

WEARABLES

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June 2014

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SCREEN-PRINTING SUCCESS

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- MANUAL PRESS EFFICIENCY
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Tank top was provided by American Apparel (asi/35297)

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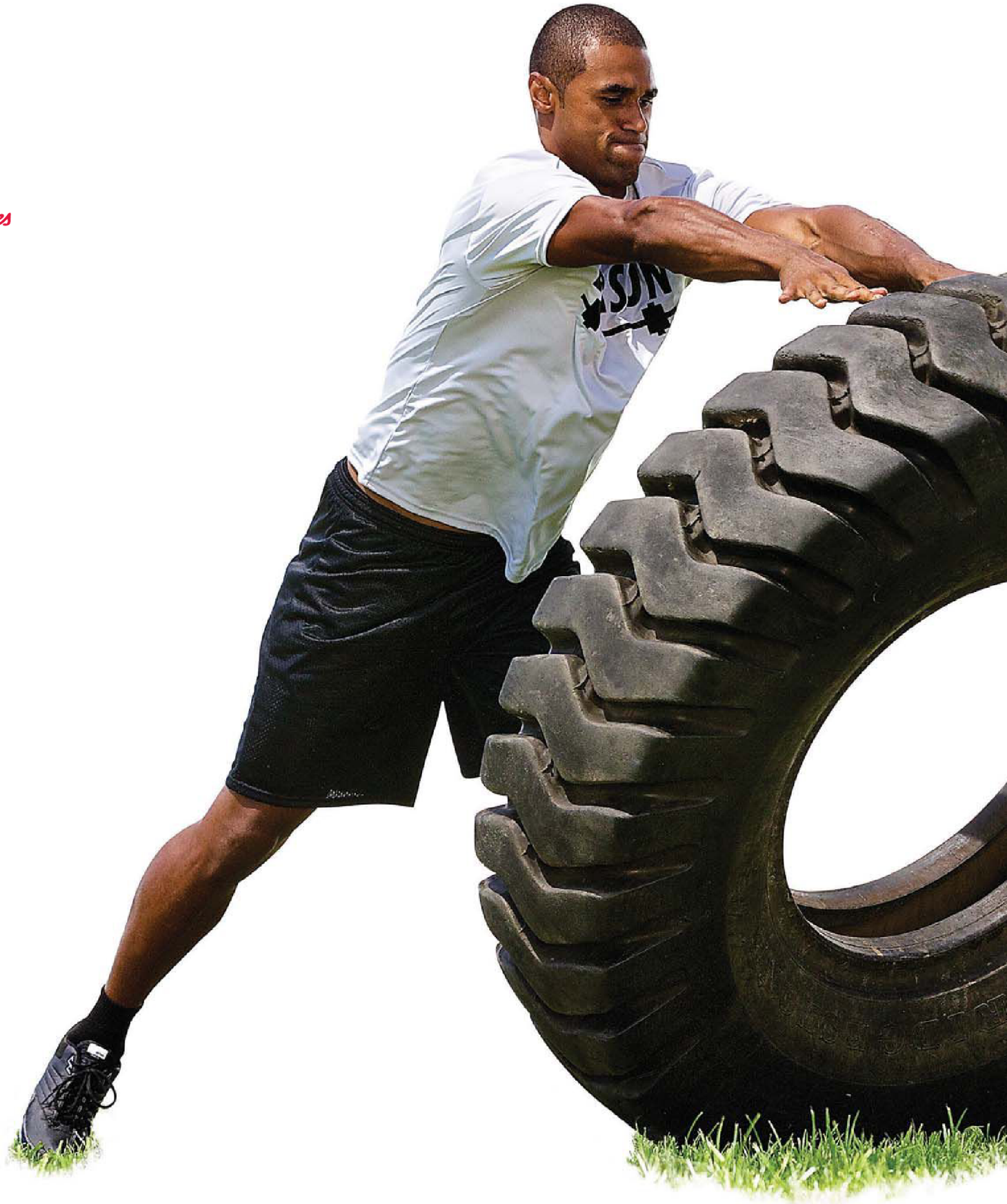
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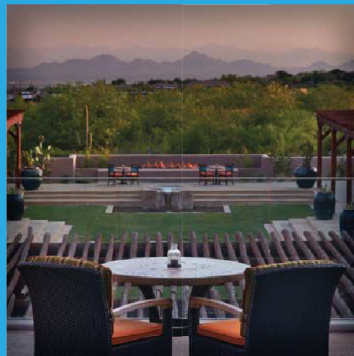
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WEARABLES

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Warm Thoughts

Summer is here (finally), and we celebrate it with our fresh and breezy cover item, a neon tank top (BB408) from American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 83 on Free Info Card). It was decorated

by Motion Textile (asi/72662; circle 130 on Free Info Card) and designed by ASI Art Director Hillary Glen.

The Design

The cover design aimed to capture the graphic elements suggested in our package of stories. After a couple initial attempts by the ASI design staff, Glen changed course with a simple approach. "It ended up not being a complicated design," says Glen, "but I liked the direct way it conveyed the idea of ink." Even better, its look emulates the slogan T-shirts that are extremely popular right now.

The Tank

The unisex poly-cotton tank "is one of our top sellers," says Yvette Corona, wholesale marketing representative for American Apparel, "due to a luxuriously lightweight soft hand that lends a worn-in feel and superior drape." The supplier has added youth sizes in the style because of the tanks' popularity. The unisex tank is available in 16 colors, including neon heather pink, neon green and three other neon shades, which have remained strong sellers since the USA-made supplier launched the colors in 2011. "It's a great option for college wear, promotional events, branded apparel and dance-wear," Corona says.

The Decoration

Motion Textile used soft-hand plastisol ink from Rutland to match the light hand and drape of the tank. While the design originally called for a bright pantone color, Motion Founder and President Tom Davenport opted for a clear ink to bring out the neon color. "When trying to achieve a tone-on-tone effect, especially on multiple garment colors within a single print run," he says, "using a translucent ink allows the garment color to work for you. This can save a tremendous amount of time on picking the perfect Pantone color."

Decoration Tip

Waterbase discharge is the ultimate choice for soft, but plastisol can also produce spectacularly light results. "When working with soft plastisol inks, it is important to control ink spread or gain," says Davenport, "which is likely to occur due to the low ink viscosity and the fact that you are using increased squeegee pressure to properly penetrate the fabric. We control this through use of higher mesh counts (typically 225), firm squeegees (triple durometer 75/95/75), and a little choking on the seps (.10 pt-.25 pt).



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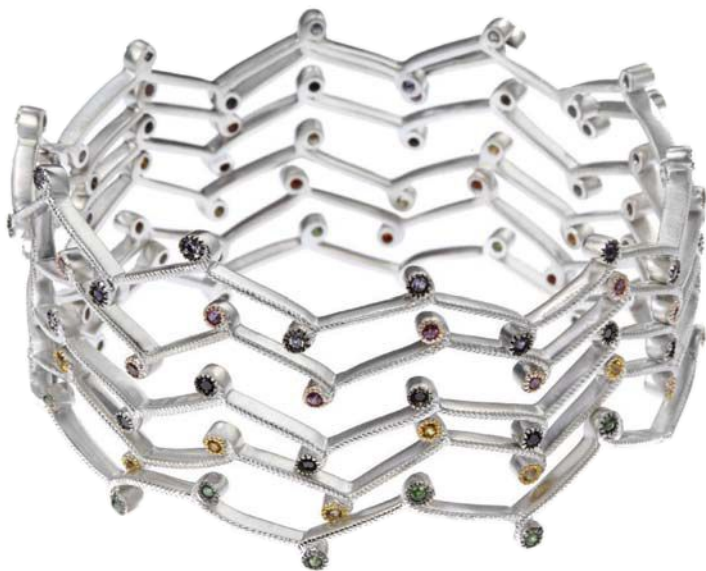
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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

Play with Pattern

The classic zigzag pattern has found new fans as a staple of both fashion and home décor. For a look at a few more engaging zigzag items, check out our online showcase.



VIDEO

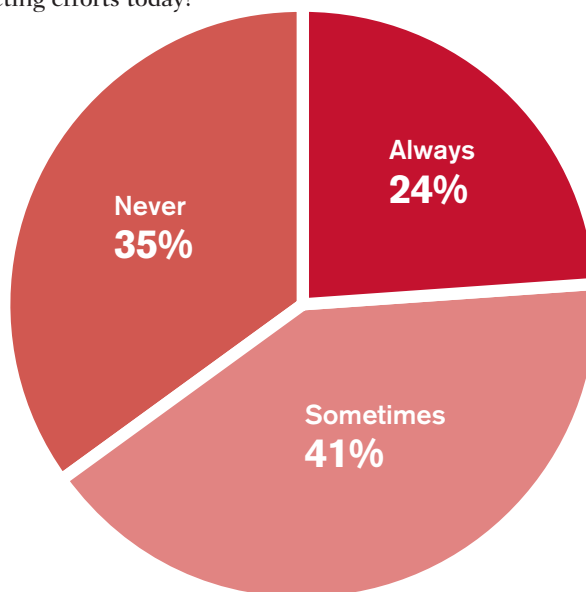
Color Us Impressed

Neons, pastels, garment dyed – do you know your apparel color trends? Fashion's color infatuation is not slowing down, and *Wearables* Editor C.J. Mittica delves into all the popular options in this Trend Alert Video.

POLL

Data Analysis

On ASICentral.com, we asked: "Do you use data analysis in your marketing efforts today?"



NEWSLETTER

Work Up a Sweat

Workout apparel is more than just for going to the gym. From high fashion to standard corporate attire, performance clothing is branching out into every facet of consumers' lives. Our *Wearables* Style e-newsletter explores the trend.

ASI SHOW

A Great Place to Work

To best the best, you have to learn from the best. It certainly applies to making your company a great place to work. To learn the top secrets from the most fun and engaging workplaces in the industry, be sure to attend the *Counselor* Best Places to Work Conference at ASI Chicago. Visit asishow.com to register.





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‘INK’ DIFFERENTLY

Plastisol on cotton. For decades, that was your constant as a screen printer. That's not the case anymore. We've chronicled the meteoric rise of polyester and synthetic fabrics, which, by the way, are extremely difficult to print on.

Now I'm telling you that plastisol ink is no longer the no-brainer, automatic choice.

Even as little as a few years ago, that notion would have been ludicrous. For decades, plastisol has been the lifeblood of this industry. It's so user-friendly, so easy, that screen printers wouldn't know what to do without it. "Plastisol can sit in the screen for months. You can come back, scrape the dust off and go print with it," says Walt Wright, marketing director for Murakami Screen. Tell a screen printer he will move on from plastisol? That's like breathing something other than oxygen.

But these days, screen printers have an old/new alternative to consider: waterbase ink. Yes, the same waterbase that dries out in your screens, doesn't go with every T-shirt color, is difficult to work with and so on.

Things are different now. Soft-hand prints and discharge are in. Demand for PVC-free prints is growing. And waterbase is making tremendous strides in opacity and increasing ease of use.

So is waterbase right for you? To answer that question, you have to check out our extensive cover story on all facets of screen-printing inks. Not only do we detail the origins of the resurgent waterbase trend, but we tell you the equipment you need to do it right. In addition, we've set up a point/counterpoint debate with two screen printers: one who specializes in waterbase discharge and another that jettisoned it to focus strictly on plastisol.

My two cents: Plastisol will remain prevalent, but there is a tremendous shift going on. Even the biggest ink makers sense it. So unless you've



“Unless you’ve found a lucrative niche with just plastisol, you’re losing business by ignoring waterbase.”

found a lucrative niche with just plastisol, you're losing business by ignoring waterbase. No, it's not easy, and yes, you have to be able to switch seamlessly between

waterbase and plastisol. But it only takes a little due diligence to become proficient at waterbase. The rest of the world primarily uses waterbase and has no problems with it; American screen printers can too.

The changing tide of waterbase is just one element of our extensive ink coverage. We delve into the increasing emphasis on product safety that is radically changing the requirements for ink. We highlight the most common errors screen printers make with ink and how to fix them. We tell you how to make your own ink colors, which can save you money and reduce overhead.

Also, we have a new column from Tom Davenport and Rick Roth, expert screen printers who run the industry blog "The Ink Kitchen" at www.theinkkitchen.com. Each issue, we will feature their top tips, secrets and stories. There's a reason the duo were spotted at this year's ISS Long Beach show wearing "Know-It-All" hoodies. We think you'll enjoy their insights.

Thanks for reading,

Charles J. Mitten



WHAT'S IN MY CLOSET?

Each issue, we ask our readers a simple question: What is your favorite branded apparel item in your closet? Send in a photo of you and your favorite garment, and tell us in a paragraph why you love it. We run one submission each issue, and that lucky winner receives a \$25 Visa Gift card.

This issue, our submission comes from Kathy Whitburn, sales associate for American Solutions for Business (asi/120075): "As I write this, the calendar says spring but the temps in Wisconsin are still claiming winter. As I was getting ready to run out the door for my appointment, I instantly

grabbed my soft-shell bonded jacket from Charles River Apparel (asi/44620). This is, by far, my favorite go-to jacket in my closet! For more than 10-plus years, this jacket has had me covered in all the elements: cold, rainy spring days, cooler summer nights, crisp fall days and warmer, snowy winter ones. I love the sleek, ladies trim fit, the warm fleece inside, the durable hardware and the water-resistant shell. This high-performance jacket provides warmth and a timeless, classic good look without bulk. Even after all these years, I always look professional and feel confident when I wear it."

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TRENDS

THE HOTTEST
APPAREL AND
ACCESSORIES

By Alissa Tallman



Women's Puma sleeveless polo (565792) from **Driving Impressions** (asi/50864; circle 123 on Free Info Card).

To see more zigzag items, visit wearablesmag.com

Zig When Others Zag

ORIGINALLY MADE POPULAR by the fashion house Missoni in the late 1950s, zigzag patterning has reemerged as a forerunning apparel trend this season. The latest collections from The Row and Marc Jacobs, along with numerous retail stores, are paying homage to this enduring design, which are also known as chevrons.

Kristen Morrison, creative director and front-end developer for eReach Consulting, takes note of the zigzag's current popularity. "Chevron pattern[ing] has become so popular that it appears across multiple industries and economic markets," she says on eReach's website. Missoni's recent Target campaign, for which the Italian fashion house designed a line of clothing, put the trend back into the spotlight. The line completely sold out within 24 hours and crashed Target's website repeatedly. Moreover, it inspired a wave of "chevron madness" from other retailers like Forever 21 and spread the pattern into many areas beyond fashion.

FASHION TIP

Pair chevrons and zigzag patterns with solids to anchor down this active and lively print.

LINE UP FOR

Contrast Piping

THIS SUMMER, EXPECT to see sportswear by the hottest designers lined with contrast piping, from jackets and running pants to golf skirts and sneakers. This unique design accent has a remarkable way of turning regular solid separates into sporty conversation pieces.

Cristina Dinica, senior marketing coordinator for Fersten Worldwide Inc. (asi/53974), lauds contrast piping for the mere simplicity behind the idea. "Piping can add depth and movement to a garment, especially when using matching colored fabric with texture to create the piping," she explains. "It can make the ordinary extraordinary, and it's a great way to draw attention to a detail or add visual interest to a garment." Dinica also points out that promotional wear has been implementing contrast piping for quite a while.

"Piping adds another dimension to apparel basics and gives a fresh update to a traditional look," says Rhea Aslin, divisional brand manager at SanMar (asi/84863). She explains how it works in terms of both solids and color-blocked items: "On a solid shirt, piping offers a nice contrasting detail to break up the look while providing pops of color. On a colorblocked shirt, piping adds additional visual details and can incorporate another uniforming color to tie together the look."

Women's track jacket (BTJ-1W) from **Stormtech Performance Apparel LTD** (asi/89864; circle 79 on Free Info Card). Reflective decoration by Visual Impressions (circle 113 on Free Info Card).

Water and windproof women's jacket (Provisional) from **Sun Mountain Sports** (asi/90139; circle 115 on Free Info Card)

DECORATION TIP

Trace the angle of the piping to get the correct angle for art on sleeves or along piping. And use extra caution with non-traditional locations. "If it's a critical order or a large production run," says Marshall Atkinson, COO of Visual Impressions, "we always recommend to our clients to order one extra item and use it as a pre-production sample."

