

WEARABLES

THE EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY www.wearablesmag.com

November/December 2014

SALES FORECAST

KEY STRATEGIES TO:

- * Increase Order Size
- * Target Growing Markets
- * Choose the Right Decoration

Who Takes The Top Decorator Crown?

THE BEST WAY TO DRUM UP NEW BUSINESS

Black Sells Best – And Other Color Insights

X-TEMP performance shirt provided by
Hanes Branded Printwear (asi/59528)

NEW 'OLD' TRENDS FOR 2015

POCKET TEES,
GYM SWEATPANTS
AND MORE

HIT THE SLOPES WITH SKIWEAR

WINTER WONDER The 3-in-1 System Jacket

SCREEN-PRINTING SUCCESS

- * PERFECT INK MIXING
- * HOW TO PRINT LOOSE KNITS
- * THE PERSONALIZATION SECRET





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asi/56842

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asi/59528



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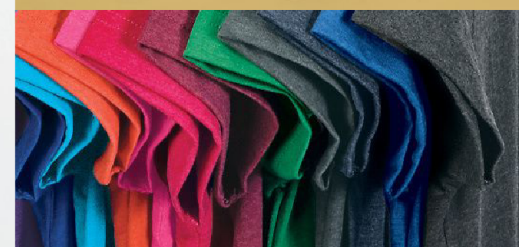
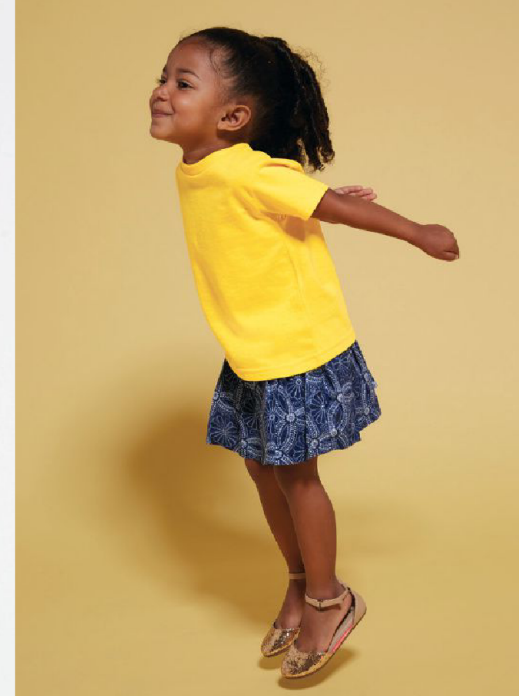


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Sun in the Forecast

To reflect the optimism that was displayed by industry companies in our *Wearables* Sales Forecast, we decided bright was right for our cover decoration. Our Sales Forecast logo was printed on the

stalwart X-TEMP tee from Hanes Branded Printwear (asi/59528; circle 117 on Free Info Card). The shirt was decorated by Heritage Screen Printing (asi/700490; circle 119 on Free Info Card).

Measure Twice, Print Once

Heritage used plastisol inks on its M&R Chameleon manual press to print the Sales Forecast logo. The versatile decorator used mesh counts of 110, 156 and 196 to achieve the proper half tones for the gradients. "These shirts are beautiful and nice to print on," says Owner Steven McKee, "however, they are soft, which can be an issue when loading them onto the pallets straight. We took our time and measured them out to ensure a properly straight imprint."

Neon Lights

Neons are having a moment again, and the X-TEMP smartly updates the trend with five heathered colors to choose from. "Because the fabric is a cotton/poly blend, the neon colors take on a unique look that's really resonating with consumers," says Newman, "and we're finding that our heathered neon colors are selling just as well as our core colors."

Playing It Cool

Hanes introduced its X-TEMP collection this year, and the results have been robust. "Looking ahead to 2015, we fully expect the trend of styles that blur the line between performance and leisure to remain strong," says Rachel Newman, director of sales and marketing. "X-TEMP hits this trend spot on by combining the comfort of blended ring-spun cotton with the wicking performance of polyester." The company is planning to expand the collection for 2015, adding men's and women's sport shirts, a youth tee and women's V-neck.

Decoration Tip

Heathered garments are trendy, but can also complicate printing by introducing additional color into the fabric. For printing on the X-TEMP, "we made sure to add a second coat to the white underbase," McKee says, "to allow for proper coverage over the heather in the garments."

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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

'Top' Shelf

In our last issue for the year, we name the Grand Prize winner of our *Wearables* Top Decorator contest. But don't forget about the multitude of strong entries we received for our five difficult challenges. Visit our website to see all the entries submitted for the contest.



VIDEO

Equal Choice

The years of women forced to don ill-fitting men's or unisex shirts are over. Women's corporate apparel options have greatly expanded in the industry, and *Wearables* Editor C.J. Mittica shows off some of the most compelling items in this Trend Alert video.



NEWSLETTER

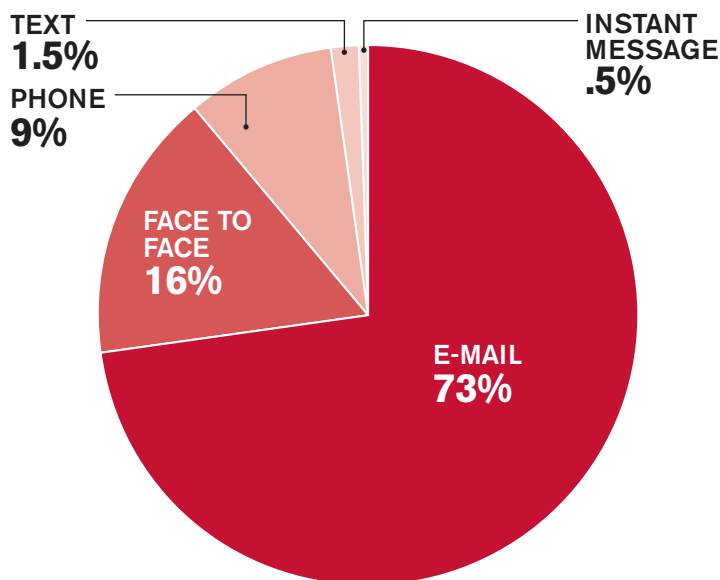
In The Bag

Bags comprise the third-most popular category in the entire ad specialty industry, and are an essential part of any marketing campaign. We examine the hottest options in our *Wearables* Style e-newsletter.

POLL

We Have Contact

ASICentral.com asked "What's your preferred mode of communication for business?"



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BUSINESS MATTERS

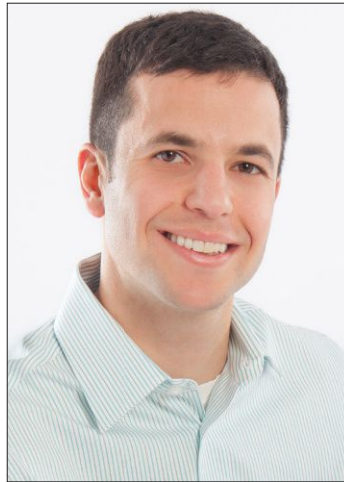
Apparel distributors and decorators don't need a reason to justify their services. We know how effective branded apparel is. We know companies absolutely need to market themselves. Only a few misguided souls would even ask "Why print something on a T-shirt?" Today more than ever, the decorated apparel industry matters.

And the results of our fifth annual Wearables Sales Forecast overwhelmingly support that notion. Printed apparel and accessories are expected to total \$8.6 billion in revenue for 2015. Our survey respondents are predicting sales and margin increases in all the major product categories, including major gains in T-shirt and overall sales. If that's the case, you'd better be prepared for a lot of printing.

As we all know, increased sales don't just happen. They are the result of proactive planning and strategies that are intelligently implemented. To that effect, our Sales Forecast cover story package arms you with the information and actions to help build your business – everything from how to increase your order size to which markets are worth targeting.

Our Sales Forecast survey is full of interesting information about our industry. Here are some revealing insights I gleaned:

- Half of screen printers don't work with other screen printers. It's very unlikely your shop can handle every type of order or every possible screen-printing technique or effect. Strike an alliance with a non-competing shop to take on the specialized orders you can't do or



“Our survey respondents are predicting sales and margin increases in all the major categories.”

the overflow during your busiest times.

- Companies who don't provide screen printing are much less likely to serve the education market (35%) than screen printers (57%). The reverse holds

true for fields like health care and manufacturing. Product clearly rules here, and where the T-shirt and polo sells big, that's where screen printers will be.

- Margins were predicted to increase overall by 5.5%. This has been a major sore spot for industry companies the last few years. To make this true, distributors and decorators really have to stick to their guns and hold the line on prices or even raise them when necessary.

There is much more in this issue. We identify top trends for 2015, teach you how to perfect your screen registration, help build your referrals and also crown a grand champion for our Top Decorator competition. Get started now, because 2015 will be here sooner than you think.

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 Ryan Moor, CEO and founder of Ryonet (asi/528500): "A T-shirt is really an amazing thing! When the shirt and its message fits you, and I mean really fits, it can actually help you feel better about yourself, give you confidence, and even make you a better person and live a better life. So what do I like to wear? Simple designs, positive messages and soft-hand water-

based inks. Print Liberation's "Don't Give Up" shirt, printed on a tri-blend from American Apparel (asi/35297), embodies the never-give-up positive mentality that I strive to live by. These days, I love the feeling of a snug-fit T-shirt, one that's not too tight or not too loose, just right. To class up the shirt, I almost always rock it with Diesel jeans and a pair of nice dress shoes. As far as the shirt goes, nothing else fits or lasts like an American Apparel T-shirt; my favorite styles are the Tri-Blend Track Shirt and the Poly-Cotton T. The shirt has to either be blank or printed with water-based ink; no plastisol for me, please. When I have an awesome shirt on, it definitely helps me have a better day! #roqout"

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TRENDS

THE HOTTEST
APPAREL AND
ACCESSORIES

By Alissa Tallman

Hit The Slopes

SKIWEAR STYLED APPAREL was all the rage on the runways during Autumn 2014 Fashion Week, from Louis Vuitton's men's lineup (which combined raglan and color-blocking designs worn with shiny specs) to Tommy Hilfiger's more traditional take featuring parkas paired with hiking boots and ski goggles.

"Skiwear is perfect to promote as resort wear," says Heather Brunner Kelly, marketing manager for Charles River Apparel (asi/44620). "At winter resorts and ski lodges especially, customers are always looking for outerwear and accessories." Vintage-style skiwear is very much in vogue, she says, as are bold colors like neons. Also, "Crewneck sweaters with old-school 1970s designs – such as snowflakes, stripes and geometric patterns – are great, as are the sleek, modern-looking ski jackets with leather accents," she says. "Both function as multiuse pieces that can be worn both on and off the slopes; you won't look out of place wearing them during the day and then out the same night."

Insulated ski jacket (19701) available from **Trimark Sportswear Group** (asi/92122; circle 76 on Free Info Card).

Nike Pro thermal mock turtleneck (444116) available from **Scoreboard Sports** (asi/88747; circle 77 on Free Info Card).

Durable ski gloves (CG-CVJ10-87) from **Assertive Creativity** (asi/37166; circle 78 on Free Info Card).

Nordic-patterned beanie (C907) from **SanMar** (asi/84863; circle 80 on Free Info Card).

FASHION TIP

Away from the mountain, match up these wintry staples with hipster street apparel, such as jeans, hiking boots and skirts.





Jazzy patterned backpack (CBP-063) available from **Ame & Lulu** (asi/35232; circle 85 on Free Info Card).

GET A TANGY KICK FROM Orange

A VARIETY OF lively orange shades and tints was on full display during fall/winter fashion shows by Balmain, Dries Van Noten, Givenchy and more. This is one dazzling color that can't fail to seize attention, whether you choose a light tangerine or a dense mahogany.

"Orange is an excellent hue for many applications and moods based on the variety of tones it can come in, from a subtle warm hue to a vibrant bright one," says Jeff Silcock, marketing manager for Stormtech Performance Apparel (asi/89864). He agrees that orange is a reliable and influential player in the promotional arena. "For those looking for a retail-inspired color, orange is an excellent choice. One of our most popular colors right now is chipotle, which is on the more subtle end of the orange spectrum."

Silcock says orange is traditionally associated with autumn but is also a winter favorite. "It's a great fall color to apply to a range of holiday events, from Halloween to Thanksgiving. If you want to stand out from the crowd and get noticed, going with a 'louder' color like orange is the way to go."

FASHION TIP

Steadfast partners for orange are basic neutrals like white, black and brown. Pair orange separates with accessories in neutral colors, such as watches, hats and caps or shoes.

Custom flip-flops created by **Brand Vessel** (asi/145158; circle 79 on Free Info Card).



Chevron sports bra (YSB101CHEV-F) available from **Boxercraft** (asi/41325; circle 82 on Free Info Card). Decorated by A&P Master Images (asi/702505; circle 83 on Free Info Card).



Elegant tie (VSRP-338-058) available from **Wolfmark** (asi/98085; circle 86 on Free Info Card).

Lightweight men's all-weather jacket (GSX-1) available from **Stormtech Performance Apparel** (asi/89864; circle 84 on Free Info Card).



Lovely In Leather

LEATHER BEDECKED THE runways this season; fall collections from Anthony Vaccarello, Cédric Charlier and Trussardi were teeming with leather jackets, leather tops and even leather dresses. It falls right in line with the enduring military trend. "From the retail shops in Europe to the fashion runways in New York, the military look is definitely still hot!" says Joy Nelson, creative design representative at Burk's Bay (asi/74600).

