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February 2013

STARS of the SCREEN

*Who will take the
Top Decorator crown?*

Above And Beyond

Go the extra mile for clients

Ride The Coattails

Outerwear sales strategies

Anything But 'Lax'

Score with lacrosse sales

Polka Dot Party

Work this retail trend

Andy Warhol,
the original
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+ **Cheat Sheet:**
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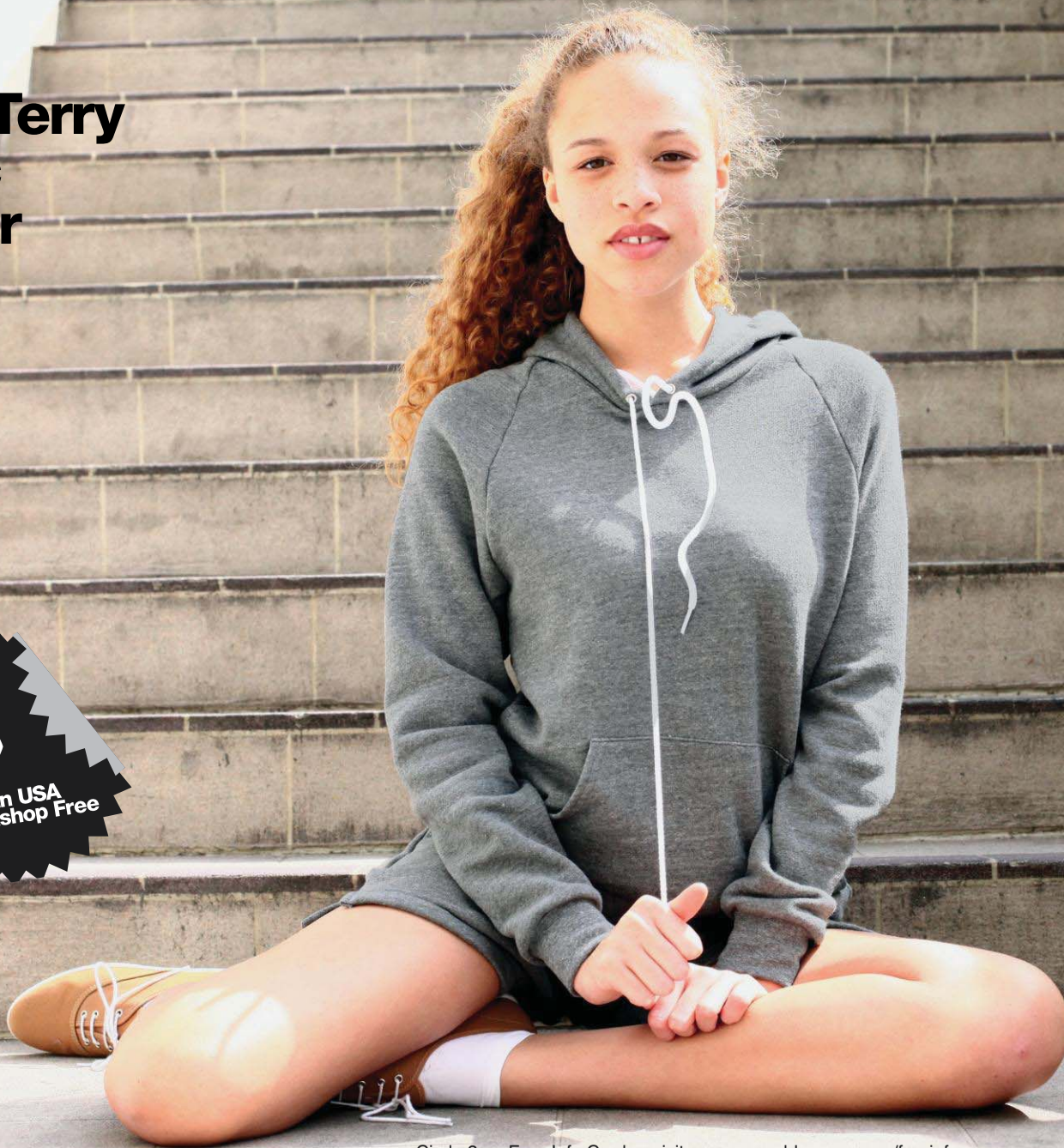
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Wearables Top Decorator

Our yearlong competition to identify the best screen printer in the industry begins. Eight combatants vie for the crown by crafting the best concert tee possible. Who moves on and who gets eliminated this round? Come find out.

BY C.J. MITTICA



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Soft Shells and Hard Sells

From bargain-basement options to pricey, weather-neutralizing behemoths, the price disparity in outerwear can go to extremes. We help you navigate the price rifts to offer the best jackets for your clients. Plus: the jackets that sell best in Alaska and Arizona.

BY CHUCK ZAK



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What lengths will you go to keep clients happy? Fly halfway around the world? Spend six months searching for an impossible-to-find color? Here are the case studies of reps who went above and beyond – and landed a client for good.

BY CHRISTOPHER RUVO



Check out the entries in our first-ever Top Decorator contest, including these designs from Black Duck (circle 132 on Free Info Card), Visual Impressions (circle 136 on Free Info Card) and T Productions (circle 133 on Free Info Card).



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We have lots of online exclusives, such as fun and informative videos and podcasts on *Wearablesmag.com*, online courses and webinars on *ASICentral.com* and social media chatter on Facebook and Twitter.



VIDEO: Wash Out. Embrace color variation by getting in on the mineral wash trend. *Wearables* Editor C.J. Mittica spills the beans on how this signature look is created in our Ask the Expert series.



VIDEO: Fresh Fashion from the Floor. It's trade show season, and we're finding the hottest styles available on the show floor at both ASI Orlando and ASI Dallas. Check out our videos to see what suppliers have in store for you.

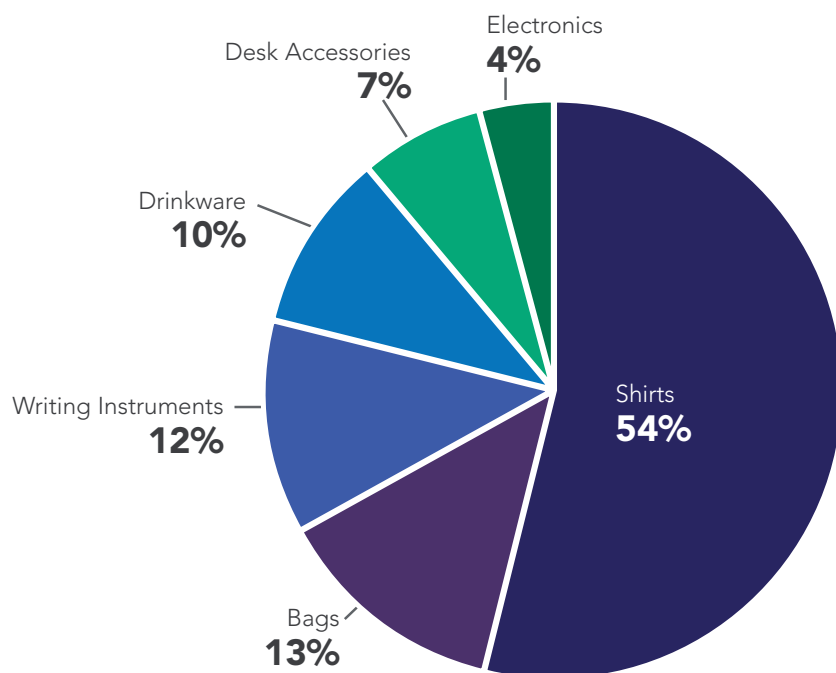


VIDEO: Who Is The Top Decorator? Our year-long competition will crown the best of the best in screen printing. The results from the opening challenge are featured in our cover story, but to see videos of each entry, be sure to check out our link at *Wearablesmag.com*.

Have a question you want answered in a future edition of Ask the Expert? Send it to Editor C.J. Mittica at cmittica@asicentral.com.

ONLINE POLL

On *ASICentral.com*, we asked, "What was your top-selling product of 2012?"



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E-NEWSLETTER: On The Mark. Millennium Logo Glove (*asi/71221*) has unveiled the latest golf innovation: a top-notch glove with a removable ball marker that serves as the branding for the glove. The supplier offers logoed golf belts and hat clips as well that use the marker. For an exclusive Q&A with this supplier, check out our *Wearables* Style e-newsletter.

E-NEWSLETTER: Performance Push. Confronting an underperforming employee can be difficult, especially in a small work environment. Instead of letting the problem fester, there are effective tactics you can use to fix the problem. Go to *Wearables* Style e-newsletter to read more.

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Accepting the Challenge

BY C.J. MITTICA



Three hundred channels to choose from, and what's on TV? Reality shows. You can't flip through your channel guide without stumbling over one. Reality shows are television's thriving medium – the only place in the world where both crab fishermen and Kardashians can comfortably reside.

I don't watch much reality television, but I enjoy competition shows that push experts to their creative limits. It's always intriguing on shows like *Top Chef* and *Chopped* to see aspiring culinary stars work with the same restrictions ("This week's mystery ingredient is ... yak jerky!"), yet dream up wildly different concoctions.

That is the inspiration behind this month's cover story: the launch of our first-ever *Wearables* Top Decorator competition. Apparel decoration is an amazingly creative process; the people behind it are equal parts visionary artists and technical virtuosos. And so we got to wondering: What would happen if the top screen printers in the industry tackled the same creative challenge in a head-to-head competition? The results can be found in this issue.

Here's how the competition works:

- Top Decorator will run throughout the year, featuring five separate challenges that will culminate with our year-end November/December issue.
- Eight screen-printing companies are participating for the chance to win a \$500 Visa Gift Card, along with the pride of winning this prestigious competition.
- Readers vote online for their favorite entries. The company with the least number of votes in each round has to take its squeegee and go home.
- Competitors will be eliminated until we have two left, setting up a head-to-head showdown in the final challenge.
- Three judges (including myself) evaluate the submissions. It works like *American Idol*: judges don't have the power to eliminate anyone. Instead, our expert opinions highlight the good and bad that will help inform the voter choice.
- In the early rounds, judges will bestow "immunity" on a top choice to ensure it moves on to the next round. But ultimately, the decision of who gets eliminated rests with the readers.

The first challenge? "Create the concert tee you wish you could buy."

The submissions we received were excellent – lovingly designed, bursting with creative appeal and crafted with technical know-how. The challenges are going to get harder each round, but given the pedigree of our competitors, I feel they will be up to the task. If you didn't vote already, you can turn to our cover story and check them out, and find out who

is moving on to the next round. If this is where the bar is going to be set, I can't wait to see what these companies will do to top it.

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 Brad White, vice president, sales, at Boundless Network (asi/143717):

"I used this Batman shirt (and picture) in a previous blog. My friends made fun of me for the 'brooding' pose, but that article, 'Business Lessons from Batman,' is still the most-viewed entry on my blog. That shirt has very special meaning for a few reasons:

1. Batman has always been my favorite superhero, and the company I was working for produced a promotion for a special-edition *Batman* movie release – how cool is that?
2. My blog was created as an outlet to talk about T-shirt projects, but eventually become a means to discuss sales, marketing and professional development. This particular post helped me steer in that direction, and the results have been phenomenal.
3. Even though I'm almost 40, I still wear that shirt (proudly), and if I wear it when I'm with my kids, their friends look at me a little bit differently. I think they recognize that I'm a big kid, and that at any moment, I might show them some new Hot Wheels cars or stage a fake lightsaber battle.
4. And finally, as a logo fanatic, I love that the Batman logo has changed over time but still remains recognizable as Batman. This video shows that evolution: <http://tinyurl.com/alz4ayj>. The particular logo on the shirt is from the 1989 Tim Burton *Batman* film, which brought the Caped Crusader back to prominence – and featured an incredibly cool version of the Batmobile.



FASHIONSENSE

Hot apparel, style how-tos and need-to-know trends

BY ALISSA TALLMAN

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HOT HUE

Hot Pink

Hot pink is poised to add zest and zeal to the fashion-industry palette this year.

Forecast as the leading hue of spring and summer 2013 and found in current fashions by Phillip Lim, Oscar de la Renta and John Rocha, it's not too early to get a jump-start on integrating this hue into a promotional campaign, from adding it to logos and embroidery to selecting it as the main hue to represent a team or organization.

Ron Wood, CEO of Tunewear LLC (*asi/92336*), endorses hot pink for its notably upbeat and youthful attributes. "Besides being a bright color that stands out, it's also adventurous and positive," he says. "It represents good health, good fortune and good times and symbolizes the notions of love, joy and happiness."

The popularity of this playful, attention-

Fashion Tip
Combine hot pink with neon brights like yellow and orange against a neutral backdrop of black or navy.



