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Embroidery's Voice & Vision

January 2015

The **ORGANIZATION** *Issue*



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In this issue's "Ask an Expert," **ERICH CAMPBELL**, digitizer/e-commerce

manager at Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Inc. (asi/700415), offers advice on how to become more efficient when you're digitizing designs. One thing to do: Run designs regularly on your machines. "Nothing teaches you to avoid unnecessary movement like waiting through them at the machine," he writes, "having to watch a misplaced jump-stitch get stitched into a design or trimming out your poorly planned piece."



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In this month's "Inspiration" section of our "Look Book" department, we feature the work of **MARIA DAMON**, who's a poet, author and chair of the Humanities and Media Studies department at Pratt Institute in New York. She finds inspiration from many talented individuals spanning multiple disciplines: "writers like Jean Genet, Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, poets bpNichol, Adeena Karasick, bill bissett, Cecilia Vicuña (also a textile artist), Christine Wertheim and many others," she says. "Certain musicians: Iggy Pop, John Fahey, wild men who try so hard to transcend this material reality that they seem to be performing in a space between the carnal and the spiritual: the ecstatic. Robert Johnson, the blues great. Dizzy Gillespie, for his wit, insight and musicianship. Patti Smith. My students who have published amazing books of poetry, and many, many of my colleagues at Pratt Institute."



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In this month's "Expert Weigh-In" section of our "Interact" department, we talk to **RICH SANTO**, president of Chicago-based Culture Studio Custom Screen Printing & Embroidery (asi/700559), who recently moved his team to a 50,000-square-foot location to expand capabilities and serve more clients, while keeping the entire process streamlined and efficient. "We took significant steps to making product and supply inventory manageable," Santo says. "We built a custom shop management program called Stock Up that manages our entire company and orders in a way that has revolutionized the way we do business. It's a full-service shop management system, and handles everything from creating and engaging a client to pricing matrixes. It schedules out all our jobs onto prices and tracks the order all the way to shipping. It even reports margins and labor time."

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Get Organized



To kick off 2015, this issue will give you lots of smart strategies to make your shop more organized and productive, from reorganizing its workflow to going paperless to changing up your decorating-equipment workstations to allow your operators to work more efficiently. In addition to making over your shop, plan to take a look at how you're running your business, whether

you're a home-based sole proprietor or heading up a large contract shop. A good way to get started is to consider how organized and efficient your company is as a whole – and if it runs in a logical, uncluttered fashion.

Professional organizational and time-management expert Julie Morgenstern told Beinkandescent.com, “*The Wall Street Journal* published a story ... with data indicating that the average U.S. executive wastes one hour per day searching for missing information in messy desks and files. And 47% of the employees polled at the ... work/life balance company LifeCare said time management was the number-one source of stress in their lives,” said Morgenstern, founder of Julie Morgenstern Enterprises.

Morgenstern, who's the author of five best-selling books, says her team designs organizational solutions for business “that organize from the inside out,” meaning that the solutions are specific to each company's culture, workflow and goals – and that are easy for employees at all levels to follow. This type of overall organizational revamp is what decorating shop owners should guide in their firms.

If you think your shop is alone in its disorganization, you'd be wrong. “I go into so many businesses where everything is so jumbled up,” says Joyce Jagger, The Embroidery Coach.

In this month's cover story “Clean Up Your Shop and Increase Productivity” by Theresa Hegel, Joyce Jagger and Kristine Shreve, on pg. 38, we've got more than 10 key strategies for you to really reorganize the way your shop works. Our goal: to help you increase your overall productivity – and sales.

The great news is that this issue is full of great ways to reorganize your shop's physical and virtual spaces and processes. In addition, we've got time-management, cost-saving and efficiency strategies to help you get on track. Here's to a successful 2015!

Nicole M. Rollender

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Get Your Stitch Report

Stitches Senior Staff Writer Theresa Hegel shares a few key tips to help shops get organized fast in the new year. Watch on *Stitches.com*.



Podcast: Improve Your Workflow

Stitches Senior Staff Writer Theresa Hegel talks with The Embroidery Coach Joyce Jagger about the importance of developing and maintaining an efficient ordering and production system. Listen on *Stitches.com*.



2015 Forecast

Imprinted apparel and accessories are expected to garner \$8.6 billion in revenue in 2015. *Wearables* magazine's Sales Forecast has the strategies, markets and data to help you forge ahead. Read the report on *Stitches.com*.

SOCIAL FEEDS



STITCHES MAGAZINE
Now, this is inspirational! A young entrepreneur shows how it's done. *bit.ly/1zixdKf*

STITCHES MAGAZINE
We worked really hard on *Stitches*' Big Decorating Challenge - and we're so proud of the winners. Check them out in the latest issue of *Stitches* magazine *bit.ly/1zN92EV*

YOU ANSWERED JANE SWANZY
Great contest. I don't know that I could have selected a winner. All of them are fabulous.

STITCHES MAGAZINE
We came across this today, and it was too good not to share. The music video features 73,000 embroidery stitches, 350 reels of thread and clearly, lots of hard work. Check it out! *vimeo.com/58893010*

YOU ANSWERED GEB FIRNEISZ
Wow is right! Very creative.

SAMANTA CORTES
Very nice job!!!

STITCHES MAGAZINE
Jetline is adding embroidery to the range of decoration capabilities the supplier already offers: *bit.ly/1wOlZax*



@LESLIELEARNS
Words that sound similar but mean different things? Here are some of the most common errors. #writingtips #proofread

@HUFFINGTONPOST
This map depicts the staggering highs and lows of the U.S. economy since 1999 *huff.to/1tkAwNG*

@ADWEEK
Instagram video ads are finally live. Here are 4 from major brands: *adweek.it/13hJlxR*

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What social media challenges do organizations encounter the most? *ow.ly/DxFVa*

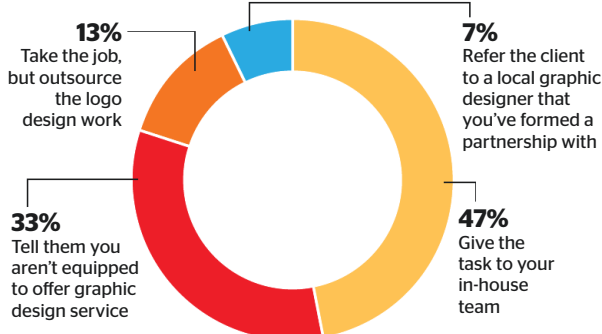
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Fruit of the Loom has partnered with Parkdale America, selling its U.S. yarn-spinning facilities to the company: *bit.ly/1wg3mzG*

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5 Office Organizing Tips That Will Take You From Cluttered to Productive -> *budurl.com/jgxb*

INDUSTRY POLL

At *ASICentral.com*, we recently asked:

When a client asks for help in designing their logo, what do you do?



BLOG EXCERPT

Stitchwork The Fashion Police Auxiliary



Trying to attract new clients? Rather than putting together a straightforward sale to bring in customers, why not get a little creative? Take Northwest Embroidery in East Milton, WA. The 37-year-old shop wanted to promote a new line of jackets from Nike Golf and OGIO. Marketing Manager Scott Mickelson was inspired by police department gun buyback programs when he created Northwest Embroidery's tongue-in-cheek version: the "Ugly Jacket Buyback." "We're trying to get bad fashion off the street," Mickelson jokes, explaining that customers can bring in their most outlandish, outdated outerwear in exchange for \$5. "Once they're in the store, they might take a look at some of our jackets." Northwest Embroidery is providing three bins to sort the garish garments: "Sorta Ugly," "Pretty Darn Ugly" and "OMG Ugly." Adds Mickelson: "We're not going to be the ones to determine which bin a coat goes in. We don't want to offend anyone."

Scan this code to read the entire blog entry by Theresa Hegel, senior writer for *Stitches*.



Pinterest

Check out the following designs that we pinned on Stitches' Pinterest page – from the *Digital Designs* and *Appliqué & Multimedia* Boards.

From the Board: Digital Designs



PennFUTEX patches from Penn Emblem Co. (asi/77120; circle 102 on Free Info Card) feature full-color, intricate images at an affordable price, pennemblem.com.



This tee featuring all-over sublimation is from Shockwaves Promotional Apparel (asi/87144; circle 111 on Free Info Card), shockwavesapparel.com.

From the Board: Appliqué & Multimedia



This laser etching on a fleece 1/4-zip is by Dubow Textile (asi/700107; circle 112 on Free Info Card), dubowtextile.com.



This logo features partial laser etching on high-pile fleece, and a red appliqué ribbon with white embroidery. It's from Vantage Apparel (asi/93390; circle 85 on Free Info Card), vantageapparel.com.

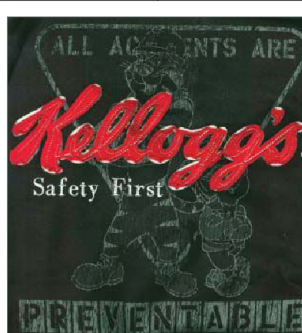
From the Board: Appliqué & Multimedia



This polyester T-shirt sublimated with an image of a soothing tropical landscape is from Vapor Apparel (asi/93396; circle 113 on Free Info Card), vaporapparel.com.



The Custom Dye-Sub Sport Pockets are made of 100% polyester and can be attached with thread or heat-seal adhesive from Dalco Athletic (circle 114 on Free Info Card), dalcoathletic.com.



This T-shirt features a screen-printed background image and a double layer of laser-cut appliqué made of jersey fabric from Quality Embroidery, laser-applique.com.



This design for the P.I.L.L.S. urban clothing brand features a combination of chenille, embroidery and appliqué, and it's by VSA Custom Apparel (asi/700739; circle 115 on Free Info Card), vsacustom.com.

Visit Stitches' Pinterest page – and all our great boards – at Pinterest/stitchesmag.

INTERACT

Letters

Share your tips (and photos) about the some of the best ways that you organized a messy area of your shop.



BEFORE



AFTER

Cleaning Up Shop

We celebrated Sweetest Day in October with a shop cleaning weekend! Our first step was taking everything off the desks and tables and putting it into the center of the rooms. Piece by piece ... keep and file, throw away, shred and re-organize. ... That was our motto! After the weekend of cleaning and working, you can see we were successful.

Rick Gosser

Gosser Corporate Sales Inc. (asi/212165), Crown Point, IN

Stitches readers sound off:

VOILA!



Submitted by Debby Labrucherie, owner and decorator at Double L Designs, Discovery Bay, CA; doublel22@prodigy.net

The Best Piece I Ever Embroidered

"We made this hoodie and crewneck sweatshirt for the California Roots Music and Arts Festival and its accompanying clothing line. My son launched the online store for the event, held every May, and we've been embellishing items for it. For the hoodie and crewneck, we used a Melco AMAYA XTS to create the distressed appliqué from Stahls' (asi/88984) Any Word. Any Way. line of custom templates. Check out the event merchandise at www.californiarootsmerch.com."

Happy Anniversary

KO Embroidery is celebrating its third year in business! I love digitizing and your magazine's articles about the art of digitizing. I always learn something.

Kate Otey

KO Embroidery, Arlington, WA

High Hopes

Buy the Bolt is a small startup business in rural northwestern Michigan. We hope to grow into an important embroidery/fiber company for the area.

Margaret Stooksberry

Buy the Bolt, Honor, MI

Family-Friendly Environment

We're a very small shop in a small town. The owners, Dave and Peggy Chelberg, are wonderful to work for. The shop has a true family feel. I love where I work and what I do!

Kimberly Kolden

P-D's Embroidery, Mora, MN

True Stitches Fans

I have a small sewing/embroidery business in my home. My 83-year-old mother with

Alzheimer's lives with me and helps me pick out designs, fabrics and threads. We especially like making items for children, the elderly and the handicapped. Special orders don't faze us. We love your magazine and read it cover to cover looking for the needle.

Robin Burch

Robin Burch's Sewing Nest, Albion, PA

Industry Veteran

I have three single-head machines and I've been in business for 30 years. I started out doing chain stitching 35 years ago.

Martha Brown

Monogramming by Martha Brown, Clio, MI

Retirement Party

I have a small embroidery, heat-press transfer and sublimation company, though I still work full-time in accounting so I can actually pay my bills! I'm 67 and hope to retire in a couple years, and then grow my business more. I have a one-needle Baby Lock, a

six-needle Baby Lock and a 16-needle Melco Bravo. I have a couple heat-press machines and two different setups for doing polyester sublimation and cotton-blend sublimation.

Sharon Wendt

Magic of Embroidery, Morris, IL

Stitching in the Buckeye State

Our company is family-owned and operated, and is located in the historic village of Wellington in north central Ohio, approximately 30 miles southwest of Cleveland. We expanded the operation this past summer by adding new equipment. We're trained on state-of-the-art SWF embroidery machines and laser engravers. We have four types of machines to perform various operations, such as sequin embroidery, rhinestones, cording and 3-D lettering, as well as a bridge machine capable of decorating long items such as table linens and quilts. The laser engraves, etches and cuts cloth and wood acrylics. We're proud to have been featured in the August 2013 issue of *Stitches* in the Quilting for a Cause feature.

Nancy Krupar

Wellington Thread Works, Wellington, OH

TALK TO US!

Tell us what challenges you're facing in your shop. React to a story you've just read in *Stitches* or on our Facebook page. Email us a shot of the latest and greatest embroidery design you've just run. We can't wait to hear from you, so send letters to the editor to nrollender@asicalcentral.com.

Expert Weigh-In



Rich Santo, president of Chicago-based Culture Studio Custom Screen Printing & Embroidery (asi/700559), recently moved his team to a 50,000-square-foot location to expand capabilities and serve more clients, while keeping the entire process streamlined and efficient. Learn his secrets to a successful move.

Our new location allows us to keep meeting increased demand from our customers.

We moved in May 2014 to a 50,000-square-foot building from 10,000 square feet. We needed to expand capacity for our demanding clients.

We offer a slew of services for our discerning customers.

We're proud to offer screen printing, embroidery, direct-to-garment printing, art creation, fulfillment, apparel sourcing and promotional products. The majority of our clients need high-volume contract orders fulfilled by us.

We had two primary objectives with the move.

From the get-go, we set out to build the latest and greatest in pre-press and production floors. Those were our two overarching goals. To do so, we installed two Legend DTS drying cabinets for screens to dry before and after emulsion, as well as new exposure units, and we created a clockwise workflow. It was our thought that if we could perfect pre-press, we'd have less downtime on press, which is the most costly time during production.

We took significant steps to making product and supply

inventory manageable.

We built a custom shop management program called Stock Up that manages our entire company and orders in a way that has revolutionized the way we do business. It's a full-service shop management system, and handles everything from creating and engaging a client to pricing matrixes. It schedules out all our jobs onto prices and tracks the order all the way to shipping. It even reports margins and labor time. I'm also a Google Apps freak. We especially love Google Docs because it allows us to collaborate in real time.

Now that we've settled into our new facility ...

... our goal is to keep up with demand while at the same time deliver on our two core goals, to innovate the printing industry and deliver superior customer service. We've created a system that's very easy to order from, so our clients remain focused on doing what they do best, like marketing their brands. Meanwhile, we remain focused solely on matching the right inks to garments and hitting the deadline.

We overcame some challenges with the relocation.

The relocation process wasn't great for everyone; we actu-

“I have a giant piece of artwork in my office that states, ‘Creating a system that enables employees to achieve great things often comes down to the work of a single leader.’”

Rich Santo, Culture Studio Custom Screen Printing & Embroidery (asi/700559)

ally went through a period of pretty high turnover when we moved. This size facility was a completely different environment and there were many who weren't attracted to the changes and added responsibility. Our greatest asset is our team. Joe Santo, our vice president of production, is an incredible talent, and his ability to problem solve and train has made us as the printer that can always get the job done.

Efficiency and productivity start with the person in charge.

It's all about the process put in place by the leader. I have a giant piece of artwork in my office that states, “Creating a system that enables employees to achieve great things often comes down to the work of a single leader.” We've done studies of our employees and departments, and it's fascinat-

ing to learn that if the department leader is organized and competent, usually his or her team members share the exact same values and work ethic. The same goes for those who are unorganized and use words like “overwhelmed” and “frustrated” on a daily basis. Oftentimes, those same exact words are used all the way down to the newest member of the team.

When a shop is looking to streamline, the first step is to develop process in each department and implement leaders who are going to oversee it.

My title is president, but I lend a hand wherever I'm needed.

My job is to push the company forward every day and never stop innovating. I still sweep floors, create artwork, run the forklift and try to make something every day.

INTERACT

Phil Stitch Answers

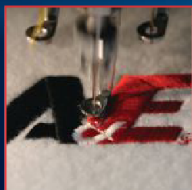


Got a question for Phil?

If you can't find what you're looking for in the 2013 Sourcing Guide, write to: *Stitches*, Attn: Phil Stitch, 4800 Street Rd., Trevose, PA 19053. Or fax your question to (215) 953-3107. For the quickest response, email askphil@asicentral.com. For RN inquiries, visit www.stitches.com for the RN Database link.

P.S. If you join ASI with the brand-new *Stitches* Membership Package, you'll be able to immediately source imprintable products from every ASI supplier member with ASI's ESP Buyer's Guide. Plus, increase sales with your own e-commerce website full of T-shirts, blankets, caps, bags, plush toys and other embroidery-ready items. Call (877) 276-0292 or visit www.joinstitches.com to get started!