She advocates that leather items make ideal employee gifts. "There is no better way to reward a valued employee who has met requested sales goals, a specific service level or a safety target than with the gift of leather apparel," Nelson says. "A leather jacket offers tremendous value and will be appreciated well after the recognition event is over."



Classic naval aviator's flight jacket (Z21A0241) from **Cockpit USA** (asi/43022; circle 88 on Free Info Card).



Men's leather vest (0710) and ladies' hipster field jacket (9201) available from **Burk's Bay** (asi/74600; circle 87 on Free Info Card).



AS SEEN AT... PARIS FASHION WEEK

◀ French designer Cédric Charlier featured leather as the main focus of his fall 2014 lineup, showcasing classic looks and designs with a refreshingly modern take.

System Jackets

BY CHUCK ZAK

THE 3-IN-1 SYSTEM jacket is the mother lode of outerwear. Comprising two independent jackets that fit together to form one supremely weather-resistant garment, these jackets are the ultimate in cold-weather comfort. That relentless commitment to performance often results in a list of technical specs as long as a 747 manual. But amid all the bullet-pointed terminology, the ease of wear and the simple attractiveness of these jackets might get overlooked. Don't. These are all great-looking ambassadors for your clients' imprint, absorbing all the lessons of retail-worthy apparel while repelling any wintry weapon thrown their way.

Lightweight (229137) 3-in-1 interval jacket features windproof/waterproof outer shell for extreme weather protection. Available from **Holloway Sportswear** (asi/61430; circle 116 on Free Info Card).



The Trifecta 3-in-1 weather protection parka (7738) has a full-length storm flap and an anti-pilling microfleece liner jacket. Available from **Landway** (asi/66238; circle 118 on Free Info Card).

Polyester-lined men's 3-in-1 jacket (88205) features a shell with reflective piping at shoulder and upper back and conceals a polyester fleece inner jacket. Available from **alphabroder** (asi/34063; circle 115 on Free Info Card).

This Rockland hooded system parka (J9985) features a polyester-lined shell and a heavyweight zip-out microfleece inner jacket. Available from **Tri-Mountain** (asi/92125; circle 89 on Free Info Card).



Tough and taped with reflective trim, this all-season water-resistant 3-in-1 jacket (XLT-2R) features a zip-out fleece liner for a full range of climates. Available from **Stormtech Performance Apparel LTD** (asi/89864; circle 84 on Free Info Card).

Three Selling Tips

1 Flaunt the flexibility. The fundamental beauty of system jackets is their appropriateness for almost any time of year. “The basic flexibility of the 3-in-1 allows the client to purchase one piece which is good for three seasons,” says Kendra Smith, manager of public relations for Proforma (asi/300094). For clients with drivers to outfit, employees working outside, or companies who want their traveling staff members covered appropriately for every climate, no other outerwear piece offers the same level of interchangeability.

2 Put price into perspective. “Price will definitely be the driving factor,” admits Danny Tsai, VP of merchandising for Tri-Mountain (asi/92125), whose Rockland jacket embodies what he calls “a great value for what you’re getting – a 3-in-1 parka.” It’s that value, Tsai feels, not the price that will eventually sway a client. For Mike Beckman, president of Proforma BPM in Atlanta, overcoming price objections is easier “if you can demonstrate a need and an appreciation of the jacket.” With new clients, Beckman tells anecdotes of previous clients who were initially reluctant but went ahead with the purchase – only to reorder more after their employees fell head-over-heels for the jackets.

3 Love the layers. Smart layering is the key to all-weather comfort, and these jackets represent that concept perfectly. Any investigation of recent retail apparel trends will notice how layering has become its own guiding philosophy, not just for practical purposes, but as an example of on-trend styling. Says Smith: “Pairing breathable fabrics with seam-sealed insulated shells in more fashion-forward designs allows clients to have strong branding while maintaining high style.” Furthermore, Smith recommends decorating both liner and shell for the kind of multiple, independent branding opportunities that resonate with customers.



Long-Sleeve Shirt

WHEN CHOOSING UNIFORM pieces for employees, it's important to keep the staff comfortable and looking good. This unique, form-fitted long-sleeved women's top (LB008) from Tri-Mountain (asi/92125; circle 89 on Free Info Card) is a keeper in both comfort and style, and would make an excellent uniform separate for the fall and winter season. It's applicable to a wide range of occupational settings and lends itself perfectly to embroidery, digital printing or other means of decoration.

Decoration Tip

To create the floral decorations, Black Duck (asi/700415) opted for geometric treatments instead of overly realistic designs. "This design uses open, curved contour fills to create a sense of volume and depth without all the stitches of a fully filled and shaded piece," says Erich Campbell, digitizer for Black Duck Embroidery and Screen Printing. It saves on cost and hand, and is a perfect match for thin, flowing fabrics.

Comfort with an Edge

Pair the shirt with these tapered pants and gorgeous wrap, then top it off with these superiorly fashionable specs for a distinguished look.



Polarized sunglasses (154868) from **Eyeking** (asi/51260; circle 90 on Free Info Card).



Alternative eco-jersey wrap (1956) from **S&S Activewear** (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card). Embroidered by Black Duck Embroidery and Screen Printing (asi/700415; circle 92 on Free Info Card).



Cotton-spandex fitness pants (810) from **Bodek and Rhodes** (asi/40788; circle 93 on Free Info Card).

Winter Hipster

This tasteful outfit features layering at its best, which keeps out the chill while simultaneously providing plenty of ways to accessorize and embellish.



Leopard print scarf (SU-ASYSP-8-8) from **Assertive Creativity LLC** (asi/37166; circle 78 on Free Info Card).



Soft-shell jacket (5251) from **Dunbrooke** (asi/50930; circle 94 on Free Info Card). Embroidered by Black Duck Embroidery and Screen Printing (asi/700415; circle 92 on Free Info Card).



Versatile skirt (250) from **Brandwear** (asi/41545; circle 95 on Free Info Card).

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THE CHALLENGE

“How Can I Significantly Increase My Rate of Referrals?”

It all started with a friendly tennis match. Mike Beckman, owner of Proforma BPM in Atlanta, had been part of a group that played casually for several years, never realizing that his partner worked in marketing for a national telecommunications company. “We never talked business,” he explains. But one night, on a whim, he entered his buddy’s name into LinkedIn, the social networking site for professionals, and made the discovery. Though his tennis partner wasn’t authorized to make promotional product purchases, he was able to refer Beckman to two other people in his company who were.

Those first two LinkedIn introductions snowballed into about 50 new connections for Beckman and more than \$200,000 in sales over the last year and a half. Beckman’s referral strategy is simple: Whenever he gets a new connection on LinkedIn, he’ll ask that person to make digital introductions to anyone else who might be interested in working with him. Nine times out of 10 the tactic results in a meeting, he says. And even if prospects are not interested in buying right away, they’re still linked up in case their situation changes. “LinkedIn is basically a digital business card that never gets tossed,” Beckman says.

Using LinkedIn strategically and selectively has proven so effective that Beckman has abandoned other prospecting techniques. “Any cold-calling, you’re just spinning your wheels,” he says. “By using LinkedIn, you’ve already been introduced, they just don’t know it yet.”

Referrals are perhaps the most powerful tools in your sales arsenal; according to the *Counselor State of the Industry* survey, 85% of distributors use referrals, far and away the most-used strategy to drum up new business. As Beckman discovered,

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

Here are some tips to help you generate more referrals:

Timing is everything. Experts say the best time to ask for a referral is when the client is happy, but the sale is not 100% complete. “They need to still feel slightly obligated and enthusiastic about referring you,” says Julia Angelen Joy, a communications and marketing consultant with Boise, ID-based Z Group PR. Make asking for a referral a regular part of your sales script.

Condition your customers. It’s crucial that your customers understand

how important referrals are, says Kowalke. “Create the culture that giving referrals is how they got to you and is part of doing business,” he says.

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

Use the Internet. Social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook are perfect opportunities for low-stakes referrals. Brian Carter, digital marketing consultant and author of *The Like Economy: How Businesses Make Money With Facebook*, suggests simply creating a Facebook post asking customers to tag a friend they’d like to refer in the comments section. Incentivizing the post by awarding a prize to a random recommender will increase responses, he says.

Follow up. Stay in contact with your customers and prospects so you’re top-of-mind when they’re interacting with their own networks, whether online or off. “Even an informative email newsletter can trigger a referral when the timing is right,” says Joellyn Sargent, author of *Beyond the Launch: The Practical Guide to Building a Business That Thrives*. Beckman has had luck with a similar technique. He’ll periodically publish marketing tips on LinkedIn, and each article prompts at least one client to call or email, reminded that they need to place an order.

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

What Happens Next

Once you’ve nabbed a referral, what should you do next?

Make sure you follow up while the referral is still hot, says Julia Angelen Joy, of Z Group PR. Don’t wait longer than a day or two to get in touch, or you risk not only missing out on an opportunity, but annoying the prospect who was expecting your call.

Thank the client who recommended you. “A surprise gift or a handwritten note can go a long way toward showing appreciation,” says author Joellyn Sargent.

Don’t forget to request a referral from the fresh prospect to keep the cycle of new business going. — *TH*

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Q&A

I Believe...

The who, what and wear of industry experts

BY ERIN REILLY AND STERLING WILSON, AS TOLD TO THERESA HEGEL

Sterling Wilson

... I deliver my sunglasses at night. I once drove five hours through the night with a member of our sales team to deliver an order of sunglasses to the University of Connecticut at 6 a.m. on a Sunday. The sunglasses were for a student event that morning, and there were no carriers available to make such an early delivery. When we got to the school, the admissions officers were so happy. Of course, we just told them that we were couriers – they never knew we made the sunglasses for them. While it isn't glamorous, I think this was one of my proudest moments because we delivered on time, went beyond "commercially reasonable" to satisfy our customer and the end-user had no idea!

... We must deliver unique value. Over the next five years, our industry will see increased competition from vertically integrated online distributors and overseas competitors. Companies selling commodity products will see their margins erode year by year and will be forced either to differentiate their offerings or cut costs in areas like customer service and product quality. We strive to deliver unique value by providing Pantone matching, full-color printing and retail packaging on every product in our line while delivering in less than 30 days.

... Being in business with a friend is about trust. Erin and I have known each other for most of our adult lives. We trust

each other implicitly, and I am always sure she is acting in my best interest. Of course, stress at work can spill over into our personal lives. We've always found that taking time to just hang out and doing things unrelated to work is crucial for our friendship and working relationship.

... It's important to celebrate every success. Just because a victory might be small, it doesn't mean it isn't important. We ring a bell and email the whole Pop! Promos team every time a sale is made. When we hit our sales goals for the month, we celebrate with an office party or happy hour. We might work hard, but we still enjoy every minute of it.

... Life is full of opportunities. "Say yes as often as possible" is the motto I live by. Every person you meet, idea you have and path you cross has the potential to change your life. Keeping an open mind helps you unlock more of that potential.

... Spearfishing is like snorkeling with a slingshot. I love to go spearfishing. When you're underwater, it's quiet, nature is all around you, and you feel weightless. It also teaches you discipline (I can hold my breath for five minutes) and is a fun way to keep fit.

Erin Reilly

... We are committed to exceptional service. Every time we make a decision as a business, we take a step back and say, "Will this be a positive change for our clients?" As such, we have invested heavily in building systems and hiring awesome team members who work every day to improve our client experience.

... Technology-related products are trending. Our custom Pantone-matched sunglasses have far and away been our most-popular product, as they are our flagship; however, it looks like our Pantone-matched touch-screen gloves are about to give the sunglasses a run for their money. We just launched our touch-screen gloves in August,



Erin Reilly & Sterling Wilson

- Owners of Pop! Promos (asi/45657), a supplier of sunglasses, bags, lanyards and more.
- Members of the *Counselor* 2013 Hot List
- Company recognized by *Counselor* as one of 2014 Best Places to Work

and we have seen outrageous sales on the product.

... Building relationships takes time, but it pays off. Two years ago, we worked with a distributor who had a demanding client that needed 2,500 sunglasses in a pinch. The domestic guys couldn't meet the design requirements, and all of the other overseas guys told her three months. We came through and delivered 2,500 pairs of polarized sunglasses and custom pouches in two weeks. A year later, she came back to us with a 150,000-piece order. We hit it out of the ballpark and are regularly receiving repeat orders. Moments like this remind us that doing well by your clients on every single order will serve you well in the end.

... A not-so-little birdie told me. The last book I read for pleasure was *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. Loved the first 600 pages... the last 250 were a bit taxing.

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BEGINNER - 100

Add On Sales With Sweaters

Cool temperatures are the ideal occasion to build your sales of promotional sweaters. As an executive gift or uniform, a sweater is a classic way to reinforce a brand or expand a uniform program.

In fact, sweaters play an important role in any uniform program. "Front desk associates at a hotel wear sweaters to change their look from a traditional suit coat to something more contemporary that makes a smart statement while staying within corporate branding," says Taraynn Lloyd, marketing director for Edwards Garment (asi/51752). "Transit programs have always found value with the addition of a sweater, and now sweaters are

more vibrant logo with the right pop of color can make any brand stand out."

Remember, sweaters come in different styles, such as cardigans, vests and jewel neck or V-neck pullovers, in addition to button-up or zipper fronts. Consider fabric type as well, particularly in terms of the recipient's location and planned use. While heavyweight wool works for the cooler climes of the Northeast, a lightweight cotton/poly knit is more appropriate for the Southeast. If you want gender consistency across a client's apparel, there are male/female companion styles of sweaters available from numerous industry suppliers.