Piped colorblocked windshirt (JST64) from **SanMar** (asi/84863; circle 77 on Free Info Card). Screen printed by Visual Impressions (circle 113 on Free Info Card).

Men's short-sleeve polo (16216) from **Trimark Sportswear Group** (asi/92122; circle 80 on Free Info Card).

Fresh Breath and Fresh Styles

STIMULATING AND REVITALIZING, mint green is making a smash appearance in high-end fashion this summer, from 1960s-style dresses hailing from Peter Pilotto and Ralph Lauren to Carven's innovative camouflage prints. Mint is a fresh and upbeat hue that looks stunning with neutrals and combines perfectly with other light colors, such as pink and yellow. Pantone's current trendy rendition of mint, hemlock, offers a sage-y take on this soft yet resplendent hue.

Charlie McGuinness, national sales manager for MV Sport/Weatherproof (asi/68318), labels mint as an ideal warm-weather apparel hue. "Mint green is a soft and soothing yet refreshing color," he says. "It reminds one of springtime." He feels mint could definitely benefit from being showcased more often in the promotional arena, even for men. "Mint is very underutilized from an apparel standpoint," he says, "which is odd, as it's only subtly feminine and very elegant."

One of the reasons mint has become so popular recently is because of the season's heightened focus on pastels. Pastels are wonderful to implement into any promotional program, as they generally lend apparel of all types a certain versatility, softening silhouettes and providing clients and end-users with more garment choices.

Women's burnout mint hoodie (W1280) from **MV Sport/Weatherproof** (asi/68318; circle 82 on Free Info Card)



DECORATION TIP
Black is a fantastic neutral to pair with this shade of green. As a result, mint should be considered for logos as well as embroidery and decoration embellishments.



Women's performance jacket (Second Layer Pullover) from **Sun Mountain Sports** (asi/90139; circle 115 on Free Info Card).



Tie-dye heavyweight tee (952) from **One Stop Inc.** (asi/75085; circle 114 on Free Info Card)



Flowy racerback tank (B8800) from **alphabroder** (asi/34063; circle 81 on Free Info Card). Screen printed by Visual Impressions (circle 113 on Free Info Card).

Pet Apparel

BY CHUCK ZAK

PET APPAREL MIGHT seem to be a novelty – until you realize just how passionate people are about their furry little companions. Tap into that deep emotional investment, and you have the beginnings of a powerful marketing campaign.

The pet market in general has remained admirably robust; pet owners spent \$56 billion last year – a record high. One especially interesting upward trend is what marketing research firm Packaged Facts calls the “humanization of pets.” Namely, people are more apt than ever to treat their pet as one of the family, and pamper them appropriately. This is where the appeal of pet apparel begins to transcend merely “cute” and starts to get serious.

For potential customers, consider any of the pet-centered services that may have once seemed marginal: sitters, walkers or groomers, for instance. And even as the number of homeless animals continues to rise, so too does the number of organizations which provide much-needed adoption services.

Becoming part of this healthy market is easy, and it begins by giving great products like these a good home.

► This fun pet scarf (SCV40) is made from anti-pill polar fleece and comes in a wide variety of colors from **FIEL** (asi/53509; circle 84 on Free Info Card). Embroidered by Stitch Designers (asi/741145; circle 118 on Free Info Card).

◄ Combed ringspun cotton doggie tank top (3902) features double-needle stitched rib binding from **S&S Active-wear** (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card). Embroidered by Vantage Apparel (asi/93390; circle 117 on Free Info Card).

◄ Soft dog sweater (PT8809) features a zippered opening and made from polyester/cotton/wool blend from **Atteff** (asi/37455; circle 89 on Free Info Card).

► Organic collar (PCA140) includes side-release buckle, slide adjuster and D-ring hardware from **WOVIN** (asi/92980; circle 85 on Free Info Card).

► Flex-fleece dog zip hoody (F997) features a kangaroo pocket, zipper closure and an opening for a leash from **American Apparel** (asi/35297; circle 83 on Free Info Card). Screen printed by Vantage Apparel (asi/93390; circle 117 on Free Info Card).





▼ Dog event vest (DEV-5) is made from poly/cotton poplin or nylon and hemmed with neck and chest Velcro closures from **Aprons 'n More** (asi/36563; circle 90 on Free Info Card).



▲ Cotton/spandex doggie tank (CST888-Doggie) has a contrast binding and is made in the USA from **Blanks Plus** (asi/40642; circle 92 on Free Info Card). Embroidered by Vantage Apparel (asi/93390; circle 117 on Free Info Card).



► Triangle-shape bandanna fits large and small dogs nicely from **Promotional Print Wear** (asi/33266; circle 93 on Free Info Card).



▼ Made from imported cotton, this pet bandanna (TSMSOL-100) is perfect for smaller dogs from **Caro-Line/Bandanna Promotions** (asi/44020; circle 88 on Free Info Card).

Three Selling Tips

1 Try unexpected markets. You can find opportunities for selling pet apparel beyond the obvious customers. Kimberly Damp, sales & marketing coordinator with WOV-IN (asi/92980), suggests college bookstores and alumni groups, or even hotels. "Hotels are becoming more and more pet friendly," she says. "Many offer pet apparel and promotions in their gift/souvenir stores." Acknowledging the importance of pets in your customers' lives, says Damp, is a good way of helping to ensure repeat business.

2 Seek cross-promotion opportunities. Organizations that work to help homeless pets tend to get involved in a lot of the same activities, and donating your own product to a compatible group is a good way to increase visibility. Melissa Mariner-Loos, president and founder of Bella-Reed Pit Bull Rescue in Southampton, PA, sells its own logoed dog apparel, but has also donated it to groups such as Furever Free, an organization that helps pay veterinarian bills for people who might otherwise be forced to surrender their dog.

3 Look for adoption and community events. For organizations that provide adoption services, it's a good idea to include an imprinted wearable with each adoption. Michele Muller of Philadelphia's Main Line Animal Rescue sends newly adopted dogs home with a bandanna that says "MLAR helped me find my way home". Bella-Reed's Mariner-Loos also suggests local "beef and beer raffle baskets" as a good place to connect with potential customers in your local area.



Sateen Blouse

THE VALUE OF a reliable and attractive woven shirt can't be underestimated, especially when you're seeking to upgrade company uniforms or improve a company's overall look. This women's sateen woven shirt (V0219) from Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788; circle 98 on Free Info Card) is a definite keeper when it comes to appearance, price and durability. Made of a cotton/polyester/spandex blend, this blouse has tons of style with its subtle sheen and is ideal for all types of working environments and promotional situations. Plus, it's available in several new and updated colors: almond, black, charcoal, white, Danish blue and sage.

Decoration Tip

"If you want a logo to stand out and are working with a dark garment, such as black, bright colors are always best," says Sean Hogan, general manager at A&P Master Images. "To make your design pop even more, try adding a small white double run stitch to the outside. Small things like this can really help make your customer's logo stand out."

Corporate Grace

This ensemble is confident, adding a slight "edge" to formal corporate attitude. It's right on-trend for any work situation; the leather bag can act as a super-cool portfolio carrier.



Six-button cardigan (CH405W) from **alphabroder** (asi/34063; circle 81 on Free Info Card).



Blended chino cargos (8573) from **Edwards Garment** (asi/51752; circle 99 on Free Info Card).



Leather bag from **Clava American** (asi/45335; circle 100 on Free Info Card).

Denim and Debonair

Cozy and casual, this hip ensemble teases out the more casual aspects of this shirt. It's great for a sports event, a weekend work event or an outdoor fundraiser.



Straw hat (1289) from **Philadelphia Rapid Transit** (asi/77945; circle 101 on Free Info Card).



Denim capris (FR334) from **Dickies** (asi/49675; circle 102 on Free Info Card).



Sparkling high-end sandals (83357) from **Hammacher Schlemmer** (asi/59444; circle 103 on Free Info Card).

Belt It Out

INNOVATIVE BELT AND buckle designs took the Fall/Winter 2014 Fashion Week runways by storm, from Prada's glamorous metallic offerings to Lanvin's hypnotizing wordy buckles. As a result, corporate apparel collections have been introducing new belt styles to accommodate the latest trends.

Taraynn Lloyd, marketing director for Edwards Garment (asi/51752), says that thinner belts are presently where it's at for women. "Skinny belts are perfect for skinny pants and can easily be a style game changer," she says. "Functionally speaking, a belt always makes a great addition to a pair of pants or shorts. Skinny belts are the best for women because they accent the silhouette in a very feminine way. You can wear a sweater or blouse over your favorite skirt or pants and change the style just by adding a belt."

Kevin Giron, sales representative for Driving Impressions (asi/50864), makes specific mention of the trophy belt as a style contender for men. "This belt is a good example of current trends in that brand recognition is almost instantaneous," he says. "Belt buckles in particular are getting bigger, showier and more prominent."

AS SEEN ON... THE PGA TOUR



◀ High-contrast belts in white and bright colors have become favorites of many golfers on tour, including color aficionado Rickie Fowler. Golf tournaments are ideal places to include a belt as part of a goodie bag.



Adidas trophy belt (N53624) from **Driving Impressions** (asi/50864; circle 123 on Free Info Card).



Super-skinny leather dress belt (SB01) from **Edwards Garment** (asi/51752; circle 99 on Free Info Card).

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THE CHALLENGE

“How Can I Jump Start My E-mail Response Rate?”

Check your e-mail inbox. Now, check your trash folder.

How many of those messages did you toss into the virtual wastebasket, unopened, without a second thought?

E-mail has become a cheap and nearly ubiquitous form of marketing, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Done right, e-mail can be the “single most important connection opportunity in existence,” says marketing consultant and best-selling author Jay Baer.

Done wrong, well, you know what happens then: nothing. So how can you strengthen your message, and engage your recipients more, ultimately leading to increased sales? Follow these tips.

Avoid rush hour. Send your e-mails midday or later in the afternoon to stand out. Your message is more likely to be deleted



if it's among that big batch of new e-mails checked first thing in the morning. “Don't fall into the ‘delete trap’,” says Baer about the morning glut of e-mails.

Don't waste your subject line. If you don't tell readers what the e-mail is about and why they should care right away, it's likely to go straight into the trash. “The subject line has to be very strong,” says David Blaise, owner of Blaise Drake & Co., an industry consultancy. Subject lines that are too cute, lengthy or misleading can inhibit readers from opening, or even worse, annoy them if they do.

Punctuate strategically. Sometimes, a question mark or an ellipsis at the end of the

subject line generates the curiosity needed to get your e-mail opened. “It could be a question like: Three promotions that get people to trade shows? If they want to know more about it, they'll open the email,” says Blaise. Just make sure the question is something your customer would want answered.

Customize your message. Generic e-mails that aren't relevant to a customer's interests are a waste of time both for you and that customer. For better results, tailor your e-mail blasts to smaller groups with specific needs. “I've been able to spend more time doing the research for each group and trying to hit the nail on the head with those individuals,” says Dave Roose, owner of Proforma Prana, “vs. throwing everything against the wall and whatever sticks, I go pick up.”

Guide the next step. Once you know whom you're sending the e-mail to, it's important to figure out exactly what you want to have happen next. Do you want the reader to visit your site, call your company or watch a video? Not having a clear goal is one of the most common problems with marketing e-mails. “You need to know what you want them to do, and every word needs to lead them to that conclusion,” Blaise says. “Realistically, if we don't know what it is we want to say to someone or want them to do, we probably should not be e-mailing them in the first place.” — *Theresa Hegel*

Audience Specific

Small, targeted e-mail lists bring relevant solutions to your clients within a certain market, who are more likely to take action as a result. Dave Roose, owner of Proforma Prana, has had great success by focusing his e-mails on confirmed customers and referrals, and dialing down the number of e-mails he sends out. “Instead of having 20,000 e-mails go out, now it's probably only a few thousand,” Roose says. He breaks these smaller mailing lists into industry categories and targets each with special promotions, based on what he thinks their specific needs will be.

For example, Roose's nonprofit category

may get an e-mail blast early in the year, promoting flip-flops in advance of a summer conference scheduled in Miami. Or, he might send out a special on website design at the end of the year, since that's when a company is working on the budget and more likely able to allocate funds for such a promotion.

It can take time (and lots of Google alerts) to perfect this technique. Last year, Proforma Prana had revenues that were 160% higher than in 2012, he says, thanks in part to the targeted online marketing strategy that has increased sales and margins. — *TH*

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MARKET SPOTLIGHT

Cowboy Up

The Western hat is a staple of Americana that crosses all borders.

The Western hat is an amazing piece of iconography. While often used in parody, it still represents deep authenticity as a symbol that works throughout America (and other countries, too).

As a promotional product, the cowboy hat may not have the range (no pun intended) of other items, but it's much larger than you think thanks to a widespread infatuation with all things Western. Musical acts such as Taylor Swift, Mumford & Sons and Blake Shelton have scored mainstream success and fame. Western heritage products are constantly being resurrected and reinterpreted by top fashion labels such as Ralph Lauren.

Bottom line, when it comes to conjuring up a certain image of purely American individualistic, man-vs.-everything-else culture, the cowboy hat is hard to top. "A cowboy hat is truly iconic," says David Goldman, vice president of Philadelphia Rapid Transit (asi/77945).

Despite being immediately identifiable to its native regions, the western hat ranks as an accessory for everyone due to what Goldman notes is the "strong country-fying of suburban areas everywhere." As evidence of the rustic lifestyle's appeal even deep within the heavily urbanized Northeast Corridor wherein he is based, Goldman notes the surprising popularity of local country radio (with Philly's WXTU is in the top 10 according to nation-based Arbitron ratings). Plus, there are a large number of country music

acts booked into Camden, NJ's nearby performing arts center. Goldman's business has had great success with cowboy hats, both in places where it might be expected – Alberta, Canada for instance – but also as an item with an international fan base. "We ship tens of thousands of cowboy hats around the world," he says.

Dawn Cervenka, account executive with San Marcos, Texas-based RiverCity Sportswear (asi/309087), highlights this worldwide appeal with a story about the F1 in Schools Technology Challenge, an international competition based in Oxford, England that asks young students to design a superior Formula One race car. When the city of Austin, Texas hosted the 2013 World Finals, Cervenka's company was chosen by the event's organizers to supply 400 affordable, but faithful, cowboy hats, with ten of those hats logoed specially to honor the final winners. "I ordered a cowboy hat made out of felt, so they had that brushed wool feeling and looked very authentic," Cervenka says. Competitors from all over the globe traveled to the Lone Star State for the challenge, with the coveted crown – and specially logoed cowboy hats – ultimately claimed by the Australian squad.

So how did this international crowd of teens react to their new headwear? "They absolutely loved it," says Cervenka. "It was the epitome of what they imagined – that we're all cowboys here."

Paula Brant, president of Western Express (asi/96650), credits the "John Wayne mentality" that resonates with all Americans, and that informs the image of that mythical frontier that remains the America of popular imagination, here and abroad. "People do Western-themed weddings, BBQs and, of course, country music," says Brant. "Lots of people order for events anywhere in the world. They're in NYC, in small towns, everywhere." – *Chuck Zak*

Product Picks

Twang-up your promotion with an iconic American accessory.



This sewn braid straw hat (2461) has an inside stretch band and U-Shape-it brim. It's popular for concerts or hosting traveling executives. Available from **Philadelphia Rapid Transit** (asi/77945; circle 101 on Free Info Card).



Get some bona fide cowboy credentials with this unisex wool felt hat (HA-46BLK) with crushable crown. It's made in the USA and a big hit at BBQs, rodeos or races. Available from **Western Express** (asi/96650; circle 104 on Free Info Card).

28 percent of U.S. listeners who cite country as their favorite music genre, more than any other format

Source: NPD Group

I Believe...

The who, what and wear of industry experts

BY STEPHANIE WOODS, AS TOLD TO THERESA HEGEL

... Women have a lot more options

these days: I think the apparel industry has taken notice that more buyers and recipients of branded apparel are women, and they want styles and cuts that are more suited to complement their body shapes.

