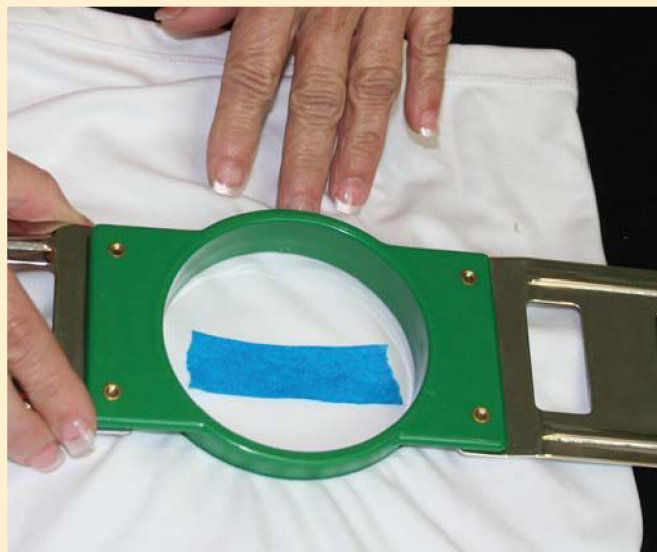
STEP 5

Sew out and complete your design. When your embroidery has been completed, gently pull the fused stabilizer away from the fabric and trim close to the embroidery as usual, leaving a margin of about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. This margin helps prevent a sunken appearance.

To further stabilize the embroidery for the life of the garment and to also make this activewear more comfortable for the wearer, it's a nice touch to add a soft fusible covering to the back of the embroidery. Cut a piece of a suitable fusible (see the "Soft Fusible Sources" box for recommended products) slightly larger than the embroidery, rounding the corners. Rounded corners help ensure that the backing won't lift. These products have a low-melt adhesive, so remember to keep the heat low when you're applying it.

STEP 3

Hoop your garment. When hooping, make sure that you get the fabric perfectly straight. You can use the knit's fine lines as a reference. This is a fabric type that you may want to mark for straightness as it lies flat on the table. To mark for straightness, I use a piece of masking or painter's tape. If the tape appears straight after the hoop has been inserted into the machine, remove the tape and embroider. If not, remove the hoop and re-hoop.



The tape serves as a guide for straightness during hooping and may be reused on multiple garments.

STEP 4

Select your needle. Your needle selection can also impact your embroidery quality on this finicky fabric.

Of course, you'll use a light ballpoint, and I suggest using a fine blade size, such as a size 70/10. Most embroiderers keep size 75/11 light ballpoint needles in their machines, but this slight change in blade size may produce better quality, especially on smaller elements such as lettering.

By Daniel Walsh

What Women Want

If you're thinking pink, you're wrong. Smart decorating-business owners know the ins and outs of gearing their marketing efforts to female buyers.

Women make up 51% of the U.S. population. So, if you know how to market to them, you essentially know how to market to the majority of your potential buyers. It's easy to fall into the trap of marketing a certain way to women: Choose pink. Choose glamour. Throw in some teddy bears or flowers. But that's a big mistake.

"I think, like with other marketing, you have to understand your audience," says Holly Buchanan, who runs Buchanan Marketing in Richmond, VA, and co-authored the book, *The Soccer Mommy Myth*. "That's where a lot of it goes wrong." Here are some top tips to ensure your marketing efforts stay on the right track.

Remember, pink isn't a marketing solution – it's just a color. This traditional "girl's color" doesn't sell like it once did. "Please don't rely on pink," says Yvonne DiVita, who wrote *Dick*less Marketing: Smart Marketing to Women Online*, and runs Lipsticking.com, a website devoted to marketing to women online. "Don't rely on stuffed animals. Women are so over that. The reality is pink doesn't

sell." Focus on how your products and services can help your female clients achieve their personal and professional goals.

Have a woman on your marketing and sales team. Starting with the marketing process, "It's important to get women involved," says Buchanan, who recommends having a woman on your marketing and sales team. You can also regularly survey your female clients on how your marketing messages come across to them.

Understand that men and women view the world – and advertising – differently. "There's been research showing that men and women have very different preferences," Buchanan says. For example, men may respond well to seeing high activity and motion in an advertisement, or they may go for the sleek look of a new car. "The car commercials, it's the cool car zipping around," Buchanan says. "If you see a person, it's usually a hand on the steering wheel. And it's a man's hand."

Women respond and look for something very different. "A lot of times, women just want to know how things work," Buchanan says. "A lot of times, they try to do these cool product shots, but women want to see how real people interact with a product." That means explanations and, yes, real people.

You can shoot videos in your shop where you try advertising approaches that would appeal to men or women, and then show them to focus groups – you'll probably get a lot of valuable feedback on how to show your decorating processes and finished products.

Recognize that social media can drive a conversation with women. Social media such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter can obviously be used as marketing tools, but more than anything, they're a means of conversation – a more personal conversation than the one-way means of traditional advertising. So use them. "Women talk," says DiVita, who adds that if you post a message on social media, you'll likely find it passed along many times by women who want to share something they've heard.

Avoid the "focus group of one." Consider this a corollary to the rule of getting women involved: It can't just be your sister or your wife! "Beware of the focus group of one, which means don't go home and ask your wife for her opinion," says Buchanan, who



Case Study: Master Networker

Known in industry social circles as "The Queen Bee" and on Twitter as "LogoLady," the chatty Barbara Dail, owner of Yorba Linda, CA-based The Creative Solution (asi/170768), didn't sell her first order of promotional products until she was 50. She's definitely making up for lost time. "It hasn't always been easy for me, although on my first day, I got a \$1,000 order before noon," she says, just as she was expecting confirmation on a \$50,000 order. "But I'm very active in the industry and I know a lot of people."

Dail has helped build up Coffee Talk, the popular industry networking club, to more than 150 members. She's found a social niche through Facebook and Twitter, where she discusses just about anything, save politics. And she's organized extensive industry support for Operation Gratitude, a nonprofit that sends care packages to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. "We've sent T-shirts, food, stadium cups, notepads, even stuffed animals," she says. "No one in the industry has ever turned me down. We've sent 600,000 packages."

Of course, not all women have reached the networking heights that Dail has, but they're apparently following her lead. *Stitches'* sister magazine, *Counselor*, recently did an Entrepreneur Study that found that 89% of women who own businesses in the industry believe they take full advantage of networking to grow their companies. What's more, the majority (52%) feel strongly about their networking skills, compared to 44% of men.

– Dave Vagnoni



LEARN IT LIVE!

Public relations is a powerful marketing tool – and there are more mediums than ever for a decorator to choose from when communicating messages. Learn what PR buzz can do for your business in “Become a Public Relations Machine: Generate Buzz for Your Business” at *The ASI Show Orlando (Sunday, January 23, 2-45 p.m.)*. Among the tactics you will learn is how to use social media marketing.

recommends assembling a larger group of women of different ages and backgrounds to give you feedback on your products, services and advertising efforts.

Offer something authentic. These days, people are used to mass marketing and slick ads – and quite often, they outright reject advertising messages that are too slick. Realize that “Women want that authenticity,” Buchanan says. “They have a B.S. meter that’s really fine-tuned. You’re better off having a real person talking about the product.” Or, film a video or record a podcast of yourself talking about the services you offer and how you’ve helped your clients achieve their goals.

Don’t forget that there’s marketing without technology, too. There’s something to be said for a personal connection. “The very best thing you can do is create an offline, in-person event,” DiVita says. “When I published my book, I organized an evening of pampering.” She invited 100

friends, and 65 showed up – they were women who specialized in or sold makeup, yoga, jewelry, massage and lingerie.

“It was like a little exhibit,” says DiVita, who says her target audience got pampered, socialized and had a memorable night. If you hold an open house at your decorating business for your clients and prospects, it’s a great opportunity for them to chat, see your machines in action, view samples and generally walk away with a great impression of you.

Know that age matters. While most women look for products that can improve their lives, save them time or help them help their friends, the ages of the women you’re marketing to do count. For example, “When you’re looking at marketing to women age 30 and under, you need to really engage them,” DiVita says. That means marketing to them in a way that makes them feel involved with you, such as with social media.

Women of different ages look for different features in the same product or service. Consider the example of a car commercial: “Younger women like to see sleek cars, because they want to be in them,” DiVita says. “But baby boomer-aged women want to see a car’s safety features.”

Show a success story. “The one thing women love is to see their sisters succeed,” DiVita says. “What we really want to know is how the woman next door did what she did.” So show and tell your audience. If you embroidered logoed apparel for a local businesswoman’s giveaway campaign and it helped her skyrocket her sales, people want to know. If you have a female employee who’s doing amazing work, spotlight her. If you’re a female business owner who overcame great odds and succeeded in building a great decorating firm, let people know. ■

DANIEL WALSH is a staff writer for *Stitches*. Contact: dwalsh@asicentral.com.

Coming Next Issue

What’s coming up in February 2011 *Stitches*

By Nicole Rollender

The Big Machine Issue

■ Ready to invest in your business this year? We cover the newest single-heads, multi-heads, digital printers, screen-printing equipment, heat presses and more – with real user reviews. Plus, we share the results of our exclusive equipment survey.

along with top-secret embroidery tips from industry veterans.

Prison Embroidery

■ Learn why the use of commercial embroidery machines in U.S. prisons is such a hot-button issue right now: great rehabilitation tactic or competition for local shops? We get the answers.

Plus ...

- How to pair embroidery with rhinestones
- How to master compensation when punching

And much, much more!

Straight-up Swimwear

■ We go on location in Florida to shoot 2011’s hottest swimwear. Plus, we’ll give you the skinny on who’s really buying decorated swimwear,



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 January needle on page XX,” along with your name, company, address and phone number (or e-mail address) so we can contact you if you’re the winner, and mail or fax it to us at **Stitches, Attn: Needle Patrol**, 4800 Street Rd., 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 January needle are due by January 31. From the correct responses, we’ll randomly select one winner who’ll receive a \$100 gift certificate, courtesy of **MADERA** Laconia, NH. Please submit only one entry per drawing. We’ll announce the winner in the March/April issue.

Slick Is Living the American Dream

In the November issue, Slick hid within the AST Sportswear (asi/30244) headquarters photo on page 52 in our “The American Dream” article. **Debbi Scheufler of Scheufler Enterprises Inc.** was chosen at random from a grand total of 27 responses. As this issue’s winner, Debbi will receive Madeira USA’s gift certificate. Keep your eyes peeled for the industry’s favorite game of hide and seek!