"Sweaters can turn a casual garment into a polished look."

Nathaly Larter,
Trimark Sportswear Group (asi/92122)

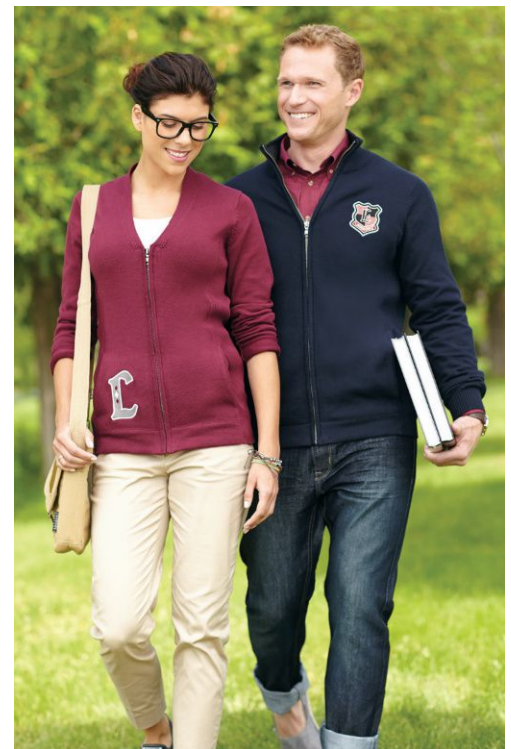
found predominantly in hotels/resorts, retail programs, security, banks/credit unions and physician/hospital programs."

Nathaly Larter, creative manager for Trimark Sportswear Group (asi/92122), explains the broad promotional appeal and ways to embellish: "Sweaters can turn a casual garment into a polished look. Add that unique pop of color under a classic shaded sweater and finish it off with your embroidered logo to create that refined corporate piece or branded uniform combo." Embroidery is the preferred choice for decorating sweaters. "Tone-on-tone embroidery adds a refined subtle look," Larter adds, "while a bolder,



Look for companion styles to outfit a female vs. a male body type or a unisex style to work for both, like this **Bella + Canvas** unisex V-neck lightweight sweater (3985) from **Bodek and Rhodes** (asi/40788; circle 93 on Free Info Card).

Photo courtesy of Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788)



These male and female full-zip sweaters (18606 and 98606) from **Trimark Sportswear Group** (asi/92122; circle 76 on Free Info Card) are made from cotton jersey knit with a ribbed-knit collar and cuffs.

Photo courtesy of Trimark Sportswear Group (asi/92122)



Sweaters like this jewel-neck cardigan (040) from **Edwards Garment** (asi/51752; circle 96 on Free Info Card) can be part of a uniform program for sectors such as hospitality, retail, security and transit.

Photo courtesy of Edwards Garment (asi/51752)

Sweatpants: The Comfortable Choice

Sweatpants often get a bad rap for being frumpy. Designer Karl Lagerfeld has been quoted as saying: “Sweatpants are a sign of defeat. You lost control of your life so you bought some sweatpants.”

In reality, most people just want to be comfortable on their days off from work. In addition, there’s a reassuring quality to a well-worn pair of sweats.

The first pair of sweats was introduced in the 1920s by Emile Camuset, founder of a hosiery and knitwear company called Le Coq

spokesperson for American Apparel. It’s as comfortable at the gym as it is on the couch.

If, however, your client wants a more modernized performance style of sweatpants, there are plenty available. These typically include an elastic waistband with a drawcord in lieu of a simple drawstring and open hem cuffs. Such style features dress up the sweatpant. The Sport-Tek Sport-Wick fleece pant (ST237) fits this bill while also offering moisture-wicking technology to keep a person fresh and dry.

“This traditional sweatpant is easy to wear for all occasions.”

Yvette Corona,
American Apparel (asi/35297)

Sportif. His first pair of sweats was simply knit of a gray jersey that allowed athletes to stretch and run comfortably.

Like their forebear, a pair of sweats must be comfortable and cozy. For those seeking warmth during the coldest season while desiring the throwback style of traditional sweatpants, check out the Unisex Classic Sweatpant (HVT450) from American Apparel (asi/35297). It’s constructed from a super-cozy 13-oz. heavy terry fleece and designed with a fitted tapered leg, drawstring waistband, large side pockets and single back pocket. “This traditional sweatpant is easy to wear for all occasions,” says Yvette Corona,



These youth sweatpants (YST237) from **SanMar** (asi/84863; circle 80 on Free Info Card) feature moisture-wicking and anti-static properties.

Photo courtesy of SanMar (asi/84863)



These classic unisex sweatpants (HVT450) from **American Apparel** (asi/35297; circle 97 on Free Info Card) come in three colors: black, dark navy and zinc.

Photo courtesy of American Apparel (asi/35297)

Best Cities For Sweatpants

Sweatpants are an excellent choice for promotional apparel in that they’re sized simply (small, medium and large), are usually unisex and people really enjoy wearing them. In fact, sweatpants are so comfortable they’ve become a measure of a laid-back lifestyle. Research firm Experian Marketing Services went so far as to use a city’s per capita consumption of sweats to indicate which cities in the United States are the “most comfortable.” The top five cities for comfort:

- Philadelphia, PA
- Hartford, CT
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Lafayette, LA
- Laredo, TX

ADVANCED – 300

Fashion-Forward Imprintable Apparel

Being “in fashion” can reflect many things from makeup to shoes to hair. When it comes to apparel, the garment’s color, cut and texture influence popularity. It might also have to do with the brand name.

Fashionability aside, is it even possible for the promotional apparel industry to offer what’s hot at retail seasonally? It depends on the supplier’s production capabilities. American Apparel (asi/35297), for example, has a global retail presence in addition to wholesale products. The manufacturer seamlessly picks up on trends because its lead time is reduced, having all operations from materi-

“Bags and hats have been very successful for us and for our customers.”

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

als to merchandising in a tight radius. “Being vertically integrated and making everything in Downtown Los Angeles gives us a huge advantage to quickly bring to market the newest trends,” says Yvette Corona, spokesperson for American Apparel. “As a leader in fashionable basics, we always want to provide our customers with the most innovative and high-quality styles in the imprintable industry.”

Crop tops are currently in demand, and American Apparel is delivering. It has added six new crop styles within the year, making its total offering of crop tops sixteen.

These include a cropped fleece sweatshirt, a cropped hoodie and a cropped raglan three-quarter sleeve shirt. They speak to the young adult and teen demographics positively.

However, some clients value longevity over the trendiest products of the moment. A reasonable solution to satisfy the need to be fashionable is through imprintable accessories. Recognizing the opportunity, S&S Activewear (asi/84358) has added hats, bags and caps from nine well-known brands in fashion-forward colors and prints. Among them are brands such as Puma, Stormtech and Oakley. These brands, with their retail presence, have an edge in introducing color trends or styles in short notice. Furthermore, the brand identity itself matters: 46% of readers surveyed in the 2015 Wearables Sales Forecast cite brand as important.

Brand-name or not, fashionable accessories are in demand. “Bags and hats have been very successful for us and for our customers. It’s an easy category to add on to a uniform or giveaway program,” says Margaret Crow, director of marketing at S&S Activewear. “Customers have asked for more knit cap styles, more camouflage patterns, more luggage and more fashion hats. Customers can get creative with all of our new offerings.”



American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 97 on Free Info Card) is able to incorporate trends quickly, include cropped items like its cropped ¾-sleeve raglan (RSABB354).

Photo courtesy of American Apparel (asi/35297)



For clients who want to play it safe with fashion, accessories like the Oakley Tech Sport backpack (92604) and the Outdoor cap camo hat (CBi305) from S&S Activewear (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card) are an easy way to incorporate trends.

Photos courtesy S&S Activewear (asi/84358)

EXPERT – 400

Color In Demand

Color availability is a big key for trends. Stitch Labs, a leader in inventory management for retailers and wholesalers, released a new infographic with updated consumer color preferences. The study included all products, but included mostly apparel and accessories. Some of the most interesting facts include:

- Pink, purple and yellow have the lowest price per unit of all the colors analyzed. Navy and brown have the highest revenue per unit.
- Products with colors of the rainbow (chromatic) only make up 37% of all units sold. Achromatic colors – black, white, neutrals, etc. – account for nearly two-thirds of all products sold.
- The average revenue per unit for achromatic products is 15% higher than for a chromatic product.
- Black is critical to any mix – it's two-and-a-half times more popular than the next color in line, white.
- Even though blue is the world's most popular color, preferred by 40% of people, it's only the third most popular color sold in apparel. (After blue, grey, red, pink and green are the next most-sold apparel colors.)

How does availability of imprintable apparel keep up with consumer demand? We checked ESP for each of those colors plus the word "shirt," e.g. "pink shirt." Here's what we found from least to most:

1,598 multicolor shirts

8,439 yellow shirts

14,457 purple shirts

13,765 pink shirts

27,719 blue shirts

31,668 red shirts

40,072 white shirts

40,656 black shirts



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TACTICAL



WEARABLES

Sales Forecast



Industry companies have a bright outlook for 2015. Here are the strategies, data and markets to help you forge ahead.

By C.J. Mittica, Shane Dale, Theresa Hegel and Sara Lavenduski

Research by Nathan Kucsma

Imprinted apparel and accessories are expected to garner \$8.6 billion in revenue in 2015. It speaks to the strength of our industry and the optimistic outlook that distributors and decorators are carrying into next year. That sentiment is reflected in our *Wearables Sales Forecast*, and we want to further those big plans for growth by highlighting key strategies – from identifying ripe markets to increasing your order size. Time to get busy.

C.J. Mittica is the editor, Shane Dale is a contributing writer, Theresa Hegel is a senior staff writer and Sara Lavenduski an assistant editor for Wearables. Nathan Kucsma is the director of marketing research.

Increase your AVERAGE ORDER SIZE

While finding new clients is the lifeblood of a successful company, boosting the average size of apparel orders with your current clients is an easier way to fatten your bottom line. Here are five tried-and-true methods for accomplishing that.

Ask: Anna Johnson, owner of Super Embroidery & Screenprinting (asi/339634), says that often all you have to do in order to increase your wearable order size is ask instead of merely fulfilling the order. "Ask if they need any higher-end or other items for family, office workers, travelers, customers, etc.," she says.

It's a simple step that Andy Shuman, general manager of Rockland Embroidery (asi/734150), says countless companies fail to take. "They won't say, 'While we're doing this, can we help fit your production staff as well? Can we do caps for you? Let's go in and let's make sure we have all our bases covered,'" he says. Shuman adds: "The biggest thing is to not be afraid to ask them for

a larger order. It seems so simple, but oddly enough, I don't think people do it."

Learn About Their Needs: Shuman says decorators need to gain in-depth knowledge about their customers' apparel needs in order to make proper suggestions about add-ons. Ask questions early in the sales process: Where will the garments be worn or given away? What kind of impact are you looking to make? How often will the apparel be worn? "If you know enough about what's going into the customer's uniform program, you can tell them that one shirt per employee isn't going to get them all that far," he says. "Why don't [you suggest] they color coordinate their days and do a red shirt with a blue design on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and on Tuesday and Thursday, do a blue shirt with a red design? That way, you can tailor it to the circumstances."

Throw In Something Extra: Johnson suggests including a free, tangible demonstration

\$500

The average expected wearables order size over the next 12 months. The total is the same for both screen printers and non-screen printers.

of other logoed apparel items you can provide for your customer. "When they order, throw a hat or bag or something different in to the order for a sample," she says. It's a tactic that has also paid off for Shuman, particularly if Rockland Embroidery had to digitize the customer's logo or make a screen. The only cost is a \$3 hat plus the little bit of extra time to print it.

Increase Order Cost: Additional pieces aren't the only way to bulk-up order size. You can increase the price of the order by pitching higher-quality items. "If someone is looking for 50 polos," Shuman says, "so much of our industry's gut reaction is to show them the \$10 net-cost polo that they're going to embroider and sell for \$20. By not offering [a higher-end polo], they miss the opportunity to show them the good, better, best."

"When we go sell a shirt order, maybe I can sell them a \$40 shirt instead of a \$20 shirt. I'll never know if I don't ask."

Prepare for Contingencies: Johnson says customers can be encouraged to order extra units by being made aware of the importance of preparedness for contingency situations — especially when the end-user happens to be a school or sports team.

"If it's for a team," she says, "suggest ordering a few extra [uniforms] to cover season changes, such as injuries or moving players from JV to varsity. — *Shane Dale*

Maximize Margins

Margin pressure is greater than ever, yet distributors and decorators are always seeking to increase their margins. What can be done? Follow these tips:

Give In A Little ... Initially: A lot of distributors will hold firm on margins from the beginning, but giving in a little at first is okay. "You drop the margin once or twice and then you build rapport, the typical customer gets busy" and stops shopping around for the lowest price on a product, says Jennifer Lyles, lead igniter of FireSign Inc. (asi/522741), a distributorship in Smyrna, GA. Then if distributor costs increase, clients are less likely to balk at a price increase on a product, knowing their distributor is reliable and trustworthy.

Avoid Certain Product Lines: For Idea Workshop Inc. (asi/229563), the easiest way to avoid margin battles is to simply offer items that aren't as price-sensitive as others.

In this case, that means high-end apparel like Brooks Brothers and Lacoste shirts or Inky and Bozko glassware. "Our products are a little bit immune" from price gouging, says Bob Horwitz, president of the Minneapolis-based distributorship.