... The Golden Rule still applies: I do my best to treat everyone as I would want to be treated. I think you get what you give, and I try to be considerate and courteous to others, remembering to say “please,” “thank you” and “excuse me.” I also have a tendency to smile at strangers. It always makes me feel good, and hopefully it does the same for them.

... The ad specialty industry is never boring: Like many others, I found myself in the industry by accident. I was working for a major entertainment studio that purchased premiums and loved the creativity and fun that went into developing the products. I soon ended up on the distributor side. I never get bored, and I can use my firsthand experience as a buyer to help clients through the process.

... Opportunity doesn't just knock: My daughter belongs to a local NHL team's kids club. By chance, the club contacted me to get her T-shirt size for a giveaway. I saw the opportunity to introduce myself as a premiums distributor and asked if they'd be open to a new resource. The following season, I was thrilled to provide two items in the kids club kit and have been proud to have them as a client since.

... Price shouldn't trump quality: Most of my clients are looking to find quality products on fairly lean budgets. I try to remind them that the product selected is a representation of their brand to the public and they don't want to make a poor impression with low-quality goods.

... Mother knows best: The person I admire most is my mom. Like any mother-daughter relationship we've had our ups and

downs, but she's always my biggest supporter and advocate.

... The Internet brings new challenges: The Internet is changing the way we do business and creating more competition. I've been fortunate that I've developed solid relationships with my clients and have a strong enough reputation as an expert resource that it doesn't come up often. The more I can establish myself as a reliable and creative source, the less I have to worry about my clients shopping around online.

... Retail is setting the tone: When it comes to decoration trends, more graphic elements are being added than the standard left-chest logo. It's a great way to be more creative in presenting apparel decoration to clients and to offer more of a wow factor.

... Social media works: Social media is a great way to boost your business and establish your own brand. I specifically like Pinterest and creating boards for themes or events that many of my clients participate in. I had an order for an annual golf tournament come directly from a product that was showcased on our golf items board.

... It's all about networking: Whether you partner with a large company or go out on your own, having a strong support network is critical. There's a lot to this business, and knowing who you can rely on to help with ideas or just lend an ear is crucial. I highly recommend getting involved with your regional associations.

... Finding balance is important: I love yoga and Pilates. This job can be stressful, and I find that both are a great way of getting a good workout while also focusing on slowing down.

... High-end products are great motiva-



Stephanie Woods

- Founder of Los Angeles-based Limelight Branding
- Judge of the 2013 Wearables Top Decorator contest
- Worked in Hollywood and features clients in TV, music and sports

tors: My client developed a wellness program for employees where they had to complete different challenges, and at each level, there was a gift. Employees who completed all the challenges received a limited-edition embroidered jacket. The employees were extremely motivated to participate with such a high-end reward waiting for them. Of 250 employees, more than 150 qualified for their jackets.

... You can have it all: Being a single mom was a defining factor when accepting my first sales position in ad specialty. By having a flexible schedule and setting my own hours, I was able to attend all of my daughter's events and volunteer for her field trips while still being productive and successful in business. I'm so grateful I didn't have to miss out on her big moments.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

A Better Bangladesh

Last year's tragic accidents exposed a fractured system. How can we improve it?

BY DAVID J. BEBON

On April 24 last year, 1,133 garment workers died in the Rana Plaza Factory collapse in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Several months earlier, a fire at another garment factory in Dhaka, Tazreen Fashions, killed 112 garment workers. In the course of just six short months, the garment industry in Bangladesh had become synonymous with unsafe working conditions and the exploitation of the factory worker.

The sudden spotlight on Bangladesh exposed a fast-growing garment manufacturing industry that thrived in a virtually lawless, unregulated wild west of government malfeasance and corruption. It was an industry that few consumers here in the United States and Europe were aware of or fully understood.

Just before last year's disastrous Rana Plaza accident, Bangladeshi garments accounted for 5.8% of all imported U.S. clothing, according to the U.S. commerce department. A year later, despite all the negative attention, it grew to 6.2%. Rising prices and other factors in China (the dominant apparel producer in the world) will continue to send apparel manufacturers into Bangladesh. That's how the apparel industry operates – it always gravitates toward the lowest-cost producer. But will that lead to more disaster? Can the inadequacies of the country's apparel factory regulation be fixed?

Many don't know that the history of Bangladesh is a relatively short one – it only achieved independence in 1971 in a war to

separate from Pakistan. Its garment industry sprouted by the end of the decade as a means to help curb the desperate hunger and famine that gripped the country of 150 million people. Jute was a significant industry and source of foreign dollars in the early years, but the worldwide consumption of jute rugs and household items eventually declined. Something else was needed.

Bangladesh was a perfect place globally to develop a needle trade and garment industry. It had close proximity to cotton and the big fabric mills of Asia as well as a huge, able-bodied population that was ready and eager to work. The garment manufacturing industry takes relatively little capital investment or heavy machinery – you only need a building, good lighting and a few sewing machines to begin production.

By 1984 there were a total 384 garment factories in Bangladesh, all focusing on cut-and-sew operations utilizing fabric imported from countries such as China, India, Pakistan and Malaysia. As world consumption of clothing has steadily increased, fed by cheap labor and less expensive apparel, Bangladesh

“Any company or brand that states it did not know its production was in a particular factory does not deserve your business.”

David J. Bebon is the CEO of DBEBZ Apparel, a manufacturer of men's and ladies' woven and knit sport shirts. He has manufactured branded and private-label apparel in Bangladesh since 1987. He can be reached at davidb@dbebz.com.



has grown its garment manufacturing sector. In 2012, the country boasted over 5,600 garment manufacturing factories employing over five million workers. It exported over \$20 million in apparel worldwide, behind only China (\$125 million) and Italy (\$25 million) in global export dollars.

This explosive growth over the past three decades has resulted in shoddy factory construction, dangerous electrical and power supplies and corrupt illegal flouting of local building codes and safety standards. In the rush to grab more garment production and more American and European dollars, garment factories were built with little regard for local building codes, fire safety or worker safety.

It is said that you reap what you sow – and now Bangladesh has suffered fatal factory fires, building collapses and the loss of precious human lives.

In the firestorm of world condemnation that followed the tragic loss of human life in the Rana Plaza factory collapse, apparel brands and retailers from Europe and North America established two organizations with the sole purpose of improving factory conditions and worker safety in these garment factories. One organization – The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety – is comprised of 26 companies, all based in North America. The second organization – The Bangladesh Accord for Fire and Building Safety – touts over 150 companies as members, with most being from European countries with a few North American firms such as PVH.

These two organizations have begun a major initiative to improve factory conditions, fire safety and general worker safety in the Bangladesh manufacturing sector. Between both organizations, they plan to inspect over 2,000 garment manufacturing factories in the year 2014. And with help from the Bangladesh government, factories that fail inspections can be temporarily or permanently closed due to unsafe working conditions or unsafe building and structure issues.

In addition to these two organizations and

LEARN IT LIVE

Learn how to establish, grow and restore trust with your customers and co-workers by attending a half-day seminar with best-selling author Stephen M. R. Covey at The ASI Show Chicago (Tuesday, July 15, 9:00 a.m.).

the rigorous factory inspection schedule, a trust fund has been established by labor groups and clothing companies with the goal in mind of raising \$40 million for the families and survivors of the Rana Plaza factory collapse.

There are many safe, clean, good factories in Bangladesh, but there are a lot of poorly run facilities as well. Will the inspections and prodding make a difference in a country with historically lax oversight of building codes and elements of payola and corruption? The jury is still out. Yes, help from the Bangladesh government is critical. But we know ultimately who will make the difference in Bangladesh: apparel companies and the consumers.

American and European apparel companies are buyers of products in a foreign country. We do not own the factories, but we have a social responsibility to ensure worker safety and human dignity wherever we spend our

money. Working conditions for every Bangladesh garment employee can be improved, but we need accountability throughout the entire supply chain. We – the apparel brands, retailers and garments manufacturers – must insist

“We have a social responsibility to ensure worker safety and human dignity.”

on audited, safe factories that pass inspections from organizations like WRAP (Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production) and guarantee basic human rights for clean, safe working environments. We must stop the sub-contracting of production to sub-par factories that hide the blame, allowing apparel companies and retailers to skirt their responsibilities.

Any company or brand that states it did not know its production was in any particular factory does not deserve your business.

We can do this. Bangladesh is a beautiful country populated by warm, kind people who are just like you and me. They are wives and husbands who have children and grandchildren, who have a basic desire to provide a better life for their families.

We can make a difference in Bangladesh – but it starts with social responsibility and accountability.

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BEGINNER – 100

Warm Up to Summer Apparel

Fashionistas rave about the trendiest of looks for summer, such as pastel colors, geometric prints and boxy cuts. What matters too for promotional apparel, is how it feels.

Performance becomes imperative as temperatures rise. Margaret Crow, director of marketing at S&S Activewear (asi/84358), steers distributors to 100% polyester that is breathable, light and soft. “The addition of performance characteristics, such as moisture wicking and odor control, is a bonus to these fabrications,” she says. Oakley, a reputable brand that’s new to the imprinted apparel market, makes summer-worthy styles with performance front and center. “Oakley is known for its innovative fabrics and design,” Crow says. She adds, “Their attention to detail means that their polos will be comfortable through the hot summer months.”

Choosing garments that are easy to wear with a relaxed attitude reflect the summer mindset. In fact, the Burnside brand is

inspired by a youthful surf/skate culture. The line includes everything from board shorts to short-sleeve button-up shirts in a cotton/poly blend. “Lightweight fabrics are really popular right now, and are great for summer,” Crow says. “Men’s shirts have become more fitted and style conscious. The mini-check short-sleeve shirt from Burnside is more fitted than woven shirts of a few years ago.” It features other popular details like two front pockets and contrast stitching.

Suggest layering apparel for logoed

“Lightweight fabrics are really popular right now, and are great for summer.”

Margaret Crow, S&S Activewear
(asi/84358)

Five Musts for Summer Apparel

1. Lightweight fabrications offer a looser weave and vents to maintain comfort.
2. Lighter colors absorb less light/heat than darker colors. However, dark colors provide better UV protection than lighter shades. Consider compromising and aim for a hue somewhere between light and dark that offers a fair compromise.
3. Looser cuts or styles with fabrics that reduce cling keep clothing from sticking to sweaty skin.
4. Antibacterial properties resist the growth of odor-causing organisms as the body heats up.
5. UPF-rated garments provide the best protection against ultraviolet radiation. Look for a UPF rating of 50+.

apparel programs. Tank tops, which can be worn under T-shirts or with unbuttoned short-sleeve shirts, double the look without adding a huge price tag for the overall style. Windbreakers are another layering option, particularly for outdoor events at night or along the shoreline where cool breezes often follow sunset.

Don’t forget the accessories. Summer apparel programs are a good opportunity to sell hats that shade the face and flip-flops for the pool. For beach-themed promotions, sunshades, large tote bags and swimwear cover-ups make profitable add-ons.



The Burnside mini-check shirt (B9257) is relaxed with side vents, yet stylish with contrast white stitching and a two-piece back yoke with inverted pleat. Available from **S&S Activewear** (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card).



The Oakley ladies Solana polo (532053) has a quick drying UV-shielding fabric to manage moisture and minimize cling for maximum style and comfort. Available from **S&S Activewear** (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card).

Photos courtesy of S&S Activewear (asi/84358)

Ready for the Rain?

Are you and your clients living in one of the rainiest U.S. states? The top five, according to www.currentresults.com, are Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and, of course, Florida. America's top 10 rainiest states average 50 inches of rain per year. From that data alone, there is a lot of opportunity to make sales rain.

You must, however, know what type of raincoat is right for your client and the promotion. Fortunately there are many styles and price points in this category, which range from sleek, high-tech jackets to shapeless-yet-practical ponchos. "When sourcing a raincoat there are so many variables," says Lori Anderson, marketing manager at River's End Trading Company (asi/82588).

She suggests considering a number of questions to pinpoint the perfect garment, including price point, brand, intended use and sought-after features. "For example," says Anderson, "if a client is a TV station and the reporters will be using the raincoats out in the elements ... they will want a recognizable retail brand." The apparel solution should be stylish to look good on the air while provid-

ing the best overall protection. For this type of scenario, Anderson recommends a quality performance jacket from Columbia with the company's Omni-Tech proprietary technology, which combines waterproof protection with breathability that allows moisture to move away from the skin. "The result is outerwear that keeps you dry and comfortable no matter what," she says. "This waterproof-breathable combination makes the Columbia rainwear extremely effective over other rainwear that is only waterproof."

Similarly, if the raincoat is to be sold at an upscale resort, the brand, its performance features and style elements will be important. By contrast, large outdoor events such as a football game or concert do not require a performance branded jacket. The perfect solution may be as inexpensive as a rain poncho.

Katharina Pieper, marketing manager for BamBams (asi/38228), says you don't have to trade effectiveness for budget programs. She notes BamBams style #RP-100, made of

PVC-0.1mil, as a choice that meets a tight price point but still performs. "This rain poncho is definitely an effective rain barrier, even for heavier rain showers, and comes with an attached head cover," Pieper says. "It is important to know that the reusable rain ponchos [in contrast to cheaper disposable options] are more environmental friendly, and with an imprint, the brand logo gets more impressions."

Bottom line: There's a rainwear solution to meet the needs of any audience, location, application or price point.

Hot Markets For Rainwear

- Resorts and hospitality
- Delivery services
- Landscapers
- Athletic teams and booster clubs
- Construction
- TV stations and broadcast companies
- Political rallies
- Concerts and festivals
- Universities and colleges



Ponchos don't have to be cheap throwaway items. This reusable poncho (RP-100) from **BamBams** (asi/38228; circle 107 on Free Info Card) offers branding bang for an inexpensive price.

Photo courtesy of BamBams (asi/38228)



For top-line waterproof performance with breathability, look to a pair of Columbia jackets – the ladies' Arcadia jacket (top, 2111) and the Watertight jacket (2135) from **River's End Trading Company** (asi/82588; circle 106 on Free Info Card).

Photo courtesy River's End Trading Company (asi/82588)

ADVANCED – 300

Working Out for the Weekend

In February, *The Dr. Oz Show* upgraded workout wear to work-appropriate wear with a segment on “Workout Wear Fridays.” Is it a trend? An article in *The Washington Post*, “The Case for Workout Wear Friday,” thinks yes, stating “clothes that go straight from your workout to your work (or vice versa) are going to come in handy in 2014.”

Luckily, the promotional apparel industry is ready for the demand. Brands such as American Apparel (asi/35297) and Bella+Allo (asi/39590) have long included comfy yet sporty garments to wear while walking, jogging or striking a yoga pose. Today, these brands offer more options than ever, allowing distributors to source a more work-appropriate fitness outfit for companies that have wellness programs or encourage employees to dress exercise-ready on a casual day. For example, the Alo performance tri-blend tee (W1101) is made of a combination of 50% polyester/37.5% combed ring spun cotton/12.5% rayon. The result is a performance tee with a soft hand and flattering drape. Not only will the shirt not “cling” too much for

the office, it has stylish details such as tonal stitching to increase its polish.

Other top apparel suppliers are expanding fitness apparel choices, offering full lines of athletically oriented garments. SanMar (asi/84863), for example, launched 26 new Sport-Tek pieces for 2014. Its Sport-Tek ladies fitness pant (LST880) and Vector wicking polo (LST670) pair for an outfit that isn’t overly clingy, but is stretchy and fitted enough to make exercising easy. When creating a workout wear Friday ensemble, the trick is to source components that can be layered and will present the right style details to present a professional look. When you do, everyone will see healthy results.



Black yoga pants with a sports shirt (LST880 and LST670) look sporty yet professional, with a black-outlined logo to pull the outfit together. Available from **SanMar** (asi/84863; circle 77 on Free Info Card).