Scarf

This dynamic ruffled fur scarf (SU-WJ20-7) is available from Assertive Creativity LLC (*asi/37166*; circle 120 on Free Info Card).

grabbing hue and its application to retail apparel and accessories of all sorts is indicative of the resurgent economy and greater confidence in renewed financial security. Along with other popular brights, such as Pantone's Lemon Zest and Poppy Red, hot pink aims to keep spirits high and maintain a general sense of optimism.

"Hot pink has gained momentum over the last couple of years," says Paul Kory, vice

president of sales for Dyenomite (*asi/51185*). "It's a color that stimulates energy (the same high energy as red) and gives off a positive vibe, which is what the end-user is looking for in these difficult times." He makes particular note of retail fashions and their integration of bright colors: "Hot pink and other neon colors are everywhere, including tennis shoes and shoe-laces, shorts, women's tops and leggings, men's dress shirts and polo shirts and even backpacks, to name just a few items."

Kory says that hot pink can be applied across industries; he also believes it will become more ubiquitous over time, specifically within the education industry, corporate markets and charity organizations.



Performance Tee

This polyester/spandex performance tee (5016) is available from Pennant Sportswear Inc. (*asi/79954*; circle 118 on Free Info Card).



Smartphone Case

Tunewear LLC (*asi/92336*; circle 119 on Free Info Card) carries this splendid-looking iPhone 5 case (EGGSHELL) in hot pink as well as several other bright colors.



Tie-Dye Shirt

Dyenomite (*asi/51185*; circle 122 on Free Info Card) offers this neon pink pinwheel tie-dye T-shirt, made of 100% cotton.

TREND SPY

Fashion Leggings

Whether you choose from leopard print, metallic purple, leather, rhinestone-studded, rainbow-sublimated or denim, current options for fashion leggings and tights are practically endless. The most recent fashions from Calzedonia, Just Cavalli and Romwe feature spectacular designs in a wide range of fabrics and textures, upgrading this item to “essential” status.

Celeste Stein, owner of Celeste Stein Designs Inc. (asi/44372), highly recommends

this trend. Her company has been turning out unique legging and tight sublimation prints for the past 20 years. For Stein, sublimated leggings and tights provide clients with a unique way to present their brand or logo. “Prints offer a vibrant, fun alternative to hosiery in traditional solids,” she says. “Fashion hosiery in general presents companies with an original, effective way to promote themselves – it’s an advertising tool like anything else.” Stein stresses the impact such products can generate:

“With a logo imprint or embroidered message, these accessories transform their wearers into walking billboards.”

Stein says that any kind of company can implement this trend into their promotional program. “After all, virtually everyone – kids, adults, men and women – need footwear or hosiery of some type,” she says. Stein cites liquor and real estate companies as well as health organizations as just a few of the many clients presently investing in such products.

Fashion Tip
Combine imprinted leggings and tights with solid-colored outfits (particularly those sporting neutral colors) to keep print designs “tamed” and contained.



Printed Tights

Celeste Stein Designs Inc. (asi/44372; circle 107 on Free Info Card) carries an impressive inventory of polyester/spandex sublimated tights, including this fantastic print (FLCT 387).



Sublimated Leggings

These colorful sublimated leggings (TT199) are available from AM Group Inc. (asi/30192; circle 108 on Free Info Card) in a variety of designs, including leopard and zebra prints.



Nylon Tricot Leggings

American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 92 on Free Info Card) offers these nylon tricot leggings (RNT38) made of 80% nylon and 20% elastane. They feature an elastic waistband and UV protection, and are available in four colors.

STYLE TIPS

Denim

Denim is a winter 2013 favorite among fashionistas and designers across the board, and it's made an evident impact on retail fashions as well. Expect to see an array of colored denim apparel this winter and well into spring, including jeans, jackets and accessories. Recycled denim is also on the fashion A-list thanks to eco-fashion supporters and investors. "For 2013, the hottest wearable trends in denim will be coated denim pants and chambray denim shirts," says Katie Smart of Axis Promotions (asi/128263). "Trendsetters are also doubling up with denim on top and on bottom."

Smart gives denim kudos for being such a versatile fabric, suitable for a variety of settings



and end-users: "Chambray shirts are classic; they're appropriate in many workplace environments and flattering for both sexes." She advises applying logos to denim apparel and provides a few different approaches to consider, depending on the look desired: "For a traditional look, use embroidery on the left chest. For a youthful or trendy company, try a subtle tone-on-tone embroidery at the yoke."

Smart recommends denim particularly "for companies who describe their brand as All-American, Classic, Honest and Hip." She also advises that "when showing trends to clients, reference magazine clippings, articles or runway looks to back up your suggestions and support your presentation."

Fashion Tip

A lot of denim can go a long way. Contrary to most fashion trends, which are best in small doses, there's no limit to the amount of denim you can suit up in.



Tote

Fabriko (asi/53450; circle 110 on Free Info Card) distributes several attractive denim totes appropriate for all kinds of events and promotions, including this roomy denim/canvas combo (1040).



Jeans

Broberry Mfg Inc. (asi/42057; circle 109 on Free Info Card) carries these men's loose-fit straight-leg jeans (B325) made of 100% cotton ringspun denim in worn-in blue and light worn-in blue.



Chambray Shirt

This women's indigo-dyed chambray shirt (2329) from Charles River Apparel (asi/44620; Circle 98 on Free Info Card) is made of 100% cotton and enzyme-washed for a soft hand.



Baseball Cap

This retro heavy-washed denim baseball cap (DN-200M) can be found at Outdoor Cap Co. (asi/75420; circle 111 on Free Info Card).

celebrity *style*

Look to Hollywood for stylish ideas on how to wear comfortable trends.



Photographer: Ian Gavan

◀ Gemma Arterton

This British actress and Empire Award winner showcases her mastery of the all-black ensemble, which is effectively grounded via two other neutrals: the rich brownish-red of the actress' hair and her white high-heeled pumps. The V-neck of the cinch-waisted wrap top creates a nice angular contrast to Arterton's oval face, as do the pants, which accent her legs. The clutch provides a pleasing, subtle hint of color to the outfit. Blanks Plus ([asi/40642](#)) and American Apparel ([asi/35297](#)) carry numerous styles of V-neck tees, and Broberry Mfg Inc. ([asi/42057](#)) distributes several fitted pants styles for women.



Photographer: Ray Tamarra

◀ John Cho

Known for his portrayal of Harold in the *Harold and Kumar* comedy films, Cho is another actor who understands the elegance of black. His outfit displays several shades of this savvy neutral by integrating various textures and fabrics, such as velvet, canvas and denim. Black tends to endow the wearer with an air of casual authority, which it does for Cho here, making him seem both approachable and dignified at the same time. Visit SanMar's ([asi/84863](#)) winter catalog for black button-down shirts for men, and take a look at A Design N Time Inc.'s ([asi/30264](#)) inventory for men's jeans in black.

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ACCESSORIES

Boots

Boots have come a long way over the past few decades. Advances in technology have allowed for increasingly complex fabrics and materials to be used in shoe design and construction, providing a higher level of functionality, durability and comfort along with updated flair. As a result, work boots are not only appropriate for snowy trails and concrete, but even for the office. You know it's a certifiable trend when both high-end designers like Gucci and rugged outdoor companies like Patagonia have produced stellar lightweight and rugged designs for the upcoming season.

John Ottaviano, director of sales and marketing at Rothco (asi/83708), notes that this season's most popular styles are those with a generous amount of military flair. He also says that several of the boots Rothco carries are "not only favorites of uniformed military personnel and contractors, but regular civilians as well." He lists a few of these boots' best attributes: "Their great suede-leather finish, the fact that they're lightweight and their durability make

them great for military or work applications," he says. "Hot features include side zippers, sneaker-like soles and lightweight ballistic materials. Even sneaker companies like Nike and Converse have entered heavily into this market."

Ottaviano explains that contemporary work-boot designs aim to both protect the worker on the job and provide comfort: "A worker spending hours on his or her feet needs appropriate footwear to be able to properly perform, and good work boots do exactly that." He asserts that work boots are highly applicable to the promotional industry. "We deal with a number of distributors who are supplying our boots to security companies, EMT and ambulance corps, small police departments, and so on," he says.

Ottaviano suggests several possibilities for implementing work boots into the promotional market, including the landscaping, construction and service industries. He adds that "many businesses have their own in-house security, so there may be hidden opportunities for distributors to provide them with the gear they need, too."

Fashion Tip
These boots can be worn with a variety of bottoms, from cords to jeans and even skirts and leggings for women.



Jungle Boot

This svelte-looking GI-styled jungle boot (5090) is available from Rothco (asi/83708; circle 95 on Free Info Card) in black or olive drab.



Tactical Boot

5.11 Tactical (circle 129 on Free Info Card) carries the A.T.A.C. 8" Shield CSA/ASTM boot that's made of water-proof and polishable full-grain leather. It also features a bloodborne pathogen-resistant membrane.



Leather Boot

Codet Newport Corporation (asi/45605; circle 112 on Free Info Card) offers these tan nubuck leather boots (BB6310) complete with steel toes and electric shock-resistance.

TRADE SHOW CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 2013

Feb. 1-2, New York City
Manhattan Vintage
Clothing Show & Sale
 (518) 852-2415;
<http://manhattanvintage.com>

Feb. 6-8, Dallas, TX
The ASI Show
 (800) 546-3300;
www.asishow.com

Feb. 11-15, Seattle, Portland, Sacramento, San Jose, San Francisco
Advantages Roadshow
 (800) 546-3300;
www.advantagesroadshow.com

Feb. 12-13, Nashville, TN
PPAMS MidSouth PromoShow
 (615) 465-8109;
www.ppams.com

Feb. 15-16, Columbus, OH
Embroidery Trade Show
 (800) 866-7396;
www.nnep.net

Feb. 16-19, San Francisco
San Francisco International Gift Fair
 (678) 285-3976;
www.sfigf.com

Feb. 17-20, Edmonton, AB
Alberta Gift Show
 (800) 611-6100;
www.albertagiftshow.org

Feb. 18-24, Washington, DC
DC Fashion Week
 (202) 600-9274;
www.dcfashionweek.org

Feb. 21, St. Paul, MN
UMAPP's Fire & Ice Booth Show
 (651) 734-9767;
www.umapp.org

MARCH 2013

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

March 8-10, Atlantic City, NJ
ISS Show
 (800) 974-7916;
www.issshows.com

March 11-15, Minneapolis, Des Moines, Omaha, Kansas City, KS, St. Louis
Advantages Roadshow
 (800) 546-3300;
www.advantagesroadshow.com

March 17-18, Syracuse, NY
New England Apparel Club Show
 (781) 326-9223;
www.neacshow.com

March 17-20, Boston
Boston Gift Show
 (678) 285-3976;
www.bostongiftshow.com

March 22-24, Long Beach, CA
The ASI Show
 (800) 546-3300;
www.asishow.com

March 24-27, Montreal, QC
Montreal Gift Show
 (800) 611-6100;
www.montrealgiftshow.com

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LOOKS WE LOVE

'Maniac' Sweatshirt



Retro apparel continues to enjoy a great deal of success in high fashion as well as both the retail and wholesale industries. A simple “vintage”-styled top, jacket or accessory that harkens one back to the latter half of the previous century is bound to evoke nostalgia and grab people’s attention. A perfect example of such a style is this “Maniac” women’s top (AA9582) from Alternative Apparel (asi/34850; circle 113 on Free Info Card). The name and style reference the 1983 dance film *Flashdance*, which ushered in the ripped-neck sweatshirt craze that dominated the rest of the decade. This updated version of the shirt tapers and shapes the distressed scoop neck and adds a nice heathered effect to the fabric. The kangaroo pockets in front provide an effective extra touch. The top is available in eco navy and eight other colors and comes in four sizes.



← Ski Resort Staff

Pair the sweatshirt with this jacket (74010) from Ouray Sportswear (asi/75402; circle 114 on Free Info Card) and these cotton cargos (FP777) from Dickies (asi/49675; circle 115 on Free Info Card). The jacket allows for a form fit, which is flattering and more convenient for the wearer than a bulky winter coat. The top and the cargos lend the wearer flexibility and comfort. Add the resort logo to both the sweatshirt and the jacket and you can also make both items available for purchase in the ski gift shop.



← **University Cheer Rep**

Pair the top with these leggings (812) from S&S Activewear (*asi/84358*; circle 99 on Free Info Card) and add this knit hat (AH91) from Kati Sportcap (*asi/64140*; circle 116 on Free Info Card). The top's tunic length makes it a perfect match with leggings, and the dapper knit hat looks sharp whether worn indoors or outdoors. Logo imprinting can be applied to the sweatshirt as well as the hat, and sublimated prints for leggings are a notable current trend.