Build Tiers of Products: Mark Faust, principal at Echelon Management International, a business consultancy based in Cincinnati, suggests a "bundling or flanking" strategy in which distributors offer tiers of products with different prices. Instead of offering "yes/no choices" they should offer options, which often persuade clients and prospects to consider products other than the one they might have in mind initially — often the lowest-priced one. Clients will choose "a combination that delivers more value for the client, and yet will also have more of a margin," Faust says. He insists that doing so can double profits, even if revenues rise nominally. — *Betsy Cummings*

Choose the Right DECORATION TECHNIQUE

Embroidery, screen printing, heat transfers, sublimation, direct-to-garment ... you're proud of the different options your shop is able to offer clients. But how do you recommend the right method for each customer who walks through the door? Consider these factors.

Intended Use: Erich Campbell, embroidery digitizer/designer and e-commerce manager at Black Duck Inc., says he always asks what the wearer will be doing in the garment. Perhaps it's for a 5K in a warm locale, a great fit for wicking tech tees with heat-transfer embellishment or sublimation. It might be for a corporate trade-show, ideal for embroidered polos. Other recipients will enjoy the entertainment at a music festival with multiple stages, prime for large orders of screen-printed cotton/polyester T-shirts. Campbell also considers the possibility of additional orders in the near future, in order to pick a method flexible enough for different types of apparel. "They may want light garments now," he explains, "but we might be asked to source matching winter gear or color-matched workwear in a month."

Artwork: Printing a design with lots of colors? Screen printing may not be the answer. Decorators will charge screen fees for each color to be used, often about \$15 to \$30 per screen for each run; reorders run from \$5 to \$10 per screen to set the job back up, says Marshall Atkinson, COO of Visual Impressions. "For embroidery, shops will often determine fees in increments of 1,000 stitches," he adds. "So there are setup fees of about \$5 to \$10 per 1,000 stitches to set up and digitize the art. But that's usually a one-time cost." In addition, says Howard Potter, CEO of A&P Master Images (asi/702505), often the client hasn't settled on artwork yet. It's then up to his shop to figure out images that match budgetary and program goals, whether it's to be digitized for embroidered polos, or translated into ink for casual tees. Once the art is designed, "look at how many colors the logo has and what that means for future production costs," says Campbell. "Their art might be suited to different sized placements or different color substrates in upcoming orders."

Quantity: Potter says a client with only two shirts might turn to sublimation because of its very low setup fees. "We wouldn't suggest



screen printing because there's too much setup to make it worth it," he says. Atkinson adds that the complex setup process involved in screen printing is not conducive to quick runs, particularly those for ongoing programs. "Instead, use DTG, sublimation, heat transfers, anything without a lot of setup," he explains. "Screen printing is good for a one-time order of 500 garments, but if it's three orders daily for six months in a catalog program, you'll stick the client with a lot of re-setup fees."

Budget: While fees for heat transfers or sublimation are often low or non-existent, the less-expensive techniques aren't always the best choice, depending on the garment. "We consider clients' budget, but we have to give them our professional recommendation," says Atkinson. "We're definitely going to embroider polos from Cutter & Buck (asi/47965). Embroidery provides a high-end look that matches the garment and the application. You can't put cheap decoration on a premium item." - Sara Lavenduski

When to Use Special Effects

Special effects can elevate a branded look, but the look may come with extra cost and effort. What are the key reasons for using special effects?

Retail Quality: Discharge ink creates prints with a soft hand that are popular at retail. "Clients love to wear and talk about these shirts," says Nathan Beam, content manager at Real Thread, "and the retail-quality feel is long-lasting."

Perceived Value: Reflective ink is popular for highlighting details on a standard screen print, says Kevin Johnstone, sales/marketing manager at FPS Apparel (asi/53475). "Just adding these accents significantly raises the perceived dollar

value," he says. Likewise, John Hansson, owner of Up Top Screen Printing, will use water-based ink or discharge even on basic tees to up the value but still meet the budget. "That way," he says, "the customer still gets a memorable shirt that's enjoyable to wear."

Creative Benefits: Charlie Taublieb, president of Taublieb Consulting, helps clients learn to combine discharge ink and foil. "I've seen printers become very inventive with it, and they distinguish themselves from their competition," he says. "When a shop really learns how to work with it, they can offer a creative and financial advantage." Likewise, it creates one-of-a-kind garments for customers that can't be easily replicated. - SL

Work With OTHER SCREEN PRINTERS

Many screen printers are hesitant to subcontract jobs. Often, their reluctance stems from a fear that the subcontractor will poach their clients; other times, decorators fret about giving up control and not being able to monitor production quality and turnaround time. But experts say it's a good idea to build up a trusted network of fellow decorators because there are many times when it makes smart business sense to send out work to another shop.

"Most screen printers are tinkerers and not businesspeople," says Rick Roth, president of Mirror Image Inc. in Pawtucket, RI. "They want to do everything themselves and don't

51%

The percentage of screen printers who never work with other screen printers. An additional 25% only send out orders to other screen printers less than 5% of the time.

think about how much more profitable it can be to subcontract jobs.

"I've seen busy shops choke themselves on work that they refuse to send out. They will take three days to print a job that a shop with a bigger press could do in a couple of hours. I've seen sore arms and backs and a shop busy for a week doing prints manually that could be done in a few hours. It doesn't make any sense."

Instead, such screen printers would be better off collaborating with peers who have faster equipment and different decoration capabilities, especially if the only alternative is to turn away potential business. Milwaukee-based Visual Impressions, for example, will subcontract out dye-sublimation jobs rather than say no to customers asking for the technique, says Marshall Atkinson, COO. Outsourcing is also a good idea if a shop gets too busy to handle order volume and meet deadlines. "You can look at it this way: You're either losing money with overtime or losing money by using another decorator. Which is easier?" Atkinson says. He estimates that Visual Impressions, with more than a dozen presses and 100 embroidery heads, runs anywhere from six to 20 jobs for other decorators each day.

Other large shops have similar stories. Megan Haines, co-owner of MiddletownInk (asi/531055) in Middletown, DE, estimates that about 20% of the contract jobs she does for the promotional products industry are for other decorators, either for overflow work or because they are not able to handle the complexity of a job in a timely manner. Terry Keeven, owner of St. Louis Print Company (asi/700623) in Missouri, says his shop also does a lot of work for smaller screen printers. "Our customers know and trust that we will not contact their end-user," he says.

Done right, the end-user usually has no idea his or her order has been subcontracted. Atkinson recommends working with three or four shops you trust on a reciprocal basis. It's a good idea to find decorators who are within one-day ground shipping, he adds. Subcontractors can even ship the completed job directly to the end-user in one of your boxes once you're confident of the quality and consistency of their work. — Theresa Hegel

The Right Number of Presses

Buying a new press is an expensive decision — one that screen printers regularly revisit as business expands. Experts recommend weighing a number of factors — order volume, workforce, building size and available capital — before signing the dotted line. "I call it the law of the water balloon," says Marshall Atkinson, chief operating officer of Visual Impressions. "You can only fill a production schedule with so much before it blows up in your face."

Make sure you're getting the most out of your existing equipment first. It may be cheaper to add a second shift than to buy another press, Atkinson says. Or if your high-order volume is seasonal, consider outsourcing a few jobs to keep customers and your checkbook happy.

St. Louis Print Company (asi/700623) started out with just one automatic press and one manual, and Owner Terry Keeven says he's invested in new equipment annually, depending on the volume his shop is generating. It's all about maintaining speedy service, keeping turnaround times of two to four days for orders under 10,000, he says. "When our lead times would stretch beyond five days for longer than a month, we add capacity," Keeven explains. If small orders lag, Keeven acquires new manual presses; when larger contracts are falling behind, he buys automatic presses.

The type of press you purchase has everything to do with the markets you target. Most printers will say you can never have enough, when it comes to the number of stations on a press. The reality is that promotional products vendors will rarely need more than an eight-color press, whereas retail giants like Nike are more likely to require multiple automatic presses with a minimum of 12-color capabilities, Keeven says.

When it comes to choosing between automatic and manual presses, automatics win out for consistency and the ability to churn out big orders efficiently. "At the end of the day, the reason you use an automatic is repeatability. It's a machine, not a guy pulling a squeegee," Atkinson says. However, if your order volume rarely exceeds, say, 60 shirts at a pop, it's probably a good idea to "suffer through" and stick with your manual presses a while longer, he adds. — TH

Build A UNIFORM PROGRAM

Creating your own uniform program from scratch can be done. According to Jeff Nero, regional sales rep for Tri-Mountain (asi/92125), many suppliers already have the necessary elements in place in order to help distributors put them together: website development, product design, fabric development, inventory housing and order fulfillment.

Once the supplier partnership is established, Nero says distributors should target end-users that have a classic corporation infrastructure, where the decisions are made by a person or group of people – procurement departments, marketing teams, etc. “Customers with multiple locations and a high employee count are great targets,” Nero says. “Always make sure to pre-qualify the client beforehand and make sure they are doing enough volume to make it worth your time and money investment.” By contrast, corporations with a franchisee structure can be difficult, since individual locations will make their own purchasing decisions separate from the corporate headquarters.

When a client target is acquired, Shurli



Allinott, president of Brandwear (asi/41545), says distributors must ask eight questions about that client's uniform needs:

1. What is your budget?
2. What are the demographics of those who will wear the uniforms?
3. What is the durability/wearability need?
4. Are storyboards required?
5. What is the expected turnaround time for fulfillment orders?
6. Are special sizes such as “tall” or “oversize” required?
7. What types of decorations are required?

8. What is the expected length of the uniform program?

Allinott says that last question is critical. “It can cost corporations dearly if they have to replace an off-the-shelf item that is discontinued after one year,” she says. Durability becomes a key factor too, since garments may need to last a long time and still look good – especially if they are laundered frequently at home or in industrial washers. She adds that offering clients private labeling is an inexpensive touch that provides another branding location on the uniform.

Once you win the business, Nero says crucial uniform program components include developing a website or using existing client technology for program promotion and ordering functions, and deciding upon appropriate inventory levels in order to maintain the program. “Running out of stock is the number-one problem to avoid,” he says. And Nero says distributors should always have a signed contract in place. “That way, all parties are protected and have a clear understanding of what their responsibilities are,” he adds.

Once the program's foundation is set, Allinott says the rest of the program becomes unique to the clients. “The wonderful part with being able to create a uniform program is that almost anything is possible – depending on budgets, of course,” she says. “You want your client to have their staff looking smart yet feeling comfortable at the same time.” – SD

Who To Decorate With

As more suppliers start to offer decoration, distributors face a choice when it comes to deciding where to have their apparel decorated. Here's what to consider:

Ease: It can often be much easier to simply have the supplier – who you are already purchasing the apparel from – do the decoration as well. It saves on both time and cost that would be incurred for an additional shipment.

Quality Work: If the supplier doesn't do quality work, then think twice. Cris Nigro, founder of Proforma Creative Precision, recommends Cutter & Buck (asi/47965) along with Ash City (asi/37143) because of their high-level capabilities. In particular, “Cutter & Buck is quick, does

excellent work, and has competitive pricing,” she says. Plus, the supplier gives Nigro the .DST file, crucial for future orders from the client that don't involve Cutter & Buck apparel.

Partnerships: If you have a decorator you already unequivocally trust, that may trump everything else. Nigro has a local screen printer she's used for nearly a decade. “He's never let me down,” she says. “We have had areas where he's needed to be flexible or I have and it always comes out to a successful completion of a project.”

Consider Strengths: If your local decorator doesn't specialize in trickier items like headwear, for example, then a headwear supplier who does makes a lot of sense. – C.J. Mittica

ANALYZE THIS

\$8.6 billion

The predicted revenue from imprinted apparel and accessories in 2015

Out of the (Bargain) Basement

Is the T-shirt a commodity item? Not according to *Wearables* readers, who are predicting big gains for the industry's most popular item.



T-SHIRTS

Sales Increase
17.1%

Margin Increase
4.6%



POLOS

Sales Increase
8.6%

Margin Increase
2.7%



OUTERWEAR

Sales Increase
7.3%

Margin Increase
2.3%



CAPS

Sales Increase
9.5%

Margin Increase
2.2%



BAGS

Sales Increase
5.0%

Margin Increase
1.7%

Born To Sell

72%

increase sales

25%

remain the same

1%

decrease sales

72% of survey respondents believe sales will increase next year, while 25% expect them to remain the same.

Pressure? What Pressure?

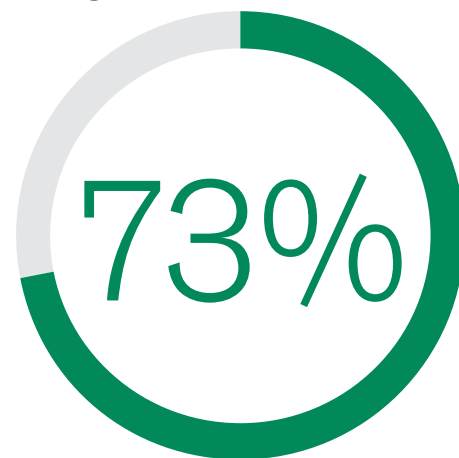


Distributors and decorators are putting margin pressure behind them, predicting a **5.46% increase** in margins over the next 12 months.

99%

The percentage of respondents who believe their performance apparel sales will increase or remain the same next year. For those who expect an increase, they predict 21% growth in sales.