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Embroidery Owl
www.embroideryowl.com | 804.693.2581

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KYS Embroidery Supplies
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www.llovet.com | 800.476.5149

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www.pinpointinternational.com | 877.778.9850

S.M. Cristall Company, Inc.
www.smcristall.com | 800.800.9983

Texas Specialties
www.texaspecialties.com | 888.550.3967

I have an A/C customer whose employees crawl through attics. They need cool, durable shirts that won't snag easily. Something that can stand up to a hard day's work and still look good enough to meet with customers.

- Cheryl

Start with SanMar (asi/84863); (800) 426-6399; www.sanmar.com. This supplier's Sport-Tek Side Blocked Sport-Wick Polo (ST655; ladies' version LST655), Sport-Tek Micro Pique Sport-Wick Polo (ST650; ladies' version LST650), and CornerStone Select Snag-Proof Two-Way Colorblock Polo (CS416) all fit the bill.

Stop snags in their tracks with the Ladies' Armour Snag-Protection Long-Sleeve Polo (75111; men's version 85111) from Ash City USA (asi/37127); (866) 274-2489; www.ashcity.com. Finally, stay cool with Century Place Apparel (asi/85988); (704) 790-0970; www.centuryplace.com; the Men's Snag-Proof Performance Polyester Mesh Polo with Pocket (4000) wicks moisture and resists those pesky snags.

I have a customer requesting a crewneck fleece with a kangaroo pouch. Basically a hoodie without the hood. - Gerald

I've got some ideas up my sleeve. First, check out the UltraClub Adult Cool & Dry Sport Crew Neck Fleece (8443) from Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788); (800) 523-2721; www.bodekandrhodes.com. It's available in sizes S-4XL and features moisture-wicking and pill-resistant qualities.

Next, ask the crew at Team Mates Inc. (asi/90674); (866) 866-2837; www.teammatesinc.com; about the Technical Performance Fleece Crew (861EFM0), a polyester fleece sweatshirt with raglan sleeves, self-material cuffs and a three-needle coverstitched waistband. Or, hang out at Pennant Sportswear (asi/79954); (603) 889-5115; www.pennantsportswear.com; this supplier's Hangout Crew Shirt (553) is made of poly/cotton fleece and comes in seven shades.

Where can I find the capes people wear for haircuts? – Alice

You know what they say: hair today, gone tomorrow! Head to USAprons Inc. (asi/93121); (800) 227-8962; www.usaprons.com; the Salon Cape (SALC) measures 37 1/2" x 53", comes in four colors and is made in the USA.

Alternately, Adcapitol (asi/31260); (800) 868-7111; www.adcapitol.com; offers the Haircutting Cape (DA600); made of nylon, it conveniently ties at the back of the neck. Choose from 30 colors to show off any brand. Finally, cut to the chase with the Salon Cape (ASC-011) from Apromos Corp. (asi/36557); (510) 732-9099; www.apromoscorporation.com. Made of 100% nylon, the cape features rounded corners with trim and measures 50" x 53".

My client wants a fleece scarf with built-in pockets. Thanks for your help. – Paula

Stay warm with AMC Line (asi/30217);

(888) 969-9879; www.amcline.com; the Fleece Scarf with Pockets (FSP-8800) features anti-pilling fleece and one pocket on each end to store phones, wallets, keys, etc. Your client might also cozy up to the Fleece Pocket Scarf (W1850) from KC Caps (asi/58760); (800) 321-9888; www.kccaps.com/asi. It's made of polar fleece, measures 74" x 17 1/2" and is fringed at both ends with hand-warmer pockets.

A third option is the Urban Pocket Scarf (SCV592) from FIEL-Fairdeal Import& Export (asi/53509); (800) 851-3435; www.fiel.com. With 9"-deep pockets, this hip, two-tone accessory measures 60" x 6" and is available in 20 color combinations.

I have a client who needs custom cycling jerseys. I know very little about the subject – where can I start? – Ross

A good starting point is Vikru Custom Apparel (asi/93846); (212) 461-4832; www.vikru.com;

where you can find the Viper (V2), the Venom Short Sleeve (V1) and the Strike Long Sleeve (V1a) – all custom cycling jerseys. Then, ride over to Jakroo Custom Apparel (asi/63104); (800) 485-7067 Ext. 1; www.jakroo.com; and check out products Tour, Vuelta, Fondo (SS_Jersey_PD55), and many other options.

Finally, Sublimation X (asi/90027); (877) 276-4666; www.sublimationx.com; offers many semi-custom and full-custom jerseys to fit your client's needs, including products 1850R-MSD, 1800C-MFC, 1800C-MSD and more.

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CORRECTION

The profile of Gayle Zreliak and Kristine Shreve, of Ensign Emblem and EnMart, in December's "Power 75" feature incorrectly listed the name of Zreliak's father. Ed Benjamin founded Ensign Emblem in 1974.



FORWARD THINKING

DTG M4 INDUSTRIAL

4X MORE!

Finally – a Direct to Garment Printer *DESIGNED* with big shops and screen printers in mind. The new DTG M4 high capacity direct to garment printer has arrived.

The new DTG M4 uses the same advanced printing technology as its smaller counterpart, the M2, but with a new platen system that allows printing 4+ t-shirts at a time. OR just go big and take advantage of its 24" x 36" print area. This improved overall efficiency dramatically increases the ROI for the machine, particularly for screen printing shops. Being able to print 4 standard t-shirts at a time means the ability to let the machine run longer without operator interaction, making that employee more productive.

The RIP software included with the DTG M series direct to garment printers is now approximately **30% faster**, further increasing the shop's productivity. The new application can queue an entire days jobs, leaving the artist free to do other things while an operator simply advances from one job to the next.



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INTERACT

Problem Solved

Q *I'm a new shop owner. I thought I needed to stock a lot of inventory to have blanks ready to decorate and ship. Now my inventory area is a mess and I have money tied up in it. What are some inventory best practices to keep me more organized?*



Howard Potter, A&P Master Images (asi/702505):

First, clean up the space and take a count of what you have. Then, figure out what will sell fast, within 30 days or fewer. If it won't sell within that timeframe, mark it down or put your logo on them and give them away or throw them in as extras when doing a customer's order and put their logo on the piece. This will help you reduce overflow and create more sales with existing customers. We only stock white and black T-shirts, because 90% of all our suppliers are no more than a two-day ship from us, so we really have no reason to keep heavy stock. Reducing your stock frees up money for your cash flow.



Andy Shuman, Rockland Embroidery Inc. (asi/83089):

Everyone's situation may be a bit different, and ultimately, it'll depend on your specific business model. Using order history as a gauge can certainly help. Also, limiting the SKUs that you offer on an off-the-shelf basis can eliminate some of the financial stress as well. You can't know exactly what you might need when you're selling from 500-page catalogs.



Deborah Jones, MyEmbroideryMentor.com:

Select core products and get samples in key colors and sizes. You can use suppliers' programs to minimize samples, such as the grommetted samples from SanMar (asi/84863) that are sold for half the wholesale price. A plastic tag is permanently attached to the sample, showing product description, color swatches, companion styles, size ranges

and other information useful for a sales presentation. You may still want to have a size range in your most recommended products. SanMar also offers a return program for samples. Using these programs takes planning, but they keep your sample stock low while still offering a full product range.



Ed Levy, Digitize4u Inc.:

With the abundance of shipping options and suppliers, there's no need to stock a lot of inventory unless you're dealing with something very specific. When I first started, there was no Internet, and shipping locations were so sporadic that I'd sometimes spend an entire day trying to find enough products across five different suppliers to fill my orders. At that time, keeping inventory was more critical. Today, I'd employ a just-in-time practice in which you can order today, have your goods tomorrow or the next day (by ground and free shipping) and avoid tying up funds for inventory that may or may not sell. Of course, you don't want completely empty shelves as you may have emergency orders, fill-ins or damage replacements.



Jimmy Lamb, Sawgrass

Technologies:

A lot depends on your type of business. If you specialize in personalization sold in a retail space (store/kiosk/mobile) where turnaround time has to be quick, then you need inventory on hand. If your typical order is small in size – “onesies and twosies” – you'll also need inventory on hand because it doesn't make sense to order single pieces since many suppliers don't like that, plus shipping could be expen-

sive. If you're dealing with fulfillment orders where you have a few days to deliver, then you really don't need inventory on hand.

If you do need inventory, here are a few simple rules that we used with our retail and mobile operations:

- Stick with the most popular styles, colors and sizes – this will take some time and sales analysis.
- Use inventory as part of your displays to reduce the total number of items required onsite.
- Offer a limited number of products as “Same Day” and most others as “Special Order.”
- If you specialize in personalization, focus on non-apparel inventory, as apparel is the most cumbersome form of inventory.
- If you end up with some slow movers, run some sales on those items only to get people in and product out.
- For your top sellers, buy in bulk to reduce cost and save on shipping.

On a side note, if you deal with personalized and customized products there are certain products that can be bought in a single color and then be digitally printed with colors and patterns. A good example is poly tote bags. You stock one color (white), and then sublimates the front and back for the customer. Then, you can add the desired embroidery or monogram. So instead of carrying 15 different colors, you only need to carry one. Plus, you can charge a higher rate overall because the item is customized in two different ways.

Have a problem you need solved? Send your question for the Stitches Editorial Advisory Board to nrollender@asicentral.com.



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asi/34063

DECORATING SOLUTIONS.....

Five Steps

By Tonia Kimbrough

Create a UV-Reactive Imprint

One way to make a big impact with an imprint is to use UV-reactive inks, which reveal your client's logo or design in sunlight.

1

USE A LOWER MESH SCREEN (110) TO APPLY PHOTOCHROMIC INK (UV INK), ALLOWING MORE INK TO FLOW THROUGH.

Otherwise, the ink lays down very similar to plastisol. You can blend both plastisol and UV inks on the same shirt so that only a portion changes color when it's exposed to sunlight.

2

CHECK YOUR REGISTRATION.

This is important since you won't be able to see ink as it lays down. With really close registration, use a black light to ensure registration is tight.

3

APPLY PLENTY OF UV INK TO THE SCREEN.

Since you can't see it when the ink lays down (other than gel color), it's important to monitor ink in the screen so that you're not missing a coverage area.

4

LOWER YOUR DRYER TEMPERATURE.

Monitor to make sure the UV ink doesn't turn a light brown/yellow color. This is a sign of ink that's over-curing.

5

VIEW THE SCREEN PRINT OUTSIDE TO SEE ITS UV REACTION WITH ACTUAL DAYLIGHT.

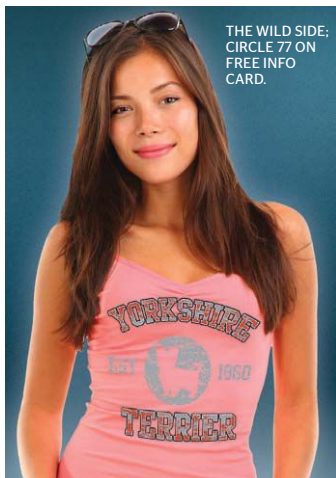


TIP: "UV inks perform best on white 100% cotton shirts," says Bruce Jolesch, president of Garland, TX-based PXP Solutions. "It's something potentially used for a special event or an incentive trip going to a beach location. The inks become intensely colored after only 15 seconds in direct sunlight and return to clear after about 5 minutes indoors."

PXP SOLUTIONS; CIRCLE 76 ON FREE INFO CARD OR CALL (877) 239-3277.

Decorating & Fabric Trends

Old School Pet Prep



THE WILD SIDE:
CIRCLE 77 ON
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Pet Owners Survey found that 68% of U.S. households own a pet – that's 82.5 million homes.

Reach out to the consumers in those households with pet-imprinted apparel and textiles. The Wild Side released a new heat-applied 3-D Vintage Patch collection that focuses on dogs. This line of textured designs uses puff embossing to create a realistic raised-stitch sewn patch.

More than 50 breeds are represented – from Australian Shepherds and Bloodhounds, to Shih Tzus and Vizslas. The full-front artwork features the breed and date it was established. These durable heat-applied graphics can be adhered to any color of shirt that's made of 100% cotton, 100% polyester and cotton-polyester blends. To view the new Vintage Patch dog breed collection, go to www.thewildside.com/heat-transfers/vintage-patch-collection.

Pet stores are at the head of the pack when it comes to sales, according to an IBISWorld industry report noting an annual revenue of more than \$14 billion with a projected annual growth rate of 3.8% for this market through 2017. What's driving such demand? Pet ownership. The 2013-2014 American Pet Products Association's National

Innovation With InFusion

As you kick off 2015, consider what's new in imprinting techniques. An innovative process from Trimark Sportswear Group (asi/92122) called InFusion takes the idea of an "imprint" a step beyond by actually infusing the brand message into the garment.

"It's the new untouchable decoration," says Nadia Baggetta, digital marketing coordinator at Trimark. "The fabrics used for this technique are specialty fabrics engineered with specific yarns for InFusion. They're a proprietary combination of high-spun polyester and cotton. The fabric and technique become one, resulting in a branded garment that's completely breathable and undetectable to the touch with razor-sharp detail."

InFusion also offers unlimited color on one setup. No extra costs are incurred per color. This technique is great for companies with colorful logos or photographic detail – every detail becomes one with the garment. It decorates over seams, zippers and large locations for a trendy, retail feel.



TRIMARK
SPORTSWEAR
GROUP
(ASI/92122);
CIRCLE 78 ON
FREE INFO
CARD.

Score With Basketball Motifs

The 2014-2015 National Basketball Association (NBA) season is in full swing, heading into February. Next month the 2015 NBA All-Star Game is on February 15. Get ready to raise team and fans' spirit with themed apparel.

New basketball clipart and layouts have been added to 'Transfer Express' (asi/91804) website for the 2014-2015 season, ensuring that decorators can easily create fresh new looks for teams, families and fans. Choose from graphics that include clip-art and layouts with basketballs, nets, mascots, male and female players and more. There's also a selection of layouts for leagues, tournaments, championships and team rosters.



With Easy Prints, creating a transfer is as easy as choosing a layout; changing the text, art and colors; and pressing it. Design one or several variations and print them out for your customer to choose which one she likes best.

Save yourself the time and hassle of direct screen printing. Ready-to-apply, one-color designs ship the same day, and by ordering extras, you can easily do fill-ins for clients. Multicolor orders placed before 3 p.m. ET will ship in two working days or less. Visit www.TransferExpress.com to learn more.

TRANSFER EXPRESS (ASI/91804); CIRCLE 79 ON FREE
INFO CARD OR CALL (800) 622-2280.

DECORATING SOLUTIONS.....

Machine & Software Updates

Bold Colors, Fine Detail With New Dye- Sublimation Printer

Roland DGA (asi/18201) introduced the Texart RT-640, an advanced 64" dye-sublimation transfer printer featuring innovative print control technology, powerful ErgoSoft Roland Edition RIP software, and a choice of four- or eight-color ink configurations.

According to Lily Hunter, Roland product manager, the Texart RT-640 incorporates a host of technological advancements that optimize sublimation transfer output while minimizing running costs. "Both the printer and our new specially formulated inks are highly innovative," Hunter says. "Previously, colors sublimated to fabrics could look distorted with dull blacks, missing grays and fuzzy details. The RT-640's variable droplet technology in combination with Roland Texart dye sublimation ink displays bold, vibrant colors and rich velvety blacks, as well as subtle gradations and fine details."

The Texart RT-640 incorporates a gold-plated, anti-static print head capable of printing seven different droplet sizes for



ROLAND DGA (ASI/18201); CIRCLE 80 ON FREE INFO CARD.

smooth gradations and denser color. A newly designed feed adjuster which, in combination with a more powerful fan and an included TU-3 take-up system, ensures added stability for high-speed printing up to 351 square feet per hour.

ErgoSoft Roland Edition RIP is a powerful tool for either four (CMYK) or eight-color (CMYKLcLmOrVi) ink configurations. Hunter explains, "Adding orange and violet inks increases the color gamut and allows for exceptional reds, oranges, deep blues and purples, while light cyan and light magenta provide subtle gradations and beautiful skin tones."

E-Tools for Greater Accessibility

Online tools and software are among the most practical and effective methods for increasing your business and managing the administrative details.

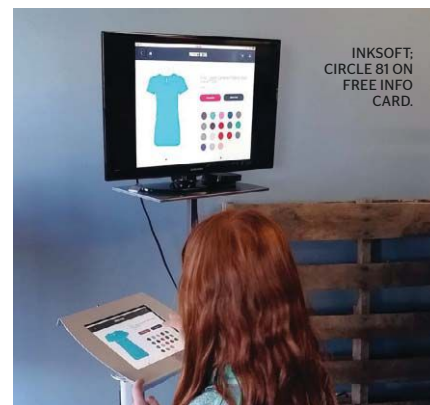
In the fall, InkSoft released a beta version of a new touch-screen kiosk program. The touch-screen kiosk software is specifically designed to be used with a finger swipe and offers many of the most popular features offered in the regular InkSoft online Design Studio. Customers start out with a home screen, which can be customized with any background.

Buyers then choose from a "get started" button or "browse our catalog" button. The get started button prompts the customer through the process of creating a design. The browse catalog button allows a user to see if the product is available before

starting the design process. An online video walks the user through all the features available and explains how to use the program. Learn more about program availability at www.inksoft.com.