Photos courtesy of SanMar (asi/84863)

This Alo tri-blend crewneck tee (W1101) from **S&S Activewear** (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card) is relaxed enough for the gym but versatile enough for practically anywhere. Photo courtesy of S&S Activewear (asi/84358)



The mandarin collar on the Acoro (051) from **Tri-Mountain** (asi/92125; circle 108 on Free Info Card) adds a touch of sophistication to workout wear that is appropriate for an office environment. Photo courtesy of Tri-Mountain (asi/92125)

Corporate Support for Working Out

- Approximately half of U.S. employers offer wellness promotion initiatives.
- Among employers that include a “Lifestyle Management Program,” 72% offer a specific “Fitness” component.
- Workplace Wellness is a \$6 billion per year industry.

Source: 2013 RAND Corporation, “Workplace Wellness Programs Study”

Automate to Price it Right

The pricing and quotation process can be time-consuming and inconsistent. The remedy lies in technology with automated software and websites. Quite simply, the time savings are significant. “When the integration of a product database is tied to your quotation and order systems, then you’re eliminating the need for duplicate data entry, not to mention removing excess errors due to rekeying,” says Rob Watson, vice president of digital experience for ASI. “If your order system is a good one, then you can convert your quote into an order with a single click – increasing efficiency and service to your customers.”

Standard price lists should be, well, standard for screen printers and decorators; yet “many printing companies both large and small don’t develop or use a standardized pricing model/strategy,” says JP Hunt, vice president of sales and marketing for software company InkSoft. “This results in inconsistent pricing, profitability issues and the inability to accurately forecast financial performance.” InkSoft helps users solve these issues by allowing printing businesses to enter their product pricing, print pricing and other pricing variables such as quantity discounts. It allows users browsing the company’s website to generate a “quick quote” to see pricing. “This self-service



“Many printing companies, both large and small, don’t develop or use a standardized pricing strategy.”

JP Hunt, Inksoft

saves time,” Hunt says, “and provides a convenient way for a shopper to request information.”

Watson says the vast majority (nearly 90%) of promotional items is found by distributors and decorators through the Web and search engines like ESP. Still, the actual e-commerce experience in the industry is small but growing since “the promotional products industry is one relied on heavily by face-to-face interaction and phone conversations,” Watson says. Many customers simply want to talk with someone when sourcing their apparel. But the benefits of automation don’t have to be just forward facing.

“Since there are shoppers that aren’t going to go to a website to self-service, InkSoft has built-in quoting controls that allow a user to quickly generate a quote by using the pricing information already stored and entered,” Hunt says. After the quote is generated, it can be sent by e-mail for the customer to approve, comment and even pay online. Either way, the result is the same: quick service and an easier path to payment.

Priced to Move

E-commerce is one facet of the automated pricing experience. Industry search engines like ESP offer quick real-time pricing and other price-specific features that streamline the distributor experience. Features include:

- **Updated Quantity Pricing:** Price adjusts in real-time as you change the quantity. A long-sleeve shirt that costs \$20 for one will adjust to \$13 if you type in 100.
- **Search By Profit:** Not only can you organize your search results by profit and cost, but you can also specify your profit margin before searching. For example, if you want to make a \$1 margin on each polo shirt, ESP can find the right item.
- **Adjustable Profit Margins:** If the price proves too expensive for the client or there is a change in services, distributors can go into their ESP presentations and adjust the margins. The pricing will update automatically.

Perfecting **PRESENTATIONS**

Power your sales presentations to new heights of success with these business-building tips.

BY CHRISTOPHER RUVO



Your strongest selling point just might be you. Perhaps that is truer nowadays than ever before. When you view the competition as a faceless website, it's the outstanding service, creative solutions and personal relationships you build with clients that keep them coming back.

"When people like you – when you're reliable and trustworthy and come up with ideas that help them get the results they're after – they want to keep working with you, even if you're not the lowest on price," says Steve Bove, a promotional consultant with NJ-based Active Imprints, which provides screen printing, promotional products and more.

With you being so crucial to the sale, it's pivotal to score face time through a presentation with a prospect and make a positive impression. To help you do that, imprinted apparel sales experts offer seven tips for ensuring your presentations sing, hitting the notes that resonate and spur sales.

1 UNDERSTAND THE PROSPECT

A great presentation begins before you step into the conference room to present. It starts with performing research to understand a prospect's specific business, promotional goals and pain points. "The perfect sales presentation isn't cookie-cutter," says David Blaise, owner of Blaise Drake & Co., a consultancy to ad specialty firms. "The presentation has to be specific to each client. And to do that, you have to understand their objectives and desires."

Before presenting, Bove gets to the heart of a client's needs through conversations held on the phone or in person. During these discussions, Bove learns about a prospect's intended message, target audience and the mediums (apparel and/or hard-good products) in which they're interested in investing. "Once I have that information," says Bove, "I build my presentation around it."

Taking a similar approach, Mark Ziskind identifies prospects' wishes, goals and areas where they feel their current ad specialties provider is falling short. The chief operat-

ing officer at Caliendo Savio Enterprises (asi/155807) performs this information-gathering through a variety of means, from direct talks with decision-makers to interviewing a company's employees or franchisees. "Almost everyone you're going to present to has a current supplier, so you're going to have to unseat someone," says Ziskind. "We figure out the problems the competition isn't solving, and we custom-tailor a presentation to show how we can alleviate those issues."

2 ESTABLISH A GOAL

While understanding a prospect's needs is critical, it's equally necessary to have your own specific goal for each presentation. You must know what you want to accomplish, develop a strategy for achieving it and have a secondary goal to reach in case you miss the mark on the primary target, says Barry Maher, a nationally renowned sales trainer and author.

Sometimes, for example, your aim may be to secure a sale on the spot, with a back-up goal of advancing the process toward closing the deal by setting up a date to present more product options. "You want to be in control of the next step," says Ryan Moor, CEO of Ryonet (asi/528500), a screen-printing equipment and supplies provider.

Weston Cotton leverages product knowledge and astute understanding of each prospect to drive at his presentation goal, which, for example, may be persuading the many buyers he pursues in the yachting industry to partner with his distributorship. "I show them the benefits they would get from partnering with us," says the owner of Florida-based Cotton King (asi/169201).

3 PRESENT SOLUTIONS FOR A SPECIFIC NEED

As Cotton alludes to, your best chance of attaining your presentation goal lies in using what you've learned about prospects to create presentations that demonstrate you're uniquely capable of making their objectives a reality in a hassle-free manner. "The presentation itself is a tailored and interactive conversation about all the wonderful ways you can help meet their needs, solve their problems and alleviate their pain," says Maher. "Anticipate common objections – the presentation should

be structured to answer those objections before they're asked."

Such a presentation is just what Ziskind delivered recently to a telecommunications company that felt its promotional products partner was failing to deliver truly brand-powering solutions. Seizing on the company's sense of being starved for good ideas, Ziskind built a presentation that focused on CSE's creative capabilities. The prospect was also keen for stronger information technology services from its ad specialties partner, so Ziskind honed the presentation to highlight CSE's robust tech support. "We matched our strengths to their needs, and in the end it was a win," says Ziskind.

4 START STRONG

When the time comes to present, don't beat around the bush. Snap prospects into focus with a powerful opening that's immediately relevant to them.

Maybe you're presenting apparel options to a school booster club that's interested in selling logoed wearables to raise funds for the football team. Begin with a word about how you understand that to be the club's main aim and have selected products that will appeal especially to likely buyers, such as students and parents. Then, says Blaise, delve deeper by extolling the merits of a primary item, explaining why it will sell especially well.

In other instances, you may not be presenting specific items, but rather seeking to demonstrate generally how your services and capabilities make you a great promotional partner. To grab a decision-maker's attention, begin as John Resnick does with a carefully conceived elevator pitch that succinctly shows how you're able to best help that particular prospect. This approach recently helped Resnick – a partner at Boston-based Proforma Printing & Promotion (asi/300271) – set the tone of a presentation that resulted in him rekindling a profitable relationship with a company in the food industry – after years of dormancy. His lead-in pitch, he says, "set the tone to get the partnership going again."

5 SHOW SAMPLES AND USE VISUAL AIDS

When it comes to apparel presentations, seeing may be believing, but touching can prove the powerful clincher of a lucrative sale. "With wearables, you want to present

samples,” says Blaise. “Many buyers want to see if it really looks and feels right.”

Phil Stumpf is a big believer in the power of samples. When the sales representative for American Solutions for Business (asi/120075) makes presentations for large apparel orders, he showcases samples decorated with the prospect’s logo.

Steaming and pressing the garments beforehand, Stumpf goes the extra mile by displaying the wearables on table-top mannequins that he sets up in prospects’ conference rooms. He even covers the tables in black felt cloth to enhance the visual effect. To maximize the sale, Stumpf exhibits items that complement the main product(s) he’s pitching. For example, he may show leather gloves to go along with a leather jacket. Significantly, Stumpf selects each item because of the appeal he believes it will have to the specific buyer and their intended end-users. “If I’m presenting to a company with a largely female workforce, then I might show ladies-cut apparel decorated with rhinestones,” he says. In this way, Stumpf has earned many orders. “There’s a ‘wow’ factor that wins them over.”

Beyond samples, successful sales presenters often use other visual aids – PowerPoints, videos, etc. – that position them as the solutions provider the prospect is looking for. When Ziskind was presenting to the telecommunications company that wanted a more creative partner, he showed a brief video CSE made that accentuated the distributorship’s passion and creative energy. “It hammered home that we have what they’re looking for,” Ziskind says.

Note here that Ziskind used the video to garnish his presentation; he didn’t make it the entrée of his pitch. Relying too much on videos and other visual aids can backfire, bogging a presentation down. Pepper them in, but let your personality carry the day

6 TELL POWERFUL STORIES AND SHOWCASE TESTIMONIALS

By speaking to prospects’ goals and pressing problems, you get them emotionally involved in your presentation. This emotional engagement, which can prove a powerful determinant in whether a decision-maker decides to work with you, can be enhanced by sharing memorable client success stories and testimon-

nials that punctuate your key selling points.

Some presentation pros take extra care to relate testimonials and tales of how they’ve helped clients in businesses similar to the prospect they’re courting. As Cotton seeks to grow sales in the yachting industry, he often speaks to prospects about how Cotton King has deftly met the decorated apparel needs of a range of well-known yacht crews. The tactic tends to strike the correct chord with buyers. “It’s an asset if you can show that you have a proven track record in the industry,” says Cotton. “When you can point to a catalog of people you’ve worked with, that increases your credibility.”

7 GO FOR THE GOAL

After dialoging with prospects about what you’ve presented and addressing any questions and concerns they have, it then comes time to accomplish the goal of the presentation.

If the objective was to clinch a sale that day, then take the simple but underutilized step of asking for it. You can ease into this by briefly recapping how the solutions you’re proposing will benefit the buyer. From there, choose the wording you’re most comfortable with and that makes sense given the prospect and ask directly for the business. If you’ve addressed all the objections you can at the moment and still the prospect isn’t ready to sign on, then be sure to set up the next phase of the sales process.

Regardless of whether your presentation ends with a sale, you should always leave something behind. In addition to catalogs and brochures, consider giving a branded gift or two. “People like receiving gifts, it increases the chance of recall and it could lead to an unexpected sale,” says Resnick. He would know. At the end of a recent presentation that concluded with a prospect asking Resnick to work up a few quotes, the sales veteran gave the decision-maker a Javalina combination pen and stylus. “The account was an hour’s drive from me,” says Resnick. “By the time I got back to the office, I had an order from them for that same pen.”

Christopher Ruvo is a senior writer for Wearables. Follow him @ChrisR_ASI and contact him at cruvo@asicentral.com.

PRESENTATION PITFALLS

Certain mistakes can sink your presentation before it ever sets sail. Here are tips for avoiding them.

MAKE EACH PRESENTATION

UNIQUE: Your presentations should address a prospect’s business and needs. Generic presentations do little more than waste everyone’s time. “It’s like if you went to a Mercedes dealership to buy a convertible and the salesperson tried to sell you a half-ton truck,” says sales trainer Barry Maher. “It might be the perfect truck for the contractor who lives across the street from you, but how much interest would the presentation generate with you?”

BE CONCISE: Remember that teacher whose class you dreaded going to because he droned on endlessly? Don’t be that guy when you present. Information overload just causes people to tune out. Instead, convey the essentials concisely.

STRUCTURE THE PRESENTATION

TATION: You may have all the right information assembled to demonstrate that you’re the perfect fit for a given prospect, but if your presentations are a disorganized jumble, you’ll fail to communicate your clout. Move around the muddle by carefully structuring the presentation so that each key point is made clearly and follows logically into the next. Not only does this vastly increase the chance the buyer will understand and retain your standout selling points, it will also help ensure you don’t forget anything.

CONTROL SPEECH AND BODY

LANGUAGE: Slouching, avoiding eye contact, fidgeting and dicing up your speech with lots of “ums” and “uhhs” all detract from a presentation. Instead, be confident. Stand straight. Look them in the eye. Speak at an enthusiastic, even pace.



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*Good
Things
Come in*

CREATIVE PACKAGES



How can you burnish your professional image and instantly elevate the value of a promotional garment? It's all in the presentation.

BY SARA LAVENDUSKI

Animated conversation, laughter and music echoed across the waters off Florida's eastern coast as the 1920s-themed party progressed late into the evening. Planned and hosted by a *Fortune* 100 company, the event welcomed elegantly dressed invitees who danced and dined sumptuously inside the famed Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach. To conclude the night, a thank-you gift was in order, and only an exclusively designed commemorative item would match the upscale

atmosphere of the event.

In the planning stages, the host company came to Diane Katzman, president of Diane Katzman Design (*asi/63988*), asking for a spectacular giveaway. Katzman and her creative team got to work designing and making Art Deco-inspired jewelry for the female guests. But instead of the obligatory logoed pouch or gift bag, each came in a hand-painted gold leaf Erté box, presented on silver trays as an after-dinner surprise. “We make sure our packaging accessorizes the product being delivered,” says Katzman. “It’s the first thing that’s opened, so it sets the scene and creates excitement for what’s inside.”

While distributors spend days and weeks painstakingly conceiving the perfect promotional item, they often leave the packaging as an afterthought. That is an egregious mistake, says Jamie Stone, president & owner of Gifts By Design (*asi/205947*). The Seattle-based company takes packaging into consideration from the very first planning stages of its customized corporate gifts. Many clients actually choose the packaging first before settling on a gift, knowing the impact it will have. The best packaging not only lends the giver credibility, but also triggers an immediate positive reaction. “The perception of the giver’s brand goes way up when an item is beautifully presented,” Stone explains. “If it’s a themed event and the packaging ties in with that theme, it shows you care enough to go that extra mile. Great presentation increases perceived value by engaging the recipient even before they’ve opened up the package.”

When it’s creative, well thought-out and detail-oriented, packaging and presentation can help in everything from upselling to strengthening a company’s professional authority. It’s not just the gift that counts.

BRAND ELEVATION

By making presentation a priority, distributors and decorators can give even the most standard items a completely different perception. “We’ll embroider a basic tee for a custom order, and if it’s packaged well and maybe even includes a private label, the recipient thinks they really have something,” says Joe Thompson, director of sales & marketing at Stitch Designers (*asi/741145*). “Packaging does everything for perceived value of our clients’ items. A 25-cent private label can actually double what someone will pay.”

In fact, presentation alone often determines the initial perceived value of the entire package, according to Eric Rubin, president of Blue Generation (*asi/40653*). “You can make an expensive item look cheap or a cheap item look upscale just by the labeling and packaging,” he says. “We lend our value-priced garments retail flair with labels and descriptive hangtags. We also neatly pack everything in branded polybags. This all increases perceived value.”

While elegant packaging can elevate even the most bargain basement of products, it’s practically a requirement to emphasize the luxury brand image of some clients. Recently, decorator Black Duck Inc. worked with a high-end women’s clothing retailer to create a line of fine blank tees, then placed each one in a fashionable foil-printed handle box that resembled a purse. “It added tremendously to the product’s luxury feel,” says Erich Campbell, embroidery digitizer/designer and e-commerce manager. “For another order, we pinned custom-printed hemp-tied tags to each garment individually. Whatever image the customer wants to present, we’ll work on a strategy to package the garment to match their message.”