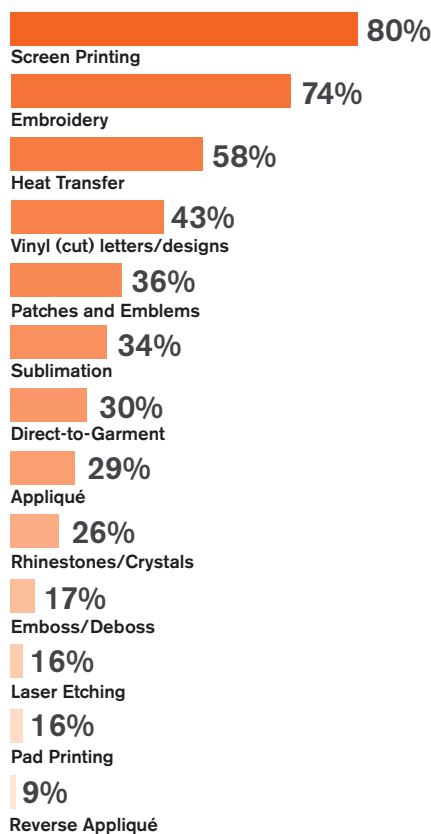
High and Dry



Moisture wicking is the top performance property, desired by **73% of clients**.

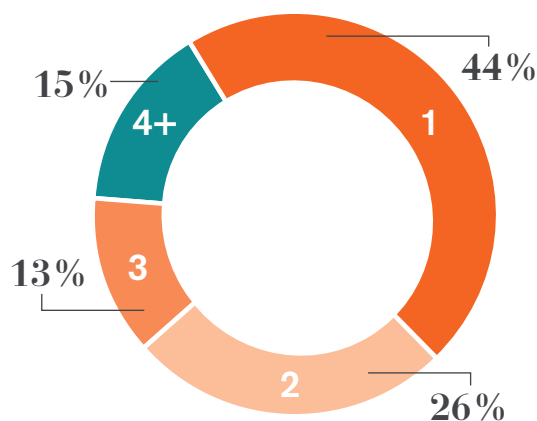
One-Two Punch

Screen printing and embroidery remain the two most popular decoration options.



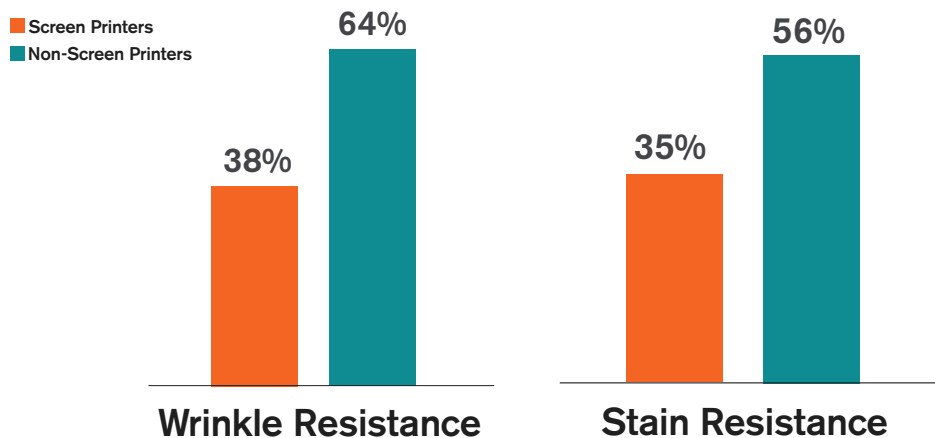
Pressed Into Service

The majority of screen printers own only one or two presses.

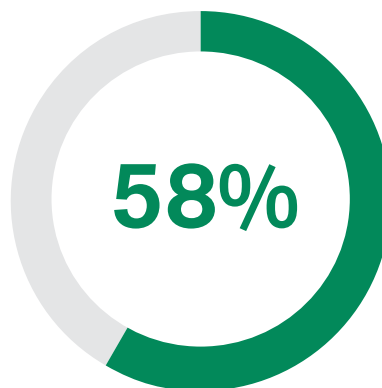


Matter of Resistance

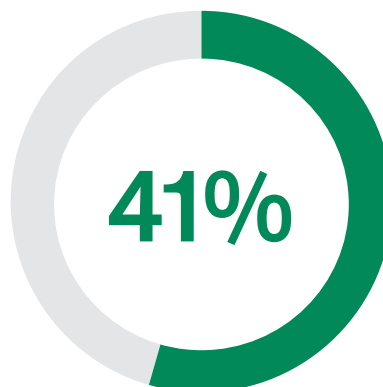
Perhaps because they specialize in T-shirts over wovens, **screen printers do not sell garments with these performance properties** as often as non-screen printers.



Time To Choose

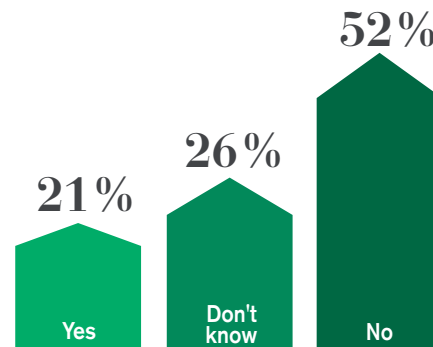


For companies who don't offer decoration in-house, they will use a decorator **58%** of the time, and the supplier **41%** of the time.



Standing Pat

More than half of screen printers are not planning to add or replace any presses in the next 12 months.



Uniform Response

Two-thirds of respondents believe uniform sales will hold steady.



Sales SPOTLIGHT

Want to up your apparel sales? Target these three key markets in 2015.

By Theresa Hegel

Though 2014 began with a dreary winter and sluggish spending, the spring thaw spurred green growth of all kinds, as the U.S. economy shot up at an annual rate of 4.6%, according to the Commerce Department. That's the fastest pace in more than two years, and experts expect the momentum to continue into 2015. With that encouraging news in mind, here are three growing markets to capitalize on next year.

Retail

Industry at a Glance: Retail sales aren't quite at pre-recession, shop-till-you-drop levels yet, but Americans feel more empowered than in years past to break out the bills for that perfect outfit. In August, the U.S. retail apparel market grew a full percent compared to the previous year, according to the National Retail Federation. Meanwhile, the NRF reports overall retail sales jumped to 2.7% year-over-year. The across-the-board positive change may be a precursor of better things to come.

"The rise in consumer confidence, labor markets and retail sales is encouraging," says Jack Kleinhenz, chief economist for the NRF. "August sales figures signal that consumers are willing and ready to spend as the economy improves." In fact, some economists are predicting retail sales growth of as much as 4.5% during the busy holiday season, from November to January. Financial consultancy Deloitte forecast holiday retail sales, excluding motor vehicles and gasoline, to jump as high as \$986 billion.

Some economists expressed concerns that continued unrest in the Middle East could dampen domestic consumer spending, but



This fitted, long-sleeved T-shirt from **Dang Chicks** is made from a 50/50 cotton/polyester burnout and garment-dyed and washed for a soft hand.

Daniel Bachman, senior U.S. economist for Deloitte, believes worries over global insecurity are balanced out by a number of positive economic signs. "Debt levels remain at historic lows," he says, and stock market gains coupled with increased home prices have a wealth effect on consumers, which may encourage increased spending compared to prior years."

That should be welcome news to more than a quarter of *Wearables* readers surveyed who count retail among their top three markets for apparel sales.

Sales Strategy: If you want to service the

retail sector, it's important to have access to top-of-the-line, high-volume equipment, like automatic presses with the capacity for many color changes. Knowledge of the latest specialty techniques is also key. Consumers love the look of intricate mixed-media embellishments and the soft, lived-in feel of water-based and discharge inks. Plus, there are a wide variety of opportunities under the retail umbrella, from branded items for brick-and-mortar stores to printing jobs for top apparel brands sold in retail shops.

Success Story: The middle of the housing



crisis five years ago wasn't the ideal time to launch a retail apparel business, but Stephanie O'Connor, creator of the Dang Chicks brand (www.dangchicks.com), was determined to succeed. "When I came into the business, I

didn't have a stitch of experience," she says. "There was a lot of competition. There are always cute T-shirts."

What set Dang Chicks apart was its strong branding: cool, comfy clothes with a message of female empowerment. O'Connor's husband, Tim, came up with the name. "When you walk into a room, you want people to say, 'Dang, chick, you look good,'" she explains.

O'Connor started out selling shirts at a single booth in a retail mart in Atlanta. Now, Dang Chicks clothing is sold in more than 2,300 stores and boutiques, including the Omni Hotel in Nashville, Boot Barn and the Sundance Catalog. In its first three years, the brand saw volume double every year; that growth has tapered off somewhat, but Dang Chicks is still going strong. O'Connor says she's branched out from T-shirts to sell jeans, cellphone cases and other lifestyle items. "The brand has really taken off," O'Connor says. "I think a lot of women can relate to it. The clothes have a fun attitude, but most of all, they're comfortable."

Dang Chicks works with a number of artists and decorators to create cute and catchy looks, but the simpler styles often have the most longevity. T-shirts emblazoned with a star and the slogan "dang cowgirl" are perennial best-sellers. "We can't take them off the line," O'Connor says.

The brand has a loyal social media following, known collectively as the Dang Chick Nation, and fans are eager to share stories of how Dang Chicks brightened their day. A woman diagnosed with advanced-stage breast cancer sent O'Connor a card and a picture of herself wearing a "Dang Strong" shirt, for instance. "This is why I'm working so hard and don't sleep at night," O'Connor says. "It's because of these stories that touch our lives. It's incredible."

\$157.2 billion

Estimated U.S. retail apparel sales for 2014, as of August, a 1.4% improvement over the previous year.

Source: www.census.gov

Professional Services

Industry at a Glance: Job search site CareerCast named civil engineer one of the most underrated jobs of 2014, pointing out robust growth projections for the profession and a respectable median annual pay of nearly \$80,000. Also on its annual list of occupational underdogs were legal assistant, geologist and accountant – all of which fall under the catchall term of professional services, a lucrative market segment that shouldn't be ignored. With 21% of *Wearables* readers polled this year ranking professional services among their top three clients for apparel, it's clear the promotional products industry, at least, is not underestimating these careers.

Typically, professional services exude a conservative feel, branding themselves on, well, professionalism. Firms in this sector tend to gravitate toward embroidered polos and golf shirts, particularly those with high-end, recognizable brand names, says Devin Jones, owner of Proforma Gateway Solutions in Houston. She has, however, noticed some of her clients trying to spice up their staid image, opting for bright colors. "They're getting away from the black and gray and blue, the standard corporate stuff," she says. "We've done a lot of oranges and bright greens lately."

Dean Schwartz of Miami-based SOBO Concepts (asi/329592) agrees it can be difficult to push the envelope with professional service clients. "It's like with anyone else," he says. "You've got to approach it from the way of: What do you want people to think about your business? Do you want them to think you're conservative or creative? You can't push clients in a way that's too edgy. For a law firm, we're definitely not proposing the same kind of things that we do with clients who target a younger demographic."

That said, Schwartz has been able to suggest more creative solutions after completing a few jobs for clients and giving them time to gain confidence in SOBO's methods. The company created USB drives in the shape of the African continent for a large law firm holding a conference in Africa, rather than sourcing the more standard flip drives originally requested. Another client, a professional business association, ordered 100 shirts with laser-etched multimedia graphics rather than

the expected left-chest embroidery for an annual membership meeting, he says.

Sales Strategy: Jones of Proforma recommends getting corporate clients into an apparel program, so you're the go-to distributor whenever the company needs to place an order, big or small. "Our largest customers do an apparel order two to three times a week," she says. "It may be just one or two shirts. Sometimes, it's considerably larger."

3.4%

Percentage of additional workers that new-car dealerships employed compared to last year.

Source: www.nada.org

Success Story: An independent bankruptcy lawyer came to SOBO asking for logoed pens, but Schwartz and company convinced him to take a more clever approach to branding. That's typically how it works at SOBO Concepts, Schwartz says. "[Customers will] come to us asking us to slap a logo on a T-shirt. We come up with a design instead," he adds. "If we had to rely on our clients to give us cool stuff to do, we wouldn't be very proud of any of the stuff we are doing."

To start the process, the SOBO team chatted with the lawyer to get a better understanding of his needs, determining that the heart of his job is helping clients to stop worrying about losing their cars, homes – or worse. "People come to him at not a great point in their lives," Schwartz says.

The team wanted to convey the lawyer's brand in a way that best represented the services he offers, while also lightening the mood for clients stuck in a very stressful situation. So, they printed the lawyer's business card information on a black sleep mask, along with the text: "Credit card debts keeping you up at night? Call us. We'll help you sleep better."