For the latest in Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), consider S&S Activewear's (asi/84358) newest proprietary system called ApparelSync. EDI, the computer-to-computer exchange of documents, has become a standard for business-to-business collaboration across the apparel industry. With ApparelSync EDI, integrated customers are connected to real-time inventory, pricing, product information and automated ordering and invoicing.

"Once integrated with our ApparelSync, the most up-to-date product information, images and prices are available to our customers continuously," says Margaret Crow,



INKSOFT;
CIRCLE 81 ON
FREE INFO
CARD.

director of marketing at S&S. "When our customers' computer systems generate a purchase order, an order with any of our three national locations is automatically generated and transmitted to us, and an order confirmation is sent right back. It's completely worry-free, creating time for our customers to focus on managing their business, not their supply chain." For more information, email api@ssactivewear.com.

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S&S ACTIVEWEAR

Bolingbrook, IL
www.ssactivewear.com

american sportswear

Santa Fe Springs, CA
www.americanasportswear.com

HERITAGE Sportswear + VAT's
VIRGINIA T-SHIRT COMPANY

Ohio, Virginia, Florida
www.herspw.com
www.virginians.com

thinc ACTIONWEAR

Portland, OR
www.thincactionwear.com

ALL AMERICAN TEES

Lubbock, TX
www.allamericantees.com

AMERICAN T-SHIRT COMPANY

Honolulu, HI
www.american-shirt.com

HO-BROWN
ENTERPRISES LIMITED

Ontario, Canada
www.hobrown.com

www.nextlevelapparel.com

asi/73867

By Theresa Hegel

Advertising Specialty Spending on the Rise

Sales of promotional products were strong in 2014, on pace once again to beat spending on mobile, radio and TV advertising. Revenues in the advertising specialty industry, which reached \$20.5 billion in 2013, were up about 6% year-over-year in the first half of 2014, according to research by *Stitches'* parent company, the Advertising Specialty Institute.

Research firm eMarketer estimated that spending on mobile advertising on smartphones and tablets would hit nearly \$18 billion in 2014, followed by newspapers at nearly \$17 billion and radio at \$15.5 billion. For 18 consecutive quarters, both suppliers and distributors of logoed or branded promotional products have reported increasingly bigger sales, a 5.1% increase for suppliers and 6.1% jump

for distributors who sell promo products and logoed wearables in the second quarter of 2014, compared to the same quarter the previous year. Distributors remained bullish about the rest of the year, with two-thirds expecting an increase over 2013, according to ASI research.

"Low-cost, high-impact promotional products continue to attract major marketing dollars from businesses who want to spread the word about their brand, company or event because they allow even small companies to achieve as high an ROI as major corporations," says Timothy M. Andrews, president and CEO of ASI. "Further, end-buyers consistently remember the advertisers on logoed items and feel good about the brands on promo products they use day in and day out. How many people say that about TV commercials or pop-up ads?"

Polyconcept Unveils Supplier Affiliate Market Place

Polyconcept North America (PCNA) has launched a new website, serving as a single gateway to all its brands and offering product access to select PCNA affiliate supplier partners.

On the site, www.pcna.com, a decorator or distributor will be able to find products from any PCNA brand, including Leed's (asi/66887), Bullet (asi/42424), JournalBooks (asi/91340) and Trimark (asi/92122). The website also provides a "Market Place" tool that decorators and distributors can use to see items from certain non-PCNA brands. Those items can be purchased through Bullet.

"PCNA has partnered with select, high-quality suppliers that offer promotional prod-

ucts that complement those offered by the PCNA companies," says David Nicholson, president of PCNA. "Market Place benefits [our clients] by providing easy access to a wider range of suppliers without the need to manage a large number of vendors in their systems."

The initial PCNA affiliate is Chocolate Inn/Taylor & Grant (asi/44900), which will offer seven of its items through the Market Place tool. Additional affiliates and products will be added over time, according to PCNA. Each affiliate will have its own virtual storefront in the PCNA Market Place section, but the products are also included, as appropriate, in searches done within Leed's, Bullet and Trimark Powered by Leed's.

Lewtan Industries Chairman Dies at 88

Marvin Lewtan, founder and chairman of supplier Lewtan Industries (asi/67230), died in October at 88, after nearly 70 years in the promotional products industry. Family members say Lewtan loved his company and the advertising specialty industry so much that he was literally at the office until the day he died. Lewtan founded the company in 1947 with his predeceased brother, Robert, offering the popular Mighty Grip Jar Opener. Other products include lanyards, wallets, towels and bags, many of which are manufactured in the U.S.

Lewtan is survived by three children, nine grandchildren and a sister. He was predeceased by Jane Sodokoff Lewtan, his wife of 37 years.

Event Calendar

Jan. 4-6, Orlando
ASI Show
(800) 546-3300;
www.asishow.com

Jan. 13-14, New York
Indigo Show
(646) 351-1942;
www.indigo-salon.com

Jan. 16-18, Long Beach, CA
ISS Shows
(508) 743-0532;
www.issshows.com

Jan. 16-19, Seattle
Seattle Gift Show
(678) 285-3976;
www.seattlegiftshow.com

Jan. 17-20, Oaks, PA
Philadelphia Gift Show
(678) 285-3976;
www.philadelphiagiftshow.com

Jan. 19-23, Boston; Long Island, NY; NJ; Philadelphia; Baltimore
ASI Roadshow
(800) 546-3300;
www.asiroadshow.com

Jan. 25-29, Toronto, ON
Toronto Gift Show
(800) 611-6100;
www.torontogiftshow.org

Jan. 31-Feb. 2, Orlando
Orlando Gift Show
(678) 285-3976;
www.orlandogiftshow.com

Jan. 31-Feb. 4, New York
New York International Gift Fair
(800) 272-7469;
www.nynow.com

Embroidered Linen Napkins an Everyday Luxury

These aren't your grandmother's table linens. Dublin textile designer Jennifer Slattery is gaining acclaim for her minimalist designs that show off both artistry and a sense of whimsy, like a set of fine Irish linen napkins bearing the dark blue, embroidered outline of flatware. "I studied graphic design in college, and I had the idea of making cutlery-themed table linens. I made some for my degree show in 2010," Slattery tells the *Irish Independent*. "I was just doing

it for fun, but people really liked it, and it sold out on the first day."

Slattery says her napkins are designed to be used regularly, not packed away to gather dust: "Years ago, table linen was put away for special occasions, but washing machines have come a long way since then. Everything that I do is machine-washable. It's supposed to be used."

Slattery works with small-scale Irish manufacturers who cut and sew her creations, but she does the embroidery in her



own studio. "It's nice to be able to work with locally woven fabric," she says. "It's helping create employment in Ireland. That's important to me."

Living Wage Garment Factory Gaining Foothold

A four-year-old "grand experiment" in sweatshop-free labor is proving that the garment industry can thrive while providing workers with a safe environment and a living wage, according to the *Huffington Post*. Alta Gracia, an apparel factory in the Dominican Republic, pays workers three times the country's minimum wage.

The plant, which produces collegiate wear for South Carolina-based Knights Apparel, is regularly monitored by the Worker Rights Consortium, an independent group. "If we can get every factory in the

industry to be like this, I would retire," the consortium's director, Scott Nova, tells *HuffPo*. "There would be very little left for labor-rights activists to do in the garment sector."

A report from Georgetown University finds that Alta Gracia is "transitioning from a fragile startup to a stable firm." The business brought in about \$11 million in sales in 2013. The brand is now sold at more than 800 college campuses across the U.S., and company officials expect to have reached \$16 million in sales by the end of 2014. Joe Bozich, chief executive of Knights Apparel, tells the *Huffington Post* he believes

this year will be the first time Alta Gracia is profitable. "It's working," he says. "Four years ago, when we started this, nobody knew. Nobody's ever tried what we're doing with an apparel factory."

Maritza Vargas, a 49-year-old union leader, says Alta Gracia is unlike any other job she's had during her 25 years as a factory worker. She and her colleagues aren't forced to work extra hours, but receive overtime pay if they do; plus, they receive frequent breaks. "It's as simple as understanding that we're human beings, not machines," she says through a translator.

Butcher Donates \$800,000 in Historic Embroidery

Oxford's Ashmolean Museum has beefed up its collection of historic English embroidery, thanks to a generous donation from an organic butcher. Michael Feller and his wife, Elizabeth, of Upper Slaughter in England's Cotswolds region, donated 61 pieces of 17th-century needlework worth around \$800,000 to the gallery.

"My wife's mother, Margaret, was a fantastic seamstress and planted a love of embroidery," Feller, 69, tells the *Oxford Mail*. "After Elizabeth and I got married, we started to collect embroidered cushions from the 19th and 20th century. They were all hand-done, and that's how the collection got started." He notes that the pieces he and his wife donated were given on the condition that at least some of them would remain on permanent display.

The donation includes pictorial panels, samplers, domestic items and costume pieces. According to the Ashmolean, the embroidery has historical significance beyond the display of technical ability. Created during one of the most turbulent centuries in English history, the embroideries illustrate the themes and concerns of the young women who made them.

SALES

Website Keeps Team Ordering Orderly

The traditional method of personalizing team uniforms with player names and numbers can be a painful, labor-intensive administrative process for decorators and distributors, involving emailed PDF forms, often filled out by hand, with plenty of room for mistakes. “My belief is that every time you touch a piece of paper, you have a chance for an error,” says Patrick Doyle, owner of Proforma Synergy in Pickering, Ontario.

So, when he landed a contract to provide branded apparel for a huge three-day event earlier last year, Doyle knew he needed to come up with a better, more organized system. The Provincial Championships are held annually by the Ontario Women’s Hockey Association and attract more than 10,000 players and thousands of fans and employees. Doyle created a website, owha.teamordering.ca, for the event that streamlined the preordering process, allowing customers to choose styles, sizes, upload team logos and personalize the apparel. Each change made to the order instantly updates the total price, keeping costs transparent. “As a distributor, I don’t have anything to do. The customer does everything,” Doyle says. “I basically figured out how to take 9,000 sheets of paper and shave it down into 20 pieces of paper.”

During the three-day championships, Doyle’s team processed thousands of orders, selling 10 times more garments than the vendor who had worked the event the year before. “It was so seamless,” Doyle says. The online store was so successful that the OWHHA has continued to use it long after the event to take apparel orders and has already awarded Doyle the contract to handle next year’s championships.

For Doyle, the best part is that his online store solution works for any athletic team or event, making ordering uniforms and spirit wear easy for both the distributor or decorator and the client. “In my mind, I’ve created something that is so totally unique to the industry,” he says. “I’ve made team ordering easy and flexible.”



WEB

Sort Stock to Rock Fulfillment

In the last four years, Hatfield, PA-based Cold Cuts (asi/528781) has shipped out more than 75,000 orders from its online band merchandise store. Not bad, when you consider musician and Owner John Bowes started his screen-printing operation in 2007 while on tour in Northern California. “I decided to cut out the middle man and print my own T-shirts,” he says, so he bought a used four-color tabletop press. “It was a piece of junk. I definitely got ripped off. I had no idea,” Bowes adds.

He quickly learned the ropes, and by 2010, he’d moved his business out of his mom’s garage and into a rented warehouse. He’d also scrapped the junk press, in favor of two automatic presses, a manual press, as well as several embroidery heads and a heat press.



That was also the year Cold Cuts launched its e-commerce site. The decorator handles logoed apparel for more than 100 bands, and is the official store for pop punk band The Wonder Years.

Keeping inventory organized is a challenge, but Cold Cuts has a system that allows employees to “fly through” the day’s orders and pick and pack shipments easily, Bowes says. The shop uses bins with dividers to store preprinted shirts – all neatly folded and bagged – separating each by size. The bins are sorted by SKU number, and Cold Cuts is working on barcoding everything to enable easy scanning. Overstock, “a constant challenge,” is boxed up and kept on shelves with a list outlining which row contains which merchandise, Bowes says. “I set it up like the department store where I used to work,” he adds. “Our system for order fulfillment is awesome now.”

SHOP MAKEOVER

Software Helps Growing Shop Run Smoothly

A few years ago, Pete Bolsoni rebranded his 14-year-old printing shop, changing the name to Same Day Tees (asi/466828) and refocusing on contract work for the advertising specialty industry. The Peotone, IL-based decorator also purchased additional equipment – several embroidery heads and a digital printer.

Since then, business has been booming, and the shop handles large-volume orders with aplomb: whether it's 50,000 eco-friendly gift towels for retail or 10,000 T-shirts for a celebrity-studded benefit concert. Same Day Tees has clients around the world. "It seems like every day we're doing something different," Bolsoni says. He's also been pleasantly surprised by how many customers are willing to shell out a premium for the shop's rush service. "It's amazing how many people need something in one to three days," he adds.

The rapid growth required an investment into organization, and Bolsoni purchased shop-management software a little over a year ago to ensure a smooth operation. "Before we rebranded,



we had a few orders going here and had no problem with just doing them in Excel," he says. But as Same Day Tees' workforce grew, it became necessary to have a system to keep track of artwork approvals and workflow. "We were spending too much time looking back at orders and not keeping track. That was a big thing."

MARKETING

T-shirt Fundraising Site Starts Strong

Gabe Peters wanted to help out a college friend diagnosed with cervical cancer. So, the vice president of merchandising for Indianapolis-based distributor Rector Communications (asi/305623) decided to set up an online T-shirt designer, powered by InkSoft's Web store and fundraising software. Peters says he liked the idea of raising money for good causes by "doing stuff we're already doing anyway." Launched this past summer, *InkTheCause.com* has raised more than \$16,000 for 15 different causes, surprising Peters and others at Rector by its almost-instant popularity.

"I expected to sell 20 to 30 shirts from the campaign for my friend," Peters says. Instead, he sold more than 100 and was able to write



her a check for nearly \$1,000. "To be able to do that is a pretty cool thing."

But the site's biggest cause to date went to the Indianapolis Fraternal Order of Police. Ink The Cause started the #StopTheViolence campaign after the shooting death of Indianapolis Metropolitan police Officer Perry Renn. On July 5, Renn responded to a report of shots fired. During an exchange of gunfire with the suspect, Renn was fatally hit with a bullet from an assault rifle, according to reports. The officer's death struck a nerve with a city already dealing with an increase in violence, Peters says.

Within a few weeks, thanks in part to a local TV station spot, Ink The Cause sold more than 1,500 T-shirts with the words: "#StopTheViolence – Indy Strong." Ink The Cause gave police \$12,000 to help families of fallen officers.

Look Book

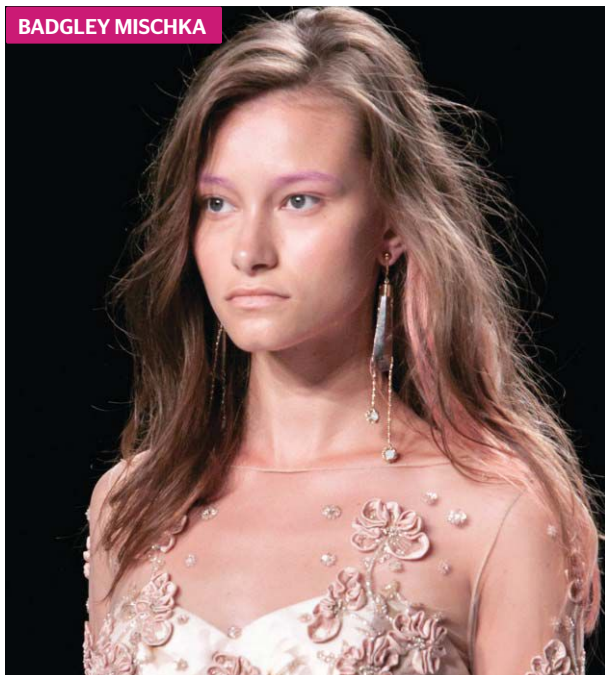
Trends

By Mariana Leung, designer and publisher of Msfabulous.com
Photography: Mariana Leung

New York Fashion Week

New York Fashion Week for spring 2015 celebrated color and romance, as evening wear designers walked richly embellished glamorous gowns. Designers who traditionally produce sportswear also added innovative embroideries to upgrade their collections. *Stitches* scoped out two designer runways that stood out for their embroidery this season.

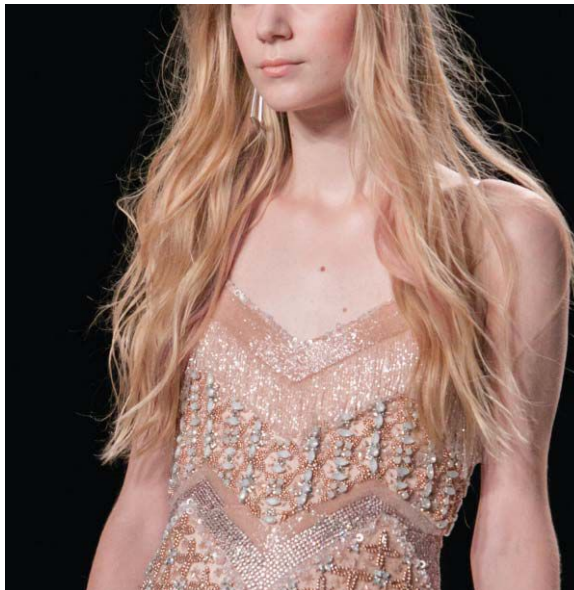
BADGLEY MISCHKA



Badgley Mischka's dream dress pairs a subtle floral print with a tulle top decked out in floral-motif satin ribbon embroidery.