Beyond the client, that polished brand

image can also reflect back to the distributor or decorator. A&P Master Images (*asi/702505*), for example, polybags all of its decorated garments with an intricate full-color print. “The design shows off our capabilities and includes our contact information,” says CEO and Owner Howard Potter. “We want to wow the recipient and make sure we’re legitimate in front of potential customers.”

For the distributor and decorator, it makes upselling easier and establishes a solid reputation for quality among customers. “If your company takes care with such details,” says Campbell, “the sense is that you will take that care with everything you do and your profile increases significantly.”

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

There are a myriad of ways to present customized packaging (see sidebar). But increased engagement can begin with something as simple as an imprinted box. The Icebox (*asi/229395*) uses its own branded packaging as a direct extension of its marketing efforts. “It’s an important differentiator for us as a distributor,” says Chuck Norton, the company’s director of operations. “We ship in eye-catching blue and white boxes, and we have since our inception. It’s the first thing the recipient sees, so it has to have a positive impact. People really notice them, so it gives The Icebox a visual representation and there’s an elevated expectation for the items inside.”

What’s inside counts, too. “When we fulfill awards programs for individual recipients, we custom print a shipping box and die-cut foam to fit the award perfectly inside,” says Stone. “The recipient feels that a lot of effort has been expended to make the presentation special.”

Not every order has to be labor intensive to make an impression. Stone has also placed goods in fully printed drawstring bags, custom boxes, gift baskets, backpacks, even water bottles. “We’re looking for fun and unexpected,” she says. “You can use custom packaging in hundreds of different ways. We always start off by asking ourselves, what is the best possible way to present this client’s item?”

Thompson agrees that it’s all about what works best for individual customers. “We’ve put T-shirts in tubes, because that’s popular at retail,” he says. “We can get cardboard customized with the client’s information. If

“Great presentation increases perceived value by engaging the recipient even before they’ve opened up the package.”

Jamie Stone, Gifts By Design (*asi/205947*)

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

Industry experts are full of ideas for creative packaging and presentation. Here, are some of the best.

1. Jewelry Box

What It Is: Diane Katzman Design (asi/63988; circle 110 on Free Info Card) created this hand-painted, Art Deco-inspired gold leaf box and jewelry for a *Fortune* 100 company's high-end client dinner.

Why It Works: The detail-oriented presentation made the event memorable and signified the high value the giver placed on the recipient.

2. Shipping Box

What It Is: The Icebox (asi/229395) sends out all merchandise in conspicuous branded boxes.

Why It Works: Recipients immediately know the source of the package and have high expectations for the items inside. The overall presentation has a positive effect on the receiver before the box is even opened, when they find their items together with marketing pieces such as a recipe book containing Icebox employees' favorite

dishes and a branded device grip.

3. Polybag

What It Is: A&P Master Images (asi/702505; circle 111 on Free Info Card) ships finished apparel in a custom polybag with a complex print in full color.

Why It Works: The bag shows off the shop's printing capabilities while clearly listing contact information for both current and potential customers.

4. Gift Bag

What It Is: Black Duck Inc. (circle 112 on Free Info Card) designed this gift bag resembling a purse for a line of women's high-end embellished T-shirts.

Why It Works: The retail-inspired design gives the package a sophisticated look and instantly raises the perceived value of the garment folded neatly inside.



a *Fortune* 500 company wants embroidered shirts from Cutter & Buck (asi/47965), for example, they're definitely looking for perceived value and the packaging has to match." A typical high-end corporate package, he explains, includes garments folded neatly in boxes with a custom color bottom, clear lid, branded gold ribbon and a name tag.

NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED

What happens when presentation gets lost in the shuffle? The products are received poorly, says Campbell, and the giver risks losing a customer. "Say the recipient finds a wrinkled T-shirt in a plain envelope, and it slumps out of the package when opened," he says. "Then they're given the same shirt, tissue-wrapped and boxed neatly with an informational hangtag and a custom label. Which will seem more valuable? It's the same shirt eliciting very different experiences and reactions."

While the tendency to skimp on packaging and presentation can seem tempting or even necessary in light of often limited resources,

disappointing clients is a risk too real to leave to chance. "When presentation looks haphazard and disorganized, the recipient is definitely less likely to place a reorder," says Potter frankly. "It should never look last-minute. It's all about speed and quality."

Sometimes, only the best presentation will do, regardless of the cost incurred. For example, high-end corporate gifts always call for a polished, professional, retail-inspired appearance in order to impress discerning recipients, says Thompson. "Say you have a 500-piece premium dress shirt order with custom packaging," he explains. "That's 500 colored boxes with clear lids and ribbon, and maybe an 8,000-stitch logo on each shirt. You're looking at about \$40 a piece, depending on the cost of the shirt."

But creativity doesn't have to be cost prohibitive. "For smaller companies, there are so many inexpensive items that make a nice presentation and then can be reused for years," Stone says. "Try using one of the items included in the gift as the package itself, like

a backpack or water bottle. Great packaging doesn't have to be expensive."

Katzman also recommends saving money by combining the packaging with the gift. "Creative packaging can be inexpensive and still create a 'wow' effect," she says. "We made flowers out of scarves for a children's hospital charity luncheon. It minimized floral costs and served as a takeaway gift. This way, the client didn't spend money on both gifts and flowers, but they got both, and well under budget."

Even the most inexpensive packaging can take extra manpower. But it's not to be looked at as a waste of resources. In a competitive marketplace, where customers always come first yet are often fickle, companies can't afford to lose focus on presentation. "Additional costs associated with packaging are a reinvestment into the brand," says Norton. "With everything being equal – product, quality, price – the only way you can differentiate yourself is through packaging and presentation." – Sara Lavenduski is an intern for Wearables.

PUT IT IN



Without it, there'd be nothing to print. Here's your indispensable rundown on everything in ink.

By C.J. Mittica



WATERBASE

TESTING THE WATERS

Plastisol's reign is threatened by the rising popularity of waterbase.

There is nothing permanent about screen-printing inks right now. The one constant for decades – plain, dependable plastisol ink – has had its era of dominance upended by an explosion of ink varieties and a pointed challenge from what once was a lightly-regarded rival. “I do believe that waterbase is the future of ink,” says Bobby Panico, president of inkmaker Green Galaxy Companies. He’s not the only one. PolyOne Corporation, maker of Wilflex inks, currently sells 90% plastisol inks to 10% waterbase. The company predicts that by 2017, waterbase inks will make up 40% of its sales.

That would be a remarkable shift. After all, while the rest of the world uses waterbase primarily, plastisol has remained the monarch of American screen printing. Its ease of use is legendary. “With plastisol, you can do a bad job of making a screen and get away with it,” says Charlie Taublier, owner of Taublieb Consulting and a five-decade veteran of the industry. “You can walk away from your press, come back a day later and start printing again. You don’t have to clean or do anything.”

By contrast, with waterbase, “there’s a lot more work involved,” Taublieb says. “It’s a lot more procedural. You can’t just stop and take a phone call. If you do, your screens will dry out or you will clog your screens.” Screen printers who offered both not only had to juggle two different sets of supplies, but had to basically be proficient in two whole different methods

of printing.

So why has the tide turned? Advances in discharge printing ushered in a whole new print aesthetic. Retail and fashion brands championed a light print with little to no hand – a development that lent itself to waterbase. “Soft-hand printing changed the market here where buyers have learned to look for that softer feel,” says Walt Wright, marketing director for Murakami Screen.

In the wake of that demand, serious innovations are being made with waterbase. For example, Panico says Green Galaxy’s waterbase inks achieve longer open times and are more workable due to their ability to rewet.

Equally promising is the development of a new type of waterbase known as high solids acrylics, which use an acrylic resin in the waterbase. The opacity is robust (long a quibble with traditional waterbase) and the results are promising. “The latest opaque waterbase inks function more like a traditional plastisol,” says Dan Corcoran, owner of Forward Printing, which specializes in waterbase discharge prints. “We’ve found that they typically bridge the fabric less than a high-opacity plastisol but still yield a bright print that washes up softer than a plastisol print.”

Waterbase will make gains, but it’s unlikely to overtake plastisol anytime soon. The development of soft-hand bases and innovations like Plasticharge has allowed plastisol to tap into the soft trend. “I think there will always be a market for plastisol here,” says Rob Coleman, segment marketing manager of textile screen inks for Nazdar SourceOne. “Your average everyday printer ... until there’s a compelling reason to move away from it, there’s no reason for them to. It’s too easy, it’s too inexpensive, relatively speaking, and it works too well.”

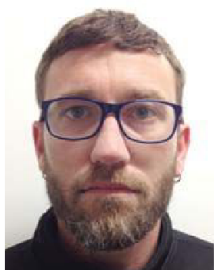
Still, it’s a new reality for inks. The waterline in the screen-printing industry is rising.

“I do believe that waterbase is the future of ink.”

Bobby Panico, Green Galaxy Companies

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

WATERBASE IS THE TREND



**By Dan Corcoran,
Forward Printing**

MOST APPAREL SCREEN

printers in the States specialize or deal exclusively with plastisol inks. It makes sense since most of us learned using plastisol. Not only is it common and readily available, it's also very forgiving when it comes to dealing with a variety of fabric types and colors.

At Forward Printing, we gravitated toward waterbased discharge printing once we saw the trends that were happening in fashion printing at the retail level. Our personal preference was for a soft breathable print, so we ventured into the waterbased printing world and did not turn back.

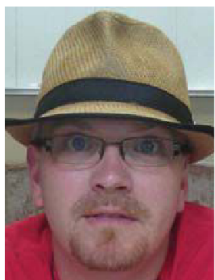
We acknowledge the disadvantages and challenges involved (irregular results based on fabric makeup and color, difficulty printing synthetic fabrics and reduced ink

shelf life), but our desire to produce a soft and washfast prints for our clients kept us addicted to waterbased printing.

We have found a number of advantages to using waterbased ink chemistries. Cleanup is a big one. We typically only use water and rags for cleanup, eliminating the need for any chemicals or solvents on-press and off. The lack of phthalates and heavy metals makes the inks compliant to most consumer safety regulations. We are able to create incredibly smooth blends and fades that we cannot do with plastisol inks due to the more rigid deposit of ink. Our customers love to have a soft print that feels like it is part of the fabric.

Now with ink companies rolling out lines of opaque waterbased inks, we have the ability to print on fabric types that were difficult to deal with in the past, so that one day we may be able to avoid printing plastisol completely. Exciting possibilities for new techniques with extremely opaque and soft prints lie ahead.

PLASTISOL PAYS THE BILLS



**By Terry Keeven,
St. Louis Print Co.
(asi/700623)**

WE DON'T DO any water-

base or discharge ink. We used to, but we got away from it the last couple years. Our market typically doesn't call

for that. We're selling to promotional product distributors for the most part, and their clients really just want their company logo on shirts, race day shirts, things like that. We don't do any sort of retail printing that often calls for that waterbase, soft-hand stuff.

You have to use a different emulsion if you're going to use waterbase ink or discharge. It gets a little confusing cause you have to keep two different emulsions on-hand, two different sets of screens. The inks work differently as well. They tend to dry out in your screens and clog up your mesh fairly quickly.

Since all of our employees are so used to printing with plastisol ink, it was a learning curve. And since we weren't doing it every day, it was hard to get the guys to remember certain things. For us, we found it was not profitable.

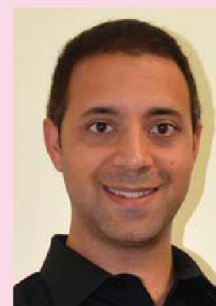
Some people do want that soft hand, and we do lose out on some business because of it. I'm okay with that because those orders are not profitable. We had to make sure we would make up for it, so we brought more business on.

We started in the beginning of 2007. We were such a young company, we weren't sure who we were going to cater to – pretty much anybody who wanted screen printing. When we were trying to be everything to everybody, it was a disaster. Not only were we doing waterbase ink, we were doing commercial ink. Today, we got rid of everything we don't do well, and we only focus on one thing, and that's plastisol printing for the promotional product industry.

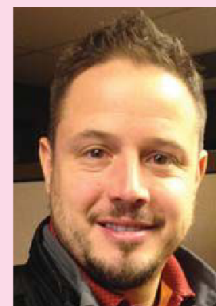
EXPERTS: TO WATERBASE OR NOT?



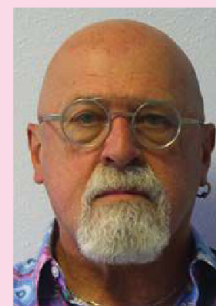
**RYAN MOOR,
RYONET CORP.
(ASI/528500):**
"I'm becoming a bigger and bigger fan of waterbase every day. The new waterbase inks from Green Galaxy are amazing, almost acting and performing like a plastisol."



**BOBBY PANICO,
GREEN GALAXY
COMPANIES:**
"We're improving waterbase inks every step along the way, so there have been many breakthroughs."



**ANDY
SHUMAN,
ROCKLAND
EMBROIDERY
(ASI/83089):**
"Today's plastisol does not need to have a bum rap."



**CHARLIE TAUBLIEB,
TAUBLIEB
CONSULTING:**
"There were waterbase inks 20 years ago that could go on nylon and spandex – opaque and transparent waterbase inks.

I don't think a lot of that has been explored for a very long time."

EQUIPMENT

GET EQUIPPED

The equipment you have for plastisol isn't always ideally suited for waterbase. Here is what you need to do waterbase right.



Exposure Unit ▲

A properly coated screen won't work without the right exposure unit. Walt Wright of Murakami Screen recommends the Olec Olite Printing Lamp, featured in this exposure unit (DMAX) from Douthitt (circle 125 on Free Info Card), which works for both conventional and CTS screens. "They thought about everything," Wright says about the lighting. "It's kinda simple — old ballast capacitor technology, but if isn't broke, don't fix it. It was and still is the best option there."



Hardener ▲

To get the optimal results from the emulsion and increased water resistance, you need a hardener from Murakami Screen (circle 124 on Free Info Card). The MS Hardener (left) is applied to both sides of the screen after it is exposed and dried and allows the stencil to be reclaimed. Hardeners A&B offers ultimate water resistance; it makes the screen hard to reclaim but provides exceptional durability for long runs.



Emulsion ▲

Emulsion that works with waterbase is critical. This diazo emulsion (SP-1400) is versatile enough to work with discharge and waterbased in addition to plastisol. It is durable, capable of long runs and easy to reclaim the screen for future use. Available from Murakami Screen (circle 124 on Free Info Card).



◀ Dryer

The RoqTunnel conveyor gas dryer (CDAU-T3015G) from Ryonet Corp. (asi/528500; circle 126 on Free Info Card) offers gas consumption savings plus a longer tunnel to help cure waterbased shirts. It features an antistatic and resistant mesh conveyor belt with built in fiberglass coated with Teflon.

COMPLIANCE

PROTECTIVE MEASURES

How product safety legislation spurred the next big thing in inks.

When the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) was ushered into existence in 2008, the legislation had jurisdiction over just one thing in apparel screen printing: lead limits in screen prints on children's clothing. And yet, the resulting fallout has been dramatic, changing not only how inks were formulated, but influencing the demands of brands and consumers around the world and creating the next big trend in inks.

The first domino was phthalates restricted by the product safety legislation. Even though their presence in or on children's clothing was not officially governed by the CPSIA (only child-care articles and toys were), brands and retailers tread carefully. Ink manufacturers read the writing on the wall and three to five years ago, they converted the majority of their plastisol inks in the U.S. to become phthalate free. (Many inks in Europe had already been phthalate free.) A few switched out restricted phthalates for other non-restricted ones; many, including the biggest companies like PolyOne and Rutland, removed them completely in their non-phthalate inks. Despite very subtle

variances and an increase in price, printers did not see vastly different results. "By and large, it was pretty seamless," says Rob Coleman of Nazdar Source One.

The next major step involves PVC, a common plastic to which phthalates are often added to soften. Though not restricted by the CPSIA or any U.S. state, major global brands such as Nike have laid down a mandate that the prints on their garments must be PVC-free. (It is restricted in many parts of Europe.) "Nike has been the big brand driving it, but it goes way, way beyond them now," says Coleman. He adds that eight of the top 10 fashion retailers in the world have PVC print restrictions in place. The motivations have come from consumer pressure and a goal of big brands to portray a healthy and eco-friendly image. "We're about 10 years behind Europe [on this]," says Coleman. "Walmart, those guys – it's a matter of if, not when – will flip the switch and do the same thing."