← **Restaurant Server**

Combine the sweatshirt and cargos and add this twill apron (240) from Day Star Apparel Inc. (*asi/48724*; circle 117 on Free Info Card). This outfit presents a relaxed yet tidy look that's ideal for small restaurants and cafés. Again, a logo can be applied to both the shirt and the apron. Add a pair of combat boots to give the ensemble funky appeal.

RETAIL RIPOFF

Polka Dots: A Trend Worth Circling

BY TONIA COOK KIMBROUGH

The perky little polka dot may seem like a simple graphic flourish to adorn apparel. After all, it's ubiquitous at retail right now. Designers from Kate Spade to Marc Jacobs have relied on the time-honored graphic in their collections, and popular retailers such as J.Crew have recently stocked

polka-dotted garments to take advantage of demand.

When a fashion-driven client wants to mix the trend with a promotional logo, however, the polka dot becomes a bit pesky. There are very few stock options from industry suppliers. Lovely ties from Wolfmark (*asi/98085*) or

loungewear from Boxercraft (*asi/41325*) both provide ready-made polka dot options onto which a logo can be added. Shirts, sweaters and caps, though, are not so easily sourced.

Polka dots have trend cache, but they need to be deployed in the right circumstances with a corporate logo. "The corporate logo will dictate the design," says Pat Williams, an award-winning digitizer and advisor to Madeira USA. "No fashion trend will directly impact a corporate logo that has weathered the test of time." But she isn't a stranger to embroidering dots on otherwise solid surfaces and willingly shares her secrets.

"There are three different ways to make a dot in embroidery, depending on the size of the desired dot," she says.

For small dots (three millimeters or less in diameter), use the star tool in your digitizing software. Set it so it makes eight points and you will get a perfect little circle.



photo courtesy of Madeira USA

This stitch-out from an emlibrary.com design shows how an image or logo can be combined with a polka dot background.

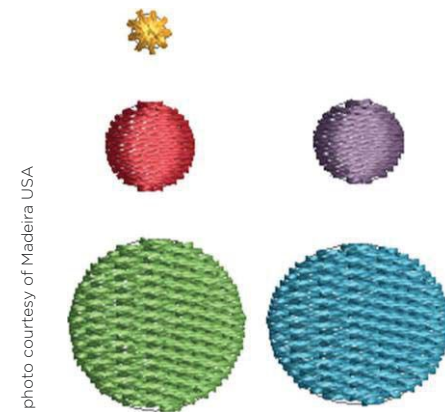


photo courtesy of Madeira USA

What looks like a perfect circle when digitized doesn't always turn out that way. If no adjustments are made, the circles on the right come out elongated. With adjustments, you have the perfect circles on the left, which account for the push and pull of embroidery when sewn out. The little star dot at the top does not need any adjustment.

LEARN IT LIVE!

Best-selling author, economist and intellectual Ben Stein shares his knowledge in his keynote speech "How to Ruin Your Life – And How To Make It Great" at The ASI Show Long Beach (Sunday, March 24, 9:30 a.m.). Come hear his financial insights as well as lessons he learned as a White House speechwriter for Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.



photo courtesy of net-a-porter.com

Knitwear has really taken to polka dots; Marc by Marc Jacobs uses the patterns in beanies, and J.Crew has them large and in charge on sweaters.



Looking for ready-made polka dot items in the industry? Check out the Newport navy and white silk dot tie (NWPS-058-329) from Wolfmark (asi/98085; circle 127 on Free Info Card) and these polka dot navy cotton flannel pants (F16ADOT-N) from Boxercraft (asi/41325; circle 128 on Free Info Card).

For circles that are three to seven millimeters wide, make your circles with satin stitches. If you make them more than seven millimeters wide, the widest stitches will likely droop and sag after the garment is worn and washed.

Circles eight millimeters or larger need to be digitized in tatami fill stitches.

Most software systems have a circle tool that creates a circle for you. Alternatively, Williams explains, you can make a perfect circle on the screen if you use four right clicks, curved nodes (one on top; one on the left side; one at the bottom; and one on the right side) and then hit enter to close the circle. Though simple, there are some important considerations. Williams advises, "Remember that the push and pull of embroidery has a big impact on how that circle will sew." She warns that once you sew out this perfect digitized circle, it will most likely look like an embroidered oval.

The reason this happens is the embroidery pushing up and down on the top and bottom as it sews pulls the sides inward. To correct the digitized circle so that it sews out well, Wil-

"No fashion trend will directly impact a corporate logo that has weathered the test of time."

Pat Williams, Madeira USA

liams offers these tips: "Enter the edit mode and pull down the top of the circle about two percent; pull out the sides of the circle about one percent; and pull up the bottom of the circle about two percent. This will make your digitized circle look like an oval on screen, but will sew out as a circle." She also suggests that when embroidering dots, save time by attaching the dots to other objects in the embroidery, which avoids excess trims in the design.

One final consideration is the fabric. Many of winter's fashionable polka dot garments are sweaters and knit beanies. While these may seem straightforward to recreate, the fabric itself poses a challenge for embroiderers because of the various sizes of the yarns used in the garments themselves. "A heavy-

weight yarn will create larger holes in the knit fabric itself," Williams explains, "so you wouldn't want to embroider the small star-type dot on that fabric as the dot may just slip between the holes of the knit. A satin stitch dot may pull a loosely woven or heavy yarn too much from side to side and wouldn't look like a dot at all. Therefore, the best choice for a dot on a knitted garment would be a tatami fill dot. Even then you would want to use a cross hatch-type underlay to give the dot a foundation on which to be sewn."

Keep Williams' advice in mind and you'll be able to offer polka-dot perfect solutions for your trend-hungry clients. ■

Tonia Cook Kimbrough is a contributing writer for Wearables.

SCORE!

How to win more sports business

BY JOAN CHAYKIN



Mike Broglio / Shutterstock.com

STICKING UP

Lacrosse leagues are growing and the demand for LAX-logoed apparel is huge.

Laura Matusek says what growing legions of fans already know: "Lacrosse is the fastest-growing sport in the U.S.," states the president of Clemson University's Lacrosse Booster club. "It's always been big in the Northeast, and it's now expanding to the South and into the Midwest. One of our goals in boosters is to make lacrosse a mainstream sport."

According to the U.S. Lacrosse Organization, youth participation in the sport has grown over 138% since 2001 to nearly 300,000 kids. It's the fastest-growing sport at both the high school and college level; the NCAA has over 557 college teams and 500 college club programs, including 200 women's teams that compete at the U.S. Lacrosse Intercollegiate Associates level.

The stats confirm that lacrosse has transcended its niche sport beginnings, and is now embraced all across the country. Players and parents are fiercely proud of the game, says Matusek. She would know – her son Kyle, a senior player at Clemson, has been playing lacrosse since first grade. She and the other players' parents and fans saw a need for lacrosse merchandise, so in 2010 Clemson's head coach asked her to develop a system to get apparel and gear for players and fans. "Lacrosse fans are *fans*," Matusek says. "Even if they're not Clemson alumni, they still like collecting lacrosse wear. I've had more non-Clemson folks ask for gear than alumni. In fact, I brought in \$8,000 selling lacrosse gear in one weekend in November at an event where high school students came to visit."

Lacrosse is played by both men and women, and the differences in the two games – from the rules to the uniforms – are certainly

noticeable. For instance, while male players always wear shorts, females wear kilts for official games. Lauren Raymond, who recently played lacrosse for her Princeton, NJ-area high school, says that female players can only wear shorts to practice. Raymond has been pleased with the performance features of her uniforms. "They offer a full range of motion and are comfortable," she says. "Plus they wash easy, as most stains come out." This wasn't always the case, however, as Raymond notes the older uniforms used to be uncomfortable. "When I started playing in the sixth grade, my uniform was an extremely heavy kilt that was held up by buttons. Also, the polo shirts were not fun to play in when it was hot. However, by high school, I loved my uniform."

Matusek says the best time to approach coaches or boosters is mid- to late summer. "It's especially important when ordering uniforms that are screened printed or embroidered," she says. Dan Walsh, owner of Lightning Wear (asi/67501), says it's never too early to contact schools and teams, pointing out that Lightning Wear's garments are U.S.-made, "which means there are no overrun charges. If a teammate's forgotten, or a jersey's lost, we can produce a replacement fast."

Also consider the time of year for uniforms. "In the spring – the regular season – there are NCAA rules in regard to the uniforms," Matusek says. "In the fall, the regulations are looser." For women, that means mesh shorts instead of skirts. And off the field, Matusek says lacrosse players will wear those shorts and casual gear to class; screen-printed hoodies and sweats are a popular choice for players to wear.

10 Most Popular Lacrosse Items

* As ranked by ESP Searches



1. Shorts

2. Jerseys

3. Reversible Pinnies

4. Socks

5. Helmets

6. Performance Apparel

7. T-Shirts

8. Sweatshirts

9. Reversible Practice Jerseys

10. Titanium Necklaces/ Bracelets



CASE STUDY:

Star Athlete's Legacy Lives On

The HEADstrong Foundation was founded by Nicholas Colleluori, a lacrosse player for Hofstra University and Ridley High School who passed away after a battle with lymphoma. Its mission is to carry on his legacy through advocating, fundraising and supporting those affected by blood cancer and working toward a cure.

Logoed apparel, accessories and other promotional items are available for sale on its website (headstrongfoundation.org), and can be bought at the dozens of fundraising events that the foundation puts on each year. In addition to the HEADstrong logo, many of the items are imprinted with the Relentless 27 logo, in honor of Colleluori's

attitude on the field, his fight against cancer and his jersey number.

The foundation has championed the Lace Up Campaign, which "has emerged as the signature fundraising initiative," notes the HEADstrong website. "It's been embraced by teams around the world, and was featured on ESPN. It's been recognized by the NCAA, Major League Lacrosse, National League Lacrosse, Lacrosse World Games and European Lacrosse Association." By selling imprinted lime green laces for lacrosse cleats and sneakers, The Lace Up campaign alone has raised more than \$500,000 so far, with over 200,000 pairs of laces sold.

Fast-Break Apparel

This women's lacrosse uniform consists of the Hit jersey (1310), made from a polyester/spandex pinhole mesh, and the women's kilt (966), made from a poly/spandex knit. Both are moisture-wicking. Available from Augusta Sportswear (asi/37461; circle 131 on Free Info Card).

PURE PERFORMANCE

Christie Wienckowski, who played attack wing for Long Island University, says uniform tops are similar to the Under Armour-style T-shirts. "Usually they're solid colors with different color lining, numbers and team names," she says. "Most teams have two different jerseys – depending on the weather. There's good range of motion, which is important for throwing, catching and picking up ground balls."

BOTTOMS UP

Kilts in women's lacrosse used to be heavy and long. That has given way to performance materials and shorter hem lengths for greater ease of movement. In the off-season, female players favor the Nike-style boy shorts in the fall and also for casual wear.



Photos courtesy of Augusta Sportswear (asi/37461)



SHOOT FOR SUBLIMATION

The proliferation of polyester jerseys allows for vivid custom designs with sublimation. "The greatest thing about sublimation is that the palette is blank," says Dan Walsh, owner of Lightning Wear (asi/67501). "There are endless colors, designs, patterns and images to choose from. Personalization and customization is made simple by the process."

PATTERN POWER

Stripes and argyles are just some of the popular patterns right now in men's shorts. Laura Matusek, president of Clemson University's Lacrosse Booster club, says funky-designed shorts are in demand right now, and "the funkier the better. The purple and orange argyle styles are hot now. The dye-sublimated shorts are great. With sublimation, the possibilities are endless."

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I Believe...

The who, what and wear of industry experts

BY JIMMY LAMB, AS TOLD TO CHRISTOPHER RUVO

Jimmy Lamb

- Manager of Education & Communications at Sawgrass Technologies, a leading developer of digital printing technologies
- Placed 20th on *Stitches* magazine's 2012 Power 75 List, a ranking of the apparel decorating industry's most influential people
- Has logged more than 1.5 million frequent flyer miles – from traveling to engagements where he is a featured educational speaker on industry issues
- Won Neal Award for industry-related business article

... With apparel printing, bigger is better! Oversize, wraparounds, multi-placement and all-over designs are in demand. The really cool thing is that the cost of printing larger designs versus smaller ones is negligible, yet the selling price is quite a bit higher, which means – ding, ding, ding – higher margins! Of course, the challenge is that you need equipment that can produce larger prints. As a distributor, you need to learn how the different systems work so you know what can be done and who can get it delivered.

... It's an on-demand world: As the economy changes, so do the buying habits of customers. People have kept a tight rein on their cash flow by buying in smaller quantities and at the last minute. One interesting development from this is that more distributors are taking on limited product decoration in-house, simply because so many of the suppliers have been slow to react to this new buying trend.