Your 2011 Growth Plan

We have a plan to help you revamp your business from top to bottom in 2011. You'll make improvements to your cash flow, decorated apparel sales, marketing efforts, online customer service, operations, human resources (and more).

Reporting done by Daniel Walsh, Andraya Vantrease, Shane Dale and Erica Young. In August, the Advertising Specialty Institute conducted a Wearables Sales Forecast survey of decorated apparel professionals.
Research by Larry Basinait.

The marketplace changes constantly. Can your business change with it? You bet it can.

It's 2011, and it's time to create your plan to take your decorating company to the next level. In this special section, you'll get top tips for getting your cash flow in order, getting deadbeat customers to pay and drumming up new business right now. Are you ready for some cutting-edge sales and marketing strategies that will help you make in-roads into new markets? Also, get ready to make the most of the Web to reel prospects in from across the U.S. We have tips for maximizing productivity in home-based businesses and contract shops. And, we have customer service and hiring tips from top business experts.

Read on to learn how successful decorators are keeping their businesses in the black this year.

Financials

Get Your Cash

In a perfect world, customers would be thrilled to give you 100% payment upfront for every transaction.

But since we live in an imperfect world, Dan Holzer, co-owner of Oakland, CA-based Forward Printing Inc., says decorators need to temper their expectations, but still collect some money upfront. "We do a 50% deposit down and request the full balance when the job's complete," he says, adding that requesting a 100% deposit for online orders just isn't feasible. "But it's silly not to take a deposit because it binds the customer to the job and doesn't give them the chance to cancel the order," he says.

Ron Lykens, president of DuBois, PA-based Xtreme Wear Printing, asks for 50% down on certain orders, depending upon the amount of business he's done with that customer. "If you ask for 100% upfront, I think that shows cash flow problems," he says. "What I'd do is either get 50% down, or I'd get their credit card info as a deposit – then check that the card checks out before you fulfill the order. That leads into setting up your accounts receivable policy. If you take your customer's credit card information before you fulfill the order, you can also ask the client to sign a form authorizing you to hit the card for specific use."

So, when should you collect entire payment on an order? Lykens uses the analogy of auto mechanics who expect 100% payment at the time of the completion of repairs. "We have a Ford dealership we've been doing business with for years. I have to pay for my vehicle when I pick it up for service, no question," he says.

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Flow in Order



You'll have a better chance of collecting 100% upfront by allowing customers to use credit cards to pay for their transactions, says Paul Gallagher, president and CEO of Hirsch International. "We see more and more transactions with people using credit cards," he says. "You give them the flexibility to choose, and that way you're getting paid almost immediately, and they're not looking at writing a check."

Electronic payments will also boost your cash flow, says Scott Gingold, marketing expert and owner of Confidential Counselor. "A check may take a week to

get there vs. a deposit to your bank electronically," he says.

Gingold agrees that, whatever terms on which decorators decide, they must make their clients 100% aware of them. "Don't just stamp it on the invoice. When you meet with a client or on the phone, say, 'This is what my payment terms are,' " he says.

With that said, Gingold does recognize that exceptions to the rule will arise. "You have to have a policy, but you have to be flexible and go case-by-case, absolutely," he says. "When somebody says to you, 'We don't do that,' the next question should be, 'Can we compromise?' Just because it's the policy doesn't mean it can't be changed." – *Shane Dale*

TACKLE OUTSTANDING BALANCES

Ron Lykens, president of DuBois, PA-based Xtreme Wear Printing, applies the following strategy to clients who are late on their payments:

- **Immediately after an invoice due date:** Pick up the phone or send an e-mail. At this point, it should be a friendly message – almost a way to expand the relationship – but you'll make a point as well.
- **60 days:** Call or e-mail the client again and remind them that they're past due.
- **90 days:** With true deadbeat clients, phone messages and e-mails simply won't work. Don't be afraid to show up on their doorstep asking for payment to inform them that their payment is required soon to avoid further action.
- **120 days:** Send them a letter informing them that their account will be sent to collections in 30 days. Nobody wants to incur the extra cost of legal representation, but a simple lawyer's note can go a long way toward receiving at least a piece of what is owed to you.
- **150 days:** Turn them over to collections.

If you're hurting and need cash from unpaid orders right away, Scott Gingold, marketing expert and owner of Confidential Counselor, suggests targeting customers who are most likely to pay first, regardless of the outstanding dollar amount. "If Tom owes you \$20,000 and Bill owes you \$5,000, but you know that Bill will drop you a check in the mail today, go after where you can get the money quickly, and then start cleaning up the rest of it," he says. "Once you have some money coming in, it takes some of the heat and pressure off of you."





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Jimmy Lamb

Business-Building Strategies

Get New Business Now

The most important measure to take in an effort to acquire new business right away is to get on the phone. Make calls to new contacts, old contacts, people you meet at a Chamber of Commerce dinner. Get in touch with people and start talking.

Mike Emoff, CEO of Shumsky (*asi/326300*), says decorators can't just sit around and wait for new business to come their way. That strategy, or lack thereof, simply won't work right now. "One of the very first things that a decorator has to do is understand that it's time not to be reactive, but proactive," Emoff says.

That means taking a step that's so simple that many decorating business owners and sales reps don't even think about it: contacting former customers. "Within every business, decorators have ex-customers that they haven't contacted in a while," Emoff says. "That would be the first place that I'd start.

"I'd go to the reps that have those accounts and say, 'Let's start with people we had a relationship with.' That's the quickest way to bolster orders. To me, that's pretty obvious, but I think for a lot of people, it's not so obvious."

To get new business now, decorators also need to change their mindset and outlook on the market. Decorators have to approach business right now with a view that customers want to buy, says Scott Gingold, owner of consulting firm Confidential Counselor.

"The first thing they have to do is have that mindset," he says. "You've got to be upbeat and give people a reason to do business with you. You've got to stop making excuses and get out there. Right now, I guarantee there are companies out there still buying."

The next step in the hunt for new business is to get your best advocates to work for you. Paul Conant, founder of Paul Conant

Consulting, says one of the best ways to get an immediate sales uptick is to institute a referral program where your top clients are motivated to give you new leads. "This is the least expensive and least intrusive way to increase your business," he says. "You can offer an incentive to your customers and entice them to help you get referral business."

It's important to note that 84% of sales in the United States are a result of word-of-mouth advertising, according to Conant. "If you can structure your product or service referral as advice between friends and families, then you'll win the business," he says. — SD



Plan for Expansion

There's definitely a certain time in your company's life when you know it's time to expand, says Paul Gallagher, president and CEO of Hirsch International. "You know it's time when your business is humming and you can do a controlled expansion where you can do more of what you're doing well or add new technologies," he says. "You're not going to fix problems by expanding, but you are going to create opportunity."

You know it's time to grow if your customers keep asking you for services that you don't presently provide, says Scott Gingold, marketing expert and owner of Confiden-

tial Counselor. Take an embroidery-only decorator, for example. "They know it's the right time if enough of their embroidery customers say to them, 'Do you do screen printing as well?'" he says. "If your customers haven't been asking for screen printing, for example, it'd be wise to do some polling of your existing base and ask, 'If we offered these services, is it something you'd be interested in?'" before you expand."

Here are three of the most popular ways that decorators choose to grow their company:

1. Acquisitions. Gingold says that growing just for the sake of growing isn't

a smart business move, and acquiring another company isn't always going to be an improvement. That's why decorators should ask themselves some tough questions before they pull the trigger on an acquisition. "Theoretically, you're going to pick up clients of the company you're acquiring, but if the client base matches somewhat evenly, what have you really bought?" he says. "What do you really get out of this acquisition? What are you really buying? The number one priority in the case of business is to be more profitable and get better. How does that match up with your life plan?"

continued on page 42



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DIGITAL PRINTING: THE NEXT HOT THING

The next logical step for decorators who want to diversify their embellishment offerings is to add direct-to-garment printing, which can be offered in a mixed-media combination with embroidery, according to Paul Gallagher, president and CEO of Hirsch International. "That's the hot expansion," he says. "What people are doing now is embellishing prints further with embroidery. So now, you have this 3-D kind of decorating, rather than say, embroidery and rhinestones."

This kind of multimedia is called "print and stitch" by Brother, according to Dean Shulman, senior vice president of Brother International Corp., who adds that the popularity of custom T-shirts is one big reason for the trend. "The reason garment printing is becoming so big is because people want custom messages," he says. "Personalization is really where it's at."

Expansion from page 40

Gallagher also warns decorators about businesses that may seem a little too eager to be bought out by you. "A lot of times, that business is in need of a lot of investment, and the equipment is really old," he says. "So, if you're buying that business, you can be faced with those acquisition costs."

2. Add additional decorating methods. An attractive alternative to acquiring another company could be to simply add the additional embellishment methods that your clients continue to ask you about, according to Gallagher. "If you're on top of your game with your existing business and you feel you're ready to expand or grow, you need to really judge acquiring a business against just expanding your business and maybe acquiring new equipment and a person to run the equipment, or gain the expertise yourself," he says.

Dean Shulman, senior vice president of Brother International Corp., says decorators should have the customers in place for that new decorating method before buying additional equipment and hiring more employees. "Some people will go out and get the equipment, and then they'll start to look for customers, which is a growing trend, especially with the Internet," he says. "The key is to make sure that, as always, you have that customer base."

In fact, in this economy, adding in-demand embellishment methods may be essential to small and/or struggling decorators, Gallagher says. "It seems that we have a long list of customers that really did well in 2010 – seen their business up 20% to 40% – and that's a lot of times because they've stepped up and added new technologies," he says. "We know an embroiderer that added digital printing, which opened additional doors for them. Businesses that are doing everything the same old way, they don't seem to be growing, and you can almost predict they're not going to be around that long."

3. Team up with non-competitors. Additional online storefronts can be a great way to expand your business online, Shulman says. "You can have four to five different storefronts in which none of them are yours, but you can acquire customers through profit-sharing with these other companies that have other businesses," he says. "Say to them, 'If you offer custom T-shirts, we'll do the back end for you and we'll do the fulfillment.' That's an easy way to find five, six or seven times the customers you already have, especially because most of those companies have an established customer base." – SD

THE TOP 6 LIST

Here are the six most-requested decorating services:

1. Embroidery (64%)
2. Screen printing (56%)
3. Heat transfers (21%)
4. Vinyl cut letters and designs (21%)
5. Sublimation (17%)
6. Direct-to-garment printing (14%)

Sales

Increase Decorated Apparel Orders

There's no magic formula to boosting the size of your apparel orders – but an old standby, which Erich Campbell, digitizer and e-commerce manager for Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (*asi/140730*), calls the "Do you want fries with that?" strategy, can still be effective.