This peach beaded tulle gown takes bling and beadwork to a new level, showing how a complicated floral motif can, at the same time, look so effortless.



The design duo Mark Badgley and James Mischka celebrated 25 years of their popular evening wear label with their spring 2015 collection that nods to florals and romance. Their runway was a parade of elegant day looks and dream gowns. For daytime, their paired fluid silk pants and flirty skirts with tweed jackets with motorcycle styling or luxury cardigans. The show-stopper evening wear combined a gorgeous palette of light purple, pale blue, and different shades of gray and caramel.

The most elegant dresses were lavishly embroidered with jewels, moonstones and satin flowers. Badgley and Mischka layered embroidery on top of lace or embellished soft tonal prints, and used rich beading to accent an elaborate cherry blossom pattern.

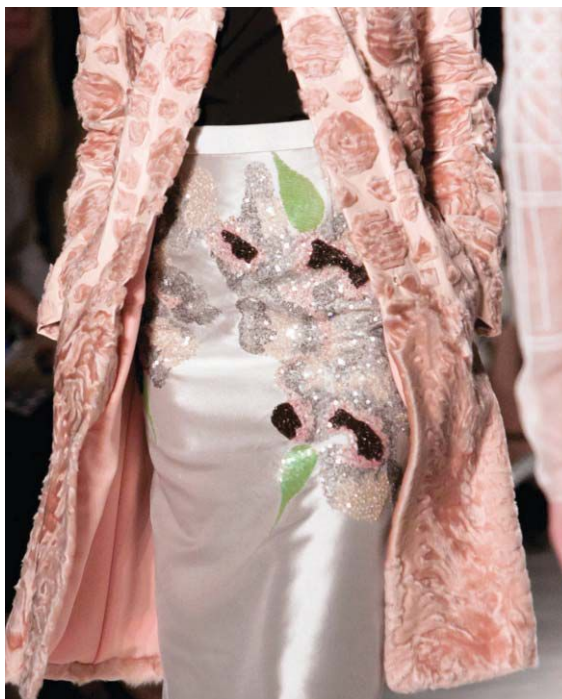
TIP: Embellishing sheer fabric with opaque ribbon and jewels looks rich. Mixing different material finishes, from crystals to iridescent gems, and cabochons to multi-stones, highlights the embroidery even more. Upgrade your prints by using embellishments that pick up the accent colors. Embroider motifs that echo the patterns of the fabric, but in a different scale or placement. This highlights the embroidery's artisanal look.

BIBHU MOHAPATRA

This white and quilted oxblood crepe gown sparkled with an expansive beaded floral detail.



For a chic day look that played off the gown embellishment, Bibhu Mohapatra paired a satin silk skirt with the same beaded floral detail as on the crepe gown (*above*) with a pink flocked floral coat.



Bibhu Mohapatra's spring 2015 collection took glamour cues from the 1920s and 1930s. The show was a tribute to heiress Nancy Cunard, a contemporary of artistic greats like Ernest Hemingway and Man Ray.

The designer's color palette was stark, with black, ivory, oxblood red, pale blue and orange mixed with geometric patterns. These wicker basket-like prints were interpreted in different scales and distorted across luxury fabrics, and softer rose and red colors were reserved for embroidered styles.

Mohapatra often styled the models with a retro turban and sunglasses like the madcap heiresses of old Hollywood movies. Bias-draped evening gowns exuded the old-world glamour of the silver screen. The designer's oversized beaded flower motifs paired with pale pink satin reminded were also a big retro nod.

TIP: Embroidering a mix of cut bugle beads and dainty sequins is an easy way to create a painterly effect on fabric. By stitching in an organic pattern, you can control the density and colors to illustrate the look you want to achieve on your garment.

Look Book

Trend Alerts

By Patricia Cangelosi

APPAREL

Geometric Prints

From sporty squares to captivating circles, geometric prints are huge in the fashion world, and the trend has infiltrated the decorated apparel industry in a big way. Samanta Cortes, a fashion designer based in New York and owner of *TXInstitute.org*, says, "You'll most likely see geometric prints on strong, confident women. The trend is mostly seen in metropolitan areas."

Cortes points out that this trend was very popular in the '70s, but it never entirely disappeared. "It's not just a fad," she says. "From the details on trims, embroidery and small, soft prints, designers have never stopped using these designs in their collections." She advises apparel decorators to keep geometric prints smaller and more understated for conservative or corporate audiences, but to go bigger and bolder for those who really want to make a statement and stand out.

Gina Barreca, director of marketing at Vantage Apparel (asi/93390), points out the versatility of geometric prints. "As far as colors and decoration, there aren't any limitations," she says. "It really depends on the specific pattern and design." Any industry would be a potential target as well, as long as the design reflects the style of the brand being presented.



With moisture-wicking qualities and a contrast checkerboard print, the Izod Checkerboard Blocked Jersey Polo (IZOD0130) from Vantage Apparel (asi/93390; circle 85 on Free Info Card) comes in black caviar/gray or bright white/ultra blue.



Check out this unique Knitted Hat (2509) from Mega Cap Inc. (asi/70434; circle 86 on Free Info Card). Made of 100% polyester, it features a jacquard-blocked design and is available in aqua/white, coffee/white or navy/white; decorated by Tempe, AZ-based AzCa Embroidery (circle 87 on Free Info Card).



PHOTO: PIER MARCO TACCA

▲ Squares, diamonds and circles dance across this eye-catching outfit. The model walked the runway at the Fausto Puglisi show, part of Milan's Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2015 showcase.



The Basic Backpack (2045P) from Everest Trading Corp. (asi/52887; circle 88 on Free Info Card) comes in many fun prints, including this bright geometric design. It features a large main compartment, a front zippered pocket and padded shoulder straps.

COLOR

Glacier Gray

According to Pantone's *Spring 2015 Fashion Color Report*, Glacier Gray is one of the hottest – and coolest – shades to watch in the coming months. Pantone describes the hue as “nature’s most perfect neutral,” a timeless color that’s “quietly assuring and peacefully relaxing.”

In promotional apparel, the color works well with laser-etching and “creates a subtle, tonal effect,” says John Perez, marketing associate at Tri-Mountain (asi/92125). Perez emphasizes the versatility of gray: “It’s a great neutral color for branding and, for the most part, doesn’t clash with logo colors. The color is so versatile, so it’s a good match for virtually any target audience.”

Elson Yeung, director of private label design and merchandising for alphabroder (asi/34063), describes this shade of gray as “a neutral tone that offers something different from the traditional black and navy. Target customers who are looking for something different, and those who are more aware of the current trends in fashion and world of sports.” He adds that gray works well for a “professional, polished look” or an “executive/corporate look.”

Pair gray with just about any color, as it’s nearly impossible to find something that clashes with it.

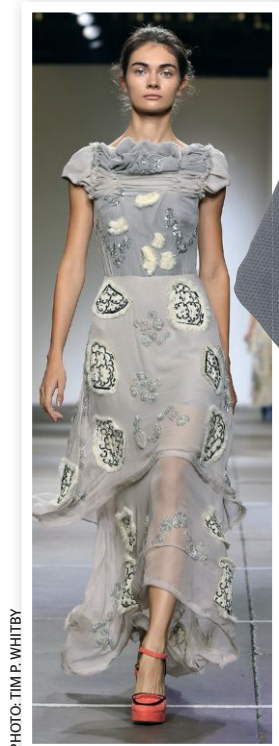


PHOTO: TIM P. WHITBY

▲ This gorgeous dress features ruffles, layers, striking decoration and the coolest color of the season: Glacier Gray. It was displayed at the Michael van der Ham show during London Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2015.



The Men's Moisture Wicking Pullover Shirt (638) is available from Tri-Mountain (asi/92125; circle 89 on Free Info Card) in five popular colors, including gray. It features contrast stitching accents for a sporty look and UltraCool moisture-wicking technology.



Also from Tri-Mountain (circle 89 on Free Info Card) is the Gala Women's Jersey Polo (KL209), which features UltraCool moisture-wicking technology, as well as a self-fabric Johnny collar and princess seams.



Alphabroder (asi/34063; circle 90 on Free Info Card) carries the Alternative Ladies' Slouchy Pullover (AA1990) in Eco Gray and other colors. The sweatshirt, which includes recycled polyester and organic cotton, is ultra-soft and draped for a flattering fit; decorated by Howard Potter, CEO of Utica, NY-based A&P Master Images (asi/702505; circle 91 on Free Info Card).

Look Book

Trend Alerts

EMBELLISHMENT

3-D Embroidery

Three-dimensional embroidery is an embellishment method that, quite literally, helps brands stand out. In order to create 3-D embroidery, the decorator begins with a layer of EVA plastic cut in the shape of the decoration or logo. Then, the embroidered design is sewn over top of the plastic to create a raised effect.

"3-D embroidery seems to appeal to the younger male demographic, ages 18 to 30," says Jessica Strain, marketing manager at Dri Duck Traders Inc. (asi/50835). "These individuals are looking for unique items with a high perceived value."

3-D embroidery is especially popular on caps. "We've discovered a niche in the headwear market by decorating the side of the cap and leaving the front open for company decoration," Strain says.

Rich Medcraft, owner of StitchWise Embroidery Design in Eagle Point, OR, cautions that 3-D embroidery – also called puff embroidery – has limited applications. "Polyester thread is a must, since it can handle the heat," he advises. "There are some logos that it won't work for."



This striking, six-panel 3-D Wildlife Series Cap (D3307) from River's End Trading (asi/82588; circle 93 on Free Info Card) is made of cotton chino twill with an adjustable Velcro back strap.

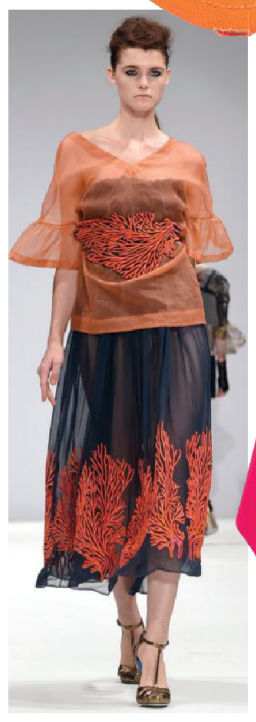


PHOTO: BENA PRUCHNIE

▲ This electrifying ensemble shows off bright, bold 3-D embroidery on both the top and the skirt. This look debuted at the Vita Gottlieb show during London Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2015.

Fersten Worldwide (asi/53974; circle 92 on Free Info Card) supplies this Men's Three-Layer Performance Soft Shell Jacket (FW3131), featuring waterproof and breathable fabric, a detachable hood, microfleece lining, a right-side chest pocket and an interior security pocket with audio port access.



The lovely Ladies Lightweight French Terry ¼ Zip Pullover (3764) from Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788; circle 94 on Free Info Card) is made from 60% combed, ringspun cotton/40% polyester with a taped neck, double-needle hemmed sleeves and a shirt tail bottom; digitized and embroidered by Nancy Mini, senior marketing specialist and resident embroiderer at Madeira USA (circle 95 on Free Info Card).



This apron was constructed especially for *Stitches* by Nancy Mini, senior marketing specialist and resident embroiderer at Madeira USA, who also digitized and embroidered the design.



Check out the Carry-All Tote Bag (1000-104) from Otto International (asi/75350; circle 96 on Free Info Card), which features protective PVC lining, reinforced dual web shoulder straps, exterior side pockets, and an interior hanging pocket in six colors; decorated by Madeira USA (circle 95 on Free Info Card); digitized and embroidered by Nancy Mini, senior marketing specialist and resident embroiderer at Madeira USA.

Showcase: Leggings and Socks

Leggings and socks provide a great way to warm up in style and advertise a hot brand at the same time. “Leggings are versatile,” says Jamie Henry, product development manager at Boxercraft (asi/41325). “You can dress them up, wear them with boots and a sweater or with your favorite T-shirt or pullover for a comfortable, casual look.”

According to Henry, dance and cheer groups and college-age women are ideal targets for promotional leggings. “We see all-over printed leggings in patterns including Aztec designs, geometric and floral as most popular and trendy right now,” she says. “On trend today are large side-leg prints as well as prints on the back calf of the leggings.”

Another trend afoot is the promotional sock, and Charles Badgett, owner of Sports Solutions Inc. (asi/88876), explains why. “Everyone wears socks, and socks can be a low-cost option as a promotional item,” he says. And quality is key. “Socks can take on a higher perceived value (and better bang for advertising budgets) if they’re well-made. Each time an end-user wears it, they see the logo on the sock, which increases brand awareness and associates the brand with quality.” In Badgett’s experience, white and black are the most popular sock colors. For decoration, many customers request custom knit-in logos, which create a higher perceived value. Other sock decorating options include direct embroidery, appliqué or sublimation.



Get these snazzy Spandex Pants from B-Skinz (asi/37823; circle 97 on Free Info Card) in a solid or any of over 100 available patterns, available in sizes XS-XL.



Days Off Designs (asi/48720; circle 104 on Free Info Card) carries these Stretch Pants (RWSP), made of 95% polyester/5% spandex and available with full-coverage sublimation.



Boxercraft (asi/41325; circle 103 on Free Info Card) distributes these Ladies’ Love ‘Em Leggings (S08); constructed of 90% cotton/10% spandex, these lovely leggings are available in a variety of sizes and colors.

Get a leg up on the competition with the Cotton Spandex Jersey Legging (8328) from American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 98 on Free Info Card). Made of 95% cotton/5% elastane, this form-fitting legging is designed for superior screen-printing results and features an elastic waistband for flexibility and comfort; decorated by Howard Potter, CEO of Utica, NY-based A&P Master Images (asi/702505; circle 91 on Free Info Card).



The High Performance Wicking Crew Sock (Sock S005C) from Sports Solutions Inc. (asi/88876; circle 99 on Free Info Card) is made in the USA, as are all socks from this supplier. This sock is designed with moisture-wicking material and a supportive arch keeps it in place and provides a superior fit.

These Unisex Stripe Knee High Socks (RSASKL) from American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 98 on Free Info Card) are manufactured in the USA from 80% cotton/15% nylon/5% elastane. Sporting a triple stripe pattern, they’re ultra-soft with a comfortable, breathable cotton blend; decorated by World Emblem International (asi/98264; circle 100 on Free Info Card).



Get your game on with the Game Sock (6025) from Staton Corporate and Casual (asi/89380; circle 101 on Free Info Card); this knee-length tube sock is made of 91% nylon/5% polyester/4% elastic and is available in 11 colors (including teal and gold); decorated by Penn Emblem Co. (asi/77120; circle 102 on Free Info Card).

These Stripe Thigh High Socks (RSASKTH) from American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 98 on Free Info Card) are made in the USA of 85% poly/13% nylon/2% elastane. With a fun triple stripe pattern, they’re comfortable, breathable and ultra-soft; decorated by World Emblem International (asi/98264; circle 100 on Free Info Card).



Look Book

Niche: Pet-Related Apparel

Pets are part of the family,” says Kimberly Damp, sales and marketing coordinator for Promopet (asi/79698), echoing the sentiment of millions of pet lovers nationwide. “People love their pets like children, and a marketing campaign tends to be a hit when pet promotions are included.” This is especially true, Damp says, when such promotions include apparel, and owners can dress up their furry friends like “team members.”

When it comes to pet apparel, Damp says, screen printing and full-color logo heat transfers work well – think jerseys, T-shirts and bandanas. “Pet apparel is great for team spirit/fundraising at all education levels, but particularly the collegiate/university level,” she says. Other markets that are ripe for pet apparel include campaign awareness sponsorships, parades, runs and walks.

“Any team, school or community sports program can offer pet apparel or pet-themed promotions to pump-up the positive vibes for the new season,” Damp says. In fact, almost every market can find a successful way to stand out by using pet apparel in a clever promotion.” Damp also points out that bandanas are an excellent option for budget-conscious customers.

The pet market creates endless opportunities, so don’t miss a chance to capitalize on the cuteness.



Keep Fluffy warm in the Flex Fleece Dog Zip Hoodie (F997) from American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 98 on Free Info Card), featuring a kangaroo pocket, zipper closure and an opening in the back for a leash clasp; decorated by Carolyn Cagle, owner of Stacy, MN-based Strikke Knits LLC (circle 106 on Free Info Card). The “King of the Castle” design features a stylized heart from Erich Campbell, digitizer and e-commerce manager at Albuquerque-based Black Duck Inc. (asi/700415; circle 107 on Free Info Card).

The Kool Off Pet Bandanna (112) from Sparkling Earth Products (asi/88449; circle 105 on Free Info Card) will keep pets cool. It’s made in the USA and comes in many colors.



This Pet Jersey (705) from Promopet (asi/79698; circle 108 on Free Info Card) is made of 100% mesh and polyester interlock; it’s machine-washable and available in seven colors so pets can support the team in style.



Constructed from poly/cotton twill, the Pet Grooming Apron (705-6426) from Promopet (asi/79698; circle 108 on Free Info Card) includes two patch pockets and a neck strap with a buckle for an adjustable fit.

Protect furry friends with the All-Weather Dog Coat (PE1305) from Bonica Precision (asi/40903; circle 109 on Free Info Card).

It contains a waterproof outer coat, a removable fleece liner and a two-way buckle fastening system to adjust the fit. Choose pink, brown or navy; decorated by Carolyn Cagle, owner of Stacy, MN-based Strikke Knits LLC (circle 106 on Free Info Card).