That rules out traditional plastisol inks, which contain PVC. The alternatives are traditional waterbase, silicone (ideal for poly and performance wear) and high solids acrylics, a

major leap in waterbase that functions more like a plastisol but is essentially a waterbase. PVC-free plastisols are available as well, and while they don't dry out like acrylics, they carry concerns over wash durability, viscosity stability and crocking.

Screen printers are adapting to PVC-free requirements, but the shift has not been easy. Acrylics are easier to use in many ways compared to traditional waterbase, but lack the open-and-forget-it mindset of plastisol. "Performance of the ink on the press is important to the printers," says Kevin J. Shikoluk, global director of marketing and technology for specialty inks and polymer systems at PolyOne Corporation. "Many times when you are moving away from plastisol-containing inks, performance on the press – such as cure and drying time – gets sacrificed, which ultimately affects the amount of garments that you get off of the dryer."

Despite that, PolyOne is very bullish about its Oasis waterbase discharge and high-solid line. Brands are demanding PVC-free inks, and the trickle-down effect is only beginning.

INNOVATIONS

FRESH COAT

There's that same old plastisol and traditional waterbase, but innovations are arriving quickly, offering screen printers a wealth of options. Here are four of the latest trends, so fresh they haven't even had time to dry.

High Solids Acrylics

The hottest thing right now in inks. It takes a little finesse (you will likely have to flash between colors), but it meets the growing non-PVC demand and satisfies printers who don't have the diligence for normal waterbase. "We've worked to make something as close to plastisol as we could," says Brian Lessard, print development manager for Rutland Plastic Technologies. "And the advantage of that is it doesn't dry in the screen. They can use it like a traditional plastisol and not worry about cleaning the screens out, misting with water or anything else that comes along with waterbase printing."



PVC-free acrylic plastisol "E.K.O." ink (RS503) from Rutland Plastic Technologies (circle 131 on Free Info Card).



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MISTAKES

OPERATOR ERROR

Get the most out of your ink by fixing these common mistakes.

1 Your Waterbase Screens Need

Work: Waterbase is not forgiving. You need 40% humidity or less to properly create and store the screens (in non-humid areas, use a heated drying cabinet). Furthermore, since waterbase penetrates every crack and crevice, “you need to tape very thoroughly and thoughtfully when preparing a screen to prevent leakage and misprints on-press,” says Dan Corcoran of Forward Printing.

2 You Buy Whatever Ink's On Sale:

Bargain basement ink doesn't work as well. A cheaper ink with less pigment will make it much more difficult to reach the proper look and opacity. You will have to apply more ink to achieve the same amount of coverage, and it will cost more in the long run.

3 You Store Your Inks Haphazardly:

A little organization goes a long way. Tips from International Coatings: Seal your buckets correctly to avoid collecting lint and dust. Don't leave a wood stick or cardboard in the ink, which can remove some of the oils. Definitely avoid extreme heat or cold;

even in a temperature-controlled room, unexpected areas like a concrete floor or proximity to a heat source (such as a flash unit) can affect or partially cure the inks.

4 You use one ink for everything:

There are hundreds of inks available, yet a gaggle of screen printers often stick with one ink no matter the fabric or application. “If you hire someone to paint your house,” says Rutland's Brian Lessard, “they don't just come out with one paint and start painting no matter what the house looks like.”

5 You Stick With The Same Mesh:

Yes, your 86 or 110 mesh “works” all of the time because “it's easier to get the ink through that mesh, but it's not correct,” says Terry Keeven of St. Louis Print Co. “You're putting down so much ink that you've got that old thick deposit of ink on your shirt.” Stop wasting ink and sacrificing soft-hand feel.

6 You Apply Too Much Squeegee

Pressure: “It makes the print look not as opaque or worse, blurry,” says Kieth

Stevens, western regional sales manager for International Coatings. “Best to back off the squeegee to where it almost doesn't print, and then slowly add pressure until the print looks optimal.”

7 You Don't Adjust For Poly:

Printing on polyester is one of the toughest things going right now. The mistakes are plentiful: running the dryer too hot, not taking the color of the shirt into account, leaving the garment in the heat chamber too long. Techniques such as mapping the dryer to run as fast as possible can help, but it starts with the right bleed-resistant ink.

8 You Undercure Your Shirts:

Lessard says a properly cured plastisol print (usually at 320 degrees Fahrenheit) will outlast the shirt. Temperature and dwell time determine if an ink is properly cured. Even if it's at the right heat, “everyone wants to go faster,” he says, “and the dryer is this magical thing you run the shirt through and everything is great.” Give it the proper time.

Silicone

The PVC-free trend is surely helping to grow interest in silicone. But so, too, is the fact that it's ideally suited for trending performance and polyester pieces because of its good adhesion and remarkable elasticity. “You can stretch them across the room and they hold their shape, they're very durable,” says Lessard. “The stretch is something that people are really, really into.”



Silextreme atomic blue silicone ink (SX2485) from Rutland Plastic Technologies (circle 131 on Free Info Card).

Performance

The rapid rise of poly garments sent ink manufacturers and screen printers back to the drawing board. Rampant problems like dye migration are being tamed with a proliferation of low-bleed plastisol inks that cure at lower temperatures and offer stretch. “The inks themselves have greatly improved the way they cover poly,” says Andy Shuman, general manager at Rockland Embroidery (asi/83089). “Just the general coverage has become pretty spectacular.”



Wilflex Oasis Epic Top Score gold ink (80000) from PolyOne Corporation (circle 122 on Free Info Card).

Soft Hand

“From an appearance standpoint, soft, soft, soft continues to be a huge driver,” says Rob Coleman, segment marketing manager of textile screen inks for Nazdar SourceOne. The trend, he says, is fueled by the explosion of soft fabrics with muted colors. While retail and consumers are gravitating toward the no-hand feel of waterbase discharge, plastisol printers are catching up with soft-hand bases like Rutland's Chino or PolyOne's Fashion Soft combined with finer meshes.



Green Galaxy Mars Red waterbase ink (IKWB-MRED-Q) from Ryonet Corp. (asi/528500; circle 126 on Free Info Card).

HOW TO

MIX YOUR OWN INK COLORS

By Marshall Atkinson

Not many T-shirt shops make their living from selling blank merchandise. Something has to go onto the shirt, and that something is ink. Usually, smaller or less experienced shops will concentrate their ink purchasing to pre-made and pre-mixed ink colors. This is often an easier route to take when stocking the company's ink room, but often it comes with a heftier price tag.

At a certain point, the convenience of using pre-made colors doesn't equate to the potential cost savings and competitive advantage that building a more advanced, cost-effective ink room can bring to a growing company. Here is a basic overview of why mixing your own colors makes economic and business sense.

In The Mix

Let's say, for example, that you want to order a gallon of pre-mixed, ready-to-use Bright Orange. This ink is perfect for you, as it can be used for any upcoming job. Retail price might be \$70 a gallon on average for this color. You've been using pre-made inks since you started your business, and it's relatively simple and easy to use — all you have to do is open the lid, scoop out some ink and print. After printing the order, you card off the remaining ink from the screen and drop it back into the bucket for future use. You used about a quarter of a gallon for the job in the end. So that was about \$17 worth of ink used.

The shop down the street mixes their own ink instead of buying pre-made ink colors. They have invested in the tools, training and an ink system to mix their colors according to an estimate on how much they need. For them, everything is measured in grams, as that's how they mix the ink using a digital scale. All ink pigments weigh differently, a full gallon of one color might weigh differently than a full gallon

of another. A general rule, however, is that a full gallon is about 5,000 grams of ink.

To print a bright orange, this shop selects a Pantone color that matches the hue needed (PMS 172) and brings up the formula on their computer workstation in their ink room. They review the work order and determine that they don't need a full gallon, so they mix about a half a gallon, or 2,500 grams.

First, they place an empty plastic pail on the digital scale and zero out the scale to ignore the weight of the bucket (Step 1). Then, the different quantities of the ink mixture are placed one at a time into the bucket. Starting with the base (Step 2), the formula is followed carefully, and after the exact weight is reached the scale is zeroed out again (Step 3).

Then the pigments are loaded one at a time, with the scale zeroed out after each one. Zeroing out the scale is crucial to the success as that's how you can keep track of the weight of each element in the mixture. When all of the ingredients are added (Step 4), the ink is combined by stirring the ink with a palette knife or drill with a paddle extension (Step 5). A competent ink room staffer can mix an ink color in about five minutes or less.

Savings by the Gallon

What's the difference in price? It's complicated. Initially, there's a big expenditure when getting the system set up. You have to buy base and all the pigments in the system to be able to mix colors. You also need a really good digital scale. Once purchased, however, you have the information and ability at your fingertips to mix every Pantone color in the book — instantly.

For discussion's sake again, let's say a five-gallon bucket of base costs \$190. All the pigments needed to mix colors are individually priced and all cost differently. The pigments

needed to mix PMS 172 are Bright Orange (\$245/gallon), Bright Yellow (\$81/gallon), Extra White (\$109/gallon) and Electron Red (\$125/gallon).

The cost for a half a gallon (2,500 grams) of PMS 172 could be expressed: Base (2,064 grams = \$8.05) + Bright Orange pigment (142 grams = \$7.67) + Bright Yellow (120 grams = \$2.69) + Extra White (35 grams = \$1.52) + Electron Red (37 grams = \$0.97) + Labor (.08 hours at \$10 per hour = \$0.80) for a total of \$21.70. The shop only uses half of that for the print so the final cost for the job is \$10.85 — about 36% cheaper than what it costs for the pre-made.

One of the big keys here is that this shop can mix only what they need at the time. Mixing the color is relatively easy, and it also allows them to be more competitive with their clients as they can offer PMS color matching.

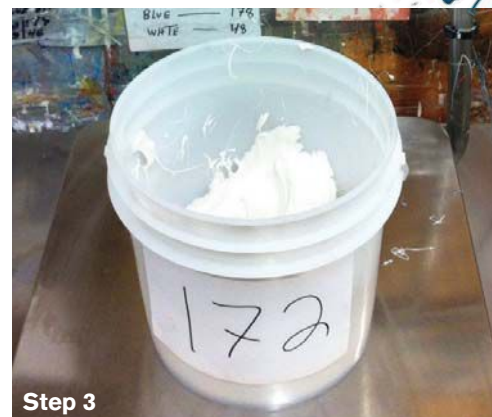
The real savings come through a recycle feature that most computer ink systems have; it allows them to introduce leftover inks into the formula to make a new color. This only works if the hues are compatible, and it's also assuming you mixed the original color you want to reuse correctly. In our example, if we reused PMS 165 to mix PMS 172, our same formula for 2,500 grams would look like this: Base (1,376 grams = \$5.36) + Bright Orange pigment (117 grams = \$6.33) + Bright Yellow (0 grams = \$0) + Extra White (124 grams = \$1.41) + Electron Red (20 grams = \$0.51) + Labor (.08 hours at \$10 per hour = \$0.80) and our new price would be \$14.41. If this mix was used for that same example order, it would only cost \$7.20 instead of \$17, which is 57% cheaper. Not all inks can be recycled into other colors, as it's all based on the hues, not your desire to recycle. However, this is a good practice to use if you can.



Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4



Step 5



Final

Mixing your own ink colors can not only save money, but allow you to offer Pantone-matching capabilities.

Consistency Counts

There are some things to look out for when using a color-mixing system. The first and most important is batch-to-batch consistency. Since everything is mixed based on weight, you are extremely dependent on your staff doing their job properly in adding the ingredients exactly every time. One extra plop of a pigment can throw off the entire mixture if it's the right size. Be careful!

Also, be sure you cross-train multiple people in using the system, as employee turnover can have a huge impact on your company if the person with the training and knowledge decides to quit during your busy season. All of your managers need to learn to use the system, as well as a few other key employees.

Other important notes:

- The most common mixing systems are PC equalizer colorants, as they have the ability to cure on their own even without the proper amount of base. If other types of pigments are loaded incorrectly, the base may not cure properly. The PC equalizer colorants cost a lit-

tle more, but for shops that are inexperienced, or don't have proper ink room discipline or management, this is the way to go.

- Most ink manufacturers have startup kits available. They come in pint kits for testing or for smaller manual shops, or in gallon kits for larger shops. Pigments are sold in quarts, gallons and five-gallon buckets. Bases are generally sold in gallons, fives and different sizes of drums (typically 30- and 50-gallon drums).

- Having the correct scale is crucial in color matching, as everything is determined by weight. The smaller the batch being mixed, the tighter the tolerance your scale needs to be. For quart-size batches, the measurement will be going out to a tenth of a gram. Don't skimp on the scale!

- For Pantone color matching, the software used to pull up the formula is generally free to use with the ink system, but you are going to need a computer workstation available. For workflow, this should be in the ink room. It doesn't take much computer space to run, so an older computer can be used if you have one

in the shop.

- You should consult with your ink distributor or supply rep on the system. Training and support will be free, and it's important that they show you how to use the mixing system and the software. Getting one-on-one training with your staff can go a long way to flatten out the learning curve and make it easier to properly mix colors.

Marshall Atkinson is the Chief Operating Officer of Visual Impressions, Inc. (www.visualimp.com) and Ink to the People (www.inktothepeople.com). He writes and speaks regularly on sustainability, efficiency, strategic planning and apparel decorating operations. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Sustainable Green Printing Partnership (SGP – www.sgppartnership.org) and also on Leadership Committees for the Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA – www.sgia.org). You can follow him on Twitter at [@atkinsontshirt](https://twitter.com/atkinsontshirt) or read his blog at atkinsontshirt.com. Contact him at matkinson4804@gmail.com.

THE BLIND SPOT

TRI, TRI, TRI AGAIN

Bright prints, soft hand on tri-blends – can it be done?

By C.J. Mittica

John Wilhelmsen has owned and operated Distinct Impression, Inc. since 1979. The Tucson, Arizona-based shop dabbles in several facets of screen printing, including custom printing and industrial printing for the aerospace and medical industries. Besides his apparel quandaries (expanding his selection of Made-in-USA garments, finding stylish T-shirts that fit his boomer clientele), Wilhelmsen is looking for the best way to print plastisol on tri-blend. “Half of our business is contract printing,” he says, “and many times tri-blends, modal or poly viscose shirts are in the same order as 100% cotton shirts. I have observed that I lose print quality when printing these shirts with plastisol inks.” Wilhelmsen is interested in maintaining brightness while keeping the hand light, and wants to know if an additive or some additional trick is required for the ink.

Mixing It Up

Tony Kozlowski, the owner at T Productions, sees a fair share of tri-blends come through his shop. His company uses a custom white ink, made mostly with a low-bleed plastisol with 20% super poly thrown in. “This is our day to day white,” says Kozlowski, who is based out of Mishawaka, IN, “as so many garments these days have some sort of man-made material in them.” T Productions uses it for everything from 100% cotton to 50/50s to tri-blends. For 100% poly garments, the shop uses just the Super Poly White.

“Some shops opt for three or more white inks for different usages,” says Kozlowski, ticking off a few common plastisol variations: nylon, low-bleed for 50/50s, super poly for 100% synthetic and a standard white for 100% cotton. “But we have narrowed it down to two.” The reason is simplicity. It eliminates the chances of the using the wrong white, and allows for consistency across all facets

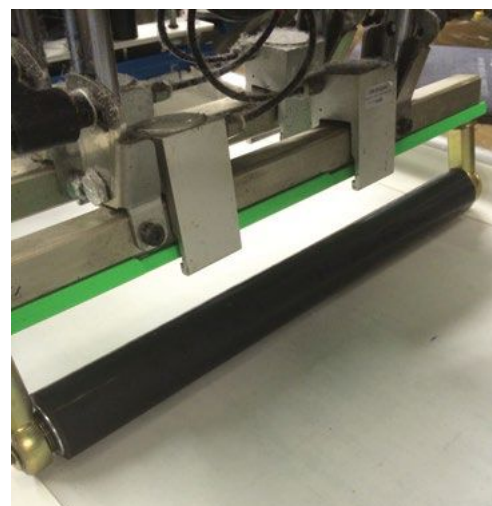


To optimize his results on tri-blends, Owner Tony Kozlowski of T Productions uses a low-bleed custom white ink mixture (left), and lays it as an underbase (middle) to help achieve a bright print (right). A crush plate (below) should be used while the underbase is hot to keep the fibers in line.

of its process instead of switching between thick and thin inks. The low-bleed properties of Kozlowski's everyday white won't have a major effect on the cotton tees he prints, but it won't hurt them either. “It's OK to overuse low bleed, but not so much to under-use it these days,” he says. And while there are cost savings to 100% cotton white, that can go out the window on a botched 50/50 print.