"If your customer wants a quote on shirts, also quote them a cap," he says. "Or, even further diversify by showing them a sampling of ad specialty prod-

ucts when they buy apparel. Make clients aware of what you can do, and volunteer some quoted prices. You may be surprised how unaware your customer is of your capabilities."

You may also be able to enhance certain orders by providing customers with higher-quantity estimates. For example, if a customer requests his minimum 36-piece order, Dan Holzer, co-owner of Oakland, CA-based Forward Printing Inc., will inform his customers of the cost

of a 48- or 60-piece order, as well. "The 48-piece order is slightly more expensive but way more worth it to the customers for the amount of money they're spending," he says. "If 36 pieces is \$120 and 48 is \$140, the customer can see the value, but for us it's just as profitable because it takes the same amount of time to do the job."

Along those same lines, decorators can voluntarily show customers how they can save money on a per-piece basis, Holzer

Shirts to Sell
63% and 53%
 Percent of respondents
 who believe that
 T-shirt and polo sales
 will increase in the
 next 12 months.

says. "Maybe the customer has a budget of \$300, but if they can scrape together another \$40 somewhere and get 72 pieces, which is 50% more than 48 pieces, that's another great way to upsell," he says.

Doug Clemons, director of marketing for AnaJet Inc. (*asi/16000*), says his company advises its decorating clients to include a

sampling of their other capabilities with completed orders. "We have several successful customers that, with every order of an embroidered polo shirt, include the same graphic design produced in a short-run – one or two pieces – on a very low-cost sample T-shirt," he

says. "This is done strictly to showcase another service that the decorator can provide for the consumer. The minimal cost of the sample T-shirt is insignificant compared to the potential upside of obtaining a highly profitable short-run order in the future." – SD

SELLING TIPS FOR TRENDY ITEMS

Dan Holzer, co-owner of Oakland, CA-based Forward Printing Inc., offers selling tips for four of the hottest trends in the decorated apparel industry today:

1. Trend: Soft distressed prints. "Learn how to print water base and print it well," he says. "It can be marked up because not every other printer is doing it. It's a specialty service right now."

2. Trend: Off placements. "Mark up your off placements or suggest moving a standard placement to an off placement," Holzer says. "Off placements can be marked up because they're a little tougher to print well."

3. Trend: Distressed garments. "If you see an order come through with some distressed art and the customer is asking for a finer ring-spun cotton shirt, offer them a distressed, destroyed or burnout shirt," he says. "The cost of the garment is higher; therefore, you should be able to take a higher margin."

4. Trend: Jumbo, oversized and all-over prints. "Invest in the equipment to be able to do this, mark up the service and take higher margins," Holzer says.




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Quick Lesson: How to Upsell and Cross-Sell

Upselling is when you sell two of an item instead of the original one the customer wanted, or you sell that customer a higher-end model. For example, if a customer wants 1,000 budget-priced T-shirts to give to participants in a charity marathon, so you show him how a better-quality shirt could bring a better return on investment. The customer then buys the higher-end product.

Jimmy Lamb, communications manager for Sawgrass Technologies, advises decorators to always have three price and quality levels of products available: “Good, better and best,” as he puts it. The “good” is the base level product to sell to a cash-strapped buyer. The “better” is an upgraded version that most people will buy. The “best” is the premium version, such as a brand name, with a premium cost.

Cross-selling would be selling add-on items to an initial sale. For example, for the customer who wanted 1,000 T-shirts for the charity marathon participants, you could offer that same customer embroidered hats to give to the top 100 finishers in the race. “Cross-selling is about finding

TOP MARKETS BUYING DECORATED APPAREL

1. Education/schools
2. Associations/clubs
3. Manufacturing
4. Non-profit
5. Health care
6. Retail



those other products and services to offer and profiling these people and their needs,” Lamb says.

In each case, making that sale is an exercise similar to walking a tightrope. If you push too hard, you can turn off the customer. “It’s a matter of thinking what can I do and what can I sell to this person?” Lamb says. “Are there comparable products you can sell regarding this marketing effort? You want to find a way to pick your client’s brain, without annoying them, on what they need. A lot of times they need something else, and they’re getting it somewhere else,” so you need to be able to pick up that extra work. — *Daniel Walsh*

PICK THE RIGHT TIME TO PITCH

To turn that “what if” into an actual sale, the first thing to do is actually try upselling or cross-selling your customers. “You can’t be successful upselling or cross-selling if you don’t attempt it,” says Shari Altman, who runs Altman Dedicated Direct, a marketing company near Winston-Salem, NC. “It’s getting over that fear and realizing you have something valuable to offer.”

Of course, you need to choose the right time in your conversation with a client. That right time is when you know what your customer wants. “Certainly when someone has made a decision to buy something, they’ve obviously crossed the line to say they’re in a buying mood,” says Craig Harrison, a Berkeley, CA-based trainer and sales expert. “However, you have to be attentive to signs of resistance. Sometimes showing does more than telling, oftentimes putting an item next to another.”

While doing that, however, you still need to keep the initial need in mind, as well as the products that you’re offering in the upsell or cross-sell. “There’s nothing worse,” Harrison says, “than selling someone something, but not addressing the initial marketing need.” So, recognize the decorating need, and what the client wants to achieve with the decorated merchandise, and then see what else you can offer.



3 NICHE MARKETS FOR DECORATED APPAREL

1. Service jobs: “Decorators who work with firefighters, race car drivers and other groups that require special fire-resistant thread and backing are very important,” says Jane Swanzy, owner of Houston-based Swan Threads. Since fire-resistant thread and backing are expensive upfront, not as many decorators target those groups, making it the ultimate niche market. “Law enforcement and military also fall into this category because of their special apparel requirements.”

2. Bridal: Wedding dresses and veils are just a start to the items you can decorate for the bridal market. Lots of items, including ring-bearer pillows, garter belts and aisle runners, can be embroidered and customized for that special day. “You can decorate tote bags for the women involved to carry everything they need from planning the wedding to their makeup for the day of the event,” Swanzy says. “Embroidered hankies for the bride to give to her mother and her new mother-in-law are a big hit and a nice profit item. She also suggests decorating the pews with monogrammed bows of the bride and groom’s new initials. “The options are just endless,” she says.

3. Horse shows and rodeos: Swanzy and Anna Johnson, president of Phoenix-based Super Embroidery and Screen Printing (*asi/700101*), both agree that horse shows and similar events are another popular niche market. “Embroidery and rhinestones are used extensively by horse/rodeo people for their shirts, jackets and pants,” Swanzy says. “Horse blankets can be embroidered and are used as awards at a lot of the competitions. Decorated bags and totes for carrying equipment and supplies are also popular.” And, because so many of these shows are run by volunteers, there’s a huge market for apparel and accessories for the people putting on and working the event. — *Andraya Vantrease*



LEARN IT LIVE!

Learn how to monitor and manage your business so that you can maximize your profits and minimize unwelcome surprises in "10 Secrets to Maximizing Profits" at the *The ASI Show Orlando* (Sunday, January 23, 2-4:5 p.m.). You'll learn when you should fire certain customers, if your gross margins are right and if you'll have enough cash next month.

Marketing & Online

Build That Business Buzz

In 2011, marketing is a key buzzword – decorators should be focusing early in the year on creating their marketing plans. Here are some smart strategies for reaching your target prospects and customers.

Follow your dollars. "My children are enrolled in a local preschool where we pay thousands of dollars a year for school and camp," says John Zalepka, president of Freehold, NJ-based Corporate Brand Inc. (*asi/168854*). "I couldn't help but notice all of the imprinted T-shirts and bags I saw coming home. It wasn't long before I was printing their stuff."

The key is to focus your marketing attention immediately on companies and businesses you know are buying decorated apparel and other merchandise. So, when you see local businesses using decorated apparel or marketing their products and services in local media, those are the companies you should be targeting.

Get organized. To effectively market to targeted audiences, decorators first need to get their lists and systems in good shape. The response rate on a targeted mailing or promotion will only get better as you clean up and confirm the information in any list you're using.

"Coordinate, consolidate and clarify your many lists," says Marsha Londe, owner of Tango Partners. "Identify your groups by business, title or information that allows you to sort and target your audience. Once you're organized, continually update. Then, you don't have to go through this process again."

"Don't send a mailing without first confirming or correcting your contact information," Londe says. "If you miss the intended recipient, you've wasted time and money, and missed an opportunity."

Coordinate a targeted mail campaign. "Coordinate the product with the message and determine your packaging," Londe says. "The most important element is that the product they select has to have a reason or a purpose. It has to complement or coordinate the messaging. Who's the audience, what are the objectives, and what's the budget and time frame?"

Fill the pipeline. Londe suggests that decorators plan out all of their 2011 marketing efforts now. The reason? To fill your sales lead pipeline in case you run into a slow time. "Suddenly there can be lull in sales, and you don't have anything in place because you haven't planned," Londe says. "If you plan ahead, come July or August, which is a really typically slow time, you can gear up for the holidays. When you're going through your Christmas list the January before, then you have one step out of the way. It's organizing, sitting down with your team, and making a plan of what you're going to do."

Send out e-newsletters or e-mail specials. Marketing efforts right now should be designed to keep you on your best customers' and prospects' radar. One of the best ways to do that consistently is to send out electronic newsletters on a regular basis – either weekly or monthly, but no less frequent. This will keep your company top-of-mind with clients and it also gives you an outlet to prove your marketing and promotion expertise.

Position yourself as an expert within your organizations. Make a point right now to brand yourself and your company as an expert – in whatever area your clients need an expert for. If you call on the manufacturing sector, then immerse yourself in that business and create a brand for your business around safety, for example. – SD

SMART ADVERTISING TIP

Mark and Lisa Wright, owner of Flowery Branch, GA-based Wright Creations, use the space on their vehicles productively. They sold their Monte Carlo and bought a Dodge Ram pickup truck; then, they put signs advertising Wright Creations on the sides and back of the truck. "If you're sitting in traffic, you might as well be advertising," Wright says. "I actually sat at a red light and had someone sitting in the car next to me, and they called me and asked for a quote," Wright says.

Perform a Technology Upgrade

Decorators should take a hard look at the technology aspect of their businesses in 2011 – both online and off. Here are three key areas that you can start planning to revamp right away.