Available in gray/light blue or white/black, the Striped Dog Polo Shirt (PT8804) from Atteff International (asi/37455; circle 110 on Free Info Card) is soft and comfortable inside and out and features a snap-button collar; decorated by Howard Potter, CEO of Utica, NY-based A&P Master Images (asi/702505; circle 91 on Free Info Card).

Inspiration: Maria Damon

“Follow your inner moonlight, don’t hide the madness.” Maria Damon quotes Allen Ginsberg as advice to apparel decorators – or any artist. Damon is a poet, author and chair of the Humanities and Media Studies department at Pratt Institute in New York. She’s also a textile artist who bridges the gap between the visual and the written word. She began experimenting with cross-stitch at a young age, when her mother took her to Denmark for their summers. “I have no training in art or textile production beyond what I learned from my relatives in Denmark, a floor-loom weaving class at age 14 and some weekend workshops in weaving or spinning since then,” she says.

Damon sees her cross-stitch pieces as visual poems: “Most of the work is generated in response to a relationship, for the most part in the poetry or literary community. I make them for people because something they said or wrote or stand for, or what they represent in the community or to me, has touched me deeply.”

Damon focuses on her process, and “the unfinished and the unsaid, the unfinished and the unsayable.” Some works of art may never be complete, and Damon loves that: “The raw, the unfinished, the still-throbbing-with-desire-to-become, is beautiful above all else.”



Maria Damon's work can be viewed in several online publications, including *jacket2*, org/article/desiring-visual-texts, *www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/lettrist*, www.hyperpoesia.net and *jacketmagazine.com/37/damon-by-funkhouser.shtml*.



Get Organized 2015

**Clean Up Your
Shop and Increase
Productivity**

Organized!

Don't wait until spring for cleaning.

Make organization a part of your New Year's resolutions to save time, increase profits and bring peace of mind.

By Theresa Hegel

A devoted client once gave Rhonda Johnson a set of delicate appliques she'd unstitched from her wedding dress, hoping the northern California seamstress would one day be able to incorporate them into a project for her. Fast-forward four years: The same client decided those one-of-a-kind heirloom pieces were a perfect complement for her upcoming silver anniversary. The only problem? "I couldn't find those appliques anywhere," Johnson says, recalling with a laugh the length of her fruitless search for the treasured lacework.

Last January, the owner of sewing and embroidery shop WeSew4U was tidying up and moved her heat press away from the wall, only to discover an envelope that had been tucked behind. Johnson was about to trash the packet, but something made her take a peek first. Inside were the appliques she'd been seeking for so long – with just enough time to complete her cli-

ent's anniversary sewing commission. "I have a habit of losing things," Johnson says. "I always find them eventually, but I waste a lot of time hunting for things that I know I have and can't find."

Johnson, a self-described "creative type," admits to feeling "more comfortable in a bit of disarray," but even she knows how quickly cozy clutter can descend into chaos. "I'm certain that I'm not the only one who turns off the lights at the end of a busy day and sacrifices daily organizational habits," she says.

But the price of that sacrifice may be more than just a perennially messy workspace: A disorganized shop is likely losing time, money and even customers. After all, few clients would be patient – or loyal – enough to wait four years for an order. Johnson says she was inspired to organize her shop after reading *Stitches'* August cover story, "Can This Shop Be Saved?" (read this story in our archives on *Stitches.com*) and seeing the uncanny parallels to her own situation. "Almost everything that was written about Point Embroidery & Screen could have been written about me,"

she notes. “Sometimes you need a kick in the pants.”

That’s not a surprise to industry veterans. “I go into so many businesses where everything is so jumbled up,” says Joyce Jagger, The Embroidery Coach. “They have no idea where anything is. It’s just a mess.” Jagger and other experts say organization is the key to a successful business: “Your place needs to be neat and clean at all times. Sometimes that’s hard when you have an embroidery business, but it’s totally necessary.”

Read on for a slew of organizational tips from the pros that are sure to point your shop toward a productive 2015.

Everything in Its Place

One of the first rules of organization, experts say, is to ensure every tool and supply has a home and is stored there consistently. In creating an organizational system, it’s important to think about when and how often each item is used. “We organize our shop floor by basically thinking about it like real estate,” says Marshall Atkinson, chief operating officer for Milwaukee-based contract shop Visual Impressions. “Prime real estate is next to the equipment where you’re working. Nothing is there unless you need it. ... If I’m organizing, I put things I hardly ever touch up on a shelf far away in a back corner. The things I will need five minutes from now are right next to me. Everything else is in between.”

Keeping track of your tools and supplies has another benefit, says Andrea Brundage, a professional organizer based in Arizona. “It saves you money because you’re not making duplicate purchases,” she says. “If your scissors are missing, you know they’re gone because they’re not in their home. Disorganized people will often go out and buy three, four and five pairs of scissors, rather than just designating a place for them.”

That’s a lesson Johnson has finally learned, after years of buying the same colors of thread whether she needed them or not, simply because “those

are the ones I’m drawn to,” she says. She recently organized her sewing and embroidery thread by color and plans to do the same with her fabric. “Now I can see right away whether I have the right color,” Johnson says.

Another reason to put tools away promptly and keep the shop floor neat is safety, says Howard Potter, CEO of A&P Master Images in Utica, NY. Few people associate embroidery shops with workplace hazards, but Potter sees a multitude of ways workers might be injured. What happens, he asks, if a worker slips and falls because a box or other item wasn’t picked up? “How many people throw scissors or knives on tables, then throw apparel on top, when it would have been just as easy to put them back in their cup?” he asks.

A Well-Defined Workflow

A cluttered shop often leads to a disorganized and inefficient workflow. Atkinson has seen too many decorators who rely on a “crazy dry erase board or notepad” to schedule out jobs and have no idea how much time they waste during each step of the production process. It’s important to have clearly defined procedures so every employee is on the same page. “There’s a tongue-in-cheek phrase I use here: I don’t want anybody thinking,” Atkinson says. “I don’t want my production folks to have to stop and come up front to ask somebody a question.”

That means all the answers should be readily available to the worker when needed, spelled out in the production worksheet. He gives the example of tonal embroidery. Visual Impressions has defined it as stitching one shade lighter than the garment, so if a customer wants the embroidery a shade darker, the sales rep must indicate that, to avoid confusion and costly mistakes.

Another high-volume shop that takes organization seriously is Culture Studio (asi/700559). The Chicago decorator moved to a 50,000-square-foot building last year, launching its own shop-manage-



Case Study Calculate Your Personal Time

A lot of small business owners take on the most remedial tasks without realizing the cost of doing so. “The cost is huge because they’ve taken their best employee off revenue generation and servicing clients,” says Mike Michalowicz, host of the “Business Rescue” segment on MSNBC’s *Your Business* and author of *The Pumpkin Plan*. “I suggest entrepreneurs look at how much they’re paying themselves during the year. That’s their minimum salary, meaning some pay themselves less than they really earn or deserve because they don’t have the money. So, if I take out \$100,000 from my business in a year, that number should be divided by 2,000, because there are roughly 2,000 working hours in a year. That means I’m paying myself \$50 an hour.”

In this case, a two-hour errand, like buying and picking up lunch, would cost that business owner \$100, plus the price of the food. “If I send out someone who makes \$10 an hour and they get the task done, that costs \$20,” Michalowicz says. “We have to really value our time and understand the costs associated with it. Most times, entrepreneurs don’t appreciate or understand how much their time is really worth.”

“Prime real estate is next to the equipment where you’re working. Nothing is there unless you need it. ... If I’m organizing, I put things I hardly ever touch up on a shelf far away in a back corner. The things I will need five minutes from now are right next to me. Everything else is in between.”

Marshall Atkinson, Visual Impressions

ment program at the same time. “It allows us to share information, and it tracks our orders throughout our entire production floor,” says President Rich Santo. Without the software, getting information back and forth from the art department to the receiving department would take several minutes, speed-walking, he says. Culture Studio’s custom software takes a simple, streamlined approach, sharing only the information needed by each department to keep employees from getting overwhelmed. With nearly 400 jobs in production at any given time and 25,000 units shipping out daily, there’s no white board big enough to keep track. Instead, Santo says, the production area includes two giant TV monitors, with one displaying the jobs due within the week, and the other showing those due in two weeks.

Take Out the Trash

A major part of getting organized is learning to let go, Brundage says. When the owner of Simple Organized Solutions works with a client, she always walks them through three questions: Do you love it? Do you use it? Does it serve you well? If clients answer no to all three, it’s a lot easier for them to discard, recycle, sell or donate the item in question, she says. Brundage also recommends starting small

and staying focused when tackling areas that may not have been purged in years. “It’s kind of like, how do you eat the elephant? You eat it one bite at a time,” she says. “You’ll be surprised how much you can get rid of.”

Johnson certainly was. The WeSew4U owner spent three and a half days clearing out her entire shop, filling the bed of a pickup truck with old computers and other digital detritus. “I was appalled at how much e-waste I had,” she says. “One of those computers was older than my children, and my children are all grown and gone.” She also took an embroidery machine that had been nonfunctioning for two years – robbed of parts to keep other equipment running – to the repair shop for a much-needed overhaul. After the frenzied cleaning, Johnson says she couldn’t wait to get back to work. “There was an extra wow,” she says of entering her newly organized workspace.

But the best part was that it gave Johnson room to expand. She already had a rhinestone cutter and setter on order, and now she has a place to put it. “I have no idea where I would have put it [if I hadn’t cleaned up],” she says. “Now, I actually have an empty spot. It has a home awaiting it.”

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Eliminate Paper and Pain

Don Tillquist was tired of straining his back digging through a dozen packed banker’s boxes any time he needed to refer to an old order. “I hated the boxes, and having to pull one out and find an individual work order was a nightmare,” says Tillquist, owner of Coastal Embroidery Inc. in Camarillo, CA.

When he saw an ad for a document scanning system that promised to solve all his paperwork woes, he was initially skeptical, but decided to give it a whirl. Three years ago, Coastal Embroidery started scanning order worksheets, receipts and invoices, working backward through all the boxes. “It took about half a year to get everything scanned,” Tillquist says.

The shop was able to get the scanned paperwork disposed of during a local high school’s shredding fundraiser. The archived worksheets are stored on a hard drive with cloud backup. When a repeat customer comes in, it takes a matter of seconds for Coastal Embroidery to pull up an invoice in its accounting software and peruse the matching PDF worksheet, with information on logo placement, thread colors and more. “We can say to a customer, ‘We did it this way last time. Would you like us to repeat that?’” Tillquist says. “It makes us look good.”

Coastal Embroidery made good use of the area that used to house the box pile: purchasing a standup vinyl cutter to fill the space.

Four Easy Ways to Get Organized at Work Today



Is your desk littered with Post-It Notes, old client invoices and random pieces of mail? Is your chair overflowing with samples from your last client visit? If you answered “yes” to either (or both) of these questions, here’s a fact that may make you re-think your sloppy ways: More than 77% of businesspeople said

that a messy workspace hampers their productivity, according to a survey by Office Max. Even more sobering: According to the Datapro/Gartner Group, the average employee spends 400 hours a year searching for paper documents. Stop wasting time and increase your productivity by using these four tips to get organized at work now.

1 Clean off your desk. If your desk is messy, it’ll keep you from being productive – and, people will judge you, says Claire Grundman, an organizational psychologist. “Fair or not, people look at a messy desk and see the desk’s owner as being scatterbrained – maybe even as someone who can’t be trusted to handle a project,” she said. If your desk has more than

five things on it, Grundman says, clear off everything and decide what you really need to keep. “Most things can be thrown away, and those that can’t should be filed neatly somewhere,” she advises. So, what stays on the desk? Grundman recommends keeping a to-do list front and center, along with any immediate paperwork. “Personal photos are OK, but only keep a favorite or two,” she says. “Save the big photo gallery for Facebook.”

2 Use a single calendar. Whether you keep track of appointments and due dates on electronic calendars or paper ones or both, choose one calendar that works best for you and use only that one to keep track of everything. “It’s too confusing to go back and forth on multiple devices or calendars,” Grundman says. “You’ll be less likely to miss out on an important date if everything is in one place.”

3 Store your samples. Decorators get samples all the time, and while they’re important sales tools, they’ll clutter up an office space quickly if left in a heap on a chair or desktop. Find a storage area where you can put them in labeled bins so that you can easily find them when needed.

4 Keep a to-do list. Use a notebook or electronic day planner to write down the important tasks you need to accomplish each day. To stay focused, considering setting deadlines for each task or job. For example, you may allot an hour in the morning for cold calls, and an hour in the afternoon to work on a client RFP. “By setting these kinds of time limits, you’re more likely to keep on task,” Grundman says. If you don’t complete a given task that day, place it on a future day’s task list to make sure that you don’t forget it.

Best Advice From Organizational Experts

Industry consultants and experienced decorators offer you their best tips for reorganizing your shop so you can be more productive in 2015.

By Kristine Shreve and Joyce Jagger

Tip: Good organizational behavior starts at the top.

Designed for: Medium to large shops, shops with employees

How to:

Employees can be told how to do what needs to be done, but living by the rules and presenting examples of the desired behavior starts with the owner and management team and works its way down to the production floor. It’s desirable and necessary to have written codes of conduct and behavior, but employees also

need to see living examples. Demonstrating required behaviors and the benefits of following the rules will also allow employees to see you’re serious about the rules and guidelines you’ve put in place.

1 Create a formal employee handbook that describes desired behaviors and clearly outlines the consequences for infractions. Make sure each new employee has read and comprehended this handbook. Don’t hand them out and assume employees will read them; take the time to make sure the information has been absorbed and understood.

2 Make sure each new employee is fully aware of all procedures for the department(s) they’re entering. Have them shadow an experienced employee for a day so they can see why the procedures are in place. Make sure the managers of each department model the behavior expected from employees – and follow the same rules.

3 Explain why the procedures are in place. Employees are more likely to follow procedures for reclaiming screens or saving fabric salvage if they understand why those things are done and how it saves time



“Employees can be told how to do what needs to be done, but living by the rules and presenting examples of the desired behavior starts with the owner and management team and works its way down to the production floor.”

Kristine Shreve, EnMart

and money. You might also consider financial incentives if certain revenue targets or production goals are met.

4 Establish consequences for failure to follow the procedures or infractions of company rules. Make sure the consequences are clearly understood and applied equally to all employees.

Tip: Clean and reorganize your shop at least once a year.

Designed for: All shops, including home-based

How to:

When customers enter your business, they expect it to be clean, uncluttered and organized. You'll be able to work more efficiently and produce more as well. For most embroiderers, the best time to tackle a large-scale shop cleanup is January, after the holiday rush. Start by going through each area of your business and analyzing what is working and what isn't.

1 Make a list of all the tasks that need to be done in each area.

2 Start with production, perhaps the spot where you do hooping. Remove everything you can from that area, returning only what you need to use on a daily basis. If you aren't using it often, but need it from time to time, put it in your storage area. You want to totally de-clutter each one of your spaces and get rid of the junk.

3 Clean and dust your equipment, tools, tables and shelving. Make any needed repairs, so that all of your equipment is in tip-top, performance-ready condition. Clean your hoops and remove tape, adhesive or old marks

you're no longer using. Discard or repair broken hoops.

4 Go through your file cabinets. File away all of the previous year's paperwork and create folders for the new year.

5 Make a list of any equipment, tools and supplies that need to be replaced.

6 Go through your samples, and make sure they're still relevant. If not, remove them from your showroom and replace them with new samples. You can have an area for discontinued samples in the corner of your showroom to be sold at reduced prices.

Tip: Going paperless saves money and time.

Designed for: All shops, including home-based

How to:

Paper is less necessary than it ever was, yet many businesses are still drowning in it. We send invoices, print bills, keep business-related paperwork in filing cabinets and often forget to purge the files regularly, or aren't able to find necessary papers when they're needed. The solution for the paper overflow is to work on making your business paperless as much as possible.

1 Check into digital storage solutions for your documentation. It could be as simple as storing documents on a USB drive or with a service like Dropbox. There are also firms that offer solutions for document storage. Determine how much data you expect to store, and then make the decision about which storage option is right for you.

2 Figure out areas where you can stop producing new paper. Can you send

invoices via email? Can you pay your bills online? Can you save documents digitally and keep them in that format rather than printing and filing? Some documents will need to be kept as paper copies, but the majority of paper that's generated can most likely be stored digitally.

3 Eliminate excess paper that's currently filed. Sort through the paperwork you've already filed. Determine what can be thrown out or shredded and do so. Anything that needs to be saved can be scanned and saved in digital format. Scanners are relatively inexpensive these days. A lot of the paper that's currently taking up space in your office could be eliminated. Make sure any paper that is shredded or discarded is recycled.

Tip: Create an efficient floor plan to save unnecessary steps.

Designed for: All shops, including home-based

How to:

Go through each of your processes to make sure your equipment and tools are positioned properly for the task at hand. A well-organized floor plan is critical when you're creating a highly efficient workflow, and it's something that should be revisited every time you add a new process or piece of equipment.

1 Make a list of existing equipment. This includes everything that takes up floor space, along with measurements. Before you start moving anything around, draw up a blueprint on a large piece of graph paper. You can also create your floor plan using an Excel spreadsheet.



“I was appalled at how much e-waste I had. One of those computers was older than my children, and my children are all grown and gone.”