... Dolphins may be man's best friend: I live on the coast of North Carolina, and standup paddleboarding is the hottest new sport. It's an excellent workout, the scenery

is great and experiences can be astounding. Recently I got into a pod of dolphins. They were coming right up to the board and rolling on their side, so I got some up-close, eye-to-eye contact. They were close enough to touch, but I didn't want to ruin the moment, so I just sat down and drifted, taking it all in.

... Sublimation printing is where it's at: It's what you can do with sublimation that makes it so exciting – apparel, promotional items, signage, awards, plaques, personalized corporate gifts, etc. It's probably the most versatile digital decoration option available because of the wide range of products that can be produced, plus the fact that the images are virtually indestructible because they are embedded in the surface.

... My dad could out-honest Honest Abe: My father is the person who's had the most influence on me. He was the most honest person I have ever met, putting Abraham Lincoln to shame! He believed in taking responsibility for your life and your actions and working hard to achieve your goals. One time we were on a road trip and he discovered that a waitress had given him the incorrect change – to his favor. He insisted on going back



to straighten it out. Oh – did I mention he discovered it 30 miles down the road? It was only a few dollars, and I asked him why he was so worried about it. His answer: "It's not my money." Those kinds of life lessons really make a lasting impact.

... Polyester is performing: Poly-performance products continue to be a big hit as consumers are finally convinced that polyester is not a bad thing thanks to brand names like Under Armour and Nike. As a result, promotional products clients are asking for the same types of products as those in their closets at home. Because these products are often tied to an outdoor lifestyle, new options such as UV-resistant fabrics are taking the poly products to a higher level.

... Change is the only constant: Thus, the challenge is staying current on trends, styles, techniques and customer needs – and then being flexible enough to reshape your business as needed. Those that do survive; those that don't ...

... Down time is dead time: I'm not one to sit back and relax. I have a lot of goals in life and a drive to accomplish them all. If I'm not moving forward, I feel like I am moving backward. I'm also smart enough to realize what my talents are and what they are not. I will focus on things that have a reasonable expectation of success based on my abilities.

... You've got to get an education: The single most important thing you can do is educate yourself about the business. One of the dumbest things you can do is make the same mistakes as thousands of others who have gone before you, especially when that information is readily available to you. It's possible to save thousands of dollars and years of heartbreak simply by taking advantage of all the informational and educational resources that are available, like trade shows, seminars, webinars, articles, videos, books, magazines – the list is long.

CHEAT SHEET

From novice to expert in five questions

By Shane Dale

SHRINK-RESISTANT FABRIC

1 Are there shrink-proof fabrics?

No fabrics are inherently shrink-proof, but they can be made that way. “For a fabric to constitute as shrink-proof, it must be treated with an anti-shrinking finish,” says Joy Shi, marketing associate for Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*). “Polyester, nylon and cotton can all be treated with chemical, anti-shrink or shrink-recovery finishes. The purpose of these treatments is to increase the fabric’s resistance to shrinking when washed.”

However, there are fabrics which are more naturally resistant to shrinking – typically synthetic fibers. “Fabrics such as polyester or nylon are less prone to shrinking than others, although they are not 100% shrink-proof,” Shi says. “It helps if they are washed and pre-shrunk, which helps further boost their resistance to shrinking.”

*This waffle-knit golf shirt (107 Endurance) from Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*; circle 103 on Free Info Card) is made from 6.3-oz. 100% polyester, which is naturally resistant to shrinking.*

*photo courtesy of Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*)*



2 Where can I find shrink-resistant fabrics?

You don’t have to look further than 100% polyester garments, which are resistant to shrinking even without pre-treatments. “It’s a matter of polyester’s resiliency; no matter what you do to it, it will kind of bounce back,” says Andy Shuman, general manager of Rockland Embroidery (*asi/734150*). “The über example of that would be spandex. It’s not going to shrink; it’s going to bounce back. Polyester has similar but less dramatic characteristics.”

The trade-off for the shrink-resistance of polyester, says Michael Snyder, vice president of Trimark Sportswear (*asi/92122*), is its lack of breathability. But he says that’s starting to change. “Now, they are coming out with more breathable apparel, and they can add wicking capabilities with engineering or chemical additives,” he says. “Apparel companies are working hard to keep improving the qualities to get it comfortable like cotton so that the consumer can stick with polyester and actually feel comfortable wearing it.”

Snyder adds that some blends are also capable of shrink-resistance, such as woven 60/40 cotton/poly blends that may be more affordable than 100% poly garments.

“For a fabric to constitute as shrink-proof, it must be treated with an anti-shrinking finish.”

Joy Shi, Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*)

3 How do I know whether apparel is truly shrink-resistant?

When buying apparel that includes fabrics that aren’t shrink-resistant on their own, Snyder suggests distributors should conduct their own research in order to make sure that the apparel does, in fact, include that feature. “One way to make sure that a garment is shrink-proof is to find any verbiage that states it has gone through the process that takes the shrinking out. But even then, there could be no truth to it,” he says. Distributors could follow up with the supplier or even wash a sample just to be sure.

Snyder also says to look for a high amount of synthetic fibers. That will help determine the potential shrinking of a garment. “The more synthetic fibers are in a garment, the less likely it is to shrink,” he says. “Another way to make sure that there is going to be less shrinking is really the old saying: ‘You get what you pay for.’ The higher-quality garments will be less likely to shrink.”

"If someone's a size large and they're buying a large, they need to be assured that it's not going to be a medium when they take it out of the wash, no matter what they do to it in the washer."

Andy Shuman, Rockland Embroidery
(asi/734150)



4 Which embellishments work best with shrink-resistant apparel?

For fabrics that are less prone to shrinking but have not been treated with anti-shrinking chemicals (such as polyester knit shirts), Shi says heat transfers are the embellishment method of choice. "Due to the lightness of the material, the heat transfer stays very well, whereas embroidery might wear on the shirt due to how thin the material is," she says. "For wovens made of polyester, and jackets and fleeces made of polyester or nylon, embroidery is a better choice, as it's the more durable method for these items."

Snyder says the risk of puckering always comes with many types of embellishment methods applied to garments that aren't as shrink-resistant as advertised. "If there is shrinking in the garment, there will be puckering on the shirt where it is embroidered," he says. "The garment shrinking can pucker embroidery or even crack a screen print."

5 What kinds of shrink-resistant apparel are people buying?

Shi says there has been a big movement toward polyester in polos, fueled by an interest in a number of performance properties. The same holds true for outerwear. "For outerwear like jackets and fleece, nylon and polyester do not shrink substantially when washed, and they are top choices," she says. "Other types of fabric treatments, such as antimicrobial, wrinkle-resistance and UPF sun protection, are much easier to add to polyester than to cotton."

Those types of features – including apparel that can withstand frequent washes with little to no shrinking – appeal to companies with uniformed staffs. "Easy care, durability and very little shrinking are ideal qualities for such uniforms where the job involves a lot of physical activity," she says. "This can encompass many industries, from construction, restaurants, hospital staff and small businesses to large businesses with sales forces."

Shuman says companies with uniformed staff must be confident that the apparel that is worn won't shrink over time. "If someone's a size large and they're buying a large, they need to be assured that it's not going to be a medium when they take it out of the wash, no matter what they do to it in the washer," he says.

For example, Tri-Mountain's 107 Endurance polo, which is made of 100% polyester, has been a hit with a customer who owns a chain of restaurants across the U.S. "They place an order once a month for anywhere between 12 and 24 polos. The embellishments are a heat transfer on the left chest," Shi says. "They love this polo for its easy care and ability to withstand frequent washes."

Snyder agrees that businesses with employees who are active for the majority of their shifts prefer fabrics that won't shrink in an industrial laundry system. Such is the case with one of his large corporate customers in the technology industry that wanted pullovers that would require minimal care.

"We offered a nice pullover that is 61% cotton and 39% polyester," he says. "They cannot afford to have shrinking, as these are higher priced and are worn for company meetings. This has worked so well for their employees and is so durable that they reorder 150-plus every month at \$32 per unit."

Blends offer the softness of cotton and the performance abilities of polyester, including shrink resistance. This Nike Golf pullover (400099) from SanMar (asi/84863; circle 121 on Free Info Card) features a zip-through collar and is made from a 61%/39% cotton/poly blend.

photo courtesy of SanMar (asi/84863)

THE CHALLENGE

'I Want To Generate More Referrals'

When it comes to connecting with quality prospects, all the advertising, clever marketing strategies and social media smarts in the world still can't beat a good old-fashioned word-of-mouth referral. And yet, many distributors neglect to pursue referrals. Some feel awkward asking for them; others simply hope that by doing a good job a client will provide referrals unasked. But by failing to court referrals proactively, the passive miss out on opportunities to grow their sales.

So how can you start generating more referrals? David Blaise, owner of the advertising specialty industry consultancy Blaise Drake & Co., suggests that you make referrals a routine part of your prospecting and selling process.

Say you're speaking with a first-time client and the chances of a sale are looking good. Mention that you do a lot of business through referrals and ask, if the person ends up working with you and is pleased in the end, if it would be alright for you to then request a referral from them. "Most people are reasonable and will say that's fine," says Blaise. "Now you've laid the groundwork. So when things go well, you can cycle back and reference how they said it would be okay to ask for a referral. Usually, they're more than

happy to help."

In another approach, you could send both new and longstanding clients a note or e-mail after a successful project concludes asking for a referral. Don't send it with the invoice, says Blaise, but do add a personal touch and thank

"If you give clients referrals, they'll be thankful and want to reciprocate."

— DAVID BLAISE, BLAISE DRAKE & CO.

them for their business before inviting them to recommend anyone who may benefit from your services. However you ask for a referral, it's important that you use phrasing that positions you as a solutions provider eager to help other businesses succeed. "You could say, 'Who else

do you know who needs help promoting their business or getting more clients?'" says Blaise.

Of course, another great way to increase referrals is to give them. Consider who you know may benefit from the services of your clients and connect them. "If you give clients referrals, they'll be thankful and want to reciprocate," Blaise says.

To encourage clients to provide referrals, you can also try offering them rewards, like referral fees or discounts. Pro-Lettering, an apparel decorating firm, offers discounts of 10% to 25% to clients who refer others that become customers of the Endicott, NY-based company. "It brings in more new business than anything else," says Joyce Jagger, an apparel decorating industry consultant and manager at Pro-Lettering. "Any and everybody will refer you if they get something out of it."

Elsewhere, Karen Hunter uses promotional products in a subtle but highly effective manner to spur referrals. The owner of Head of the Hunt, an authorized Kaeser and Blair (*asi/238600*) dealer, gives products that bear her company's branding to clients. Friends, family and colleagues of the recipients may ask about the product or Head of the Hunt, which leads Hunter's clients to mention her and her services. As a result, some curious inquirers end up working with Hunter. This happened recently when she gave a client within a university a tote bag. Another buyer in a different university department asked about the tote, learned about Hunter, and then contacted her to order the bags. "If your clients are your advocates," says Jagger, "it can lead to a lot of new business." — *Christopher Ruvo* ■

Rev Up Referrals

Here are three proven strategies for getting more referrals.

Volunteer Locally: Volunteering is a surefire way to connect with new people in your area. Even if they don't need your services, they may know someone who does. And who would be shy about referring the nice person who was out helping the community?

Swap Referrals: Clients, people in your networking group(s), fellow members at the chamber of commerce – all could potentially give you referrals. Make an arrangement in which you agree to refer people to them whenever possible as long as they do the same for you.

Utilize Testimonials: If a satisfied client is willing to give you a referral, he or she may also agree to provide you with a testimonial. A brief video testimonial would be ideal. But if that's asking too much, then post the customer's kind words on your website, and consider

using them in your marketing materials and advertisements. Remember, testimonials enable satisfied customers to give you a reference even if they don't know someone who needs imprinted apparel or products.

— CR

Five Ways Your Clients Can Use *Pinterest*

1 **Convey a corporate culture.** Human Resources can use Pinterest to showcase camaraderie, productivity, positive customer interactions or teamwork. Images to motivate safety, wellness or a positive work ethic will enhance employee outreach or recruitment efforts. The reward of a fun imprinted product can encourage employees to take photos of colleagues doing good work.

2 **Develop a lifestyle association for a brand.** Check out the pinboard of health-food grocer Whole Foods. Rather than simply pinning images of its products, this marketer has smartly created a series of visual topics that speak to a healthy lifestyle such as images of gardening, recycling, vegetable recipes or entertaining. A lifestyle-inspired pinboard is a way to generate a brand following without seeming too self-promotional.

3 **Support an incentive program.** If, for example, a company has a sales incentive plan that culminates in a travel reward, use images of the destination posted on a pinboard to keep participants motivated. The themed board can showcase the culture, historic sites, beautiful landscapes or cuisines of the region. Consider launching the incentive plan and its pinboard by handing out a promotional gift with a QR code linking to the program's Pinterest page.