1. Revamp your website. An important part of marketing your business is to be able to cast a wide net on the Web, and attract the right customers and prospects, starting

with your company website. The new year is a great time to consider what results your website is getting and what results you want it to get for your business.

For example, you don't necessarily need a hugely high-tech website with lots of animation or Flash features, says Jimmy Lamb, communications manager for Sawgrass Technologies. "If it's purely an information-

based website, you don't want to invest a lot of money," he says. "What I ask people is, 'What's your function for the website?' If you're going to have information only, you could conceivably do that on Facebook."

Doug Clemons, director of marketing for AnaJet Inc. (*asi/16000*), says decorators who are looking for more than an info-only site should look at how existing online apparel

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Listen to an interview
with industry veteran
Jimmy Lamb

EDGE OUT ONLINE COMPETITORS

Scott Gingold, marketing expert and owner of Confidential Counselor, suggests the following strategies for dealing with online competitors:

1. Learn your competition's strengths and weaknesses. "Discover what they're doing right or better than you, and incorporate it into your own offerings," he says. "If an online competitor is cleaning your clock, find out their weaknesses and capitalize on them, but do it in a professional manner."

2. Don't obsess. "Once you've thoroughly reviewed your primary competitors, move on," he says. "If you keep focusing on them, you'll lose sight of your own business. Make certain that you're maximizing what you really offer."

3. Don't try to beat them on cost. "If you try to sell on price to beat a competitor, eventually you'll lose," he says. "There will always be someone out there cheaper than you."

4. Play nice. "Don't speak ill of your online competitors. It only makes you look weak and small," he says.

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printing leaders attract and conduct their business. Based on that info, they should research website-building providers such as Zazzle.com and Cafepress.com, which allow users to easily create custom sites.

However, if you decide you want to add an e-commerce function to your site, Clemons points to many third-party Web applications that allow decorators to integrate a garment design e-commerce application into their existing sites. "Design applications such as No-refresh.com, Productsdesigner.com and Rsktech.com can allow decorators to very quickly enter the online e-commerce field and offer a fulfilling design and purchase experience for their customers," he says.

2. Upgrade your software. Software upgrades are another constant technological consideration for decorators. Erich Campbell, digitizer and e-commerce manager for Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (*asi/140730*), says your business management, artwork, digitizing and other embroidery-specific software should probably be updated or upgraded once a year, and at least every other year. He adds that decorators should sign up for their software vendor's newsletter to be aware of possible money-saving software upgrade deals.

However, Lamb cautions decorators to calculate the profitability of a potential software upgrade before pulling the trigger. "What is the ROI on an upgrade, and will you use it?" he says.

But sometimes, software does become outdated, at which time Lamb says decorators either need to upgrade or switch to a different brand. "As things get older, a lot of companies don't offer support after a certain point," he says. "Try to find out what's new and evaluate it to see the benefit, but always stay current as to what's being supported. If you have a good product, stick with it. If you have a bad product, a necessary upgrade is a good chance to switch."

3. Work social media. Use social sites, such as Twitter and Facebook to communicate your messages to prospects and clients. With Facebook pages especially, Lamb says that decorators can build an online community where they interact with their "friends." As an example, "an industry friend of mine, who's with a large towel supplier, does Facebook really well," Lamb says. "He doesn't try to make it a corporate message; he just tries to document where he's at and what he's doing. For example, he'll post a picture of him and his young

CUSTOMER SERVICE ON THE WEB

Jordan, MN-based Thread Logic's business model is clean, simple and easy. Clients visit the company's website (www.thread-logic.com), where Founder and President Jeff Taxdahl offers about 350 wearables, including polos, sweatshirts, jackets and hats; clients select their products and upload their logos to be digitized and embroidered. Taxdahl even provides free logo evaluation, to ensure the artwork will work for embroidery (30% of those uploads turn into orders). Then, in seven to 10 business days, customers receive their decorated apparel order.

Thread Logic serves about 3,000 customer accounts located across the U.S.; in fact, the business cranked out 70,000 decorated pieces in 2009. Taxdahl, who's somewhat of a Web wizard, designed his online business model to allow customers to easily serve themselves 24/7. Here are his top tips for creating a successful online business model.

Offer a flat price point. Typically, embroiderers charge customers by stitch count; however, Thread Logic has a set rate for all logo sizes, colors and stitches. "Not many people know how many stitches are in their logo, so we've built a model on a flat price point,"

Taxdahl says. "We present to customers, 'This is what it costs to put your logo on shirt A, on shirt B and on shirt C, and so forth.'"

Offer a simplified quantity discount. Most quantity discounts only apply when the order is all the same product, all the same color. "At Thread Logic, we don't care what you're getting," Taxdahl says. "We're going to consider everything in your order - no matter what it is - toward the quantity discount. I just want your order."

Offer free logo evaluation. Not every logo transfers well to embroidery, so being able to find out whether yours will transfer before ordering helps to avoid unnecessary purchases and production costs. "Customers can send us their logo and we'll tell them how well it transfers to embroidery for free," Taxdahl says. "That gives us a chance to engage with that customer before they ever spend a dime. They can feel us out from our response and decide whether or not they want to do business with us."

And remember, "A website isn't a 'build-it-and-they-will-come' proposition," Taxdahl says. "An online model is about marketing. When you talk about the Internet, you think technology, but really, to be successful, it requires a marketing skill set." - AV

daughter on the beach lying on the company's new beach towel. Images tell a story really well."

Remember, though, if you create a company Facebook fan page, you have to update it frequently in order to generate business,

Lamb says. "It's got to be interactive, and you have to do it every day," he says. "Invite everyone you know to become fans. Give your customers a reason to be on your Facebook site. Put images of some of the latest hot new products out there." – SD

Operations

Choose the Right Business Space

While the real estate market has certainly hit tough times over the past few years, it's also providing unprecedented opportunities for businesses looking for new retail and production spaces. Between low mortgage rates on purchases and landlords practically begging for tenants to fill rental spaces, this can be a great time to consider moving. In fact, when Chicago-based Tip-Top Branding (*asi/344851*) moved offices last year, it saved \$25,000 a year in rent in the process.

A commercial real estate agent tipped off Brad Akers, president of Tip-Top, to the deal and he decided that the savings were too good to pass up.

If you decide to make the leap from home to retail, consider your long-term goals. Could you continue to grow your

business and up production in your home-based facility, or do you need to go to retail? Some decorators choose to keep their shops home-based, but add a separate building on their property to house extra equipment. "If you intend to have a retail sales area or showroom, make sure the front-end space you pick can allow for proper, uncluttered displays of all your wares and comfortably sized aisles for clients," says Erich Campbell, digitizer and e-commerce manager for Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (*asi/140730*). "And as far as production areas go, make sure you have a space that's big enough to house your machines, and also allows you to comfortably move boxes of stock along the production line. Give operators a little elbow room and make sure that your storage areas are accessible."

If your budget doesn't currently afford you the dream workspace you envision, Campbell suggests perfecting the production side of things first. "You can come up with creative, space-saving ways to show your wares if you have a smaller showroom area," he says. "Get your production space right first, and unless your shop is retail style and you count on walk-in or drive by business stay away from the big storefronts." – AV

TWO STARTUP MISTAKES TO AVOID

For every startup, there are seemingly obvious mistakes that business owners either fail to understand or decide to overlook – so here are two mistakes to avoid in the first year.

1. Mixing personal and business finances. Too many small-business owners dip into personal accounts to cover business costs or slap down their business credit card to buy a new couch for their living room. For embroiderers working out of their homes and funding the entire startup themselves, it may seem fine to mix finances, since they're likely coming from the same pool. But don't do it, experts say. Why? It makes tracking finances (i.e., separating personal and business expenses) down the road a nightmare.

2. Not knowing when to quit. For many startup embroiderers, the office is often tucked away in a corner of the house. That means work is always accessible and often a gnawing presence that's hard to ignore. But it's important to shut off the computer and step away from the home office at the end of the workday, experts say. To do that, set time limits for working after-hours at home. – Erica Young

MAINTAIN CONTRACT ACTIVITY

What's key in a contract embroidery shop is to have enough work coming in from ad specialty distributors and other "middle-man" type of entities. Unlike other embroidery shops that sell decorated apparel to end-users (and can charge for the decoration services and the garments), contract shops decorate garments that are provided to them – meaning they can only charge for the decoration services. Ultimately, that means a contract shop owner needs to have a large, repeat client base. So how do you do it?

Acquire adequate equipment to provide a wide range of services. "You need to plan," says Bruce Perryman, who runs Embroidery Unlimited in Tempe, AZ. "So, you need to have the right amount and variety of equipment." For example, Perryman has nine machines of six types to effectively hit the array of possibilities, ranging from a single-head embroidery machine to a laser bridge.

Carefully target lucrative prospects. Louisville, KY-based Stitch Designers Inc. (*asi/741145*) maintains and controls its growth by scouting out prospective clients before pitching services to them. Jeremy Judah, the company's director of marketing, uses data on prospects that's stored in ASI's CreditConnect program – to gauge who might make a logical and profitable client. Judah recommends that contract shops look for distributor clients serving various industries. "What helps us is we're spread out," Judah says. And, Perryman used to stick to the same group of clients who proved to be reliable both for business and payment. Now, he looks further. "The economy affected so many people that our select group of people was less select," Perryman says. "So we cast our net a little wider." – DW

Human Resources

Hire the Smart Way

Hiring the right sales, production and support people to help you grow your decorating business might seem like a leap of faith, but it doesn't have to be. There are some key ways you can ensure that you're hiring the best possible person for the job – especially now as the market is flooded with a lot of job applicants. “Instead of just hiring a body, you need to choose a good person who's truly going to be an asset to your company,” says Danon Middleton, COO of Tango Partners.

Of course, decorators must tailor that experience to the appropriate position. “If it's internal staff that supports the drop-ship order process in your company, you want to find someone who's had organizational-type jobs, is good on a computer and has good communication skills for when they're processing the order,” she says. “But if you're looking for someone to do product sourcing or digitizing, you really want someone with specific experience and a little creative flair.”

If you're looking for a new employee right away – particularly in the sales or production area – and can't find anyone with industry experience, Middleton recommends looking for job candidates who are proficient in the retail industry. “If someone's involved in that atmosphere, they tend to catch on a little quicker to this market,” she says.