With dark tri-blends, Kozlowski definitely recommends a low-bleed white for the dark fabric, especially as an underbase. Wilhelmsen has openly wondered about the addition of an additive, but Kozlowski says additives like Catalyst or Nylobond should only be used on nylon jackets, where elasticity is not needed. In addition, he suggests a crush plate to use while the underbase is hot that will crush the fibers back into the ink deposit.

To preserve the fashion angle of the tri-blends, Wilhelmsen typically uses a fine mesh, either 280 or 305, “to lay down as little ink as possible,” he says. “[But] we appear to lose ink brightness when printing on these fabrics.” Kozlowski thinks that mesh “is way too high to lay enough ink down to successfully print



‘bright’ on these fabrics.” If a bright print is the goal, he suggests a maximum of 158 mesh for the underbase, perhaps even 110 or 86 if the art allows. If a fashion look with little hand is the aim, the higher mesh is the way to go. “This mesh/look/feel struggle has been going on as long as screen printing itself,” Kozlowski says. “Modern man-made textile materials have forced printers to adapt and often sacrifice hand for brightness.”

**THE INK KITCHEN**

WELCOME TO OUR KITCHEN

Advice and secrets from the screen printing know-it-alls

By Tom Davenport

MY BUDDY RICK ROTH and I started a blog earlier this year called The Ink Kitchen (www.inkkitchen.com) with the intent to share our “real-world” knowledge with the decorated apparel industry. Both of us have been at this for a very long time and we have experienced many successes and achievements. However, like anyone else in the industry we’ve had plenty of failures too. On the site we talk about (and show) our highs and also our lows and even our utter failures with extreme candor. This is just as we have done for years with each other and our peers. It is through this open and honest sharing that we have learned, grown, and mastered the craft. Now we’re here at *Wearables* to share with you as well. Welcome to The Ink Kitchen!



◀ Good Old Plastisol

I’ve got news for the world, plastisol ink ain’t goin’ nowhere! Plastisol is still the most versatile, print-friendly ink available. If you want opaque spot color on a dark substrate or super high-resolution halftones, plastisol is the ink of choice. You could make an argument for plastisol as the most environmentally friendly ink due to its extraordinary shelf life, but we won’t go there now. And no, plastisol ink doesn’t have to be rough, shiny and bullet-proof. Today’s plastisols are not your father’s plastisols. When utilizing a base and pigment mixing system, printers can control ink viscosity and achieve a very soft hand while retaining a visual pop!

Waterbase and Discharge ▶

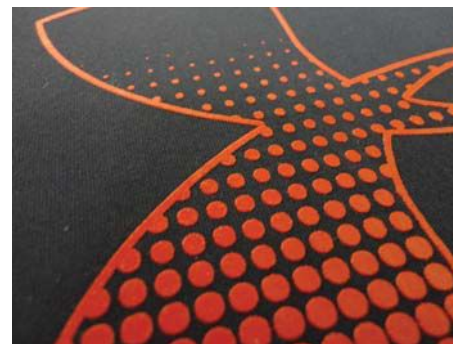
No, you can’t drink or water your plants with waterbase ink. But if you want the softest possible print, it is often the way to go. You want bright color on a dark shirt but don’t want to feel a thing on the

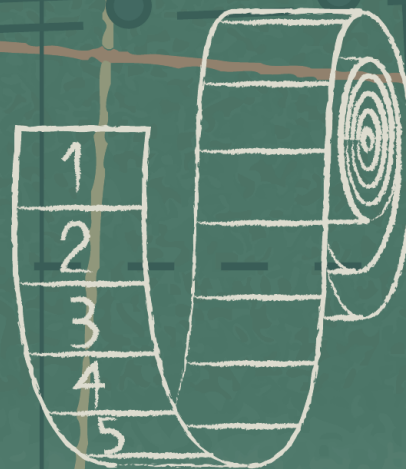
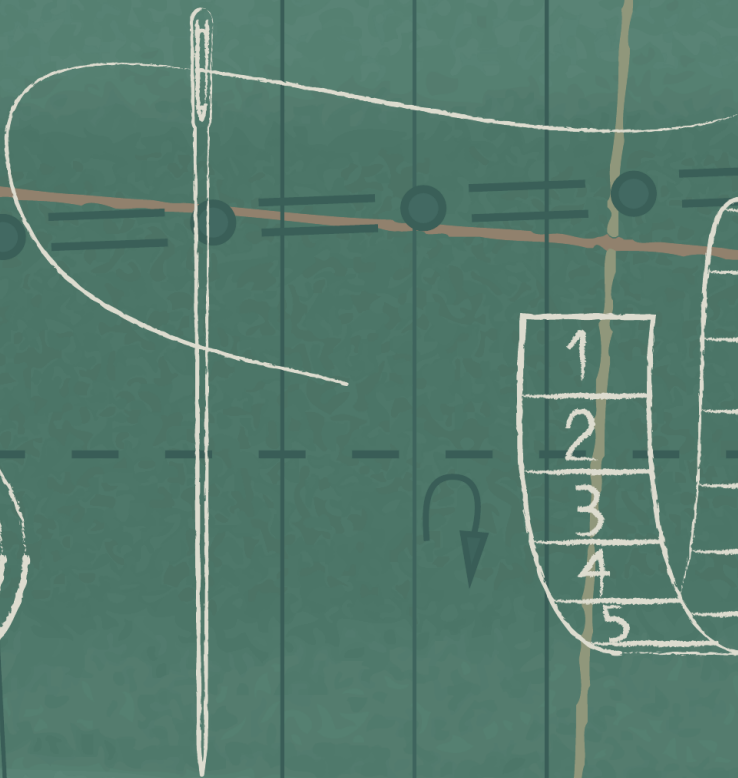
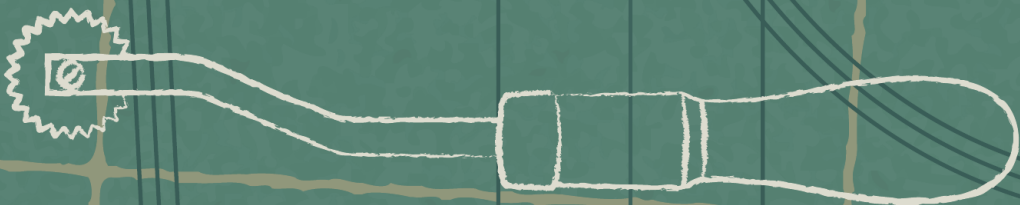
shirt? Discharge, a waterbase ink with some slightly nasty stuff mixed in which neutralizes the dye in a colored garment. Discharge is difficult and intimidating to work with and has many limitations, but when done well the results can be phenomenal. (Done poorly, the results are abysmal.) Mastering discharge printing is something that very few have done. Discharge requires tremendous knowledge of not just the printing process, but the substrate as well. No other textile printing process so heavily relies on the substrate as much as discharge.



Silicone and Other Crazy Stuff ▶

Silicone ink, high-solids acrylic ink, Rick even made edible ink once. There are all sorts of new exciting (and scary) ink technologies emerging. While some of these technologies have been in use for some time, they are still in their infancy relative to plastisol and waterbase inks. The drive toward these new technologies has come primarily from the big brands, none of whom I will name here. The primary intent is to produce plastisol-like results minus the PVC for environmental purposes. Some of these technologies will yield superior print results, specifically with regard to tactile characteristics on both cottons and synthetics. But beware! Mistakes will be made when working with new ink technology and R&D is a prerequisite. Not for the faint of heart!





DESIGN IT YOURSELF

How can any consumer become a graphic artist and create her own shirt? With the help of screen printers and their online design capabilities.

BY THERESA HEGEL

Owen Wittenberg decided to do it himself.

A graphic designer for the international environmental engineering firm URS, he had taken on the daunting task of designing a T-shirt and distributing more than 1,000 of them to offices across the U.S. for the company's annual service day. Last year, the Tallahassee, FL, man says the effort to garb employees in matching tops — coordinating sizes, tracking down responses from every office — was nothing short of a nightmare. "It was kind of all over the place," he says. "Too many people had to do too many things to get everybody all on the same page."

Screen printers can save customers that hassle by incorporating design-it-yourself functionality to their websites. User-designed apparel sites such as CafePress, CustomInk and Zazzle have been around for more than a decade, but it's only been in the last few years that the self-design concept has really caught on, with more and more decorators launching their own versions. "The designer gives people the ability to feel like an artist even though they're not," says Kortni Remer, general manager of Broken Arrow Wear (asi/146656) in Des Moines, IA. The decorator recently updated its online design lab, increasing functionality and adding compatibility with Apple products.

Technological advancements, the ubiquity of social media and consumer expectations have joined to make online designers a force

to be reckoned with. "Everybody laughed at these sites 10 years ago," says Jim Franklyn, vice president of sales and marketing for distributor Inkhead (asi/231159), which already has a product customizer on its website but is in the process of rolling out a full-fledged designer. "They're not laughing now."

These days, design sites are faster and exceedingly user-friendly. Many are built for the modern consumer with mobile and tablet platform compatibility, says Claude Vlandis, vice president of business development at Pulse Microsystems. The company's PulseID Online software allows decorators to add such tools to their own websites. "In the beginning, where it all started, everything was slow," Vlandis says. "Every interaction with the server for images was taking longer than it takes today."

Now, with only a few clicks of the mouse

"The online designer gives people the ability to feel like an artist."

Kortni Remer,
Broken Arrow Wear (asi/146656)

A TOOL FOR DECORATORS

Customers have embraced online design labs, especially when they're easy to use and offer lots of choices and functionality. A surprise for some software manufacturers, however, has been the number of decorators who end up using the same tools as their clients, rather than a professional graphic arts package. "It's kind of become a virtual graphic design software," says JP Hunt, vice president of sales and marketing for InkSoft, commenting on the company's online tools. "It's so much easier than Corel and Illustrator."

Companies like Stahls' ID Direct (asi/88984) have also recognized this phenomenon. The company offers its online design service, CadworxLIVE, free to all of its customers. CadworxLIVE is similar to consumer design labs, with an extensive library of templates and clip art, plus the ability to quickly and easily create sports team shirts. "Not everyone who has a business can hire a trained graphic designer. It's nice when you can get graphics that are already preconfigured," says Andrea Pietrowsky, marketing and communications specialist. "There's not much of a learning curve."

Another benefit for decorators is the mobility of these online tools. Sales representatives can bring a laptop to a meeting with a client and walk them through design ideas on the Web, says Jim Franklyn, vice president of sales and marketing for Inkhead (asi/231159). Instead of having to leave that meeting with a slew of scribbled notes that must be deciphered and interpreted into a design, everything is stored in a personal online library, ready for later use, he says. Claude Vlandis, vice president of business development at Pulse Microsystems, knows of decorators who have used his company's online designer as an order processing tool. "It's just another way of getting orders into the company system," he says. "Some are phoned in, some faxed and some orders are done electronically with the online designers."

— or taps on a touchscreen — a T-shirt can go from idea to order. The convenience factor is paramount. "People want to do it on their couch in their pajamas ... [or] sitting there drinking coffee at 5 in the morning. That's how things are happening," says Marshall Atkinson, chief operating officer of Ink to the People, a custom T-shirt site that caters in particular to fundraisers.

NO MORE HASSLE

Wittenberg chose Ink to the People for his company's service-day shirt. The design he conceived was nearly as simple as the process of ordering it: a royal blue shirt with a white imprint, matching the colors of his firm's logo. On the front is the URS logo, plus the abbreviation "GP2W," signifying "Great Place to Work." The back features the word volunteer with two hands reaching out to each other and the names of all the branch offices participating in the National Day of Service.

Wittenberg was able to upload his design, place it on his selected shirt style and send out a link via e-mail so other offices could easily order as many as they needed, in whatever sizes they wished. "It was kind of like making one marketplace for all of us to access," he says. "It removes the extra coordination that it takes to funnel shirts to all these offices."

Multiple business models have been built around the online designer model. Sites like CafePress allow users to build virtual mini-stores filled with their print-on-demand creations. Brick and mortar decorators employ them in a traditional order model, except the design work and other parameters of the order are done online by the consumer.

Ink to the People gives would-be creators the platform to create the design of their dreams with a built-in safety net. The customer specifies how many T-shirts must be sold to make the order financially feasible, then launches a campaign through e-mail and social media to reach that total. If the T-shirt doesn't reach its target order, Ink to the People doesn't print any shirts, and no money in terms of up-front costs has been spent. "[The customer] doesn't have to worry about collecting money or the distribution part," Atkinson says. "It's a much cleaner way of doing it."



Graphic artist Owen Wittenberg at URS used an online designer from Ink to the People to design the T-shirts worn at the engineering firm's annual service day.

Eliminating order forms and enabling e-commerce is a big draw of online design sites, especially when you're targeting busy parents for a school or youth sport league fundraiser, says JP Hunt, vice president of sales and marketing for InkSoft, a software company with an interactive design tool for decorators' sites. "Parents don't want to write a check," he says. "They don't even know where their checkbook is."

Fundamentally, however, consumers like online T-shirt design sites because they're fun, allowing them to indulge their creative streak without requiring a master's in fine arts or access to pricey and complicated graphics software.

Most online designers allow users to upload their own art, or to create a design using fonts and clip art from the decorator's files. Customers can choose from an array of colors, and add strokes, outlines and shadows to make the design more unique. Some of the labs feature other special effects, like distressed overlays that give designs a crackled, vintage look. A few, like Broken Arrow Wear's, even allow for all-over printing on shirts.

For youth coaches needing to create team jerseys, customers can enter individual player names and numbers as part of their order. Other templates let customers alter a pre-loaded design to meet their needs. Vlandis of

LEARN IT LIVE

Beef up your graphic skills by attending “CorelDRAW: Master the Fundamental Skill Set” at The ASI Show Chicago (Tuesday, July 15, 1:30 p.m.). You’ll begin to learn the essential CorelDRAW skills you need to successfully work with your clients’ graphics and logos.

SIMPLE BY DESIGN

Online designers make it simple enough for any customer to create a printed T-shirt. Here are some of the essential functions that make them so user-friendly, featuring Ink to the People’s designer.

1 Customers can add and position their own text on a blank T-shirt, choosing from an array of fonts, colors and special effects, to personalize their message.



2 Most online design studios have a library of shapes and clip art for customers to choose from. Or, they can upload artwork they’ve created in a different program.



3 Advanced features include the option to add a distressed overlay for a vintage look; social media buttons that allow customers to share their designs and generate interest among friends and family; and more.



Pulse gives this example: A cute T-shirt bearing the slogan, “5 reasons I’m a happy granddad,” with the granddad in question inputting the names of his own grandkids and changing the initial number to match. And voila – a personalized shirt has been created. “Most consumers are not going to start from scratch and make beautiful art,” Vlandis says.

WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

The rise of the design-it-yourself website all comes down to simple customer demand. People are used to going online to get what they want, when they want it. That holds true in both the retail and ad specialty markets. Companies ignore that reality at their own peril.

“We all carry devices in our pocket that have more computing power than the rockets and crafts that carried man to the moon, and we immerse ourselves in technology every day,” says Brenden Prazner, product marketing manager at DecoNetwork, another software company that sells online design tools. “We are conditioned now to look online first.”

“All the trends show a rapidly increasing migration to the Web of both consumers and businesses, and the businesses that don’t adopt or change will fade away like the old thermal fax paper we used to know and not-so-much love.”