4 **Encourage "crowdsourcing."** Brands can ask fans and followers (customers or prospects) to post images of how they use the product on their own social media pages. When the brand is tagged in the post, it can be re-pinned on a company's pinboard. This becomes a great form of testimonial and useful way to learn how customers are using a product.

5 **Create a contest.** Digital marketing agency Prime Visibility recommends Pinterest-based contests to engage users or to generate important customer feedback. A popular form is a "Pin It to Win It" event, where prizes are awarded for the most creative pinboards related to a company's brand. Or followers are asked to comment on a pinned image (write a caption or tagline), and the best comments are voted on to determine a winner. Imprinted gifts that tie into the contest theme can be given to winners.
– Tonia Cook Kimbrough

NEWS TICKER

Broder Bros. Co. (asi/42090) announced it has acquired fellow supplier Imprints Wholesale (asi/62486). While financial terms of the deal were not released, Scott Lynes, CEO of Imprints Wholesale, will now become president of the western region of the combined operation. The supplier also announced it is now carrying Russell Athletic apparel.

Dalco Athletic is offering full-color dye-sublimation twill appliqué that produces bright colors without multiple layers or per-color costs.

GatewayCDI (asi/202515) has announced a new preferred supplier relationship initiative that's designed to help suppliers better understand the needs of end-users. The initiative includes PowerPoint presentations sent to suppliers, containing information about GatewayCDI clients, target demographics and logo information.

Great Dane Graphics has published *T-Shirt Artwork Simplified*, a comprehensive book that answers questions about creating artwork for screen printing or digital DTG printing. To purchase the book, visit www.greatdanegraphics.com or call 800-829-0836.

Inkcups Now moved to a 26,000-square-foot facility at 310 Andover Street, Danvers, MA, on Jan. 1. All contact information, with the exception of the street address, will remain the same.

OUBE (asi/75110) has announced a merger with Mail



Make Business Come To You

If you receive an e-mail from Danette Gossett, you can't help but notice her e-mail signature: "A nationally certified woman-owned enterprise." The owner of Gossett Marketing (*asi/212200*) decided it was important to become nationally certified by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) about eight years ago.

When she got certified, she didn't expect it to be a big deal. But she found that her existing clients appreciate that she's certified. "Some of my clients track their spending with women- and minority-owned businesses. I've had clients that have ordered more from me once they realized I was a woman-owned business," she says. Gossett has also been able to add large, woman-owned businesses to her client base.

She's found that the certification gives her the edge in meeting supplier diversity quotas. "Sometimes companies have quotas when they want to

give back and spend 10% with woman- or minority-owned business, so we qualify for those quotas," she says.

The certification has given her a leg up working with corporate clients as well. When Gossett had lunch with a contact from the local Hyatt hotel, he informed her that orders have to be placed out of the corporate office in Chicago. "I told him that I'm nationally certified with WBENC," she recalls. "Then, he realized that he has a local supplier diversity quota, so he can use me for that aspect of it."

Being WBENC-certified allows her access to Council events where she meets purchasing agents for major corporations. However, adding a certification to an e-mail signature is not the end. "Don't become certified and expect business to walk into the door. You have to work at it and do the follow-up," Gossett says. And then the word should spread.

—Jennifer Vishnevsky ■

Tell Your Story

Whether trying to make a sale to a new client or strengthen a relationship with an existing one, boost your chances by making the story of your business part of the pitch. Let prospects know why you first entered the promotional products business, what your mission is and what makes you unique. For example, Arlene Bates, owner of Arlene L Bates & Associates (*asi/133775*), has been in the industry for several decades and makes her history and experience central to her communications with prospects. "I'm working with the grandchildren of the owners I worked with originally," says Bates. "They really like the personal story I can tell." —Alex Palmer

NEWS TICKER

Sort, Inc., which will create three separate divisions under the OOB brand name.

Pacific Emblem Company now offers mixed medium chenille patches for school promotions, letterman jackets, promotional apparel and more. For more information, visit www.pacificemblem.com or e-mail quotes@doctorpatch.com.

Sports Art (*asi/88804*), based in Nashport, OH, has joined ASI as a supplier decorator.

Stahls' ID Direct (*asi/88984*) now offers Sublimated SimStitch heat-applied appliqué patterns, which give the decorator a patterned, sewn look without sewing. Each is printed with vibrant sublimation inks on Perma-TWILL.

Talbot Marketing (*asi/341500*) has completed the asset purchase of What's Up Clothing Company, the firms have announced. Terms of the agreement, which was finalized on December 13, were not disclosed.

T-Biz Network International will be presenting three Fresener's Printers Boot Camp Workshops from March 1 through 3 in Scottsdale, AZ. Visit www.printersbootcamp.com or e-mail Scott Fresener at scott@biznetwork.com for more information.

Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*) has begun offering the Greg Norman Collection of apparel to the corporate promotional market in Canada.

Virginia T's (*asi/93917*) and **Heritage Sportswear Inc. (*asi/60582*)** announced they have combined operations.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

Choosing For Your Clients

With more available choices, distributors must narrow down to the best options.



Marc Held is the national sales director at Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788). He can be reached at mheld@bodekandrhodes.com or (800) 877-9911, ext. 1201.

It's now 2013, and as a distributor selling apparel, you should be excited. Trade shows are here, and apparel suppliers are debuting their new apparel lines and products. It gives you a very good reason to contact your customers and show them something new. And with the industry on the forefront of retail, it no longer takes years for that popular style or color to show up in your suppliers' catalogs.

As you wander the trade shows and look for these trends, you will notice the overwhelming supplier offerings in apparel. No matter the focus of your favorite supplier – woven dress shirts, polos, outerwear, caps and bags and more – there is no shortage of options. In 2013, the number of apparel offerings continues to grow in styles, colors and sizes. It was only 10 years ago that ladies had very few options; today, they have equal to or even more choices than the men. The term “uni-sex” has slowly vanished.

Choice goes beyond just male and female. Size options continue

to expand too, ranging from XS to 6XL to accommodate both petite and heavyset demographics. Colors such as red, navy and black are no longer lonely ambassadors as in some cases they have over 100 counterparts. Yes, that is 100 colors in some styles.

As you explore all these options, you'll contemplate sending your customer a catalog or Web link. Stop and think if that is the right choice. As much as I took the first few paragraphs to brag about all these options, how is the end-user supposed to pick one polo from another? Better yet, why would they choose one polo over another? Of the major suppliers in the industry, each has dozens, if not hundreds of options. Sure, cost may be a factor, or they may have a brand preference, but at the end of the day, they are looking to you to be the expert. They want you to ultimately make the choice.

Use the “paradox of choice” to your advantage. Instead of sending out that catalog, go back and give your customer that

“good-better-best” option. If you do this for polos, wovens, outerwear and fashion tees, you have just narrowed your overall product offering to less than 20 styles. Become the expert on these styles. If the customer wants something else, you can always go the catalog or Web link route.

As you walk the trade show, ask every supplier for their “good-better-best” options, even if it is not apparel-related. Every supplier should be able to tell you this.

With everything said, narrowing your choice does take time and requires you to do some homework:

1. Wash and then wear those items. If you like them, your energy and conviction will be contagious. Plus, it looks better on you than on a hanger.
2. Check stock with the supplier. Why sell anything you can't get?
3. Ask the supplier if it's a core style that it sells, and does it foresee the style being around for the next two to three years? Why push something that may be discontinued soon?

4. Ask your supplier about quality testing and other compliance standards. Go with those suppliers that have the standards that allow you to sleep well at night.

5. Consider selling a supplier's private label (its own brand). The quality of a name brand, without the price. Think about your customers that want a name brand-look without paying for it.

6. Go with those styles that have men's and ladies' coordinates.

7. Look for petite and larger sizing options.

8. Look for those styles that have a unique selling point. Think about performance properties: Wrinkle-free (easy care), moisture-wicking, UV protecting, anti-static, and shrink-resistant.

9. To help narrow your selection, ask the supplier for one or two of their top-selling styles that are unique to them.

So, with all those options out there, narrow your search and sell what you like. The good news is, your options are really endless. Have fun, because that's what selling apparel is. ■

► ASK THE ADVISORY BOARD

With so many options available in categories like polos and T-shirts, what can distributors do to narrow down the choices for clients?



CRIS NIGRO, Owner of Proforma Creative Precision: There are tons of questions you can ask. Price, thickness and feel of the fabric are the things I start with for tees. For polos, the first question is, how will they be used and who's wearing them? It's important to understand if they're for golf or something else, like an environment that might cause some poly products to snag easily. Find out the price range they want to be in. Also, what's most important – Washability? Durability? (Do they have some heavier people that might not wear T-shirts underneath so they want a thicker item to keep it professional? This has come up.) From there you can ask even more questions: Does it need to wick? How much does softness matter? Solid or styles with multiple colors? Retail-like, or does that matter? Important to have a ladies' cut? All of these questions will help.

WEARABLES UNIVERSITY

The source for your wearables education

By Tonia Cook Kimbrough

Courses this month:

Fabric Tutorial – 209

Decorating Workshop – 329

Need-To-Know Terms – 168

Color Clinic – 114

Size It Up – 284

An intermediate-level look at soft, pampering fabrics.

Fabric Tutorial – 209 *Sophomore*

Pamper Recipients With A Soft Fabric

One of the most important impressions a garment makes is how it feels. Is it soft, smooth or plush? Help your clients make a positive impression by choosing promotional apparel made of fabrics with a pleasing hand.

Classic examples, of course, are fabrics such as combed, ring-spun cottons or a fine silk. Even fabrications that add a percentage of these fibers in a blend can yield a soothing effect. There are also luxurious fabrics, such as velvet and cashmere, that feel lush and look rich. A tightly-woven merino wool or a lofty fleece can give the impression of a “hug.”

Aside from the type of fiber or fabrication, look for details about the quality of the yarn used to make the textile. For example,

a fine 40-singles yarn yields a smooth, lightweight fabric luxurious to wear. The Tri-Mountain Gold collection from Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*) recently introduced the Rosewood (W982), a 74%/26% cotton/polyester mini-striped dobby dress shirt in a 40-singles yarn that not only has an extremely soft hand, but it also resists wrinkles.

Think about the fabric’s texture inside and out. You want the textile to be nice for others to touch and to feel soft against the skin of the person wearing the item. Shelly Renning, general merchandise manager for SanMar (*asi/84863*), suggests the new Red House ladies’ sweater fleece full-zip jacket (RH55). “With the soft, sweater-knit face and the fleece interior, this piece gives you the comfort of that favorite fleece piece with the contemporary professional design of a sweater,” she says. “It’s definitely a want-to-wear piece vs. a have-to-wear piece!”



*The combination of a sweater-knit face with a fleece interior makes this Red House ladies’ sweater fleece full-zip jacket (RH55) from SanMar (*asi/84863*; circle 121 on Free Info Card) super-soft inside and out.*
photo courtesy of SanMar (*asi/84863*)



*This crisply tailored mini-striped dobby dress shirt (W982) from Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*; circle 103 on Free Info) gets its soft hand from 40-singles yarn. It is made from a 74%/26% cotton/poly blend and is treated to resist wrinkles.*
photo courtesy of Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*)

LEARN IT LIVE!

Learn the software you need to become a decoration master by attending "Start Editing Today With CorelDRAW" at The ASI Show Long Beach (Friday, March 22, 2 p.m.). Discover the essential CorelDRAW skills you need to successfully manage your clients' graphics and logos.

An advanced course on expanding your decorating capabilities with ease.

Decorating Workshop – 329

Junior

Build Business With the Right Equipment

Expanding your business may be a matter of choosing a new piece of imprinting equipment. That's what Shawn Lyons, owner of The T-shirt Makers, did. Wanting to increase his ability to produce full-color photographic designs in a variety of sizes and without concern for minimums, he chose a VersaStudio BN-20 digital printer/cutter with CYMK and metallic silver ink from Roland DGA (*asi/18201*).

In an industry where up-to-the-minute is everything, Lyons values the BN-20's fast and consistent production. He simply creates his artwork digitally and then exports it to the BN-20 for printing and cutting. The printed artwork is then heat-transferred to garments. "My goal is to provide my designs quicker and more cost-effectively than anyone in town," he says. Often, Lyons leaves the BN-20 printing overnight to manage his production deadlines. "The fact that my designs are printed and waiting for me in the morning helps me stay one step ahead."

Lyons added the digital printer/cutter to his business in December 2011. Within three weeks, the investment paid off by earning back the price of the equipment. "With new technology comes new opportunities," Lyons says. His story might inspire other apparel distributors and decorators to look at equipment options to build their own businesses. Today's vendors are increasingly offering packaged solutions that take the legwork and guesswork out of adding a capability.