Before they begin the hiring process, Middleton recommends decorators come up with three key characteristics that are important for their new employees to possess. The nature of those characteristics will depend upon the personal wishes of the employer and the position to be filled. “That's a key thing when you look at all the résumés on Monster.com or wherever,” she says. “Look for three key components, and if you don't see those three key things on their résumé, toss it.”

Ken Thoreson, president of Acumen Management Group, recommends a very detailed approach for hiring new employees that can be implemented very quickly. “For each job position in the company, you need to define the ideal profile for each employee,” he says. “This would be



QUICK HIRES

While time may be short, Ken Thoreson, president of Acumen Management Group, emphasizes that decorators should make time to interview multiple candidates, which can often be done in a matter of days. He recommends decorators with the ability to do so interview a minimum of five people for each position, and have three people from the company interview each candidate.

“Each interviewer must understand they need to take the emotion out of hiring,” he says. “The first step is to hold a telephone interview, and see if they can qualify based upon your top-five list. Each person should have a scorecard to rate each of the interviewees. The scorecard should be made up of the two top-five lists.” Thoreson then recommends that each candidate be scored on a scale of one to five – one being worst, five being best – for each category.

And, remember, business owners are taking risks every time they hire someone. How do you know that a person is trustworthy and responsible and can do their job? “You don't,” says John Horne, president of Stitch Designers Inc. (*asi/741145*) in Louisville, KY. “I go to my employees and ask if they know anyone who they think can do the work and enjoy it. Word of mouth is where I'd start.” Businesses can also use profiling companies or staffing firms to add science to the hiring process and weed out the unqualified applicants who would show up because of an ad in the paper.

the top-five past work experiences that you think are required to be successful.”

Once decorators decide on those five essential pieces of prior work experience, Thoreson takes the process even a step further than Middleton, suggesting that they come up with five characteristics they desire in a new employee. “Describe the type of person you're looking for – attention to detail, strong communication skills, etc.,” he says.

Based upon both sets of top-five criteria, Thoreson says employers should post a help-wanted advertisement on online services like Monster.com and Careerbuilder.com, along with industry newsletters. “You need to advertise every 60 days, whether you're hiring or not,” he says.

During the interview process, Linda Neumann, CEO of Brilliant Marketing Ideas Inc. (*asi/146083*), says employers must ask technical, industry-related questions – in fact, she suggests giving those types of questions higher priority than questions regarding character. “Offhand, just ask them about the things that are sometimes misunderstood, like pricing situations or other industry questions,” she says.



SUCCESS STORIES Smooth Operators

Want to know the secrets of decorators who started small and ended up as million-dollar operations? Meet three profitable contract embroiderers, who literally began with nothing and just followed the money.

By Erica Young

If you rewound a decade or two, you'd find Rob Dubow selling pool tables and juke boxes. You'd find Andy Shuman hitting the books (and the bar) as a junior in college. And, you'd find John Horne crunching numbers as a financial consultant.

But now, Dubow, Shuman and Horne are sporting million-dollar smiles, and it's not due to expensive cosmetic-dentistry work – it's because their contract decorating businesses each gross at least \$1 million in annual revenue. Read on to learn their secrets of success.



LEARN IT LIVE!

Want to take your sales to the next level? Want to know how superstar salespeople do it? Then don't miss "The Next Level: Strategies to Become a Sales Superstar" at The ASI Show Orlando (Sunday, January 23, 4:00 p.m.). This interactive presentation, delivered by top sales trainer George Ludwig, will give you actionable insights into how the best salespeople operate.

ABOUT STITCH DESIGNERS (*asi/741145*)

President: John Horne

Location: Louisville, KY

Company Founded: 1985

Million-Dollar Years: 1988 to present

Specialty: Contract embroidery/screen printing; digitizing

Secret to Success: "Treating others as I'd want to be treated," Horne says. "That includes my employees, customers and vendors."

2010: \$1.5 million in revenue

STITCH DESIGNERS

John Horne started off in the banking industry, financing equipment for businesses in all types of industries. "It ran the gamut from ice cream machines for convenience stores to towing vessels for the Mississippi River," Horne says. Then, his life took a twist into thread.

"In 1984, an embroiderer came to me for a loan and I financed three two-head machines for him," says Horne, who developed a rapport with the customer that, over time, fed Horne's interest in the decorating business. Finally, Horne decided to take the entrepreneurial leap and start his own embroidery firm.

"The thing was that no one in Louisville did embroidery when I was looking to launch my business," Horne says. "So I

knew if I established myself as the one-and-only, I could have a future in this business." Just to be sure, he talked to local screen printers to see if they'd do business with him if he bought an embroidery machine. The consensus was positive, so a year later, Horne leased a \$32,000, six-head Barudan machine and got a bank loan for operating capital. "The machine was pretty straightforward, so I figured out pretty quickly how to run it," says Horne, whose business, Stitch Designers (*asi/741145*), recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. "For years I had the confidence to sell, so I knew I had the confidence to start my own company."

EARLY DAYS

Coincidentally, as Horne was launching his business, his next-door neighbor – a glass glazer who was on strike – was looking for new opportunities, so Horne recruited him as Stitch Designers' first employee. "I taught him how to run the machine so I could go out and round up clients," Horne says.

The duo got their lucky break in 1986, when a screen printer hired Horne to run 200 polo shirts for Churchill Downs. This contract job got Horne thinking about selling wearables and other promotional items, in addition to servicing his existing clients. He joined ASI as a distributor member, and decided to open an office in Manhattan,

where commission-based reps could bring in more sales and access bigger clients.

Unfortunately, the introduction of NAFTA in 1994 forced Horne to change his plans. "Our bread-and-butter companies started using overseas sources at prices that were a fraction of our cost," he says. "I wasn't making money with my Manhattan sales force, and shut it down."

At this juncture, Horne knew he couldn't market his services to end-users without a strong sales force. "I decided to add more embroidery machines and establish Stitch Designers as strictly a decorating company that offered decorating services to advertising specialty distributors and other similar clients," he says. Luckily, his numerous connections from his years as a distributor allowed him to keep his new contract business afloat, and it also gave him insight as to what distributor customers expect from a decorator.

Once Horne decided to focus on being a contract shop, he realized that hitting the million-dollar mark wasn't going to be easy. "If you're selling clothing in addition to the decoration, it's not so very hard to hit \$1 million," he says. "But it's hard if it's all embroidery." And, he says, he realized how important it was for his team to work closely with their distributor clients to make sure the end-buyer's artwork translates correctly into embroidery.

SIX STEPS TO BECOMING A TOP CONTRACT SHOP

1. Educate distributors. Invite distributors to come to your shop to see how decorating processes are actually done. Show them an art file that's been digitized, and how that design is then embroidered onto a garment. You could also record simple informational videos and post them on your website or YouTube page.

2. Get client feedback. Besides hosting facility tours, you could also conduct an annual survey to learn directly from your distributor clients how to better serve them. "We send out a survey to every company in our database," says Andy Shuman, general manager for Rockland Embroidery (*asi/734150*) in Tipton, PA. "We even send it to the customers we know had a challenging experience."

3. School your clients in artwork requirements. Distributors aren't always aware that art for embroidery cannot come as very low-res files, such as a .tiff or .bmp, since that often results in lower-quality embroidery. Or, for a very detailed logo, you may have difficulty interpreting an extensively detailed design. Creating a clear, concise artwork-requirements document

outlining these specifics can help smooth out the process. Give it to your clients and post it on your website.

4. Keep the lines of communication open. Communicate with your distributor clients throughout the production process – share updates that they can pass along to end-buyers. Also, be sure to ask for signed proofs before you begin imprinting.

5. Become a real decorating resource. In order to be a full-service decorating consultant, pay attention to trends, be creative and offer advice. "The market is moving toward fashion," Shuman says. "So we're doing a bit more of what you'd see in stores, like the distressed look."

6. Recognize the importance of trust. As a contract decorator, your distributor trusts you not to approach his end-buyers – so building and keeping that trust is essential. "I want loyal customers who send me continuous work," says Rob Dubow, owner of Dubow Textile (*asi/700107*) in St. Cloud, MN. "That's why focusing on them and providing a quality product every time is so important."

MAKING IT FLY

As a contract shop, Horne and his team began getting jobs of all sizes from hundreds of customers each month, instead of large jobs from a couple of clients. "I bought several lists of screen printers, embroiderers, promotional product distributors and sporting goods stores," Horne says. "I must have had a total of 20,000 fax numbers." In order to market his services, Horne sent out a mass fax blast offering free digitizing for an embroidery order of 36 pieces or more. "The offer was unique, and it resulted in tons of new business from all across the country," he says.

Not long after, unsolicited faxes were punishable by law, so Horne turned to e-mail blasts, then e-mail video blasts, direct phone calls and exhibiting at trade shows. "I realized you have to do a combination of these things to stay visible in the market," he says.

In addition to working with distributors, Horne does work for some big names and brands. For example, he's been embroidering items for Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville for the last 14 years, and must have at least 100 versions of the logo. And, that's in addition to Tommy Hilfiger, Nautica, Polo, Timberland and the Queen of England — these are all contacts he initially made during his time as a distributor.

Horne attributes Stitch Designers' growth to his staff and creative marketing. On average, his employees have been with him for nine years, which translates to a consistent product and fast service. Stitch Designers now houses 300 embroidery heads on 18 Happy machines in a 37,000-square-foot facility, and its primary customers are advertising specialty distributors, screen printers, document printers, uniform companies, sporting goods retailers and other smaller embroiderers. With more than 1,000 orders a month shipped to 47 states, Horne says precision is key. "I always promise my customers that we're going to do the work fast, we're going to get it right and we're going to make them look good to their clients," he says.

One of Horne's embroidery highlights came in 1986, when the Kentucky Derby asked him to embroider its first lush 554-rose blanket. "They came to me and said, 'We hear you're the best embroiderer in town,'" Horne says. "The funny part is that I know they came to me because I was the only embroiderer in town." However, this particular project has come full circle for Horne, since he was first asked to embroider the blanket just one year after he started the business, and has been doing so every year since.

ROCKLAND EMBROIDERY INC.

In the one-traffic-light town of Tipton, PA, sits a 20,000-square-foot building with 50-plus employees, 255 embroidery heads and six screen-printing presses. This is the home of Rockland Embroidery (*asi/734150*), a contract embroidery shop that grossed more than \$4 million in revenue last year.

General Manager Andy Shuman got his start in the business in 1998, when he was still a college student. "I knew David Schlier, the company's founder and president," Shuman says. Although Schlier didn't start Rockland Embroidery until 1991, he had been an integral part of the industry since 1969. With that many years in the business, he'd taken part in different projects for a slew of clients, from local schools to giants such as Nike and Nautica. Simply put, Schlier knew a lot of manufacturers that were producing products for big-name accounts.