Rhonda Johnson, WeSew4U

2 Cut out pieces of paper to represent everything, whether it's a machine, table or something else, that's taking up floor space. Make sure you draw the pieces to scale. If you're using Excel, create each piece by using the shapes tool. Label each piece so you'll know what it represents. Use the graph paper blueprint and the paper cutouts to experiment with different layouts.

3 Finalize your layout. Once you have your layout the way that you want it, glue the cutouts into place. If you're using Excel, print out your optimal floor plan. This will help you ensure everything gets placed in the proper location when you make your move. It'll help everyone involved understand exactly what's needed. If electrical work or carpentry is required, make a copy of the blueprint for the contractors.

Tip: Keep the right tools for each job close at hand. Place all of the tools for a particular job process in the area that you are doing that process.

Designed for: All shops, including home-based

How to:

It's important to organize each work area for maximum efficiency. You may end up having duplicate sets of tools, but that's OK, because it'll save you the time you would have spent searching for the right tool for a job.

1 Make a list of each area in the business, and the tasks and job processes performed in each.

2 List all the tools needed for each area. Each workstation has certain tools that are applicable only to the jobs or procedures done there. Keep all the tools needed for that area close at hand so there's no time spent searching for the tools. If you don't have all the tools necessary for that area, purchase them. If you're using the same tools for more than one area, purchase duplicate tools.

3 Each employee is assigned her own tools. If you have employees, and more than one employee is performing the same task, each one should be assigned his or her own set of tools. There should be enough for everyone. If each employee is assigned certain tools, make sure they keep track of them. A good method is to have them wear an apron and keep the tools in the pockets. This is a very efficient way of keeping track of the tools and having them at their fingertips at all times, saving a lot of wasted steps in looking for that needed tool.

4 Don't borrow tools from one area to use in another. When tools don't get returned, it forces you or your employees to hunt down the right tool for a task. This is a big time-waster. Make sure all of your tools stay in the area they've been assigned.

Tip: Eliminate excess inventory.

Designed for: All shops, including home-based

How to:

Inventory can be a huge burden, taking up space and income, but the temptation is always there for shop owners to carry items “just in case.” To maximize the ben-

efit of the inventory carried and produce the most income, many shops benefit from moving from “just in case” to “just in time.” Here are some ways to stock the inventory you need, while still having access to additional inventory should a customer request it.

1 Create a list of inventory that should be stocked at all times. Look at your orders for the past year or two and make note of which items have been sold and in what amounts. Set a threshold for stocking the item in your shop. If a particular item meets this threshold, it becomes a stock item. If it's below the threshold, then don't stock it.

2 Make a list of all the vendors from whom you have purchased products, whether it was once or regularly. List vendor contacts, shipping times, extra fees for rush orders and which items you buy from this vendor. Create a file on your computer in which you bookmark the websites for these vendors, rather than working with paper catalogs.

3 Try to narrow your list of vendors, so you're working with two or three on a regular basis. You want to create relationships with vendors that have a selection that meets your needs, as well as pricing that meets your budget. Regular purchases will help establish you with your preferred vendors, and may lead to better pricing – and a greater likelihood that the vendor will help you out in an emergency.

Tip: Create efficient order and production follow-through systems to ensure a smooth workflow.

Designed for: All shops, including home-based

How to:

Figure out your order and production systems on paper first, before deciding whether to use a manual system or purchase shop management software. It's usually better to start off with a manual system, and then move to software, once you've outgrown your paper process. However, software can't help you if you don't develop a good system first.

1 Create a sales order packet. This includes an order form, quote form and a checklist with all the job processes listed. The checklist follows the job, so each step in the process can be checked off and dated when it is completed.

2 Log in each job. After an order is taken, it should be logged into your system, either on a paper log-in form or on a spreadsheet. Include the date, job number, customer's name, customer's purchase order if applicable, job name, item description, quantity, job process, due date, date goods arrived from the supplier and date shipped. A job order packet should be created to follow along with the job as it goes through production.

3 Begin the design process. After the order had been logged in, start working on the design and sew-out. You can get customer approval on the design while you wait for the goods to arrive.

4 Begin the production process. Once the design is ready to go and the goods are in, the job can be hooped and embroidered.

5 Finish the job. Once the job is embroidered, it'll go to the finishing area to be trimmed, have the backing and topping removed, and be steamed, folded, counted and shipped. Once a job has been shipped, go back to the log-in form and fill in the date that it was shipped and draw a line through the entire order.

6 Bill the order. Create the invoice and send it to the customer to let them know their job is done and ready for pickup or has been shipped.

7 Evaluate the job to ensure everything was completed properly and efficiently.

Tip: Thoroughly clean your embroidery machines, and keep up with weekly maintenance for trouble-free sewing.

Designed for: All shops, including home-based

How to:

It's important to oil and grease your machines, including the tensions and control panel, using your maintenance manual or machine tech's recommendations as a guide. Many breakdowns can be prevented with regular weekly maintenance. Once a year, have a tech go over your entire machine to see if any parts need to be replaced.

1 Set aside time each week, perhaps on a Friday afternoon, to clean and oil your machines.

2 Carefully blow out the control panel to remove any dust that collects inside. Don't touch anything inside of the control panel.

3 Make sure to check your tensioners. Check under the tension disks. Lint and dirt collects there, which will cause your tensions to change during production. Lift up the tension disk and use a cotton swab dipped in alcohol to clean it out. This helps to remove buildup.

4 Clean out the bobbin case. Each time you change your bobbin, blow out the case. You can use a can of air or a compressor to do this. Once a day, clean out the spring on your bobbin case by sliding a piece of paper under it. A business card works great for this. Dirt or lint can get caught in there and cause your tension to change.

5 Oil the hook. Every four hours of operation, stop and oil your hook with one drop of oil. Don't overdo it, however. If you're working with fabrics that create a lot of lint, such as sweatshirts, you may need to clean it out and oil the hook every three hours. If you start getting thread breaks, stop and oil the hook.

Tip: Expand your markets through contract relationships.

Designed for: All shops, including home-based

How to:

The most profitable shops offer a variety of products and decoration techniques. Having equipment and supplies on site for different types of decoration, however, may stretch a shop's budget. One way to offer new products and decoration options to your customers is to form contract relationships. In this sort of relationship, an order is taken by Company A, the work is done by Company B, and then the finished product is supplied to Company A's customer. Here's how to create a lucrative contract relationship.

1 Determine the additional techniques or products you'd like to offer. Investigate local companies, which may be open to a barter arrangement. Another area to investigate is companies that offer transfers. Purchasing a heat press and offering transfers is an easy way to expand your decoration options.

2 Call companies that sell equipment or supplies for the particular decoration method you want to add and ask if they have any customers they can recommend. Many companies keep a list for just this purpose and will be happy to make a referral.

3 Make sure the company or companies you wish to work with have a clear understanding of how the relationship will be conducted. Pricing, delivery times, quality of work, returns and complaints, and rules about poaching customers should be clearly established and understood. Make sure the prices charged by your contract suppliers allow room for you to charge your customer a reasonable markup and still make a profit.

KRISTINE SHREVE is the director of marketing for The Ensign Group and Ensign Emblem Ltd.; and **JOYCE JAGGER** is owner of The Embroidery Coach, an industry consulting firm.



SAVE OUR SHOP

AILOGOIL

An expert seamstress, Linda Gadwood thought starting an embroidery business would be a snap. But the Omaha woman ran into more snags than she expected. Embroidery Coach Joyce Jagger came to the rescue, helping Gadwood jumpstart productivity and elevate the quality of her craft.

By Theresa Hegel

Photography by Kathy Cordes

Linda Gadwood didn't expect such a steep learning curve when she opened up Logo Linda, a modest 17-head contract embroidery shop in Omaha a few years ago. But the expert seamstress and empty nester quickly became overwhelmed, trying to figure out both the business and technical side of her livelihood. "I didn't realize exactly how hard it was going to be," she says, traces of desperation still evident in her mild Midwestern voice. "I felt like I was just on an island by myself; I didn't know where to go to get help."

She struggled to figure out embroidery basics, like hooping and optimal digitizing settings. There were times when she ruined garments because she didn't double-check the hooping before running the machine. "It's surprisingly easy for garments to come out crooked," she says. "That was my school of hard knocks."

Another issue was time management. Gadwood and her husband, Terry, a full-time machine operator, often spent long hours and Saturday shifts, catching up with work at the shop. "We joke that we're connected at the hip," Gadwood says. But the couple would have preferred to spend some of that together time away from the office.

Despite all of the overtime, Logo Linda was also in danger of losing business from one of its largest manufacturing clients, whose sales rep was dissatisfied with the quality of the shop's

work, complaining of lettering that was fuzzy around the edges. The adjustments Gadwood made to her pull compensation and underlay settings weren't having the desired effect, and the sales rep was threatening to take business elsewhere, to a large supplier already doing a lot of the firm's decoration jobs.

“If somebody came in and asked me how much work I have in-house, I’d never have been able to tell you.”

Linda Gadwood, Logo Linda

Gadwood didn't know where to turn until someone pointed her to industry veteran Joyce Jagger's embroidery training website. After watching videos on how to maintain machines and other technical tutorials, Gadwood was hooked. She flew out to a seminar Jagger held in Binghamton, NY, and was the first to sign up for The Embroidery Coach's one-on-one mentoring program. "Had I been working with Joyce from the beginning, my business would have taken a different path," Gadwood says. "That's why I'm glad and anxious to be able to work with her."

The Process

One of the first things Jagger notices about Logo Linda is a lack of organization and defined processes, starting with how Gadwood and employees handle incoming inventory. Cardboard boxes in varying sizes are stacked nearly ceiling-high onto two wooden pallets along one wall. "They're not even counting the work, inspecting the garments or anything," Jagger says. "There's no process at all to get them ready to embroider." Not only that, but starting a particular job often requires the machine operator first to disassemble, then reassemble the looming cardboard

THE FEELINE

Save Our Shop



Prior to Joyce Jagger's intervention, Logo Linda didn't have a system for processing incoming orders, leading to a disorganized workflow.



Jagger helped Linda Gadwood organize her production area, with an eye toward efficiency.



The Embroidery Coach advised Gadwood to install a shelving unit in the shop's inbound inventory area, to give easier access to shipments.



Gadwood set up a cap-hooping station adjacent to one of her machines to help speed production.



Thanks to Jagger, Linda and Terry (pictured) Gadwood have increased productivity by 60%, cutting back on evening and weekend overtime as well.

About the Series

Stitches received such positive feedback from its August "Can This Shop Be Saved?" feature that we decided to launch a recurring series, focusing on struggling shops that are transforming themselves with the help of expert intervention. We won't be neglecting previous makeover subjects, however. Each installment of the series will include exclusive online coverage of shops profiled in past issues, updating readers on their continuing achievements.



Scan this code to learn about changes Craig Wold has made to Point Embroidery & Screen in Stevens Point, WI, since his shop was featured in the August issue.



tower to reach the needed inventory, wasting precious production time.

Jagger advises Gadwood to install a large shelving unit over the pallets, so every box is easily accessible. "It's much easier to find stuff," Jagger says. Deliveries are immediately inspected and logged in. A staging table nearby allows employees to stack garments by size, review thread choices and make sure the order is ready for hooping

and embroidery. "That saves all of the time that the machine operator has been spending getting garments ready at the machine," Jagger says.

The tweaks to the staging area are just one of many adjustments Jagger suggests to the shop's floor plan. She has Gadwood move various tables and pieces of equipment within the shop to optimize the workflow and shave time off each job. A perfect

example is the shop's hat-hooping station. "The way they are hooping caps is horrible," Jagger says. The hooping device is clamped to an embroidery machine set up way too low. Not only is it a recipe for back pain, but the operator can't see where to clip the sides of the cap, resulting in less-than-optimal hooping. "They don't know the difference," Jagger says. "You don't want to have to bend over, especially not

“They’re not even counting the work, inspecting the garments or anything. There’s no process at all to get them ready to embroider.”

Joyce Jagger, The Embroidery Coach

when you have large orders to get out.”

Jagger has Gadwood install a higher table next to the embroidery machines to attach the cap hooper. The table and shelves above store an array of hoops and backing material, all at the operator’s fingertips. “It’s really helping our efficiency,” Gadwood says.

Like many embroiderers Jagger works with, Gadwood spends little time planning her day out. “We guess at how long things are going to take us,” Gadwood says. “If somebody came in and asked me how much work I have in-house, I’d never have been able to tell you.” Jagger sets Gadwood up with machine scheduling and daily planning worksheets, helping her quantify her pricing and time out her day. The paperwork makes a huge difference, Gadwood says. “Now I know our total hours of production.”

Jagger also helps Gadwood improve the quality of her embroidery, teaching her to tweak digitizing settings for various fabrics, to ensure that logos come out crisp. Other areas where Jagger is guiding her pupil: website design and employee hiring. “She’s done everything I’ve told her,” Jagger says. “She hasn’t fought me on anything.”

The Payoff

Gadwood says her husband calls Jagger the “she-saved-our-bacon lady” – with good reason, too: Jagger has already helped Gadwood increase productivity by 60%, while still reducing overtime. The best part? No more Saturday shifts for the Gadwoods.

The quality of Logo Linda’s embroidery is also on the rise, thanks to Jagger’s digitizing tips. “We know we’re putting out a much better product,” Gadwood says. Customers have also noticed. The sales rep from the large manufacturing firm has stopped threatening to pull busi-

SPOTLIGHT:

Decorating Baseball Caps

One of the problem areas at Logo Linda was the setup for hooping caps. Here are three tips to improve the efficiency and quality of hat decoration:

1. Purchase a cap-hooping device. But make sure you mount it correctly. The device should be above your waist, but below your chest. If you mount it too low, you run the risk of backaches and slower production time, says Joyce Jagger, The Embroidery Coach.

2. Edit your stitch file. Because they’re dimensional, caps require a different stitch sequence than flat garments, says Erich Campbell, digitizer/e-commerce manager at Albuquerque, NM-based Black Duck Embroidery and Screen Printing (asi/700415). “Caps have to run from the center of the cap out; otherwise, they’ll ripple out when they run and not be very stable,” he says.

3. Slow down. A typical hat design should run at about 600 stitches per minute with a hat frame and 750 for a flat, according to a blog post from embroidery equipment manufacturer ColDesi. Intricate details and small lettering may require even slower speeds.

SPOTLIGHT:

Inventory Staging

The Embroidery Coach Joyce Jagger helped Logo Linda implement a better system of logging in and staging embroidery jobs. Here are three tips to improve your inbound inventory:

1. Open boxes immediately. Double-check that the apparel supplier has sent the correct number, sizes and colors of the garments you ordered. You don’t want to delay production trying to correct mistakes at the last minute, or lose money sewing on the wrong items.

2. Consider staging jobs by a numeric system. If you stage everything by due date, “You’re playing musical chairs with your boxes all the time,” says Marshall Atkinson, chief operating officer of Milwaukee-based Visual Impressions. His shop assigns jobs a six-digit work order, sorting them by the last number in the order.

3. Plan ahead. Linda Gadwood and her husband, Terry, like to get an early start. They thread their machines and lay everything out for the next day’s jobs before heading home each evening. “That way, you can walk in and open up and start your orders right away,” she says.

ness and instead asked what Gadwood did to make the company’s logo look so much better – better even than the stitch file that had been created by a larger decorating rival. “I never thought I’d hear that,” Gadwood says. “I told her that it was our regular process.”

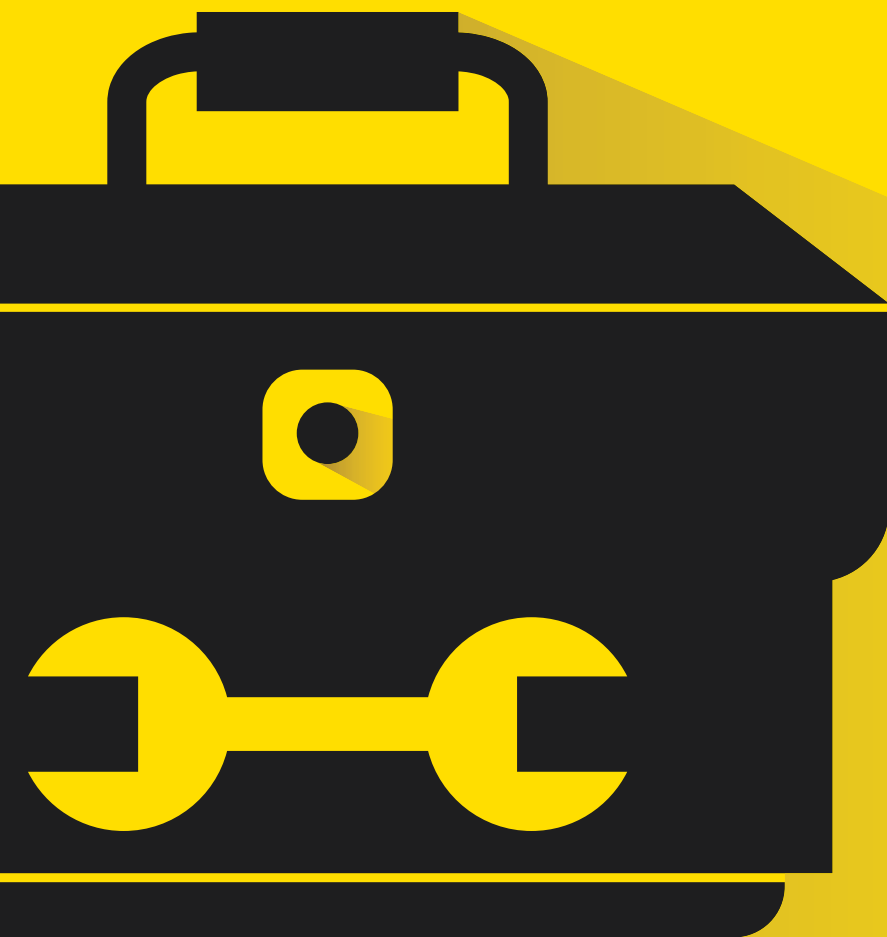
This is only the beginning of Logo Linda’s success story, Jagger says. The next

step in The Embroidery Coach’s overhaul agenda is creating a marketing plan to draw in new customers. “She’s getting so much more work out in a month’s time that she’s got capacity to put out more,” Jagger says.