For example, Digital HeatFX, the heat-applied graphics division of Pantograms Inc., recently introduced a Diamond Business in a Box package, which includes a large-format white toner printer, heat press and transfer supplies. "Our clients have been asking for years for a process



The OKI 920 WT from Digital Heat FX (circle 124 on Free Info Card) is a tabloid color white toner laser-printing system for creating transfers at either 11" x 17" or 8 1/2" x 11". photo courtesy of Digital HeatFX

that can decorate light and dark garments, hard surfaces and a variety of other textiles," says Joe Smalley, Digital HeatFX national account manager. "The Diamond Business in a Box package is unique in that it finally offers those solutions, and it does so with a process that is simple and easy to learn, without any of the mess or maintenance issues found in comparable decorating methods. That means a quicker return on their investment and none of the headaches."

The VersaStudio BN-20 digital printer/cutter from Roland DGA (*asi/18201*; circle 125 on Free Info Card) offers quick desktop printing with the ability to print CYMK as well as metallic silver ink or white. photo courtesy of Roland DGA (*asi/18201*)

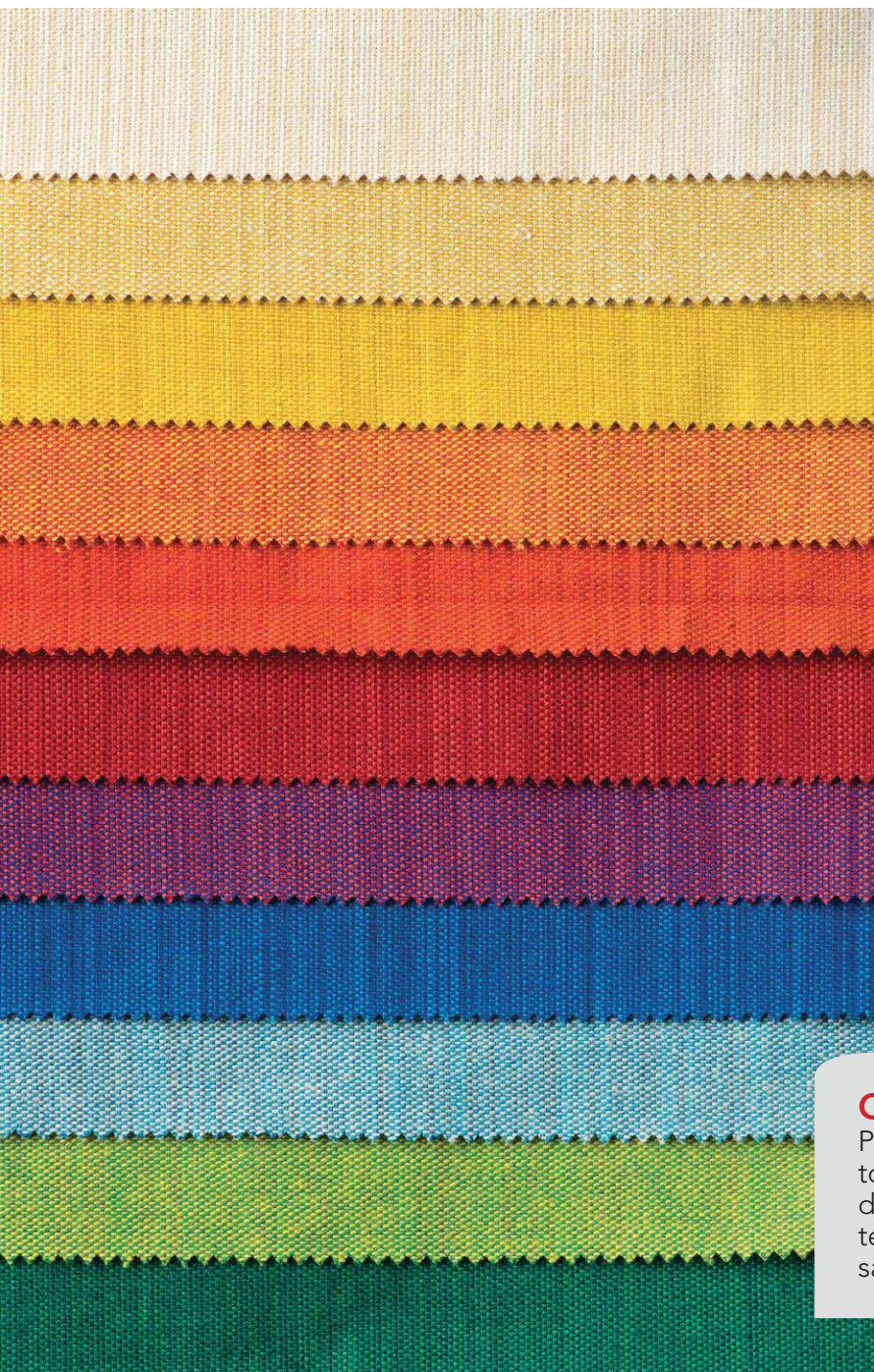


An entry-level look at ways to talk about fabric.

Need-To-Know Terms – 168

Freshman

Learn How To Properly Describe Fabric



Talking fabric with your clients is simple as long as you know a few key descriptors. Understanding these terms makes it easier to describe a fabric while allowing you to compare quality:

Body – how thick, firm or weighty a fabric is (A thick brocade, for example, has a heavy body.)

Drape – how a fabric hangs or falls (Does it fold loosely and fall into regular ripples, or is it stiff and rigid, resisting folds?)

Durability – the ability of a fabric to resist wear over time, laundering and use (Denim and canvas are supremely durable fabrics.)

Elasticity – describes the extent to which a fabric recovers from being stretched (Good elasticity means that the fabric retakes its shape after being stretched through wear or tension. Spandex is a prime example of this.)

Gauge – a measurement in knitting that refers to the size of needles used to knit the fabric or can sometimes reflect thread count in woven fabrics

Hand – what a fabric feels like to touch (soft, rough, textured, silky, smooth, etc.)

Weight – how many ounces per square yard of fabric (A European standard measures it in grams by square meter.)

Quick Tip

Place a fabric over your hand and let it hang down to see how it drapes. Rub it between your fingers to determine how it feels. Twist, stretch and rumple it to test for resilience. Encourage your clients to do the same as you present the garment.

Entry-level inspiration for using the palest of colors.

Color Clinic – 114

Freshman

Make 'Em Blush: Pale But Powerful Colors

Color doesn't have to be bold to command attention. In fact, frequently the most captivating of hues are pale. This is particularly true when a color is intended for female-focused promotions or springtime programs.

Industry suppliers know this. That's why you'll find many soft shades in their color palettes. Sometimes the type of garment may suggest a soft colorway. Think of comforting, cuddly robes. Colorado Clothing (*asi/45792*) offers its Bliss Robe (CC5027) in spa-like colors of Cotton Candy (pale pink) and airy Spa Blue. The light yellow called Butter makes a plush micro-fleece jacket (CC6358) as visually warm as it is to wear.

"These soft and colorful tones complement the softness of the garment and pair well with darker colors for an imprint."

Joy Shi, Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*)

Joy Shi, marketing associate at Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*), notes an array of lovely shades in styles that range from activewear to executive-wear. Lilac, Soft Orchid, Apple and Seafoam are a few of the fresh hues you'll find from this supplier. The new micro-fleece pullover Helena (FL7270) is soothing in Pale Blue. "These soft and colorful tones complement the softness of the garment and pair well with darker colors for an imprint," Shi says.

You can decorate pale-colored garments with great sophistication. Tina Schmitt, director of sales/special markets for Colorado Clothing, recommends a silver-toned thread to embroider a pale "Petal" pink ladies' uniform sweater. In contrast, you can make a logo leap off a light-colored background by using a darker or complementary thread or ink color.



The tactile softness of this plush Bliss Robe (CC5027) from Colorado Clothing (*asi/45792*; circle 140 on Free Info Card) is reinforced visually in a pale pink called Cotton Candy. photo courtesy of Colorado Clothing (*asi/45792*)

The new Dolce spandex jersey V-neck tee (KL010) from Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*; circle 103 on Free Info Card) comes in Soft Orchid, a feminine shade perfect for a woman who embraces an active lifestyle. The color looks great when paired with black yoga pants. photo courtesy of Tri-Mountain (*asi/92125*)

Five Pale Connotations

- ✿ Fresh
- ✿ Romantic
- ✿ Feminine
- ✿ Calm
- ✿ Sophisticated

An intermediate review of fit factors and solutions.

Size It Up – 284

Sophomore

Apparel With The Right Fit

Size isn't only about smalls, mediums and larges. It has to do with the cut and tailoring of a garment. Ultimately, these details significantly influence how well a garment fits.

In general, women are more figure-conscious than men. Look for flattering cuts that enhance their body shape. Lauren Cocco, senior merchandiser for Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*), points to the



Not only does this women's ¾-sleeve textured shirt (1241) from Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*; circle 97 on Free Info Card) come in a wide range of sizes (XS-3XL), but it also features important fit details like a feminine silhouette and bust darts. photos courtesy of Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*)

Seek apparel options with adjustable fit features such as an open bottom with cordlocks or half-elastic sleeve cuffs with Velcro closures. The Stormer waterproof jacket (7330) from Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*; circle 97 on Free Info Card) provides both.



bust darts featured in Vantage's women's ¾-sleeve solid textured shirt (1241) as an example. Other design features that affect fit include princess seams to accent the curve of the body or raglan sleeves that provide comfort and drape attractively.

End-users' expectations are also important. "Clients and end-users can guide how the garment will be worn," Cocco says. "Is it a fashion piece or a business uniform? Is it sized long enough to tuck in? Is it full enough for athletic and physical activity?"

Look for choices that allow for adjustment such as Vantage's Stormer waterproof jacket (7330). "Adjustable options are critical for ultimate comfort and ease of movement," Cocco explains. "This jacket

"Is it a fashion piece or a business uniform? Is it sized long enough to tuck in? Is it full enough for athletic and physical activity?"

Lauren Cocco, Vantage Apparel (*asi/93390*)

has half-elastic sleeve cuffs with Velcro closure and an open bottom with cordlocks that allow the wearer to loosen or tighten the cuff and bottom opening." Similarly, the elasticity of a garment can accommodate body shape for a perfect fit. Another example: The micro-mesh knit body fabric used in the Vansport Omega Solid Mesh Tech polo (2600) has inherent stretch for ease of movement and an attractive shape and drape.

Finally, remember people come in all shapes and sizes, so work with apparel brands that design silhouettes for the greatest population. Cocco advises that you use manufacturers that do live model fittings on real people to reflect real customers. Ask for a brand's published sizing guides. Inquire whether the supplier offers complementary styles in plus sizes or big and tall. By working with such a supplier, you'll achieve a better fit for end-users and happier clients.

Tonia Cook Kimbrough is a contributing writer for Wearables.

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Hot Product Showcase

This Month: Polos

By Chuck Zak

Polos were once the exclusive province of the rote and the unimaginative. Ill-fitting, drably predictable in their styling and prone to curling collars and unsightly sweat stains, these shirts were strictly Squaresville. No longer. Our collection brings together moisture-defying models that elevate any active soul to whole new levels of style, alongside more traditional examples that factor in all we've learned about "What Not To Wear" from the new, comfortably middlebrow fashion police.

So if long black socks with wingtips and pleated shorts still sound like a good idea to your clients, upgrade their style with these options for the relaxed professional who still knows how to get the job done.



Work And Play

Build that go-anywhere, do-anything look with this slim-fitting ladies' 3/4-sleeve cotton/poly performance polo (3547-017). Works great as part of a sporty ensemble or as a business-casual basic. Also consider it for indoor/outdoor jobs such as garden centers where comfy and dry workwear is essential. Available from Dunbrooke (asi/50930; circle 100 on Free Info Card).



Smooth Operator

This women's fitted smooth knit polyester polo (2213) boasts moisture-management and antimicrobial properties to maintain freshness throughout the day. The button-less Johnny collar helps this classic stand out as a stylish, sweat-friendly piece for tennis instructors or gymnastic clubs. Available from Charles River Apparel (asi/44620; circle 102 on Free Info Card).



Breathe Easy

The enhanced breathability of this 100% micro polyester textured knit polo (16215) helps make it so easy to wear whether on the field or the sales floor. Contrasting stitching adds to the eye appeal while the wicking finish does its moisture-defying magic. Charity sporting event organizers can look smart and stay fresh all day in this. Available from Trimark Sportswear (asi/92122; circle 106 on Free Info Card).



Clean Cool

The soft, silky hand on this polyester micro piqué polo (1700), in addition to its advanced wicking and antimicrobial features, make it a winner for coaching staffs or soccer teams at any level. Soil-release properties help keep this shirt clean and ready to take the field. Available from Game Sportswear (asi/55752; circle 102 on Free Info Card).