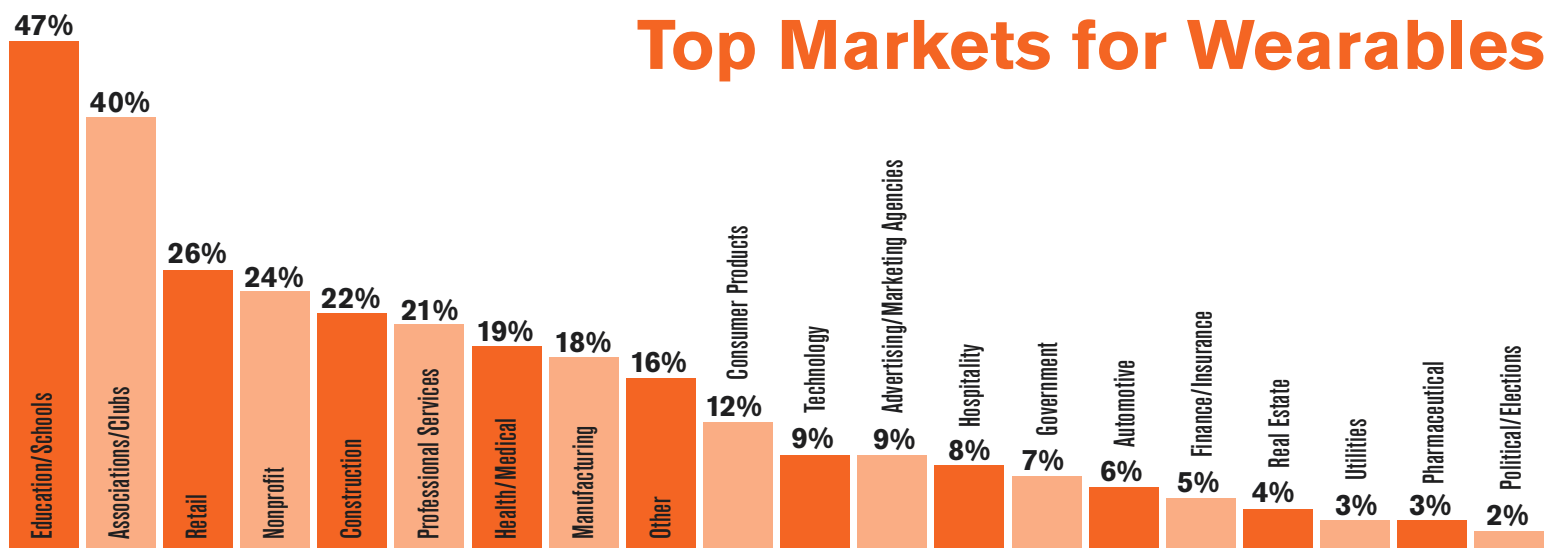
The lawyer has been pleased with the results, reporting back to SOBO that the sleep mask makes his clients laugh, giving them license to relax in his office, Schwartz says.



Kristina Albrecht, graphic designer at **J. Carroll Corp.** (asi/529690; circle 108 on Free Info Card), created this vector artwork design for the 2014 Bud Classic Car Show on a Gildan Ultra Cotton T-shirt (2000).

Automotive

Industry at a Glance: Turns out, a lot of Americans have been craving that new car smell. In particular, sales of pickup trucks, SUVs and crossovers jumped significantly this year, up 9% over 2013, according to figures compiled by Autodata Corp. As of August, more than 5.7 million vehicles in what is known as the "light truck" category had been



Notes: No matter the demographic – screen printers, distributors, decorators – **education** came out on top. ... Non-screen printers were three times as more likely than screen printers to service the **health/medical field**, and more than twice as likely to sell to **manufacturers**. ... As **technology** jobs continue to increase, look for the share of this market to grow into the next decade and beyond. ... Though the portion is small, the **real estate** market is showing increased stabilization, including four consecutive months of existing home sales increases from April to July. ... As the Forecast looks ahead to next year, respondents were anticipating a post-election year hangover in the **political** arena.



Proforma Gateway Solutions client Packers Plus, a company that creates oil and gas well-drilling solutions, gives out these polos, along with a package of goodies, to new hires. The electric blue OGIO men's high-performance polo (OG101) and women's version (LOG105) is made of 100% polyester with moisture-wicking technology. Available from **SanMar** (asi/84863; circle 80 on Free Info Card).

sold, Autodata reports.

Higher sales also mean a larger sales force. New-car dealerships employed more than 1 million people last year, a 3.4% increase from the prior year – the highest figures since before the 2009 recession, according to a 2014 report released by the National Automobile Dealers Association, a McLean, VA-based trade group. “The economic recovery is continuing, and we expect a stronger housing market, improving job prospects and continued low interest rates for auto loans to boost sales this year,” says Steven Szakaly, chief economist for NADA.

Dealerships spent \$7.6 billion on advertising in 2013, a 6.1% increase, NADA reports. Though about a third of those dollars went toward Internet ads, dealerships still see the value in allocating funds for advertising specialties, like shirts, mugs and keychains.

New and used car dealers aren't the only automotive segment to consider, however. There are scores of classic and specialty car shows across the country, each of which requires a commemorative T-shirt, at the very least. Another area ripe for promotional sales is the lucrative aftermarket industry. Last year, sales of automotive specialty-equipment prod-

ucts reached \$33 billion, a 6.7% year-over-year jump, according to a 2014 market report from the Specialty Equipment Market Association.

Sales Strategy: One negative? Profit margins for dealerships remain slim or flat due to heated price competition. Dealerships may give in to temptation to skimp on promos, but as Howard Potter, owner of Utica, NY-based A&P Master Images (asi/702505), it means ad specialties are a golden way for them to stand out. “Think about it,” he says. “If most dealerships are giving away things that would be thrown away, the few that spend extra are

noticed faster, and the product is out there promoting longer, which is giving them more advertising for their dollar.”

Success Story: The J. Carroll Corp. (asi/529690), a 20-year-old decorating company in San Luis Obispo, CA, is carving out a niche creating colorful T-shirts for car shows, especially after hiring automobile enthusiast and graphic designer Kristina Albrecht. Albrecht estimates the shop churns out commemorative car show shirts at least twice a month. J. Carroll is working on expanding both the number of shows it works with and the amount of merchandise it decorates for each.

Albrecht has had particular luck with the Bud Classic Car Show, a growing event in Northern California that originally sought Albrecht out via her personal website two years ago. She brought the client with her when she was hired on at J. Carroll. “Every year, they just let me design what I want,” she says. “It ends up being a pretty big order.” J. Carroll helped boost that order with strategic use of freebies. A complimentary hoodie included in last year's batch of T-shirts prompted show organizers to tack 150 hoodies onto their T-shirt order this year, Albrecht says.

Albrecht also reminds show organizers and the decorators servicing them not to neglect the women. “With a lot of these shows, it's not just the men, it's the wives too,” she says. “They don't want necessarily just the standard, boxy T-shirt. They want something a little more flattering.”

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

About The Wearables Sales Forecast

There were a total of 324 respondents to the study. Survey respondents consisted of two groups:

Screen Printers include:

- Screen printers who do not sell promotional product hard goods.
- Promotional product distributors that also offer in-house screen printing.

Non-Screen Printers include:

- Decorators that do not provide screen printing or sell promotional product hard goods
- Promotional product distributors that do not decorate in-house



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TOP TRENDS FOR 2015

What's now and what's next? We take a look ahead. By C.J. Mittica

Everything moves in cycles, and that certainly includes fashion trends. “New” trends are often just old ones recycled and updated for modern tastes. But just because styles are rooted in the past doesn’t mean they are all regarded the same way. Some are at the peak of their popularity while others are on the precipice of going big. Some trends lay dormant for decades while others never really fell out of favor. Here’s our look at what’s popular now and next. The key quality they share? All of them will matter in 2015.

— C.J. Mittica is the editor of Wearables. Contact him at cmittica@asicentral.com and follow him on Twitter at @CJ_Wearables.



1

1. Neon blue heather X-Temp performance tee (4200) from **Hanes Branded Printwear** (asi/59528; circle 117 on Free Info Card); screen printed by **A&P Master Images** (asi/702505; circle 83 on Free Info Card).

2. Ladies fan jersey (229340) from **Holloway Sportswear** (asi/61430; circle 116 on Free Info Card).

3. Authentic Pigment garment-dyed messenger bag (1906-61) from **alphabroder** (asi/34063; circle 115 on Free Info Card); screen printed by **Visual Impressions** (circle 113 on Free Info Card).



2



3

COLOR

Bold colors are inescapable right now. **Neon heathers** add welcome complexity and open up lucrative new groups of buyers. Garment-dyed items create deep, rich hues and can be found in everything from tanks to **bags**. Look for them in crossover items like casual garments with **athletic references**, which bring the performance craze to the fashion-conscious.



1. Tall heavyweight tee (PC61T) from **SanMar** (asi/84863; circle 80 on Free Info Card); screen printed by **Mojo Art and Image** (asi/275280; circle 114 on Free Info Card).
2. Alternative Apparel fleece sweatpants (9587) from **S&S Active-wear** (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card); screen printed by Visual Impressions (circle 113 on Free Info Card).
3. Tennis backpack (TBP-060) in Cricket pattern from **Ame & Lulu** (asi/35232; circle 85 on Free Info Card).

FASHION WEEK FAVES

These hot fashion week styles are just starting to be seen in the promo realm. **Long tees** hanging down to the mid-thigh (and beyond) were popular in the New York shows, but unlike the '90s baggy aesthetic, these are more form-fitting. Designers like Todd Snyder and Alexander Wang are popularizing **tailored sweats**. And bags don't have to be boring anymore, thanks to arresting **graphic prints**.



1. Lightweight decorated hoodie (98732) from **Trimark Sportswear Group** (asi/92122; circle 76 on Free Info Card).
2. Burnside short-sleeve plaid shirt (B9202) from **S&S Activewear** (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card); screen printed by Visual Impressions (circle 113 on Free Info Card).
3. Lilac Bloom poly/spandex tunic (LB758) from **Tri-Mountain** (asi/92125; circle 89 on Free Info Card).

ALWAYS STYLISH

The promo ranks are being infiltrated by these popular retail looks. **Vintage designs** remain the epitome of cool, and new soft-hand techniques create stunning lightweight looks. **Plaid** is a pattern powerhouse. Meanwhile, **polos and tunics**, that corporate staple for women, are incorporating fashion touches like colorblocking and epaulettes.



1

2

3

RETRO

These über-trendy looks, which needed a couple decades to shake off the mothballs, have been smartly updated. Color, pattern, '90s nostalgia – the timing is right for a **Baja** resurgence in bold stripes or more subtle treatments. Men are re-embracing that summer staple known as the **tank top** and wearing them in just about every imaginable venue and climate. **Pocket tees** are everywhere, but now they are a vehicle for vivid colorblocking and contrasting patterns.

1. Baja stripe hoodie (PRM22BZ) from **Independent Trading Company** (circle 109 on Free Info Card).
2. Garment-dyed tank top (9360) from **Comfort Colors** (circle 111 on Free Info Card) with custom pocket and decoration by **Kotis Design** (asi/244898; circle 112 on Free Info Card).
3. Corporate Cool custom pocket tee from **T-Shirt Tycoon** (asi/87000; circle 110 on Free Info Card).



In the last challenge of the year, whose entry belongs in an art gallery? Plus, we name our Grand Prize winner.

BY C.J. MITTICA

CHALLENGE #5: RECREATE A PAINTING

Winona Nelson is an accomplished artist and illustrator whose work has been published in several different mediums. One of her most recent personal pieces, an acrylic and oil painting titled "Bloom," was recently on display at the Arch Enemy Arts gallery in Philadelphia. Nelson has allowed *Wearables* to use "Bloom" as the basis of our last challenge. Competitors were tasked to replicate the painting as faithfully as possible. Screen printing was required to be used.

The shirts were judged on these criteria:

Technical Reproduction:

How faithfully is the work of art reproduced on a T-shirt? Are the large and small details preserved? How closely does it match the colors from the original?

Inks and Printing: How is the clarity and the hand of the print? Were the screen-printing method and inks chosen suitable for the print? Were they used in an expert fashion?

*Sponsored by
Hanes Branded
Printwear
(asi/59528)*



WINNER T PRODUCTIONS

Circle 120 on Free Info Card

Our winner received high marks for its advanced techniques and excellent pre-press work, creating a detailed print which preserved the small elements that make this painting distinctive.



T-SHIRT FRONT



FRONT OF SHIRT DETAIL

- + Highly detailed reproduction of the painting's key details, including the women's face and wolf's fur. Subtle details of the painting pristinely preserved, from the flowers of the women's dress to the definition in the tree leaves.
- + Demonstrated technical excellence, from the meticulous work with separations to the use of high mesh counts.
- + Softer hand compared to other competitors, a difficult task given the challenge to reproduce the painting in full.
- + Advanced use of screen-printing techniques, including a hybrid of index printing and simulated process.
- Color is close to the original but mildly desaturated, earning the entry a minor demerit.

Q&A Wearables spoke with Tony Kozlowski, owner of T Productions, about the keys to reproducing a complex piece of art on a shirt and how to combined simulated process with index printing.

Q: To reproduce a detailed work of art like “Bloom,” what is the approach your company takes?

Tony Kozlowski: When it comes to reproducing detailed artwork on textiles, several things are taken into consideration. The level of fine detail determines final line screen, and the coloration of the design determines separation technique. If an image has a lot of small detail such as the woman’s face in the “Bloom” design, we like to go with 65 LPI for a simulated separation, and 150 PPI for an index separation, or both if a combination is used. DTS and high mesh counts are highly recommended for final output.

Q: You used a hybrid of index printing and simulated process. What prompted that decision?

TK: We felt that with a limited and very specific range of colors used in the original image, it would be best to match and print those colors, rather than simulate them with color blending. So for the color plates we used stochastic dots, or index color printing. We have always loved the way this type of dot prints on fabric, and is very forgiving with any unwanted interaction of garment weave, or screen mesh, since the dots are random. The underbase, black and high-light screens (the whole of the greyscale image) were pulled from a simulated separation and screens were produced using 65 LPI traditional halftones. We have always felt that creating the greyscale portion of the image (possibly the most important part of reproducing any image) using halftones retains better tonal balance and detail than index, but then overlaying the indexed color plates on top results in a great image in terms of detail, coloration and appearance.