THERESA HEGEL is a senior writer for *Stitches*. Contact: thegel@asicentral.com; follow her on Twitter at @TheresaHegel.

OPERATIONS

REVAMP YOUR BUSINESS



Start 2015 off right with strategies from business and industry experts on how to get more referrals, how to save time and money, up your cash flow and more.

It's time to shake off the winter slump, and resolve to turn your shop into a lean, mean earning machine. Read on for a slew of ideas to make your business more efficient, productive and profitable in the new year.

Save Time at Work

Decorating shop owners and salespeople can easily fall prey to time-consuming detail work, from product research and placing cold calls to filling out purchase orders and chasing payment. Here are 10 tips to master your time so that every minute is maximized profitably.

1 Clean the client closet. Rid yourself of deadweight clients so that you're devoting time to those current and potential customers who are most profitable. Expert John Mariotti, CEO of The Enterprise Group, recommends comparing your clients in terms of annual sales and gross profit dollars. Keep the clients who are in the top 25% for both factors. Lose the bottom 25%.

2 Analyze product profitability. Know which wearables and printable product categories yield the most profit for your business. Focus your energy on those goldmines.

3 Make the most of market expertise. Look to your client base to see if there are clear areas of expertise that you've created rather than spending time on learning a completely new market. If you've focused previously on hospitals, for example, you might be able to leverage that knowledge for home-healthcare providers

and dentists. This would be a quicker way to expand your client base than picking a market about which you know very little.

4 Encourage repeat business. Cold-calling to snag that initial order is one of the most time-consuming of sales activities. Leverage the sales you've made successfully to create more orders. Provide a discount coupon, for example, along with your client's invoice or purchase receipt. Recommend continuity campaigns or suggest products (like calendars) that repeat annually.

5 Create a time cushion. Even the best time managers can be thrown a curve ball that sets a project spinning into overtime. Therefore, it's wise to create a time cushion. For example, when planning a big order with a critical deadline, set a pre-deadline for at least a couple of days earlier than required. This allows for a finalization period to manage production errors or delivery snafus, if they arise.

6 Example, don't waste time calling your accounting clients during the height of tax season. Analyze your clients to pinpoint their busy season. Then plan your contact/pitches for several months preceding or soon after their crazy period ends.

7 Learn on the run. Download podcasts from suppliers and industry educators that can educate you while driving to a client's office or while jogging.

8 Purchase quality equipment and software. Whether you're selecting a heat press to expand your services to include transfers or selecting a new desktop printer and computer, spend a little extra to get the right quality equipment. Cheap versions frequently require repairs or are slow to process/print. Choose reliable equipment, etc., to stay on track.

9 Be accurate from the start. When submitting orders to a factory, have all the pertinent details and artwork in order and clearly explained. The fewer times you touch the order, the more profitable it will be. Ideally, have a pre-set form that you can use for most purchase orders, tailoring it as necessary for the garments selected.

10 Think quantity and repetition. When clients have ongoing needs for a particular product, secure a blanket purchase order for the year and pre-schedule shipments at regular intervals. Your client receives price breaks for quantity, and you're eliminating the time it takes to regularly resell or refill the order.

Get More Referrals

Referrals are one of the most powerful tools in your sales arsenal, and cyber space has spawned new and innovative ways to request and leverage them. Despite this, few companies have formal systems in place to take advantage of customer goodwill. "I am amazed at how many companies do not ask for referrals," says Kevin Kowalke, a Waukesha, WI-based business strategist with a focus on marketing and sales. "You must give your customers reasons and ways to refer."

Here are seven tips to help you generate more referrals:

1 Use LinkedIn strategically. Mike Beckman, owner of Proforma BPM in Atlanta, calls LinkedIn "a digital business card that never gets tossed." He connects with potential clients on the site, and then asks that person to make digital introductions with anyone else who might be interested in working with him. It's led to more than \$200,000 in sales over the last year and a half, and is now the only way Beckman prospects. "Any cold-calling, you're just spinning your wheels," he says. "By using LinkedIn, you've already been introduced, they just don't know it yet."

2 Leverage other social media sites. Facebook provides the perfect opportunity for low-stakes referrals. Brian Carter, digital marketing consultant and author of *The Like Economy: How Businesses Make Money With Facebook*, suggests simply creating a Facebook post asking customers to tag a friend they'd like to refer in the comments section. Incentivizing the post by awarding a prize to a random recommender will increase responses, he says.

3 Timing is everything. Experts say the best time to ask for a referral is when your client is happy, but the sale isn't 100% complete. "They need to still feel slightly

obligated and enthusiastic about referring you,” says Julia Angelen Joy, a communications and marketing consultant with Z Group PR. Make asking for a referral a regular part of your sales script.

4 Condition your customers. It’s crucial that your customers understand how important referrals are, Kowalke says. “Create the culture that giving referrals is how they got to you and is part of doing business,” he says.

5 Practice reciprocity. Show your clients you’re willing to give them referrals so they’ll be motivated to send their trusted network to you. “Become the connector of people to position yourself as an extremely valuable person to know,” Kowalke says.

6 Follow up. Stay in contact with your customers and prospects so you’re top-of-mind when they’re interacting with their own networks, whether online or off. “Even an informative email news-

letter can trigger a referral when the timing is right,” says Joellyn Sargent, author of *Beyond the Launch: The Practical Guide to Building a Business That Thrives*.

7 Be worthy of referral. Focus on providing great customer service and high-quality products to inspire word-of-mouth marketing. “If people see immense value in working with your company, they’ll enjoy the opportunity to help others by introducing them to you,” Sargent says.

Smart Accounting Strategies

Cash flow is an issue that plagues many small-business owners, even shops that are expert at recruiting and retaining clients. Many business managers simply assume their cash flow is satisfactory, if the business is earning a profit, but that’s not always the case, and poor cash flow can easily drown an otherwise successful business. Read on to learn how to manage your finances and make 2015 the year of the cash flow reboot for your business.

1 Respect and understand financial statements. According to some surveys, 25% of businesses don’t even maintain accounting records (let alone produce financial statements). The bottom line for small business owners is simple: If you don’t make an effort to prepare, review and understand your financial statements, then you need to ask yourself why you’re in business in the first place. And this especially holds true for the statement of cash flows because an abundance of invaluable information is available from this most commonly overlooked and mismanaged financial statement.

2 Plan, run projections, and plan some more. Proper planning is essential to the launch, growth, management and ultimate success of your business as measured by the ability to generate profits and, just as important, to avoid running out of cash. Having access to sound financial plans structured for different operating scenarios is an absolute must.

3 Focus on capital and cash – the lifeblood of your business. One of the most common reasons small businesses fail is that they lack adequate cash or capital, not only to survive difficult times, but also to prosper during growth opportunities. Remember, one of the greatest losses a company can realize is that of lost opportunity, which has its roots in not being prepared to capitalize on market opportunities.

4 Understand your selling cycle. The selling cycle is often much longer than company executives want to believe. It spans from the time a product or service is developed to supporting customers after a sale. If not properly managed, the selling cycle becomes one of the largest consumers of cash in a business, with almost every business owner experiencing frustrating delays at one time or another.

5 Manage your disbursements cycle. To counteract the selling cycle cash consumption machine, businesses need to understand that the disbursement cycle (managing expenditures and cash payments to vendors, employees and other creditors) can be leveraged and managed to be a primary source of cash for your business. Invoke what’s called the matching principle. That is, similar to properly matching revenue and expenses to ensure that an accurate measurement of a business’s profit or loss is obtained, you should be able to match cash inflows and outflows.

6 Be creative to generate cash. Turn your assets over more quickly, in order to convert them into cash more quickly. Leverage your vendors, suppliers and financing sources. They don’t want to lose your business, so placing just the right amount of leverage on these groups can result in enhanced cash flow because liabilities offer a source of cash. Manage external sources of cash – with banks, leasing companies and even the federal government – to ensure that cash is made available when needed.

7 Balance the balance sheet. Your business needs to strike a proper balance between making sure that current assets are financed or supported with current liabilities and making sure that long-term assets are financed or supported with long-term sources of capital such as a five-year note payable or equity. Every business should strive to achieve a financial condition that ensures constant maintenance of adequate levels of both solvency (the ability to pay all just debts) and liquidity (the ability to quickly access cash to support business operations).

8 Always think of CART. Your company’s financial and accounting information system needs to produce Complete, Accurate, Reliable, and Timely financial information, reports and data, so management can make informed business decisions. When you have the proper systems in place and know what to look for, you can keep cash flowing, helping you to grow a successful business.

Tap Into a New Niche

You might think it's best to have a book of business in every possible market, but niche-based selling has plenty of perks. By establishing yourself as an expert in specific fields, you establish yourself as a consultant rather than solely a product provider. Here are two niches worth exploring:

Clean energy. Thomas Rector, CEO of Rector Communications (asi/305623), dove into the clean energy market about five years ago. A good friend from college worked for the state of Indiana's Department of Energy office and that contact put Rector in touch with a number of clean energy accounts. Most recently, Rector started working with IND Solar Farm, the largest solar farm in the country built at an airport. That unique positioning lent itself to a number of promotional opportunities, beginning with the farm's

groundbreaking.

It was early spring in Indiana and still cold outside, so the easy promotion resolution was to supply volunteers, sponsors and staff with shell jackets and long-sleeve polos embroidered in three locations. "In addition to apparel, we supplied the traditional groundbreaking materials such as hard hats, commemorative shovels, giant scissors and ribbons," he says. They also supplied solar cell chargers, silicone iPhone speakers, luggage tags, pens, lanyards and water bottles to community leaders, press and supporters.

Following the groundbreaking, Rector Communications was asked to help with a number of ongoing promotions. "Many were used for outreach as staff would travel the state and country representing the pioneer work that was happening at the Indianapolis Airport," he says. "We

tried to be creative, but also responsible, as this is a green project so our promotional products should be as well."

Rector researched and talked with a number of reps finding their best and most popular recycled, biodegradable, sustainable or refurbished products. At the end of the day, the IND Solar Farm used slap-type can coolers (made of recycled car tires), pens (made of recycled plastic and biodegradable ink), drawstring cinch bags (made of recycled plastics), notepads (made of recycled paper), carabiners (made of recycled aluminum) and wooden airplanes (a biodegradable product). "Our big-ticket items included solar backpacks, solar cell chargers and additional shell jackets," he says.

The clean energy niche fits in well with the mission at Rector Communications: to change the world by finding inventive ways

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to use traditional products. “Our involvement in this niche is allowing our team to support a project that is changing a culture and lessening the world’s reliance on fossil fuels,” he says.

Overall, Rector Communications generates over \$200,000 in annual sales from the green energy niche. The IND Solar Farm project itself generates between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

Gaming. Play means serious business for Scottsdale, AZ-based Pulse Marketing and Apparel. The company does \$25,000 annually with one major client that provides poker gear and works on tournaments. As a result of that relationship, Pulse has been introduced to and completed projects for other major poker-related organizations. These referrals have turned poker into a \$50,000 annual category for the company.

That revenue is likely to grow. Adam Wright, owner of Pulse, says the company has what he calls “an awesome relation-

ship” with the original poker-related client. “They were a startup that we got involved with since day one,” he says. “A former client changed jobs and brought us with him to the new company. Poker was just starting to be televised and had become very popular and they harnessed the television audience and our imprinting methods and apparel for even more visibility.”

The players’ apparel was well-thought-out. For TV purposes, Wright pitched certain imprint methods and locations to the client. First, it needed to be easily picked up by the cameras. Other considerations: “It can be cold in poker rooms, so we created a hoodie for the players to keep them warm,” he says. “When they look down at their cards, the logo is visible on the top of the hood. We also put logos on the cuffs because the camera shows the players hands a lot.”

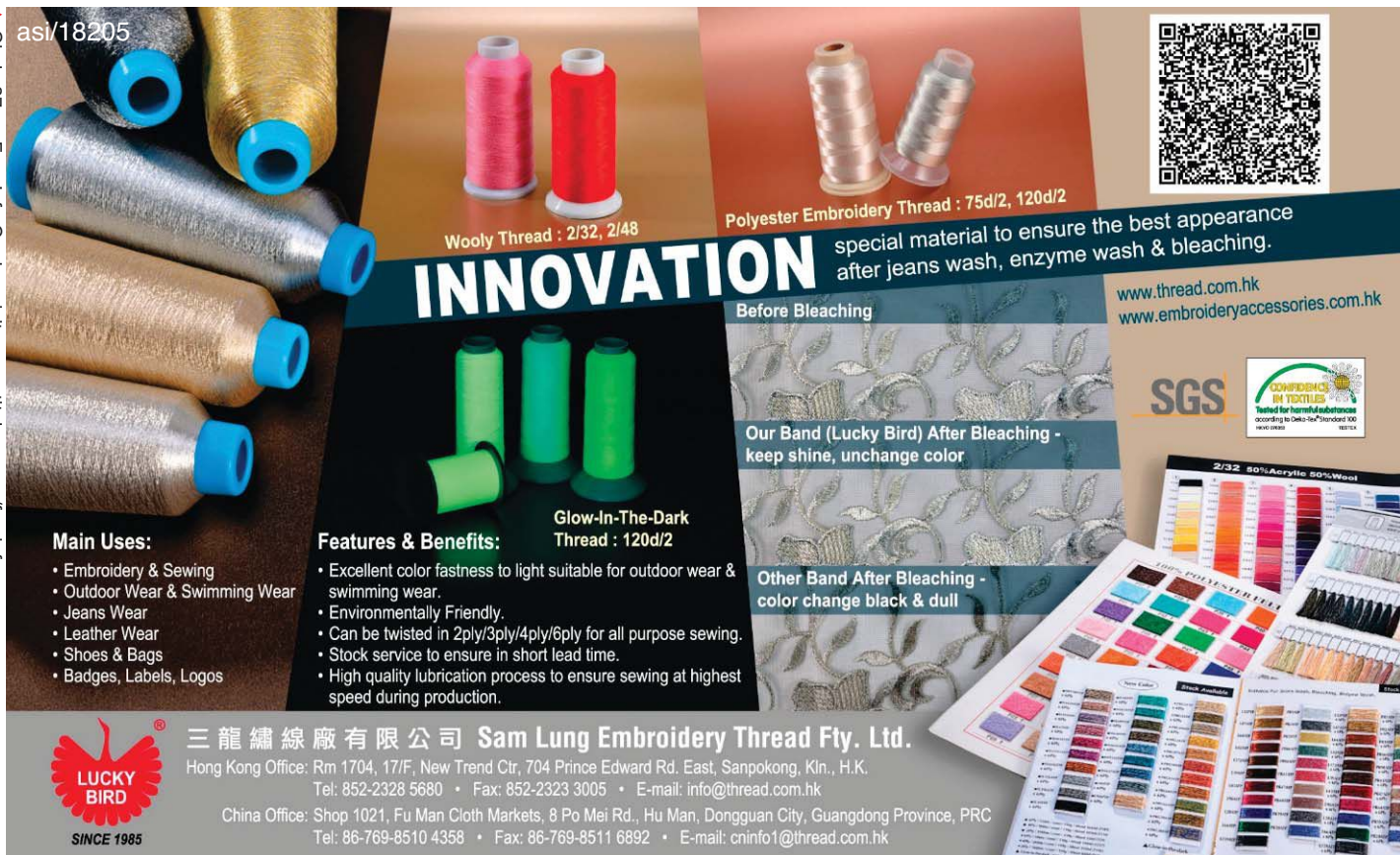
He did his research before presenting options by watching a few poker matches on TV to find out the players’ habits

and the camera angles that were used to make televised poker compelling. “Using that knowledge, we recommended large imprints and multi-format methods (screen printing combined with embroidery, 3-D patches) and put them in the locations we knew would get picked up.”

The products were intended to drive traffic to the client’s website. Seeing the name and URL of the company on TV drove the audience to visit the site. While the orders from the client are relatively small, they are high dollar. “They want these players in top-quality, comfortable garments so that they’ll want to wear them and get use out of them voluntarily,” Wright says. “The extra expense is justified by the exposure.”

That exposure is also a perk for working in this niche. “Seeing your product on TV is probably the most fun,” he says. “And seeing the players who you’ve outfitted win the whole thing is also really exhilarating.”

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The Brand Com

The stone-cold reality: You aren't too busy to build your own brand. Follow these proven steps to rehab your company image in 2015.

By Theresa Hegel

When it comes to branding, too many decorators have a serious case of “shoemaker’s child syndrome.” Remember the old saying? The shoemaker’s children go barefoot because their father is too busy crafting fancy footwear for his clients to tend to his own family.