That’s why Broken Arrow Wear launched its online designer over three years ago, and why Inkhead is developing one. Consumers asked where that functionality was, and the companies realized they had to meet the need or lose business. “There’s a new wave of decision-makers that are coming into play,” says Inkhead’s Franklyn. “[Millennials] are demanding technological answers.”

Those answers do come at a cost for decorators. To add an online design studio from InkSoft it costs \$1,499 to activate, then \$149 a month after that for the standard package, while the Elite package costs \$1,999 to activate and \$199 a month after that. Other services are priced similarly. With proactive digital marketing and SEO optimization coupled with strategic local prospect targeting, the resulting client gains can pay for the designer and more. A properly functioning design lab can also act as a gateway to other services and traditional orders.

“People want to design shirts on their couch in their pajamas.”

Marshall Atkinson, Ink to the People

Design-it-yourself websites are also not likely to replace the traditional model completely; in fact, most of the sites encourage customers to use live chat features or call a representative if they get stuck while designing or want to work through a logistical issue. There will always be people who are overwhelmed by the choices offered by online design labs or want to rely on the expertise of others – or whose orders are simply too big and important. “If you’re the director of marketing placing a \$50,000 order for your company, are you really going to get on a designer and figure it out yourself?” Franklyn asks.

Franklyn notes that while the average order is around \$50 at one-off design sites, Inkhead’s average sale is closer to \$850. The numbers show that while a broad range of customers are opting for the self-serve e-commerce experience, a smaller core group so far are gravitating toward the design-it-yourself trend – typically dabblers, local groups and small businesses. “A lot of small-business people wear 19 different hats and want to have their hand in the cookie jar and do everything,” Franklyn adds. “The designer is perfect for them.”

For companies whose customers are driven to the Web, the designer is just one more robust option to offer clients to reach the same end goal. “At the end of the day,” says Atkinson, “it’s all about us printing T-shirts.”

Theresa Hegel is a senior staff writer for Wearables. Contact her at thegel@asicentral.com and follow her on Twitter at @TheresaHegel.



Scott Fresener is the director of T-Biz Network International and the co-author of *How to Print T-shirts for Fun and Profit*. He has been in the industry since 1970, producing dozens of video and DVD training programs. He has also created automated separation programs called T-Seps and FastFilms.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

Little Changes, Big Increases

Simple fixes for manual press production can eliminate downtime.

BY SCOTT FRESENER

During the busy months, it is important to get as much production as possible from a manual printing press. There are simple but important changes you can make to squeeze out a few more shirts and dollars per hour. Some suggestions are more long-term and managerial and will take time for the changes to show in increased production. It is very important to not disregard simple changes that may only increase production by a few shirts per hour. Add these savings up by a day, then a month, and it may be enough to pay the rent! Remember, you not only need to speed up general production, you need to reduce unnecessary downtime that decreases production.

This is a two-part article that will address two key areas. Next month we will look technical and production-related issues. This month, it's managerial and procedural changes.

Double Check the Art: There is nothing more frustrating than a production delay with screens to remake because the art was just not checked thoroughly. If you don't have artists who know screening, then let the artists work in the shop for a week to learn about color sequence, ink buildup, mesh counts, trapping and other art/production considerations. It is much easier to spend a little extra time on the separations than to stop the presses.

Use a Detailed Work Order: I have been in too many shops where a work order either didn't exist or was not used. "Print as before" becomes the norm on reorder jobs, and if the production crew is new there are

chances for mistakes and down time. Why should you reinvent the wheel on a reorder? There should be notes as to color sequence, flash stations, ink considerations, job problems and more. This, along with a sample shirt from the previous run, should always accompany a reorder to production. To my amazement I find too many shops don't even keep a sample shirt for future reference.

Keep Track of the Little Things: You should be gathering data on all jobs (like I mentioned) and the amount of time spent on setup and teardown, rejects, screen problems and other reasons for production delays. Chart the reasons for production

delays on a weekly and monthly basis to find trends. Are you having too many torn screens? Maybe your tension expectations are too high or general handling is poor.

Train the Sales Staff: Try to get your sales staff to learn about screen printing. Too much time is often spent trying to print something that just doesn't work. There are also too many samples printed without an order as the outcome. Likewise, there are too many redone samples with minor changes requested by the customer that are frivolous.

Cross Train: Likewise, all production personnel should learn to do more than just print. When there is a lull in production, they can sort and package shirts, spot shirts, clean screens and more. I am always amazed at the amount of standing around that goes on, especially if there is a production problem. Try to find self-starters who can find work to do.

Keep the Pressure On: This may seem heavy handed, but you need to always keep the pressure on production. If they feel that all they need to do today is one job, then one job is all that is done. If there is a schedule that is a little overly optimistic, it will always keep the pressure on during printing, setup and teardown. They'll know there are other jobs that need to be done too!

Have Weekly Meetings and Job Post-mortem: This is very important and often overlooked. Get all parties involved at the end of the week for a short meeting to go over the week's jobs. A quick postmortem on each job will help everyone learn from mistakes and have better communication on future jobs.

“I have been in too many shops where a work order either didn't exist or was not used. 'Print as before' becomes the norm on reorder jobs.”

ARTWORK

Facing Nature

BY SARA LAVENDUSKI

Lynka Promotional Solutions (circle 105 on Free Info Card) has established itself as a leading distributor and decorator in Europe since it was started over two decades ago. The company, based in Krakow, Poland, has generated award-winning prints by teaming with talented artists to create stunning designs. This particular eye-popping piece was created by artist Darek Suchocki, who has partnered with Lynka for over 15 years.

This "Leaf" design created by Suchocki is actually printed in three

versions: a 9-color separation in plastisol inks (shown here), a 7-color separation for printing with water-based ink, and a 5-color separation with discharge inks. Lynka created multiple versions to meet the increasing demand for water-based and discharge prints. "Since each of these printing techniques requires the use of different types of density grids," says Joanna Kocab, marketing/sales specialist, "the challenge was to get all the colors as close as we possibly could, despite the difference in the amount of printed colors in all three techniques."



Globe of the Eye

On closer inspection, it becomes apparent that the iris of the eye is actually an image of the globe. "To help highlight the eye and give it a wet effect," explains Kocab, "we used a clear gel to over-print on the eye."

Dose of Reality

Lynka spared no effort to make this design look as realistic as possible. "We wanted the design to really pop," says Kocab, "so we used a light puff process to bring dimension to all the veins in the leaf."

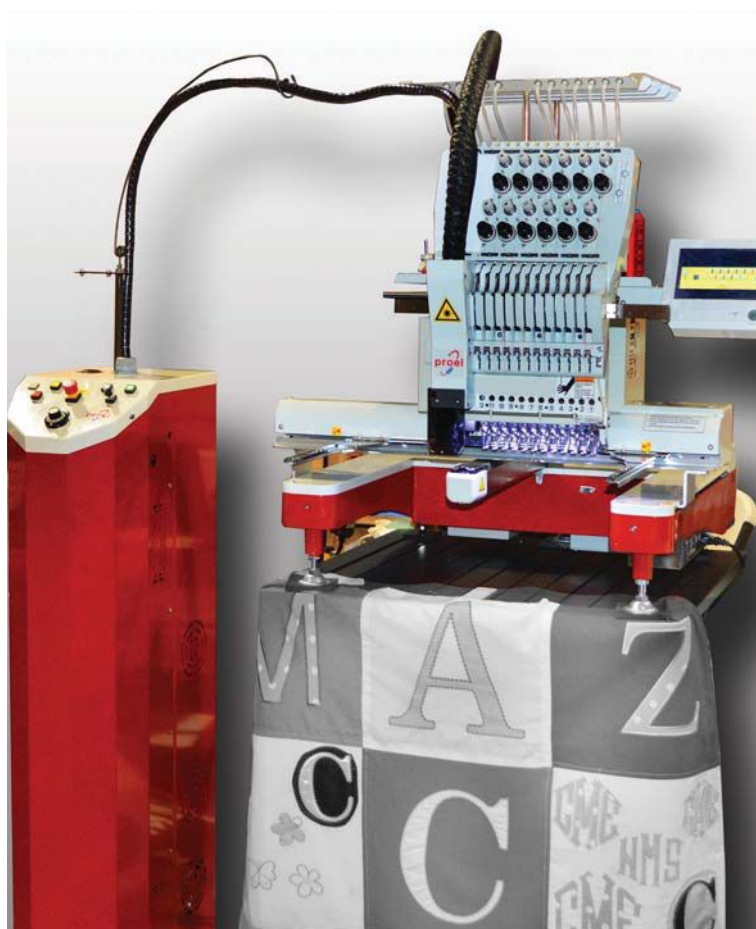
In the Details

What works for plastisol doesn't always work the same for waterbase, so Lynka had to tweak each version. "Since we had three versions of this design," says Kocab, "we had to modify details such as shadows, light and patterns before starting the process of separating colors."

EQUIPMENT CORNER

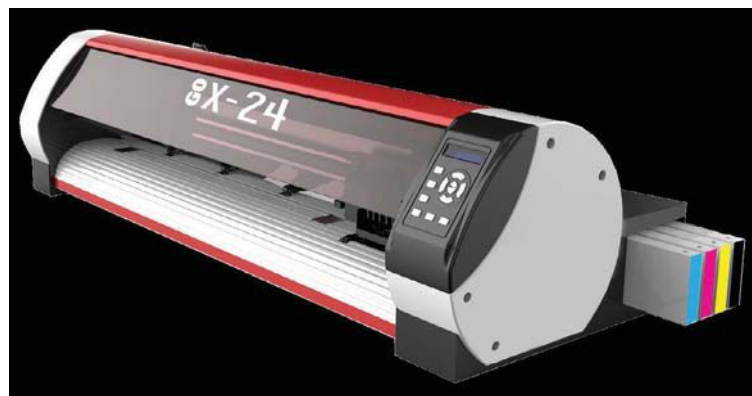
The latest in machines and decoration products

EQUIPMENT



▲ Proel TSI E-Laser 1200 Series – BITO USA

BITO USA (circle 119 on Free Info Card) offers the new Proel TSI E-Laser 1200 series, a combination single-head laser and embroidery machine with the power and capabilities of a LaserBridge. It integrates the process of cutting and embroidery in one seamless operation. Available in 30 and 50 watts, it offers the highest power levels in its class, allowing users to cut materials such as canvas, suede and synthetic leather.



▲ GO X-24 Printer/Cutter Unit – Graphics One LLC

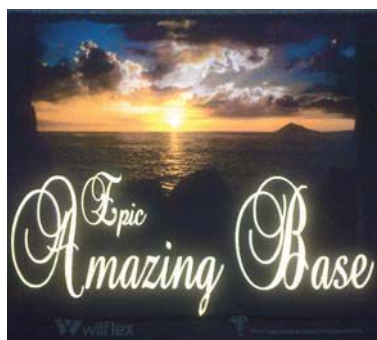
Graphics One LLC (asi/14975; circle 121 on Free Info Card) has launched the integrated GO X-24 Printer/Cutter unit that offers an all-in-one print and cut solution. The unit offers standard-sized imaging with speeds of up to 60 square feet per hour, flexible color offering of four or eight colors and the ability to print up to 1440 dpi.

► Fusion Sleeve/Leg Platen – Stahls' Hotronix

The Fusion Sleeve/Leg Platen from Hotronix (circle 120 on Free Info Card) is a quick-change heat press accessory designed for decorating sleeves and pant legs. Measuring 6" x 20", it features a Quick Slip Lower Platen Protector for additional ease of garment threading during heat application. It's compatible with all models of Fusion heat presses.



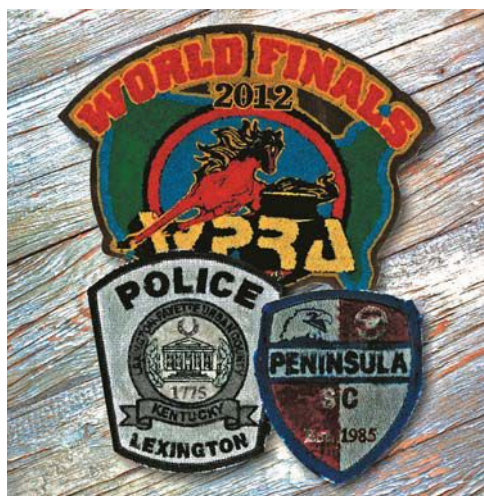
INKS



◀ Epic Amazing Base – PolyOne Wilflex Inks

PolyOne (circle 122 on Free Info Card) has added Epic Amazing Base, a new hybrid mixing base, to its Wilflex Epic non-phthalate ink color system portfolio. It excels in vector art designs and is designed for printing onto 100% cotton or cotton/polyester blend substrates with optimal color vibrancy and printability.

EMBLEMS AND PATCHES



▲Distressed and Vintage Patches – Penn Emblem Co.

Penn Emblem Co. (asi/77120; circle 127 on Free Info Card) offers a variety of emblematic products and processes that can create faded and frayed emblems and patches, perfect for distressed and vintage looks for novelty, university, military and motorcycle club applications, among many others.

TRANSFERS



◀Prespaced Number Styles – Stahls' ID Direct

The Prespaced Number styles from Stahls' ID Direct (asi/88984; circle 96 on Free Info Card) are available in a variety of heat transfer materials. The numbers are prealigned on a carrier, which saves layout and application time, and are perfect for jerseys, T-shirts, jackets, bags and more.

CUTTER MATERIAL



◀Easyweed Glow-In-The-Dark Cutter Material – Graphic Solutions Group

The Easyweed Glow-In-The-Dark Cutter Material from Graphic Solutions Group (circle 128 on Free Info Card) is a highly durable polyurethane film that features a patented adhesive formula and pressure-sensitive carrier. It weeds more easily than traditional films without losing pieces, and is easily heat applied to 100% cotton, 100% polyester and cotton/poly blended fabrics.

STABILIZER



◀Wet N Stick Cutaway Stabilizer – Floriani

The Wet N Stick Cutaway from Floriani (circle 129 on Free Info Card) is a hoopless solution for jobs that need more support than a tearaway. This two-ounce stabilizer is designed for use with fleece, chenille, sweater knits, and other fabrics that might get hoop burn. It provides stability and support without crushing high-loft fibers. This water-activated adhesive also eliminates the need to use a spray adhesive that can gum up needles and contaminate the air. And it can easily be repositioned if necessary by gently removing it and rewetting the adhesive.

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Anchors Aweigh

Every year, the sisters of Delta Gamma make a literal splash with their annual Anchor Splash. Held at the Gibb Pool at Washington State University, the day-long charitable event offers friendly pool competition among the campus Greek chapters at WSU.

The funds raised that day benefit Service for Sight, the official Delta Gamma philanthropic project that helps raise money for genetic research, adaptive devices, Braille books and other programs for those suffering from low vision and blindness. Service for Sight has been Delta Gamma's official charitable project since 1936, when alumna Ruth Billow, who was blind, suggested that her sorority find a way to help those with sight limitations.

"We hold philanthropic causes high in our mission and goals," says Brian Blee, marketing director at College Hill Custom Threads (asi/164578), which created the official event tank tops and is based at Washington State University. "We donate 10% of philanthropic

orders back to the causes our customers promote."

In 2011, College Hill Custom Threads officially opened its doors on the Wazzu campus in Pullman, just above a bar and grill popular with students. The company is a resource for branded items and very tied-in to the latest apparel and decoration trends. "We've been very involved with all chapters here since we started our business," says Blee. "Everyone knows to stop by our office when they have an event coming up."

For Anchor Splash (the anchor is the popular symbol for Delta Gamma, combining the sorority's two Greek letters), College Hill screen printed about 100 tanks from Comfort Colors. "Their products are dyed in dozens of different colors," says Blee. "They're some of our favorite products. This particular batch was standard screen-printed, but we often like to use water-based inks on Comfort Colors items to give the art a vintage look and feel." — *Sara Lavenduski*

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116535 performance adult unisex short sleeve tee

- 4.3 oz. (146 g)
- 65% Polyester / 35% Combed, Ringspun Cotton
- Moisture wicking performance
- Anti-microbial treated for odor control
- Short set-in sleeves
- 3/4" seamed rib knit collar
- Taped neck and shoulder seams
- Two-needle sleeve and bottom hems
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