Q: How were you able to preserve the

RUNNER-UP

TARGET DECORATED APPAREL

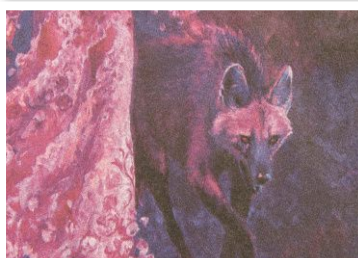
(asi/90549)

Circle 121 on Free Info Card

This entry featured a Hi-Res Accucolor process that created rich, deep colors and a highly detailed print.



T-SHIRT FRONT



FRONT OF SHIRT DETAIL

- + Subtle details of the painting well maintained, especially the flowers and shadows.
- + Excellent use of color, including vivid pinks and blues. While shaded a touch too dark, overall it was very close.
- + Technical ability capably displayed, from good use of separations to the hi-resolution processes.
- Hand of the shirt heavier than other entries, most likely because black ink was printed instead of using the shirt color for the black in the image.

2nd RUNNER-UP

AVENTA

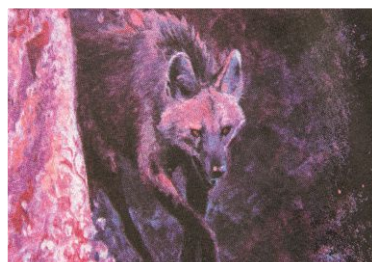
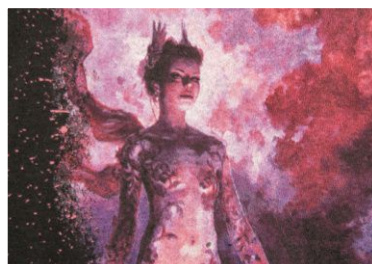
(asi/31940)

Circle 122 on Free Info Card

This entry's strong showing was defined by creative presentation combined with lively color work and detailed printing.



T-SHIRT FRONT



FRONT OF SHIRT DETAIL

+ Colors are vibrant and engaging and allow the image to jump off the shirt.

+ Cropping and title card gave the image a dynamic quality, instead of being presented in a static box. While one of the woman's hands was cropped out, overall the crop had a positive effect.

+ Strong detail in the print's larger elements, particularly the flower dress.

- Contrast of the image slightly off. The reds were accentuated too much, while the blues were a bit low, diminishing some of the image's depth.

Q&A CONTINUED

detail of the work yet keep a reasonably soft hand to the shirt?

TK: In our case, to achieve a soft hand we used high mesh counts (230 for the underbase and 305 for the top colors and highlight) and good choices in squeegee durometer (65 durometer for underbase and 75 durometer for colors and highlight). Inks must remain as opaque as possible to achieve a bright print while laying down such little ink.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Hanes Nano Collection

The Hanes nano collection capitalizes on the growing demand for lighter weight shirts with a contemporary fit, especially popular with millennials and the collegiate market. Available in tee and fleece styles, the nano collection is known for its lightweight, ring-spun softness and vintage color palette. The 4.5 ounce ring-spun cotton nano-T® T-shirts are available in men's and women's styles with a new youth style launching in 2015. The ring-spun, high-cotton 80/20 nano fleece styles feature a 100% cotton face for exceptional printing. And, thanks to a unique vintage color dying process developed by Hanes, the nano collection offers printers the best of both worlds – the look and feel of garment-dyed fabric with the print and color-fastness you expect from a Hanes® T-shirt. Heading into 2015, the nano collection is expanding to 11 styles, representing fashion-forward retail styling at its best.

+ Contemporary fit with fashion-forward retail style that fits everyday people.

+ Lightweight ring-spun comfort with the weight and softness of vintage garments.

+ Vintage color palette delivers the look and feel of garment-dyed while maintaining color-consistency and color-fastness

+ Perfect for DTG and screen printing; 30/1's ring-spun cotton gives nano tees a higher stitch density and ring-spun, high cotton 80/20 fleece styles have a 100% cotton face.

+ Eleven styles, including two new styles for 2015 – the youth nano-T® T-shirt and the nano quarter-zip fleece

GRAND PRIZE WINNER

VISUAL IMPRESSIONS

Circle 113 on Free Info Card

Original Challenge: Political Shirt

Our Grand Prize winner was rewarded for its creative and bold take on the standard political shirt, which featured duplicitous TV President Frank Underwood from the hit series *House of Cards*.

A Word From the Winner

Marshall Atkinson, COO of Visual Impressions:

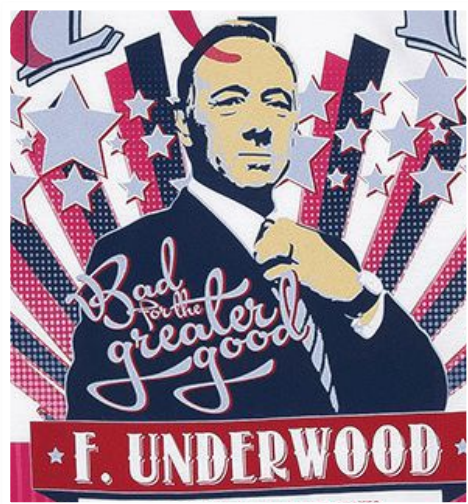
The entire staff at Visual Impressions is very honored to win the *Wearables* Top Decorator Grand Prize! We've sweated bullets every month getting our entries put together and trying to not only think up a creative way to satisfy the contest rules, but to also challenge ourselves during the process. We always tried out a new or different technique or had someone that's not used to working on projects like this contribute. The contest for us was all about growth and the journey and we're excited that we ended up on top of the mountain. This was a great experience, and the *Wearables* team did an excellent job coming up with different tasks each time.

The *House of Cards*-inspired design was a lot of fun to put together from a creative standpoint, as we wanted to do something different. We chose the show rather than a "normal" political theme as we thought that the shirt would resonate with more people than a standard Republican or Democrat type offering. To stretch our production limits we tried to print the oversize portion as a second location. We imaged the art sideways on a normal screen and just printed it old school by holding down the frame by hand and not printing it inserted into the press frame. The red was thinned out with curable reducer so it was translucent and when printed it colored the previously printed and dried location underneath, and that gave it the illusion that we used more colors for the design.

- + Ambitious creative vision that takes the idea of the standard political shirt and turns it on its head.
- + Extremely soft hand is a terrific achievement given the oversized printing.
- + Demonstrated technical excellence, from the use of halftone dots for shading and color variation to the printing of the oversize script without a press – a daring technique that was pulled off with panache.
- + Perfectly calibrated for fans of the show, but can also be appreciated by those who don't watch.



T-SHIRT FRONT



FRONT OF SHIRT DETAIL

GRAND PRIZE RUNNER-UP

NORTHEAST STITCHES AND INK

(asi/41325)

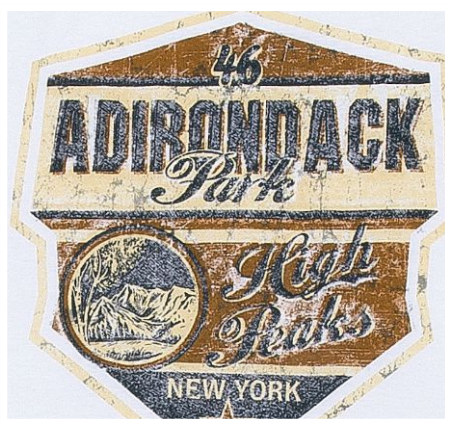
Circle 123 on Free Info Card

Original Challenge: Mixed Media Printing

This shirt seamlessly marries screen printing and embroidery to make it look like one single design. The effect was innovative and unique – a technical marvel and a real standout.



T-SHIRT FRONT



FRONT OF SHIRT DETAIL

GRAND PRIZE FINALISTS

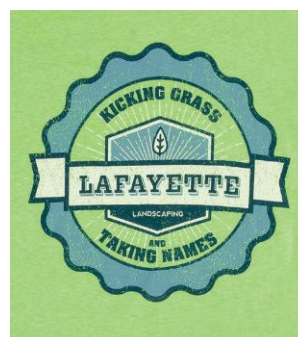


SILKWORM INC.
(asi/326835)

Circle 124 on Free Info Card

Original Challenge:
Charity 5K Poly Shirt

A lively original logo supplemented excellent technical printing on difficult polyester.



BOXERCRAFT
(asi/41325)

Circle 82 on Free Info Card

Original Challenge:
Landscape Logo

This original design was soft, creative and eye-pleasing – well suited for a new landscaping business.



T PRODUCTIONS

Circle 120 on Free Info Card

Original Challenge:
Painting Recreation

Extremely detailed print reveals a high level of technical skill and does justice to the complex original work.

CONTEST RULES

Wearables Top Decorator was open to distributors, decorators and suppliers with screen-printing equipment. Participants must prominently use screen-printing in their design. They were allowed to incorporate it into mixed media with other decoration methods.

The winner is determined by three expert judges and a popular vote by *Wearables* readers. Entries were judged based on the creativity of the logo and how well it was printed on a shirt. The reader vote breaks all ties. One vote was allowed per reader per challenge round. The winning company received a \$200 Visa gift card from Hanes Branded Printwear (asi/59528). The winner of each challenge in the contest was eligible for a \$500 Grand Prize. The winner of the grand prize was determined by three expert judges. Entries were judged on technical excellence and creative vision.

HOW TO

Decorate Loose-Knit Garments

BY THOMAS TRIMINGHAM

The surface of a garment can dictate, in a significant way, which decoration process will work the best. A standard T-shirt is the most popular fabric surface in part because of its ability to work with most decorating styles. The task becomes trickier when you attempt to decorate on fabrics that are woven looser or have a rougher surface; a garment that is created with larger threads may have a weave that has ribs, ridges or large seams. You become much more limited in both artwork and decorating styles.

If you are unsure of how to work with a fabric, then it is imperative that you acquire a sample before you promise a method of decoration to a customer. Even if the garment specs state that it is acceptable to use a certain decoration type, you should still verify that the garment will not have seams, liners, pockets or other challenges that may make the decoration method you are considering extra difficult.

Garments that have rough surfaces can be grouped into different categories depending on the fabric types. The most common are: ribbed, piqué, mesh, terrycloth, canvas and

denim. Of course, there are many other variations of these, but to keep things simple, it is easier to focus on the most popular styles.

Each of the garment weaves may be formulated with different compositions of fibers, so it's important to pay attention to the fabric composition and not just the weave of the garment. A nylon fabric, for instance, is very heat-sensitive and requires a special additive for screen printing ink to adhere. Some woven polyesters may look similar to nylon, but they can be printed with normal screen-printing ink and won't have the same extreme heat sensitivity. The lesson is to read the labels to determine composition. If you are still unsure, get a sample and test the decoration method on it first – especially if the order is large or composed of expensive apparel.

The following is a breakdown of the most common weaves that can challenge decorators with rougher surfaces, and what are the recommended decorating methods for each fabric.

Ribbed: The most popular ribbed garments

are ladies' and men's tank tops, fitted undershirts and ladies-cut tees. There are different ribs – 1x1 ribs, baby ribs and other rib styles that have both large and small ribs together – so it is a good idea to get a sample to see how the shirt will hold a print. On a close inspection, you can see these garments have vertical ridges. The lightweight versions of these garments are not good for embroidery, heavy screen prints or heat press (unless the heat press is a lighter peel print or broken into small pieces). Because they are fitted, these methods can be too heavy for the fabric, altering the shape or making them uncomfortable. The ribs are not easily screen printed with normal ink and may crack due to the stretch of the fabric when worn. Especially with ladies ribbed tank tops that are fitted, the best print would be a waterbase ink, a reduced viscosity ink or an ink with a stretch additive so that the print sinks into the garment and covers the high and low areas of the ribs. Another solution to ribbed fabric is to create a distressed print (Figure 1) that will work with the rib and won't appear awkward



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

if the print doesn't cover perfectly.

Piqué: The piqué weave is usually seen in thicker polo shirts. These garments can be screen printed, although it is dependent on the artwork; designs with a lot of details may become damaged if the print doesn't cover. The holes in a piqué fabric can be large enough to show through a thinner screen print and may cause breakdown in a heat-press application because not enough of the fabric touches the pressed area. Embroidery (Figure 2) will always be a fool-proof option for piqué garments. Since the fabric is thicker, the embroidered threads don't affect the feel of the garment, and this method will also wear the best over repeated washings compared to screen printing or heat press.

Mesh: Mesh fabric is a staple item for uniforms and athletic shirts and shorts. Special attention needs to be paid to the fabric composition, particularly nylon, which requires special inks or additives and is sensitive to heat. A large majority of mesh garments are made from polyester, and well-suited for screen printing. Heat press and sublimation also work well. Mesh isn't good for embroidery due to the large holes, and since they are often worn in athletic settings, so comfort can be a concern. A decision needs to be made and discussed with the client whether

they would like a print to bridge the holes of the mesh or not. If the fabric is a large mesh and the client wants a print or set of numbers to cleanly cover the mesh (Figure 3), then a heat press application may be the best solution. It will provide the most consistent coverage with less risk of some of the mesh showing holes through the print.

Terrycloth: The biggest concern with garments that are terrycloth is that the fibers of the weave stick out away from the surface in many directions, like hair. This "fuzzy" fabric is used in towels, socks and also some sweat-shirts and pants. Larger threads that stand away from the surface can make screen printing difficult. Heat-pressed vinyl is also not commonly done on these items because the surface of the heat press may not get enough of the item to adhere, and the design will be less permanent. One process that is worth mentioning on terrycloth is sublimation. The most common solution for decorating towel-like fabric is to use a thinner ink that will soak in, such as waterbase or reduced viscosity ink (Figure 4). If you use embroidery, use it in smaller areas so it doesn't alter the surface feel too much.