But when those large companies began to outsource most of their work overseas, Rockland Embroidery focused on providing contract decorating to advertising specialty distributors, retail resellers and manufacturers — and did so in large numbers even before Shuman came aboard. "Rockland has always been a volume-based decorator, and we've branded ourselves as a supplier of contract decorating," he says. "We rely on this to provide us with the volume needed to keep the facility running."

ABOUT ROCKLAND EMBROIDERY (*asi/734150*)

General Manager: Andy Shuman

Location: Tipton, PA

Company Founded: 1991

Million-Dollar Years: 1995 to present

Specialty: Contract embroidery/screen printing on apparel; imprinting promotional products

Secret to Success: "Find a niche market," Shuman says. "And, excel at it."

2010: \$4 million in revenue



Although Shuman's team has done work for high-profile clients such as MTV, President Bush and Sean John (rapper P. Diddy's clothing line), their main focus is on their most loyal customer. "We cater to distributors' needs to help them serve their clients," Shuman says. "We don't compete against them at all — we work with them."

THE BREAD AND BUTTER

Rockland Embroidery's success is due to the company's focus on providing contract embroidery and screen-printing services — in addition to several other imprinting options — to distributors. "Ninety-nine percent of our accounts are repeat clients, because we've established ourselves as our distributor customers' contract-decorating partner," Shuman says. "We've grown our client base by sticking to this strategy consistently for many years."

Rockland Embroidery offers a slew of decorating services, from embroidery and screen printing to garment transfers and PVC emblem development. "At the outset,

success stories

we weren't screen printers," Shuman says. "We evolved into printing eight years ago, when we moved into a shop three times the original size." Rockland Embroidery also expanded into laser cutting, etching and rhinestone application in order to be a full-service decorator.

To market its services, Rockland Embroidery initially produced samples of its most attractive logo work – one example is the stork from the Vlasic pickle commercials. Shuman's team would send a sample to prospective distributor customers, along with a handwritten letter. "We still use mailer promotions," Shuman says. "But as we've grown, we've incorporated e-mail blasts and trade show exhibitions. We put a very strong effort into branding our company within the promotional products industry by using a mix of marketing techniques."

Shuman says the key to his firm's marketing success is getting in the door with one sales rep, and then having that rep communicate to colleagues about Rockland Embroidery's work. "Word-of-mouth is vital to our client base growth, and high-volume contract decorating is not always an easy job," he says. "That's why we're always striving to achieve better customer service."

"The challenge with the resulting growth isn't getting the sales itself, but keeping those clients and sales profitable," he says.

DUBOW TEXTILE INC.

The third time's a charm, right? This saying definitely holds true for Rob Dubow, since St. Cloud, MN-based Dubow Textile (*asi/700107*) is his third – and most successful – business. "First, I owned a movie-and-VCR rental chain in the early 1980s, since most people rented instead of purchasing," he says. Dubow and his friend, who had opened multiple stores together over a period of six years, sold the business to a competitor. Then, Dubow got involved in the amusement business; he owned video games, pool tables and juke boxes that he placed in bars and bowling alleys. In 1990, he sold that business to yet another competitor and was on the prowl for another business opportunity. "I knew the previ-

ous owner of an embroidery business who was looking to get out of the industry, so in 1991, I decided to purchase it," he says.

With this new business, Dubow, who knew nothing about embroidery, had to dive in headfirst and learn from doing. When he had to present revenue projections to his bank, he used some information he received from the previous owner, and quickly guessed at what the business could do. "I also used the knowledge I gained from my previous businesses, and it worked," he says.

Dubow's commitment to quality and expertise fueled the growth of his embroidery business. After starting in a converted garage with three employees, he moved to a 3,500-square-foot production facility and doubled the company's embroidery heads to 48. "Then in 1994 we built the current 22,000-square-foot facility," he says. "And then three years ago purchased the building next door, which is about 6,500 square feet."

A FOCUS ON WORKFLOW

Dubow attributes his company's growth to three things: diversification of services, from embroidery to dye sublimation to fulfillment for his distributor clients; technology, which gives his customers the ability to track their orders online; and seasoned, dedicated staffers. By marrying these key elements, Dubow has transformed his business into one of the largest contract decorators in the upper Midwest, with more than 60 employees who run two shifts on 130 embroidery heads.

Dubow's team relies on a simple but well-honed workflow system. Many years ago, Dubow initiated a visual process flow chart, where each step of an order was written on a yellow sticky note and posted chronologically onto a 10-foot-by-8-foot wall. "Any time we had a question about the next step, or a process took multiple directions at the same time, we used a pink sticky note to identify that disconnect," he says. This worked as a learning exercise for his staff, since once the order was complete (and the wall was covered entirely), they collectively deliberated how to remove

ABOUT DUBOW TEXTILE INC. (*asi/700107*)

Owner: Rob Dubow

Location: St. Cloud, MN

Company Founded: 1991

Million-Dollar Years: 1994 to present

Specialty: Contract embroidering/screen printing; digital printing; laser appliqué; dye sublimation; heat transfers

Secret to Success: "Diversification of services, technology and a dedicated staff," Dubow says. "Above all, a lot of hard work."

2010: \$3.75 million in revenue



each pink sticky note.

Dubow Textile has moved this type of process flow chart into its own computer system, which it purchased and launched in 1996. The goal of this process, whether on a large wall or a software program, is to recognize problems, acknowledge why they happened and prevent their repetition.

Dubow strongly believes in being partners with his distributor customers. "If we can make our customers look better to their customers, it solidifies the relationship and everyone wins," he says. "It's important for our distributor customers to know all we have to offer so that they can then sell the creativity to their customers. By doing this, the end-client ends up with an original product, with a higher perceived value and a higher bottom line." ■

ERICA YOUNG is a contributing writer for *Stitches*.

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



Might Makes Copyright

By Daniel Walsh

About two years ago, Leah Paley's friend ordered a design off eBay and asked Paley to embroider it for her. The friend knew nothing about embroidery, Paley says, but she knew that Paley, a mother of seven living in Virginia, had fallen in love with embroidery back in 2001. Paley said she'd produce the embroidery and figured that was the end of it.

A year later, Paley's friend got a letter informing her that she'd purchased a design that had been pirated and sold in violation of its copyright. The friend could either pay a fee of several hundred dollars or face a lawsuit. "The thing was so bizarre," Paley says. "She doesn't even own an embroidery machine." The friend contacted the Texas Attorney General's Office complaining about harassment, because the letter originated in Texas. (Like others

who received such letters, she declined to be interviewed for this story.) As Paley learned more about it, she was amazed to find other

embroiderers had received such threats. "To threaten little old ladies and stuff for purchasing a \$5 design on eBay?" Paley says. "Just tell them it's an illegal design and not to use it."

Settlement demand letters like these have become commonplace in the world of digital artwork over the last few years. Whether it's embroidery designs or stock photos, big companies and lone individu-

als have learned not only that these letters get results, but that they may be the best way to crack down on copyright abuse and digital piracy. "The word has gotten out that settlement demand letters work," says Matthew Chan, a Georgia businessman and author who successfully fought such an effort by Getty Images

"Check to make sure the people you're doing the work for are truly licensed to use a copyrighted image."

Ed Levy, Digitize4U

and subsequently launched the website www.extortionletterinfo.com. “It’s not just stock photos or embroidery. They scare people. They just work.”

Companies such as Getty Images and Masterfile Stock Photos have used settlement demand letters to go after people they believed were taking images meant for personal use and then reselling them to others at profit.

In the embroidery world, no company has led that charge like Bernina, which owns several embroidery and sewing-related companies, including Great Notions, an online catalog of digital designs. Bernina organized the short-lived Embroidery Software Protection Coalition (ESPC), a group of several companies that went after alleged copyright abusers in 2005 and 2006. The proliferation of pirated designs around the Internet, often sold on sites such as eBay and Etsy, has deflated profits for companies that produce and sell them legitimately. “Today, you find free designs all over the Internet,” says Martin Favre, president of Bernina USA. “It’s getting more difficult to make money off this business.”

While it’s simple to observe that digital piracy is rampant, crafting a solution isn’t nearly as simple. Many who received settlement demands claimed to have purchased designs innocently – and not knowing about the copyright issues – without plans to profit from them. They say that those issuing these settlement demands are practicing “extortion.” Those who profited by

knowingly selling pirated designs often got away and continue to do so. Amid outcries, the ESPC collapsed. Now, even Bernina, which accused others of piracy, faces similar claims that it stole others’ designs.

THE NITTY-GRITTY

Here’s how simple it is to pirate someone’s copyrighted image: Go to your local newspaper’s website. Right-click on any photo you see. Save it to your computer’s hard drive. Then, post the photo on your company website. That’s it!

As an embroiderer, you could buy or download a design and then sell it to others. Or you could buy a design, stitch it and then sell it. Maybe you’ll cross over into promotional products and sell them wide-scale, perhaps reproducing them for shirts and selling them as distributors do. All these are potential copyright violations if you don’t have permission to use the copyrighted designs. “In the home market, it’s clear: You cannot use a design for anything but your own personal use,” Favre says. “You cannot put it on a sweatshirt. You can’t put it on a hat. You don’t have the right to do it.”

The latter, of course, has become rampant in embroidery and digitizing circles. People see a design, and they realize they have the artistic talent to craft it and share – or sell – it. So people did it. Many saw nothing wrong with it. After all, it was their craft work, even if the design wasn’t. In an online culture where people are used to obtaining free information, that sentiment comes nat-

urally to many. “One of the things I argue is once you put something on a website, there’s an implicit consent that you can use it,” says Mike Meadors, who runs a fabrics business in Colorado and hosts a website called Tabberone’s Trademark & Copyright Abusers Hall of Shame (www.tabberone.com). Whether others disagree or not, that mindset is common online. “There’s no control,” says Ed Levy, owner of Digitize4U, a digitizing and embroidery company based in Montoursville, PA. “Companies that pirate software are often based in other countries. They’re pretty much untouchable because their servers are in China or other countries where you can’t touch them.”

As media companies began losing more money, they began looking for a solution. They found it in a program called PicScout. Developed in 2002, PicScout can scroll across the Web searching images. It can then crosscheck the images against a database of images belonging to the client. If there’s a match, the ownership of the Web domain can be checked in a worldwide registry, such as the one run by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. An automatic notification can be sent to the company whose copyright may have been violated, which can then automatically trigger a letter to be sent to the person accused of using the digital artwork in question. PicScout made available the means for tracking copyright violators and pursuing payments from them, and most of it could all be done through automation.