Simple Pleasures

Subtle grosgrain taping along the self-fabric collar gives this women's 3/4-sleeve polo (LB138) understated style while the cotton/spandex blend provides welcome stretchability. Apply an equally low-key logo for a quietly confident self-promo, or leave it alone and gift it to a client with good taste. Available from Tri-Mountain (asi/92125; circle 103 on Free Info Card).

.....• The snazziest wearables around



Conform To Form.....•

This striped women's polo (222369) achieves a balance between traditional professionalism and modern flaunt-it-if-you-got-it sensibility through crucial details like a button-free placket and gently form-fitting cut. A whole swath of great colors is available, too. Perfect for any warm-weather employee working the ticket window or waiting tables on the veranda. Available from Holloway Sportswear (asi/61430; circle 105 on Free Info Card).



Wick Time.....•

Sleek ultra-wicking cotton/polyester pima knit polo (13Z0062) is ready to make someone the slickest swinger on the golf course. The clean-finished placket is a nice touch; jazz up any charity event with this one, or use it to say thanks to top-tier clients. Available from S&S Activewear (asi/84358; circle 99 on Free Info Card).



Fits Gerald.....•

Pre-launched for softness and shrink-resistance, this form-fitting unisex cotton piqué polo (pq412) helps wearers achieve that effortless awesomeness usually reserved for only the hippest among us. American-made for American maidens and men lounging in the dorm or working the door at clubs or concert halls. Available from American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 92 on Free Info Card).



Soft Sell.....•

Comfort is queen in this ladies' classic-fit, snag-resistant polyester polo (BG-6224) with stain- and wrinkle-resistance. Ease of wear and quality construction make this shirt perfect for product reps patiently pacing the mall or wedged into a kiosk. Available from Blue Generation (asi/40653; circle 123 on Free Info Card).



Stripes For Stars.....•

Go with a classic look in this 100% ringspun combed cotton polo (PIMA) with horizontal striping. Cut full for an easy fit, this is what to wear when hobnobbing with movers and shakers on the back nine or sipping a Scotch & Soda in the clubhouse. Available from Tiger Hill (asi/91261; circle 104 on Free Info Card).



Hunt Club.....•

The digital camo back panel insert adds a sense of testosterone-fueled derring-do to this men's khaki polymesh polo (FW6937), making it a natural for sporting goods retailers or gun shops. It's fully fleshed out with anti-moisture, antimicrobial features and a reinforced self-collar. Available from Fersten Worldwide (asi/53974; circle 96 on Free Info Card).



WEARABLES

TOP DECORATOR

2013

Eight of the sharpest screen printers in the country duke it out in the opening round of our competition. Who is moving on – and who gets eliminated?

BY C.J. MITTICA

Why do we love decorators? They're artists and visionaries who bring still images to life on a fabric canvas. They do things with T-shirts we never thought possible. Equal parts creative geniuses and technical masters, they take apparel and fashion to places they've never gone before. You may say your decorator is the best, but now there is an arena to test their mettle.

Announcing the launch of *Wearables* Top Decorator, our first-ever competition exclusively devoted to decoration. Top Decorator will run throughout the year, laying down five robust challenges that competitors must complete until a single victor is crowned. At stake is a top prize of a \$500 Visa Gift Card, but more importantly, the satisfaction of defeating the best of the best and rising to the top.

Eight skilled screen printers have signed up for the competition – and one of them will be going home this round. Who will pass the test? Come find out.

MEET THE JUDGES



SCOTT FRESENER

Scott Fresener is the director of T-Biz Network International and the co-author of *How To Print T-shirts For Fun And Profit*. He has been in the industry since 1970 and has served as a judge for many industry awards, including the SGIA Golden Image Awards and the Impressions Awards.



C.J. MITTICA

C.J. Mittica is the editor of *Wearables* and a staff writer for *Counselor* magazine. He has been with ASI since 2008 and has served as the editor of *Wearables* for over four years.



STEPHANIE WOODS

Stephanie Woods is the founder of Limelight Branding and has been an industry member for the past 10 years. She was first introduced to the promotional products world as a marketing assistant with Warner Bros. Pictures, and has worked in several industry roles before starting her own distributorship which she shares with her partner, D'Shené Cotton.

CONTEST RULES

Wearables Top Decorator was open to distributors, decorators and suppliers with screen-printing equipment. Participants must prominently use screen-printing in their designs. They are allowed to incorporate it into mixed media with other decoration methods. Judges granted immunity to one contestant, and the rest were grouped into a popular vote for *Wearables* readers, who were told to choose their three favorite designs, based on creativity, technical mastery and design appeal. The submission with the least votes was eliminated, and the remaining competitors move on to the next round.

CHALLENGE #1: CREATE THE CONCERT TEE

ENTRY #1: OPTIMISTIC DEADBEAT

Created by Black Duck (circle 132 on Free Info Card)

DETAILS: The art was an original colored pencil drawing by artist Newbern Taylor. The spot process color seps were done in-house using Freehand Graphics software. It is an eight-color design using Wilflex inks. The under print was done with a 156 mesh screen; all other colors were on 255 to 280 mesh screens. All screens were tensioned to 30 newtons. The screen frames were all Newman roller frames. The design was printed on an M&R Challenger press. Art originally created for retail and Internet sale and adapted for the contest.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

Scott Fresener: I like the graphic, but the print is just too heavy. I wish they had used a 230 mesh for the underbase white and a 305 for the top colors and reduced the ink a little to give the print a softer hand. The colors pop and the print is very clean and in good registration. I would like to have seen a higher LPI for the halftone. In a picture the print will look good but in today's market people want a softer print, and this could have been a little softer with a higher mesh count.

C.J. Mittica: "Optimistic Deadbeat" pretty much describes half the people who graduate from college. Out of context, this shirt is very appealing on look alone: it oozes Southwest flavor, and I think the decorator did an admirable job transcribing over the intricacies of pencil art into a screen-printed T-shirt. However, it doesn't scream concert merch tee to me – maybe for Los Lobos.

Stephanie Woods: This is a great example of bright and bold use of color that works well with the artwork. The white is crisp and sets a great base for all of the vibrant colors in the design. The detail in the shading of the rose is striking.



YOU WISH YOU COULD BUY

ENTRY #2: RUSH

Created by T Productions (circle 133 on Free Info Card)

DETAILS: The decoration was created for Rush's upcoming Clockwork Angels 2013 European Tour. Imprint on the front created with eight-color simulated process with plastisol inks. Back image uses three-color simulated process with plastisol inks. (Both use 55 LPI, 230-305 mesh, 70-75 Durometer squeegees.)



FRONT

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Scott Fresener: Very nice. It looks like a concert shirt of today and is similar to a lot of concert shirts you see. The prints (both sides) are very clean and bright. Registration is great and I like the artwork on both. They used a high mesh, which gave them a good soft hand to the print. They made good use of the black shirt with transparent ink to let the shirt be part of the shadow detail.

C.J. Mittica: Some very nice details on this shirt; the intricate work on the back looks great. It runs counter to the lightweight fashion tees and no-hand discharge printing that current fashion tastes (as well as I) favor, but there still remains a strong market for this type of shirt, particularly in the music realm.

Stephanie Woods: I know a lot of guys who would want this shirt. The detail and the depth of the colors in the design are outstanding.



BACK

ENTRY #3: QUEEN

Created by In Your Face Apparel (asi/62494; circle 134 on Free Info Card)

DETAILS: Indulging a love for Queen, this supplier and its senior designer dreamed up a 1975 concert T-shirt for the band. It was screen printed with fashion soft plastisol ink on a 100% cotton striped V-neck shirt.



JUDGES' COMMENTS

Scott Fresener: Interesting graphic and colorful. The image and print have a '70s feel to them with the use of pink and blue as the main colors. I was surprised the hand was so heavy since they say they used "fashion soft" plastisol. This heavy a print would have been acceptable in the '70s, but today I think it would be a turn-off. I am curious about the mesh they used. Also, if you look closely, the thin horizontal lines of the shirt and the thin lines that are actually in the graphic pretty much line up, but the overprint colors bleed out and the lines are gone in part of the print. This print might photograph well and these flaws won't be seen, but if you look at the actual shirt – technically it is not a very good print.

C.J. Mittica: It's certainly an ambitious effort that pays off decently. This supplier nails the mid-'70s aesthetic, and the wall of color thrown up is a fun look. The striped shirt is a unique choice for the competition. I do commend the supplier for trying something different.

Stephanie Woods: This is a bold shirt! The colors really pop and the ink coverage is well-done considering the texture of the shirt. I will say that I think the quality of the imprint is overwhelmed by the striped shirt. It's a bit too much for my taste.



ENTRY #4: BEATLES

Created by Kaules Screen Works (circle 135 on Free Info Card)

DETAILS: Honoring the greatest rock and roll band ever, this Beatles decoration was printed on a Vastex six-color, six-station manual press with Wilflex matte black plastisol ink. It was printed using 230 yellow mesh screens at 40 LPI 22.5 angle elliptical dots. Shur-Loc screens and Ulano orange emulsion were used.

ENTRY #5: LADY GAGA

Created by Visual Impressions (circle 136 on Free Info Card)

* JUDGES' IMMUNITY

DETAILS: Created specifically for Top Decorator, this funky pink shirt saluting music's biggest "Monster" was printed in multiple locations using Crystalina and both metallic colors and regular spot colors.



FRONT

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Scott Fresener: A very nice print that is technically excellent. Good registration, clean colors, good halftones and all in all a great print with good use of special effects inks. This is a very good print and nice graphic.

C.J. Mittica: My favorite shirt in this competition. This decorator fires on all cylinders. The imagery is bold yet cohesive, the color scheme is calibrated just perfectly, the wraparound design showcases great creativity and the incorporation of Crystalina as a special effect takes everything to another level. You could easily imagine this shirt selling out at retail or at the T-shirt booth of one of Lady Gaga's concert spectacles.

Stephanie Woods: There's not a lot that isn't going on with this shirt. And I mean that in the best sense. The vibrant imprint colors really pop, the metallic foil is tasteful and well-placed, and the use of Crystalina complements the gems in the design and highlights other fun elements. Little Monsters would definitely line up to buy this one.



BACK

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Scott Fresener: This print is nice as a one-color, but it is just that, which means technically there is not much to it. I can see concert-goers buying this shirt as a simple one-color image, but in a competition where there are lots of other prints with pop, this one misses out. Also, they seemed to lose a lot of the fine highlight and shadow details.

C.J. Mittica: Technically, this shirt hits the mark: clean design, little hand. But in a competition where many of the participants really upped the creative ante, this shirt feels plain and uninspired by comparison. Its lack of creative approach really hurts it.

Stephanie Woods: The photo quality of the imprint is amazing! I can't help but be impressed at the detail of the image and the imprint. The fine lines and shading make this a top-quality imprint.

ENTRY #6: MAYHEM FESTIVAL

Created by Culture Studio Custom Screen Printing & Embroidery (asi/700559; circle 137 on Free Info Card)

DETAILS: Printed for the Rockstar Energy Drink Mayhem Festival, this shirt features discharge ink used on the underbase and plastisol inks for the top color. It was printed on a Challenger 2 with Rutland inks.



FRONT

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Scott Fresener: Nice job with discharge/plastisol combo. I like the graphic. Good registration. Nice hand. It would have been softer if all colors were discharge, but the red and blue would not have had the same pop.

C.J. Mittica: Strong work. The ghoulish design tweaks its obvious reference point well enough for its tattooed target audience. I especially like the "papery" look of the background – other decorators could have thrown up a white or tan background and called it a day, but the aged, textured look offers welcomed depth.

Stephanie Woods: A scary one but well-done. The detail in the imprint shows the paper texture of the poster-style design very well. The use of shadowing also helps create the strong details.



BACK



ENTRY #7: THE LOOK AND THE SOUND

Created by Golden Goods (asi/57695; circle 138 on Free Info Card)

DETAILS: This retro imprint, created specifically for Top Decorator, was made with discharge inks on the supplier's own 100% cotton fashion-fit women's tee.

ENTRY #8: REVEREND HORTON HEAT

Created by Target Decorated Apparel (asi/90549; circle 139 on Free Info Card)

DETAILS: Designed exclusively for Top Decorator, this colorful yet vintage-style print was created with no real hand and a grunge look. It features a nine-color discharge imprint on the front and a two-color discharge imprint on the back shoulder. Special-effect red foil was added to the front and back.



FRONT



BACK

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Scott Fresener: This is a very good use of discharge ink, and the print has zero hand. The small highlights of foil are a nice touch and very clean. Due to the nature of discharge, the print is not bright and the discharge is a little uneven in spots. I like the overall vintage dull look to the print and the lack of hand is excellent. The white in the print is very bright even though it is discharge ink.