Canvas: Canvas fabric is often used in book bags, totes and jackets. In many respects, canvas fabric has the same print concerns as a

ribbed garment without the stretching issues. The canvas has hills and valleys on its surface that a thin print may not cover, so the ink may need to be modified thinner or printed thicker to cover over the gaps (Figure 5). Thinning the ink will allow it to spread into the valleys of the fabric; a thicker ink will cover the dips in the fabric like a solid patch (but may have less durability with less fabric contact). Canvas is rugged, so embroidered and heat-press decorations work well on canvas. There are fewer limitations than some of the other styles.

Denim: Denim fabric is commonly used for jeans, shirts, jackets and accessories. In many respects it is very similar to a baby rib, but the advantage to denim is that there is usually more fabric to work with than a thinner rib shirt. It can be printed, embroidered and even heat pressed (rhinestones and rhinestuds are particularly popular on jeans) without too much trouble. The same ink sensitivity applies to the denim surface as a ribbed garment, so distressed images (Figure 6) or thinner inks (waterbase or reduced viscosity) will make printing easier and more consistent.

Thomas Trimmingham has worked for more than two decades as an industry consultant, freelance artist and high-end separator. Contact him through his educational website: screenprintingartist.com.



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Brian Goldberg
is the president
of Pulse
Microsystems.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

Profiting From Personalization

Demand for personalized garments is high, and variable data can be the key to quick sales.

BY BRIAN GOLDBERG

Personalization is one of the fastest-growing segments within the apparel decoration industry. Customer demand is high, and there is currently a great opportunity for decorators to profit from this trend.

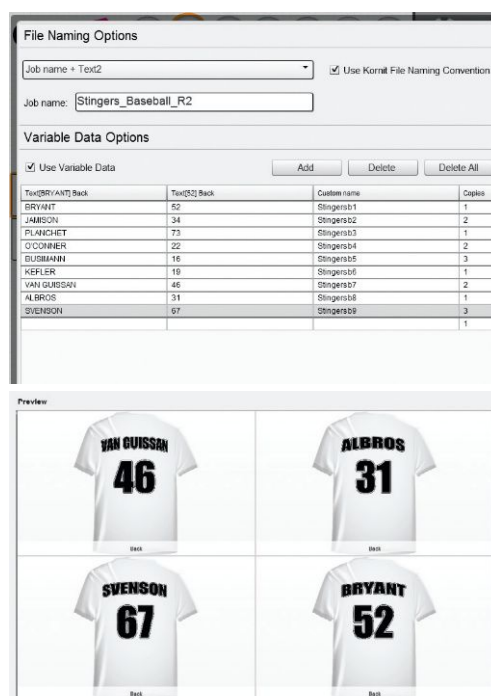
Before, many businesses that wanted to personalize garments – decorating pieces with individual names, numbers and other unique information – found the process too time consuming, labor intensive or costly to make a substantial profit. However, new technological innovations are pushing these obstacles aside.

The most important? Variable data. This technology improves the productivity of digital print companies by significantly reducing the time it takes to create multiple personalized items that are similar in appearance. It works with a number of decoration techniques that are particularly suited for personalization – direct-to-garment printing, sublimation, embroidery, even iron-on transfers.

A variable data solution works by creating customizable templates within a design program. This allows both the text and graphic properties of a design to be swapped or edited without the need to resize or reposition these elements before sending them to print. This makes it ideal for any business that deals with orders from teams, clubs and special events.

Variable data also allows the user to replace personalized text and designs instantly. It uses simple data fields, with the data imported from spreadsheets. All personalization files can be generated on the same server, using fonts with the same appearance, rules and vector engine. This results in consistent, high-quality results that businesses can, and do, depend on.

A common example of this would be a baseball jersey. Each member of the team will



Variable data software can enable quick personalization of garments. For a baseball jersey, import a list of names and numbers on a team roster, and the software will set up each garment through a customizable template.

have his last name and number on the back of the jersey. Before variable data, it would be a time-consuming process to set up each name and number manually. Variable data allows the names and numbers to be easily swapped out, since the locations of both fields remain the same.

The best part is that variable data solutions gather information from a company's existing order processing system to automatically create design files based on their customer-approved specifications. This process also helps eliminate production errors, specifically those related to sizing and spelling

mistakes. It simplifies the creation of personalized digital print designs.

This technology basically allows a company to design one garment and print many. It's the perfect solution for companies dealing in mass personalization because a single template can be the basis of hundreds of different garment designs – not just for members of one team or group, but all entities within the same market.

Variable data combines powerful technology with a simple user interface, allowing users to tap into the benefits of design creation and processing while avoiding the complexity of expensive design programs. A variable data engine can be built into existing production processes without difficulty, saving businesses hours of design time that can now be spent focusing on other important aspects of the business. And it works easily. For embroidery, the user clicks on any template and adds in a list of names. Once the names are all entered, an order number is created with a set of barcodes, which can then be printed and scanned directly at an embroidery machine.

When a company experiences phenomenal growth, it is important to have the equipment and systems in place to keep up with increased customer demand. A great variable data solution is streamlined and scalable, growing with your organization and increasing the rate at which orders can be handled and processed without any interruption in terms of quality.

In today's decorating marketplace, consumers greatly value garments that are personalized. Buyers want to work with decorators who can make it happen. Employing a comprehensive variable data solution has become essential to any business that hopes to provide quick and easy mass personalization of garments to become highly profitable.

Tom Davenport is founder and president of Motion Textile, Inc. (asi/72662). He currently serves on the Board of Directors for SGIA.



Rick Roth is the president of Mirror Image Inc. He is known for his award-winning screen printing and embroidery as well as his philanthropy. Visit The Ink Kitchen blog at www.theinkkitchen.com.



THE INK KITCHEN

Don't Modify – Get Organized

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

BY TOM DAVENPORT AND RICK ROTH

THERE IS NO SUCH THING as a perfect ink mixing system, or even a really good mixing system. Formulas are often inaccurate by several shades. (Yes, I've experienced this consistently across several mixing systems and it is not for lack of a high-end scale).

So what do you do when you know a color will not pass in-house QC or customer approval? Most shops will modify the formula or simply adjust the mix by eye. This creates a big problem with repeatability in your shop. Honestly, can you rely on your ink-smith's record keeping skills enough so that you trust that every modified formula has been properly documented? If adjusting by eye, do you trust that all parties in your shop have the same eye for color? Of course not, but in the midst of a busy production day, when you just need to get the job off your press, expediency wins. Don't let this happen! It is a trap that seemingly all printers fall into, including myself. After years of

acquiescing to expediency, our ink inventory, heavily modified without documentation, had become such a burden on production that we decided to decommission it. The old inventory – tens of thousands of dollars' worth of ink – was palletized and placed on racks where it rests today. (That's another problem in and of itself. Look at these buckets in the picture, and now imagine hundreds of them.)

Time for a fresh start. When we moved into a new facility in 2012, we started mixing a new ink inventory. Today, this is how we handle an inaccurate mix:

- To be fair to the manufacturer, we've established a one shade up or down tolerance for all ink mixes (in the bucket, not on the shirt)
- If a formula is off by more than a shade we set the mix aside and request a new formula from the manufacturer. Amazingly the revised formulas are almost always perfectly accurate – why can't/don't they do that the first time?
- If we do not have time to wait for a new formula, we substitute with another similar color from inventory or mix a similar formula (which is hopefully accurate)
- We've arranged a buy-back program with our supplier for the inaccurate mixes. To do this we had to convince them that the accuracy issues were in the formulas and not "operator error." It wasn't easy, but it was worth it.

The whole point of an ink-mixing formula is to provide accuracy, repeatability and a level of ease in your ink department. Modifying colors over time will create nothing but a headache and, well, maybe a little job security for you "expert" ink-smith who knows or thinks he/she knows how to modify every color just right.

Don't let this happen! – TD



Sometimes I Love T-Shirts

Keri Ambrosino, Judy Winters and I combined to make this year's Pawtucket Film Festival shirt. Of course there was some help from the former Soviet Union. There are millions of reasons to be horrified by the policies of the former Soviet Union, but they did stop Hitler and they did produce some of the best poster art ever made.

There is good use of the shirt color as the background to make the print less inky. We used a Nano shirt from Hanes (asi/59528), which is thin but not too thin, fitted but nothing crazy, and it is made from very soft ring-spun cotton.

I've produced the Pawtucket Film Festival for 15 years and we've made a free shirt for everyone in attendance every year. We have had some great shirts, but this is one of my favorites. – RR



EQUIPMENT CORNER

The latest in machines and decoration products

PRINTERS, PRESSES AND MACHINES



▲Air Fusion Heat Press – Hotronix

The new Air Fusion from Hotronix (circle 98 on Free Info Card), a unique auto-open, auto swing-away heat press, is now available in a tabletop version. Powered by an air compressor, this heat press has patented Auto Adjust Pressure. It features a fully threadable lower platen, auto on/auto off, an energy-saving sleep mode and a production cycle counter.



◀Bridge Laser Machine – Hirsch International

The Seit SL-10 bridge laser machine from Hirsch International (asi/14982; circle 99 on Free Info Card) offers precision cutting, a large cutting area

and a high production speed. The revolutionary shape of the Seit SL-10 bridge laser allows it to be mounted closer to your embroidery equipment, resulting in improved cutting parameters. With the optional 3-D scan head, a 500 mm x 500 mm field can be cut or etched in a single firing of the laser. The new 3-D scan head is approximately 35% faster than the fixed model.



◀3-D Printer and Milling Machine – Roland DGA

Roland DGA (asi/18201; circle 100 on Free Info Card) has released the mono-Fab series, including

the company's first additive 3-D printer, the ARM-10, and a new compact 3-D subtractive milling machine, the SRM-20. The ARM-10 3D printer is ideal for validating a design in the initial stages of prototyping or modeling a complex shape. The SRM-20 desktop mill incorporates the latest subtractive rapid prototyping technologies. It features a milling spindle, independent collet, circuit board and firmware that delivers speed, precision and ease of use in a compact desktop size.

PATCHES



◀Chenille Appliqués – Penn Emblem

Penn Emblem (asi/77120; circle 101 on Free Info Card) offers chenille appliqués that are made of thick, fuzzy yarns embroidered onto a felt material. It can create custom designs including mascots, lettering and team names.

EMBROIDERY EQUIPMENT



◀Multifunctional Frame System – Madeira USA

The Multifunctional Frame System from Madeira USA (circle 104 on Free Info Card) is an easy-to-operate frame system that enables embroiderers to pop in a paper-framed, plastic pre-frame, stitch out a badge or emblem and simply tear away the plastic film background. Selling for \$329.20, the system is machine-specific, is easily

attached and removed as needed, and opens up the ability for lower-volume embroiderers to offer emblems, badges and patches to their customers.

TRANSFERS

► Pre-Cut Numbers – Stahls' ID Direct

Stahls' ID Direct (asi/88984; circle 102 on Free Info Card) now carries 28 new styles to its line of pre-cut numbers. The introduction of these new number styles will expand decorating options and allow customers to decorate team uniforms with the look of the pros.



▲ Eco-Film Heat Transfer Vinyl – Imprintables Warehouse

The new Eco-Film, a heat transfer vinyl from Imprintables Warehouse (asi/58475; circle 103 on Free Info Card), is free of PVC and one of the easiest films on the market to cut, weed and apply. It comes in more than 40 colors and can be used on any vinyl cutter and heat applied to 100% cotton, 100% polyester and cotton/poly blends.

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Run For It

It all started with a branded tube of blueberry-flavored lip balm. Two years ago, Marc Kozak and his wife Cheryl, the owners of Blue Monster Promotions (asi/466761), attended a local Chamber of Commerce luncheon in their hometown of Wildwood, FL. There they met Erika Corley (top right), a member of the Wildwood Rotary Club and the city's director of events. They delivered their elevator pitch while handing her the self-branded blue lip balm; instantly "she was hooked on our creative thinking," says Marc Kozak. "She wanted us to bring a new life of creativity to the local community."

Soon afterward, Blue Monster was recruited to help promote the Wildwood Ides of March 5K, which appropriately took place on March 15, 2014 and benefitted the Wildwood Athletic Club and local Rotary International chapter. The first annual event in 2013 welcomed 215 participants; Blue Monster brought its marketing expertise to bring that number up to 450 people for its second year. "We marketed the event with a logo, signage, medals and these shirts," says Marc. "We also brought on a few large sponsors from the local community, including PSL Construction, and challenged

them to recruit the most people to run on their respective teams. We then designed shirts for their runners."

The Kozaks used CoolDri performance shirts (H4820) from Hanes Branded Printwear (asi/59528) as well as performance tees (42000/42000L) from Gildan (asi/56842) for the PSL Construction team. Each features a screen-printed imprint designed by Blue Monster. "Last year, we designed an affordable Gildan 100% cotton T-shirt for everyone," says Marc, "but we wanted to step up to the white performance tees. In Florida, it gets hot quickly and the heat lasts all day. The performance shirts are more affordable than higher-end shirts, but more breathable than a basic cotton tee."

In total, Blue Monster distributed 450 goodie bags, 450 official tees, 175 Team PSL shirts and 72 medals. "There are so many 5K events, mud runs, core training runs and other events that people attend just to get a medal and shirt," says Marc, whose goal is to get an additional 100 people for next year's 5K. "If the event has a cool and trendy design to promote it, you'll get more attention and more runners signing up." — *Sara Lavenduski*



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