PLAY IT SAFE WITH COPYRIGHTS

With pirated designs proliferating around the Internet, it’s very easy to unknowingly use a pirated design or have someone use it on your behalf, such as a Web developer building your website. However, avoiding use of those images is in some ways just as easy. “Check to make sure the people you’re doing the work for are truly licensed to use a copyrighted image,” says Ed Levy, owner of Digitize4U, a Montoursville, PA-based embroidery and digitizing firm. That means requesting documents showing the person who provided the image either created it or has a contract to reproduce it.

Levy learned the hard way to ensure that he had that documentation. In 1996, authorities raided his business because it didn’t ensure it had a sublicense. Charges were eventually dropped because there was clearly no intent to abuse copyright, Levy says.

If you receive letters from someone claiming you misused a copyright, make sure to check that the letters are legitimate. In recent months, at

least one apparent scam has proliferated in the form of a settlement demand letter ostensibly written by a female lawyer from Texas, but that clearly using spellings of words consistent with Great Britain, not the U.S.

Oscar Michelen, an attorney and instructor at New York Law School who has handled numerous digital copyright cases involving settlement demand letters, says many such letters have questionable legal standing. He says many people simply outlast their pursuers by ignoring them, but that comes after quite a bit of pressure, including sending debt collectors to secure settlements from alleged copyright infringers. “They’ll find your phone number and e-mail and step up contact,” Michelen says. “They’ll send it to a lawyer. If you’re willing to hold on through all of that, you’ll get through.” But if you have the image in question on a website somewhere, there’s one other key step. “We advise all our clients to just take it down,” Michelen says. “Even if you’re right, just take it down.”

Bernina caught on and formed the ESPC with some of its subsidiaries and outside companies, including Tacony Corp. and Pulse Microsystems Ltd. The ESPC sent out numerous settlement demand letters. "One of our customers got one of those letters from the embroidery coalition," says Angie Sims, a moderator of a popular online sewing forum who used to work for a Brother dealer in Nashville, TN. "She didn't contact an attorney. She just contacted the embroidery coalition and sent them \$300."

Meadors, who has received and successfully fought similar demands from companies claiming he infringed copyrights, said that's a common response. "Most people would rather pay the \$300 fine, as the ESPC calls it," he says. "It's basically copy-

"We started researching the embroidery design industry as a new market for us and were blown away by the amount of copyright infringement."

George P. Riddick III, Imageline

right extortion." Such sentiments hurt the ESPC. For every person selling pirated designs online, there were others who claimed to be innocent crafters. "We got badmouthed many, many times over for being a big corporation going after these 65-year-old women," Favre says.

In 2006, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a nonprofit group protecting digital rights, stepped in to fight the ESPC on behalf of embroiderers. "We got involved in a specific nuance of this," says Corynne McSherry, an attorney with EFF. "Our clients were involved in a Yahoo! group formed to talk about this. The ESPC found out about this and tried to subpoena identities of the people in the group," McSherry says the ESPC had filed the lawsuit against numerous John Does.

"What the ESPC was doing is going after innocent people for very mundane things and threatening people with lawsuits."

Mike Meadors,

Tabberone's Trademark & Copyright Abuse Hall of Shame

Then they went to the Internet service provider to secure the identities for the lawsuit, since "Before you can get someone's identity, you have to show you have a legitimate suit," McSherry says.

The ESPC eventually collapsed due to bad publicity from its efforts, Favre says, but the message got out. Embroiderers and digitizers shared news of the lawsuit threats on online messaging boards. Even those who faced accusations of digital piracy recognized something needed to be done. "These people need to be put out of business because this is obviously piracy," Meadors says. "What the ESPC was doing is going after innocent people for very mundane things and threatening people with lawsuits."

TABLES HAVE TURNED

George P. Riddick III can be different things to different people. Copyright expert, businessman, copyright extortionist, shakedown artist – again, it all depends on who you ask. He has a company called Imageline that he says pioneered clip art in the early 1990s, and he claims copyrights on the vast collections of digital clip art he says his company developed during that time, and he has followed the example of Getty and the ESPC by using PicScout and threats of litigation that come with settlement offers. He has sued or threatened to sue various companies and individuals for violations of copyrights he claims. "We started researching the embroidery design industry as a new market for us and were blown away by the amount of copyright infringement," Riddick says.

Riddick says he only goes after people distributing Imageline's copyrights for money. One of those targets is Bernina, which he accuses of using his clip art without permission. "They take the artwork," Riddick says. "They modify it. They then

turn around and license it." After he contacted Bernina dealers to tell them they were violating his copyrights by selling the designs, some got scared, so in August Bernina sued Riddick and his companies.

Riddick's critics say his operation – and his copyright claims – are very questionable. Many say Riddick makes a living today primarily through such lawsuits. As of press time, one could go to Imageline's website, www.imageline2.com, and see the message, "Major website upgrade coming in November 2009!" The phone number listed on the website has been disconnected. "We haven't used or updated that website or phone number in years," Riddick says. "We're making some organizational changes." Riddick declines to specify what those changes are, but says they'll be revealed in 2011.

As of press time, the Bernina-Imageline case was still open in a federal court in Illinois. U.S. District Judge Milton I. Shadur has already invalidated some of Riddick's copyright claims. "Riddick's mass registration of clip art does not give protection to the individual pieces of clip art in the collection," says Oscar Michelen, an attorney and New York Law School instructor who has handled numerous digital copyright cases, including one for Riddick. A federal judge in New York ruled similarly in an unrelated case in May, and the rulings could become precedents in other cases.

Riddick has fought the judge's ruling and initially represented himself in the case. "I probably know the copyright laws of the U.S. better than most people and most lawyers," Riddick says. Shadur disagreed and ordered him to hire an attorney, according to court documents, saying that copyright law "doesn't seem to work the way you seem to think it does." ■

DANIEL WALSH is a staff writer for *Stitches*. Contact dwalsh@asicentral.com.



Jennifer Osborne opened her Owensboro, KY-based retail shop, Emages Embroidery, on January 1.

Race to the Starting Line

Just several weeks before jumping from part-time decorator to full-time business operator, Jennifer Osborne didn't have all of her systems and processes ready for prime time. But with an industry veteran's advice and her own tireless effort, Osborne got Emages Embroidery where it needed to be as the doors opened.

By Robert Carey
Photography: Brad Luppino

As of January 1, Jennifer Osborne is the proprietor of a full-time shop called Emages Embroidery in Owensboro, KY, a small city about 100 miles from Louisville. Up until then, she worked in a doctor's office full time, and did digitizing and embroidery jobs after business hours and on weekends.

In her 450-square-foot storefront space on a busy street in town, her mother interacts with customers and shows samples of Osborne's digitizing work and decorating on blankets, fleece vests, polos, book bags, cosmetic bags, spa wraps, towels, cozies, key fobs and baby items. A few miles away, Osborne's home has a computer loaded with Melco's DesignShop software, a single-

head Tajima Neo, and lots of supplies and her garment inventory ("The store would be too cramped if I had the machinery and garments there," she says). She uses her space at home to do all her own digitizing, marking, hooping and trimming.

Her goal: "I want to make at least \$30,000 in revenue for this year, because I could live off that amount," Osborne says. "The shop rent is just \$500 a month and the other expenses are quite low in this region." She made \$11,000 last year as a part-time operation, though it could have been more if she didn't keep her prices down to ensure that she gets business. "A lot of soccer teams come to me, and I have a lot of walk-ins for small orders," she says. "I also do digitizing work for a mainly screen-printing



Osborne's mother, Jean Harris, helps out with customers in the shop's busy showroom.

firm – they give me a good amount of business.”

But to make a reasonable living, she knew in the weeks before leaving her full-time office job that she'd have to land more clients through dedicated sales and marketing efforts. As of October 15, though, she had no one doing sales and her online presence was barely passable. “I just had no time to do any of that – some nights I was getting very little sleep between working at the doctor's office and then filling orders at home,” she says. Then again, Osborne knew she'd have no other source of income besides Emages Embroidery come January 1, 2011, so something had to give.

A VETERAN'S ANALYSIS

At Louisville, KY-based Stitch Designers (asi/741145), owner and President John Horne has grown the business from six heads to 300 heads housed in 37,000 square feet over the past two decades, and now employs 30 people. Looking at Emages Embroidery's physical layout, Horne notes that “It's not the best situation that she can't have her machines in the store,” he says. “If she likes the location and no larger spaces are available

nearby, she can get by with it for now. But she should be on the lookout for vacancies in larger storefronts.”

Regarding Osborne's priorities as January 1 approached, Horne adds that “she should spend most of her time selling,” he says. “It would be a much better use of her time to use a contract shop for larger orders; she can't afford to spend all that time running the machine herself. She could offer the digitizing free for orders of more than 12 pieces and then send most of those larger orders to a contract shop. This will give her an advantage over other small shops.”

Horne cautions that Osborne's contractor shouldn't be located in the immediate area, because there's a chance that the contractor would eventually approach her clients directly. When narrowing down contractors, “Ask for testimonials from clients of similar size and orders, and make sure the shop can turn things around in three to five business days,” he says.

When it comes to pricing, Horne advises that Osborne mark up each item by at least 33%, and then add onto that the embroidery charge. “It's an industry rule of thumb,” he says. “Besides, once people get used to low prices, it's incredibly hard

to raise them to get to the profitability you need.” As for pricing orders she'll contract out: “Just get the contractor's price list and build out your retail prices from that.”

Lastly, Horne wants Osborne to add one or more catalogs to her website that's currently housed on another site (www.jilldasilva.com/emages/products_03.html), which would allow her to sell over the phone with the prospect looking at items on the site. Then she could use social media to drive people to her improved site.

Osborne's tasks between October 15 and December 15:

1. Find a contract shop.
2. Find new prospects and start selling more aggressively.
3. Contact an apparel supplier to help her develop a website that will act as a sales tool.
4. Determine a new pricing structure and stick to it.