Decorators often fall into the same trap, with excuses like: “I don’t have time to build my own brand because my job is building their brand,” or “I’m too busy selling to worry about marketing my own company.”

It’s a disconnect that bothers brand-savvy companies like Toronto, ON-based

Rightsleeve (asi/308922) and Fairware (asi/191452). “I’ve always found it ironic in this industry that we exist to help our clients animate their brand and accentuate their brand and leverage their brand, but there are a lot of folks that don’t think about their own brand,” says Denise Taschereau, CEO of Vancouver, BC-based Fairware. She wonders: If you don’t have a strong grasp of your brand, how do you convince a client that you’ve got what it takes to promote theirs?

Industry companies who aren’t proactive – and who don’t provide creative solutions to clients – get pigeonholed as transactional entities, says Mark Gra-

ham, founder of Rightsleeve. It isn’t a bad thing for companies that want to paint themselves as the low-cost provider, but it makes it difficult for them to stand out. Plus, Graham says too often it contributes to the branding problem the decorated-apparel and promotional products industry suffers as a whole – the well-worn “trinkets and trash label.”

Branding matters because buyers care about it – particularly millennials, who are becoming an increasingly potent buying demographic. A recent study by Edelman, the world’s largest public relations company, revealed that millennials consider brand identification almost as important as



mandments

religious preference and ethnic background when defining themselves online. Brands aren't simply what people like – it helps identify who they are.

Sturdy brands have devoted followers who are fiercely loyal and repeatedly praise them to others. Good promotions not only define the client's brand, but shape your own as well. So how to tell if your brand holds up? "I always say, 'Does this pass the T-shirt test?'" Graham says. If a company puts its brand on a T-shirt, would it be worn outside the actual event? "If you can create something that is going to create this emotional connection, that sense of, 'This is really cool. I would proudly wear that,' that's the Holy Grail right there," Graham says.

You don't have to be a knight of the round table to take on this quest. Building, promoting and managing your own brand (as well as your clients') does take time and energy, but it's more easily attainable than the mythic medieval cup. In keeping with our epic theme, however, here are the 10 commandments of branding. (While these

aren't chiseled in stone, they can certainly be read on tablets.)

1 Know Yourself

The first step in branding is figuring out what you bring to the table – round or otherwise. What are your company's values? What message do you want to get across to customers? Too many fledgling businesses think they can just come up with a name, throw together a logo and call it a day. But experts say your brand is so much more than the sum of its parts. Logos, names, taglines and websites are all just the external trappings of something much more essential.

"Brands should be developed from the inside out," says Kelly Fletcher, CEO of Fletcher PR, a national firm that specializes in marketing to women. "Define what makes your product or service valuable and different. What is your corporate reason for being?"

For nine-year-old Fairware, the answer to that question was simple. Taschereau

and Sarah White, co-founders of the company, wanted to create a brand based around sustainability and creativity. Their mission, then and now: "We believe we can change the world through the simple act of buying," Taschereau says.

Being environmentally friendly was never about following the hip trend of the month for them. "It's always been part of our DNA," Taschereau says. She and White knew from the beginning that the brand wouldn't be for everyone. "While that may terrify some business owners, I see it as our secret sauce," Taschereau says. Instead of fighting for prospects among thousands of more general competitors, Fairware only has to contend with the handful of competitors that cater to the eco-conscious crowd.

2 Stand Out

Once you know your niche, the trick is getting noticed. When you and your competitors in the global marketplace are all saying pretty much the same thing, in the same words, offering similar

products, services and pricing, the way to stand out is through smart branding, says Ryan Sauers, a sales and marketing consultant. “Quite frankly, the noise in the world is so loud and so strong, and our attention spans are so short, that it’s very difficult to be heard without a compelling and concise brand message,” he adds.

So how does a brand differentiate itself? It’s not about throwing a bunch of buzzwords into a blender, hurling the mushy mess onto a wall and hoping something sticks – though there does need to be some kind of “stickiness” to your message,

some element a potential customer can’t help but remember, Graham says. You have to figure out what you do best and craft your brand message around that. For Rightsleeve, it’s about helping clients create “emotional connections” with creative and thoughtful promotional campaigns. “I knew that I didn’t want to be some lame coffee cup seller,” Graham says.

The name Rightsleeve, a spot rarely chosen in traditional logoed apparel, plays into the firm’s emphasis on uncommon solutions. “There are so many people who have goofy names in the industry that

don’t really mean anything,” Graham says. “I wanted to come up with a brand name that was easy to remember and easy to spell. ... I liked how [Rightsleeve] rolled off the tongue ... and fit my own brand of quirkiness.”

3 Be a Good Listener

Your brand is not what you say it is – rather, it’s what others are saying about it, both online and off. “Perception is reality when it comes to brand,” says Sauers, who runs Sauers Consulting Strategies. If you want to make sure your brand message is being heard the way you want it to be, you must pay attention to feedback. Like a standup comedian perfecting a joke night after night until laughter is assured, you have to be attuned to your audience, always gauging reactions and tweaking your communications to evoke the image you’re trying to project.

4 Be Authentic

People want to make a real connection with the brands they frequent. If it’s a brand that matches their values or interests or just makes them feel cool by association, they’ll gladly wear apparel or use products bearing its logo. And once they’ve latched onto a brand, they’ll often fiercely and passionately defend it. Ever witness a fight between a Starbucks aficionado and someone who prefers Dunkin’ Donuts coffee? The caffeine-fueled battle can get pretty intense.

“We have to feel we can relate to a brand, feel part of it and participate in it,” Sauers says. Having a robust presence on social media can help with this. Update your feeds regularly, be as transparent as possible, interact with your customers sincerely and write posts that sound like they come from a real person, not a robot. It matters: a study by Chadwick Martin Bailey and iModerate Research Technologies found that consumers are 67% more likely to buy from brands they follow on Twitter and 51% more likely to buy from one they follow on Facebook.

Other forms of marketing – from email to traditional mailers – should also be faithful to your company image as well. Otherwise, the clients you may attract may not be the ones you want.

MEMBERS ONLY:

Diagram of a Rebrand

If you’re of a certain age, you probably remember a time when there was nothing cooler than a Members Only jacket. The iconic bombers, with their distinctive shoulder epaulettes and discreet “Members Only” tag sewn onto the chest, were nearly synonymous with ’80s style.

The brand was so of its era that it later became a punchline, shorthand for someone who couldn’t let go of the glory days of the past. Pop culture references in the early aughts were along the lines of 2001’s *Shallow Hal*, which had Gwyneth Paltrow’s character teasing another for wearing a Members Only jacket, asking if he was “the last member.”

So, outerwear entrepreneur Jaggi Singh was pretty surprised when eight years later, his teenaged son started asking for a Members Only jacket. Resurrected in 2003 after its parent company went bankrupt, the brand had gradually regained its hipness, with an underground following of avid fans posting thousands of Members Only selfies onto Tumblr feeds, he says. “Retro is big right now. Americana is big,” Singh says. “The time is right for this. ... People are looking for heritage brands.”

Singh and a business partner bought Members Only in 2012, with the aim of relaunching it as a “lifestyle brand,” expanding beyond jackets to offer sportswear and accessories. “What we’re trying to do now is make it relevant for today,” Singh says. “I still think it’s a long journey ahead. It’s a marathon, not a sprint.”

In addition to counting celebs like Drake, Zac Efron, Rihanna and Anderson Cooper as fans, the revamped Members Only line appeals to tech-savvy millennials with hipster sensibilities. The brand has also reframed the exclusivity implied by its brand name: “Our strategy is we’re all members of the human race,” Singh says. “Everybody is a part of the story.”



Members Only (circle 116 on Free Info Card) is resurrecting the once-popular fashion brand with trendy outerwear styles as well as sportswear and accessories.

5 Honor Your Core Audience

A customer's passion for your brand is a powerful tool, but just like in a real relationship, those feelings must be nurtured and respected. "The one thing that is sure to ruin a brand is the betrayal of its core audience," says Kyle Kane, CEO of 180 South Group, a brand management firm. "Once that trust is lost, it is nearly impossible to gain back."

Think of the personal brand of a celebrity like Lance Armstrong, he says. Armstrong peddled a message of "honesty, hard work and perseverance, until he was caught cheating and lost all respect from his fans," Kane points out. On the other hand, "goddess of domestic perfection" Martha Stewart was able to bounce back after being convicted and jailed a decade ago for insider trading. The difference? Stewart's scandal "was not a direct contradiction and betrayal of her core audience, since lying and stealing has nothing to do with cooking and designing a bedroom set," Kane says.

Most brands don't have to weather such massive scandals, but the same principles apply on a smaller scale. For example, if you make a mistake and a follower on Twitter calls you out, the best thing to do is issue a swift and sincere apology, and then follow through with real-world actions to correct the problem.

6 Be Consistent

Once your brand image is established, it's important to keep it consistent through every facet of your business. "Your brand is everything, from your name, website, logo and slogan, to the fonts, colors and textures you choose to use, and even your tone of voice when you answer the phone," Kane says.

Of particular importance is making sure apparel – whether an employee's uniform or a promotional T-shirt given out to potential customers – matches the brand's personality. When you choose the wrong type of garment, or a decoration technique that doesn't fit, it can be particularly jarring. Steven Kanney, presi-

dent and owner of Naperville, IL-based Target Decorated Apparel (asi/90549), has noticed this phenomenon whenever he walks into an Apple Store. Employees' logoed shirts are often faded, with cheap-looking puckered embroidery on the chest, he says. It doesn't match the cool, high-end, well-designed tech the brand is known for. "Everything else they do is so good and clean," Kanney says. "That just feels blatant to me because everything else is so strong."

7 Be Image Conscious

If a client is trying to choose the cheapest garment out there, remind her that shaving those few extra dollars off could have a much bigger impact than just on the bottom line. "It's what you're suiting your people up in to go into battle," Kanney says of logoed apparel. You don't want to put your team in a "giant bag T-shirt that's just a big square slab of nonsense," Kanney says. Nor would you want to give that away as a promotional item, because who would wear it?

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Brand Commandments

It's also important to consider your design objective ahead of time, says Gina Barreca, director of marketing for Vantage Apparel (asi/93390). Not all decoration techniques work on all garments. Also, she says, quality and labels matter: "When you're looking at the quality of a product, you want to try to get the best you can in that category, so maybe you can suggest a high-end T-shirt for a client, rather than a lower-end polo." It's easy to elevate or convey a particular image if you piggyback on an established apparel brand, she adds. Putting your logo on a higher-end brand polo shirt from Vantage's Greg Norman line, for example, can give your own brand a boost by association.

8 Be a Marketer

Salespeople are conditioned to sell, naturally. But Graham says when all you focus on is pushing product out the door, personal and company branding take a backseat. "We're not an industry of marketers; we're an industry of salespeople," he says. "I really feel that's our fundamental challenge."

Defining a brand means carving out time to think creatively. Moreover, it means eschewing constant self-promotion for content that reflects your company values and best qualities. Social media in particular lends itself to this way of thinking; nobody wants to follow a brand that constantly promotes itself without adding value. "If you put out solid information and creative content and ideas, you will gain traction and a following even if you're a one-person company," Sauers says. Constantly blasting customers with news about specials or entreaties to "like" your page won't endear your brand to the public.

9 Be Vigilant

Promoting a brand is an ongoing effort. The work isn't over just because it's achieved household name status. Kane says he and the other brand managers at 180 South Group spend about six months launching a brand into an emerging market, through product and story placements, celebrity engagements and other public relations strategies. After that, it can be a 24/7 job to keep the

brand top-of-mind and its image untarnished. "A brand is the soul of a company, and the soul knows no time," Kane says. "One of my mentors used to say, 'A good brand manager knows when the client has a toothache.'"

10 Tell a Story

Just as every superhero has a dramatic origin story, the best brands have a tale to tell. Batman wouldn't be Batman if a young Bruce Wayne's parents hadn't been killed, and Apple likely wouldn't have become Apple without the charismatic influence of the late Steve Jobs. A brand tells its story just as much through visual cues, like business cards and logoed apparel, as through more literal means, like the "about us" section of the company website.

"A brand is an emotional connection," Kane says. "A strong brand identity is the common thread that can unite the passion of many toward one common goal."

THERESA HEGEL is a senior staff writer for *Stitches*. Contact her at thegel@asicentral.com and follow her on Twitter at @TheresaHegel.

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COMING NEXT ISSUE

What's coming up in February *Stitches*

by Nicole Rollender



The Machine Issue

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needle watch

Needle Patrol

Our friend Slick (an embroidery machine needle) has hidden himself somewhere in this issue. He might be in an editorial photo, graphic or text – he's not in an advertisement. If you find the needle, send us a note that says, "I found the 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. Mail or fax it to us at *Stitches*, Attn: Needle Patrol, 4800 Street Rd., Trevoise, PA 19053; fax: (215) 953-3107. Also, tell us a little about your business. No phone calls please; you must respond in writing. Hurry! Responses for the January needle are due by January 30, 2015. From the correct responses, we'll randomly select one winner who'll receive a \$100 gift certificate, courtesy of Madeira USA, Laconia, NH. Please submit only one entry per drawing. We'll announce the winner in the March/April issue.



Slick Likes Soft Shells

In the November issue, Slick hid on page 40 in the "Look Book" fashion trends section, right next to soft-shell jacket (3093) from Bishop, The Garment Co. (asi/40585). **Leslie Jones of Baker City, OR-based Blue Mountain Design Works** was chosen at random from a grand total of 28 responses. As this issue's winner, Leslie will receive Madeira USA's gift certificate. Keep your eyes peeled for the industry's favorite game of hide and seek!

ASK AN EXPERT

By Erich Campbell

LOOKING FORWARD

In the next issue, you'll learn how to add a laser to your decorating offerings. See you next issue!

Q *My designs aren't efficient. When I digitize, I bounce back and forth between areas in my design, and even between reworking art and digitizing. By the time I'm done, my sequence is sloppy and I've used colors too many times. How do you get organized for a design and do less fixing when you finish? How can I make my designs run cleaner?*

I applaud your desire to be production-friendly. Some digitizers' designs look great, but contain excess movements, color changes and trims that slow down the embroidery process and make every run less profitable. Luckily, a little preparation and clean-up can help set you up for success to make your process, and your operators' stitching process, more efficient.

1. Preparation. To avoid bouncing back and forth, first assemble your art assets. If your art is poorly created or elements are missing or indistinguishable, you may think about drawing before you digitize. It's useful for digitizers to be able to draw simple vector graphics. It enables us to take bad art and create a clean, sharp-edged and "zoomable" piece that can be approved by the customer before digitizing starts. Not only can we clean up poor quality art, but we can make alterations to layout, line thickness and detail before we set stitches.

This is also the time to do research and gather resources. Before digitizing, track down typefaces and reference photos. When working on animals or nature scenes, I tend not only to have my main image on the ground layer of my work file, but reference photos that help me see details that might not be

in my main art, but may help me in clarifying my approach to digitizing an element.

An effective low-tech method of preparation for art alterations and good sequencing is to print out your reference art and sketch the outlines of your embroidered elements directly on the page, paying attention to how you travel through the design. Think of your pen or pencil like the needle and color the design, trying not to pick up your needle while you execute each color. Attempting to make each element connect in a contiguous line will help you avoid unnecessary color changes and trims as well as define unavoidable breaks. Sketching is also helpful in areas where source material doesn't give you cues for textural elements.

Good preparation is equal parts activity and reflection; assemble the art assets you need, making sure they're clear enough to show necessary detail. With fonts, art and reference materials assembled in your work file, you won't be diverted by searching for what you need, and you'll focus and maintain flow in your process. Throughout the process, keep the idea of the needle's progress in your mind. Envision the stitching process entirely before you place a stitch. As you start digitizing, think two elements

ahead. How will you move into the next area, and how will you exit that area? Try to move logically from place to place with as little wasted traveling as possible. If you don't run machines much, try to do it regularly to stay in practice. Nothing teaches you to avoid unnecessary movement like waiting through them at the machine, having to watch a misplaced jump-stitch get stitched into a design or trimming out your poorly planned piece.

2. Clean-up. The last step of the digitizing process should always include watching the design run virtually. Most software has a slow replay function, so learn to use it. Speed through filled areas and long runs of satin stitches, but pay careful attention to the beginnings and endings of elements and color changes. You'll occasionally have to do some clean-up, especially if you're doing more than the average logotype. The trick to any alteration in sequence or collapsing of color changes is to remember to think sequentially. Watch the preview run, and when you see wasted movement, watch it again, isolate the inefficient portion and think about ways to improve your movement through the design.

If you're truly stuck, follow the areas on-screen with your finger like you were doing the

pencil-as-needle exercise from your prep phase. If you have wasted color changes, save a copy of your design and group elements in the same color.

Look to areas where you can change which element runs first without ruining the dimensional look of your piece. Each time you regroup, try to place elements in a single tour of the design, with an eye toward hiding travel run stitches under elements later in the sequence. You won't always get each color down to a single change, but if you've explored your options, you're far more likely to use color changes, and any movement, in a reasoned and efficient way.

ERICH CAMPBELL, an industry veteran, is an award-winning embroidery digitizer with experience in designing, implementing and maintaining e-commerce websites. A longtime 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/700415). Contact: ecampbell@blackduckinc.com.

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