ABOUT THE EXPERT

John Horne,
President, Stitch Designers (asi/741145)
www.stitchdesigners.com

Over the last 25 years, John Horne has

grown his business considerably. His multi-million-dollar company, contract embroidery shop Stitch Designers (asi/741145), started as a promotional products and apparel distributor in 1986; then, taking the plunge into decorating, Horne added six embroidery heads in 1991. By 2001, the business boasted 150 heads, and has now impressively doubled that to 300 heads. The company is housed in a huge 37,000-square-foot space in Louisville, KY, and employs four customer-service representatives, two digitizers, an office manager, a marketing manager and a controller; on the production side, there are between 15 to 20 people at any given time.

"I just did a baby's down blanket with initials and birth date, and I charged twice as much as I would have in the past."

Jennifer Osborne, Emages Embroidery

THE MIDTERM REPORT

By the middle of November, Osborne had acted on a few things: She strengthened the quality of the product photography on her own website, and linked that site to a customized presence she has on a website hosted by apparel supplier Tri-Mountain/Mountain Gear (*asi/92125*) containing its extensive wearables catalog. She also created a Facebook page (Emages Embroidery Inc.) and quickly gained 70 fans.

As for the sales effort, "I tried to get a friend to do some sales for me, and I'd pay her a commission," Osborne says. "But then she had a death in the family, and since then I haven't been able to find

the time to meet with her to train her in everything she'd need to know." As a result, Osborne started making phone calls herself during her 30-minute lunch break at her office job "to try to get some bids in places such as the local Toyota plant," she says. "I know they order a lot of shirts, so I'm trying to get in on their next round of ordering."

In the search for a contractor, Osborne reached out to a former colleague and mentor who has his own decorating shop in Macon, GA. Though that shop is quite far from her own, "All I have to do is ship the raw goods to him and he'll take it from there," she says. "I'm very comfortable with this new situation, so I'll go out and focus on getting some larger orders now."

Going forward, though, she wonders if it is appropriate to ask for money up front to procure the items and other materials needed to complete a sizable job. Absolutely, Horne says. "You certainly wouldn't be out of line to request some sort of prepayment," he says. "Asking for the money to purchase the goods is a cost of doing business that a customer should have no problem incurring – that shouldn't come out of your pocket. If you're direct in your approach, you won't come across as needy. Remember, though, to help a customer

make all of his decisions on what he wants, and then ask for the deposit last. Be ready to negotiate the amount, but start at 50%, minimum. If there's resistance to that, ask how much he had in mind – and then think hard before taking on that order."

THE FINAL REPORT

By mid-December, Emages Embroidery was much further along toward being a legitimate full-time operation than it was just eight weeks before. The firm's website and social-media presence has improved, and Osborne's sales efforts have brought some good opportunities. She got on the phone and contacted several local businesses besides the Toyota plant, such as a few horse stables, plus the local electric company and the water district. "If I got the purchasing manager's voicemail, I explained who I was and what I can offer, and I'm following up with samples of my work," she says.

What's more, an employee at the local college who worked with Osborne two decades ago remembered her during one call, "and she immediately brought in one of the college's logoed shirts to see if I can do some variations for different departments," Osborne says. "Until now, it never hit me to think about all the contacts I

By the Numbers: Emages Embroidery 2010 Revenue

Embroidery: \$9,000

Digitizing: \$2,000

Total: \$11,000

2010 Expenses

Store rent/insurance/utilities:
\$6,000

Total: \$6,000

Profit: \$5,000

Hemmed In: Jennifer Osborne

Stitches: What's been the biggest challenge in your business?

Osborne: Not having enough time. I was working full-time at a doctor's office, although now I'm only part-time there. Still, trying to find new customers, build a website and do the production for my existing business leaves me little time to sleep.

Stitches: What's been your biggest business surprise?

Osborne: As I've focused harder on getting new clients, I've come to realize how many contacts I have in all walks of life. There are so many people I can contact who at least know my name. That's reassuring.

Stitches: What's one thing you'd do differently?

Osborne: I'd have a slightly larger storefront so that I can have my machine and my computer there. Right now those are a few miles away, at home.

Stitches: Where do you want to see your company in two years?

Osborne: My goal for 2011 is to get to \$30,000 in sales; I think I can do that. And, I have a good contractor in place to support me as I grow. But I might need to train a salesperson in order to get past that number – and then I'd have time to fulfill a lot of that business rather than contract it out.



For now, Osborne houses her embroidery machine and software at her home.

have in all walks of life, and inquire with them to see if they could use my services. It's exciting."

Even with that said, what Osborne has learned in the past few months is that while she is adept at selling, "I really do like the production end of things." So the idea of hiring a salesperson in the near future is very much alive. Another thing she learned is the limits of her production capacity: Osborne spent one entire weekend, from Friday night until early morning Monday, fulfilling an order for 185 decorated fleece vests on her machine. "Even though it went pretty smoothly – I didn't lose any garments to mistakes or tension issues – it knocked me flat," she says. "I worked 14 hours each day, and then slept just four hours on Sunday night." Having a contractor to whom she can outsource feels even better to her now.

On the other hand, Osborne calculated that she earned \$48 per hour on that vest order, proving that she's made positive strides with her pricing strategies. "Honestly, I didn't even mark up those garments as much as I should have, because that's a recurring order," she says. "But on one-off orders, I've changed my prices without

a single customer saying anything. I just did a baby's down blanket with initials and birth date, and I charged twice as much as I would have in the past."

So as 2011 opens, Osborne is confident that Emages Embroidery will earn more than the \$30,000 needed for her to earn a reasonable living. "Between my own embroidery jobs, digitizing projects, and embroidery jobs I do for a local screen-printing company, I made almost \$6,000 in November," she says. "That's kind of shocking to me."

NEXT STEPS

Horne is happy with Osborne's progress, but feels that she can push her efforts even further as she formally opens her doors on January 1. To enhance her marketing efforts, Osborne should investigate the Constant Contact (www.constantcontact.com) software product to manage her e-mail marketing programs; it offers services starting at \$15 per month and has a new "share" feature, where e-mail recipients can virally market her message to others. "This type of effort could bring a lot of response for Emages," Horne says. "Jennifer just needs to make sure she gets back

"She could offer the digitizing free for orders of more than 12 pieces and then send most of those larger orders to a contract shop. This will give her an advantage over other small shops."

John Horne, Stitch Designers
(asi/741145)

to everyone who expresses interest in her business in a very timely manner – within 24 to 48 hours."

Osborne should also work on going even deeper into her local area to mine for prospects and other business partners by joining the chamber of commerce, attending networking functions and sponsoring local events, "which really help to increase exposure at a low cost," Horne says.

Finally, Osborne needs to really understand – and teach any new sales rep – that "in order to have opportunities to bid on jobs, you must be in the mind of your potential customer precisely when they have a need," Horne says. "You might not get their business in your first attempt to talk with them, but persistence pays off – at some point they'll call you for a quote or sample. But find the right balance. If you call people too much, they might get annoyed; if you don't call enough, they won't remember you." Horne's parting advice to Osborne is to plan out her 2011 communications strategy, with approximate contact dates and the specific types of messages or promotions she wants to disseminate with each contact. ■

ROBERT CAREY is a contributing writer to *Stitches*.

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By Erich Campbell



Got a decorator dilemma?

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

Looking Forward

In the next issue we're going to give you a sublimation primer. See you next month!

Q I'm learning to digitize and I understand what the different stitch types are, but I just don't always know when and where to use them. I can fill areas with stitches, but they just don't look the way I want them to. How do I get started interpreting art into stitches, and how do I do more than just filling spaces with thread?

A Though I can't teach you everything there is to know about interpreting images into embroidery in a single page, I can give you some very good tips to help you see the world in stitches. My first recommendation to any digitizer starting out, whether they're asking about stitch densities, pathing or even artistic interpretation, is to analyze the designs of other great digitizers. If you know of a master who does the sort of work you want to do, purchase their designs and watch them run, either on-screen or on-machine. Make measurements of their work, and watch how they interpret their subjects. You'll find that some rules tend to hold true for all digitizers: For areas thinner than 10 mm, such as the lines in most lettering, a satin stitch is the norm. For areas wider than that, split satins or fill stitches are often called into play. For lines thinner than 1 mm, running stitches fit the bill.

Once you've internalized these guidelines, you'll begin to see how the masters deviate from the rules, or add to them. Some digitizers use curved fills to show the volume of an object; some use different stitch angles to change the color that thread appears, altering the angle so the thread reflects the brightest light. Some digitizers fill wide spaces by overlapping many satin-stitch columns instead of going to the usual fill stitch. The truth is that there is no one completely right way to interpret a logo.

Practice by envisioning things in stitches when you have a moment to let your mind wander – look at a logo on a billboard and see how you'd form the lettering and images; see the cars in front of you broken up into body panels, complete with fill stitches in different directions to show the way the light plays across the surfaces; break buildings into segments, and think how railings would be perfect satin stitches, or cables hanging over the street would be running stitches in your embroidered scene. Try to make the world into stitches before your eyes. Keep

stitches on your mind, and when the time comes to interpret them, half of your decisions will be made.

When it comes to venturing beyond the safe haven of simply filling all the objects in your source artwork with stitches, however, you need to allow yourself the license to get creative. Sometimes you have to digitize the lines that aren't there – fill an animal's coat with stitches that follow the direction fur grows; construct a seemingly flat bird's wing of many satin-stitch "feathers"; or carve a silhouette of a person into a single-color sculpture, complete with arms, legs, clothing, a face and hair as separate segments of satin and fill stitches.

Though not all customers will want this artistic treatment, you'll often find that though a logo or image is given to you in a flat form, the beauty of a well-executed and naturally 3-D embroidered interpretation isn't lost on most consumers. Once you start thinking of your source image as the jumping-off point for the eventual embroidered artwork you'll

Practice by envisioning things in stitches when you have a moment to let your mind wander – look at a logo on a billboard and see how you'd form the lettering and images.

create, you'll be free to make something truly special. Moreover, once you help your customers understand that digitizing is an act of artistic interpretation, they'll more likely respect changes that must be made, such as thickening overly thin lines or increasing the size of impossibly small lettering, in order to translate their artwork into stitches.

Own embroidery as your medium, know the properties of thread and how it interacts with fabric, know the way light plays on its surface, and soon enough, you won't just render images slavishly into embroidered shadows of themselves. You'll create designs that are both suited to thread and bring out the best of the source image's essential qualities. ■

ERICH CAMPBELL is a 10-year, award-winning embroidery digitizer with experience in designing, implementing and maintaining e-commerce websites. A long-time technology fan, ad-hoc IT staffer and constantly-connected Internet dweller, Campbell is in the process of adding social media to the marketing arsenal of Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (asi/140730). Contact: ecampbell@blackduckinc.com.

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