C.J. Mittica: This is an example of a fun design that impresses you the more you look at it. The hand being super-soft is a major plus, but it's the small details that grab you, like the tattoo renderings and the font colors. Love the subtle use of foil effects – just enough here and there to catch your eye in the appropriate places.

Stephanie Woods: This is my favorite! It's a great example of a high-quality tee that I would buy at a concert. I really appreciate the combination of water-based discharge ink creating a soft but colorful and detailed design, with the red foil accents highlighting the devilish details.

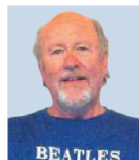
JUDGES' COMMENTS

Scott Fresener: This is a very soft and fashion-oriented print. Their use of discharge is very good. However, I think this is a little too subtle. Because of the distressed nature of the print, it is hard to judge technically other than that there is zero hand to the print. But it has a great retro look to it.

C.J. Mittica: A textbook example of how to create a knockout retro imprint. The interplay of image, words and symbols is seamless, and the no-hand discharge printing looks great and feels even better. The result is a shirt that's effortlessly wearable.

Stephanie Woods: Although the design is fairly simple, the color combinations work for me. I also like the silhouette imprint using the tee to create the shadows of the design to make it work. It's a cool retro-style tee I could see selling well at a show.

JUDGES' TOP THREE



SCOTT FRESEMER

1. Lady Gaga
2. Rush
3. Mayhem Festival



C.J. MITTICA

1. Lady Gaga
2. Reverend Horton Heat
3. Mayhem Festival



STEPHANIE WOODS

1. Reverend Horton Heat
2. Lady Gaga
3. The Look and the Sound

VOTING RESULTS

	VOTES	PERCENTAGE
Lady Gaga	455	26.3%
The Look and the Sound	224	12.9%
Optimistic Deadbeat	210	12.1%
Rush	192	11.1%
Beatles	189	10.9%
Reverend Horton Heat	177	10.2%
Mayhem Festival	144	8.3%
Queen	143	8.2%

An amazingly close finish sees In Your Face Apparel eliminated by a single vote. Meanwhile, Visual Impressions' Lady Gaga shirt was a runaway favorite among the readers. Our next test will challenge these competitors to master the use of special effects decoration. Be sure to check out *Wearablesmag.com* and the April/May issue of *Wearables* for the next round of *Wearables* Top Decorator.





SOFT SHELLS & HARD SELLS

No wearables category has more price disparity than outerwear. So is more expensive automatically better? Not exactly.

BY CHUCK ZAK

Outerwear is durably constructed to handle the most intense elements that Mother Nature can hurl. But there is one element that can break down the defenses of all jacket types, from slick raincoats to sub-zero neutralizing ski jackets: client displeasure. “Outerwear is tough,” says Cris Nigro, owner of Proforma Creative Precision (*asi/490196*). “It has to look good and it has to do its job, otherwise you’ve just thrown money down the toilet.” Still, there’s no reason for clients to be dissatisfied; with a dizzying array of styles, fits and functions available for your client’s money, no wish should go unfulfilled.

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ALL WRAPPED UP

The bounty of options in outerwear can only be touched upon here, but these few examples offer a pretty good idea of what's available for different budgets and various climates. Even the tightest-spending clients should be pleasantly surprised at what their money can buy them, whether it's a lightweight jacket for the morning jog or a supremely adaptable beast that can carry wearers – and the client's logo – through all four seasons and right back into a new year.

WINDBREAKERS



▲**Good:** Virginia T's (K647)
\$21.98

This nylon 210T unisex windbreaker offers no-nonsense, lightweight protection with an acrylic coating, concealed hood and drawcord hem. Available from Virginia T's (asi/93917; circle 91 on Free Info Card).



▼**Better:** American Apparel N431
\$31.40

American Apparel brings its usual finger-on-the-pulse style to this USA-made, 100% Nylon Taffeta windbreaker with matching nylon zipper and two pockets on the outside and inside. Available from American Apparel (asi/35297; circle 92 on Free Info Card).



▲**Best:** Tri-Mountain 1500
\$45.00

Get no-nonsense coverage in great colors with this water-resistant model featuring a light-weight cotton flannel lining and snap-up placket. Available from Tri-Mountain (asi/92125; circle 103 on Free Info Card).

FLEECE



▲**Good:** Bodek and Rhodes 8485 **\$29.50**

This colorful full-zip fleece jacket is made of anti-pill 100% polyester and includes elasticized cuffs and nylon-reinforced pockets. Available from Bodek and Rhodes (asi/40788; circle 94 on Free Info Card).

▼**Better:** Rothco 9778 **\$59.00**

The extra-warm liner on this military polar fleece jacket fights off the cold, and attributes like under-the-arm zippers, two inside mesh pockets, a drawstring waistband and hook-and-loop sleeve adjustments do their part as well. Available from Rothco (asi/83708; circle 95 on Free Info Card).



▲**Best:** Fersten Worldwide FA3854
\$100.00

Stay warm and dry with this moisture-wicking women's fleece jacket that includes a 100% textured polyester body bonded with 100% polyester microfleece. Other features include front welt pockets and self-adjustable sleeves with Velcro closures. Available from Fersten Worldwide (asi/53974; circle 96 on Free Info Card).

SOFT SHELLS



▲**Good:** Fossa Apparel 5518

\$56.00

Start off with this cutting-edge, lightweight soft shell and enjoy the comfortable flexibility, wind-resistance and highly breathable polyester mesh layer. Includes an MP3 player pocket on the sleeve. Available from Fossa Apparel (asi/55141; circle 131 on Free Info Card).

▼**Better:** Charles River Apparel 5317
\$63.90

A nicely cut women's single-layer polyester/spandex soft-shell jacket, this water-resistant model also features stand-up collar with chin guard, zippered side pockets and an inner knit hand warmer with thumb holes. Available from Charles River Apparel (asi/44620; circle 98 on Free Info Card).



▲**Best:** S&S Activewear 5309

\$96.20

The four-way stretch in this polyester/spandex all-season soft-shell jacket promises comfortable motion in any direction. It's wind- and water-resistant and includes elastic back cuff and zippered hand and sleeve pockets. Available from S&S Activewear (asi/84358; circle 99 on Free Info Card).

SYSTEM JACKETS



▲**Good:** Dunbrooke 8461-417

\$79.90

This affordable and impressive ladies' wind- and water-resistant polyester 3-in-1 system jacket features a detachable hood and an inner jacket with quilted shell and full butter pile fleece lining. Available from Dunbrooke (asi/50930; circle 100 on Free Info Card.)

▼**Better:** Broder Bros. WP6086

\$195.00

This 3-in-1 system jacket begins with an outer PVC shell with polyester no-pill fleece, quilted water-resistant lining, fleece collar lining and multi-use pockets on front, sleeve and interior. The inner fleece liner features nylon lining and handy side-entry pockets. Available from Broder Bros. (asi/42090; circle 101 on Free Info Card).



▲**Best:** Stormtech Performance

Apparel VPX-4 **\$279.00**

This mighty men's 5-in-1 system jacket makes its mark with a waterproof and breathable outer shell, front welted panels with zippered pockets, under-arm zippered vents and an adjustable, detachable hood. The inner jacket is insulated as well and features detachable sleeves for instant conversion. Available from Stormtech Performance Apparel (asi/89864; circle 102 on Free Info Card).

Of all the wearables categories, outerwear is probably the one with the widest price disparities – from \$10 roll-up windbreakers to \$500 tricked-out bank-busters. When a client is looking to put his or her logo on a jacket, the choices can seem overwhelming. There are fleeces and soft shells and even 3-in-1s in multiple price ranges, with reams of spec information that threaten to surpass character limits in catalog descriptions. Thus, expect clients to gravitate toward simplicity at the lower-price echelons as if compelled by an inescapable gravity. “It’s really difficult to discuss outerwear by price,” cautions Nigro. Context matters – it encompasses everything from brand names to technical features. When it comes to selling outerwear, a good deal more is involved than just checking the bottom line.

Getting What They Pay For

Comparing jackets on cost and features alone is tricky for one simple reason: “It’s really

“Outerwear is tough. It has to look good and it has to do its job, otherwise you’ve just thrown money down the toilet.”

Cris Nigro, Proforma Creative Precision

hard to talk price because of brands,” says Lori Anderson, marketing manager for River’s End Trading Company (*asi/82588*). “You almost have to break it up by private label, industry brand and retail.”

Consider soft-shell jackets, a popular seller in the industry for their adaptability to any

climate and ease of decoration. “Customers buy Columbia when they want the value of a recognizable brand,” says Anderson. These are the same jackets that grace the pages of glossy magazines and the backs of celebrities and athletes. “The more expensive jacket is usually mirroring a retail line, and the client knows that they need to spend more to get that type of item,” says Jane Munro, president and owner of As You Wish Promotions (*asi/125450*). “Many times the branded jacket is not better, but it has a higher perceived value and thus can bring in the higher-priced purchase.”

That proves there’s value to be had beyond the brand names. A private label or non-retail brand can still offer a great soft shell for under \$60 with performance properties. Anderson notes that industry labels have become quite adept at creating retail-inspired styles with “finishing touches like finished seams that give budget-priced jackets the look and feel of higher-end pieces.” Pair with a brand

POSITIVE LATITUDES

America enjoys all the climates of the world, right within our own borders. But what demands are there on outerwear in two of the most climate-extreme places within the 50 states?

“System-type jackets are always nice up here,” says Stellar Designs President Tim Ellis, whose distributorship is based in Anchorage, AK. “We have school districts that buy heavy stuff for their security staff, and corporate clients that buy expensive jackets for their execs to go skiing in.”

That obviously makes sense for frigid Alaska, but even in sweltering Phoenix, clients have specific outerwear needs. “I deal with a lot of hospitals, which are traditionally kept cool,” says Dana Manross, brand development manager for Commotion Promotions (*asi/166010*) in Phoenix. “They won’t allow anything with a hood or a center pocket and it must zip up the front. So the

staff often uses heavyweight and lightweight fleece vests and jackets.”

Manross also cautions against forming too stereotypical an image of the typical Arizona day. “Here you have really hot, and then not so much,” she concedes. But that dry climate allows for a surprising amount of daily temperature variation, and those cool mornings are when much of Arizona’s booming construction industry gets moving. “Arizona is such that you can wake up on a winter morning and it could be 38° and by lunch hour it’s 60°,” she says. For those early risers, 3-in-1 jackets offer the ability to shed layers as temperatures rise, while allowing Manross’ clients to triple their logoing opportunities.

Ellis has some surprises too, for those who may harbor assumptions about outdoorsy Alaskans. “Quite honestly, the camo craze isn’t that strong up here,” he says. But

Ellis can verify that Alaska does experience warmer weather and the outerwear needs that accompany it. “Lighter jackets are still a good seller for us,” Ellis continues, “and some of the basic three-season-type jackets are really strong sellers. We go around the calendar; we definitely have the four seasons.”

Still, there must be some unique demand for heavy gear at which the rest of us in the lower 48 can marvel. “Some outlying areas get pretty cold,” Ellis says. “Just this spring we brought in three samples for someone who needed something that will go to -40°.” That’s brisk weather no matter where you’re from.

But everything is relative. “Usually the lowest it’s going to get in Phoenix in the morning is about 42°,” says Manross. Alaskans may scoff, sure, but remember, “That’s cold for Arizonans.”

name in a good-better-best strategy to show how these jackets compare favorably – and let customers decide if they want to pay for the name.

Of course, there are some jackets for which you simply can't go bargain basement. "It's challenging to find a heavyweight winter jacket for under \$60," Anderson says. Instead, the 3-in-1 jacket is an ideal year-round alternative. Because it's so versatile (a lightweight and heavyweight jacket all in one), customers are a little more willing to loosen their purse strings. "A 3-in-1 is a whole different beast," says Nigro. "You can get a customer to go a little higher because, if they want the recipient to wear their brand year-round, this is what they're going to give them."

What if a client is seeking good-looking pieces with performance features at budget prices? How can they be convinced to consider something similar at a higher price point? "The budget-friendly item may have less color-blocking and no lining," says Kate Souza, PR & internal communications specialist for Charles River Apparel (*asi/44620*), "while an expensive jacket would have special features like a detachable hood, bonded fabrics and branded zippers."

The level of performance features can also vary depending on the jacket. Although each price level can boast impressive specs, "a less expensive jacket may be water-resistant versus a more expensive item that will have true waterproof properties and be more breathable," says Souza. This can make a significant difference for the end-user, depending on whether they are the person handing the car keys off to the valet before ducking into a dry, cozy restaurant, or the valet themselves, assaulted by driving rain as they rush to retrieve a Hummer.

With that in mind, straight line comparisons of jackets prove difficult. Even if one jacket boasts a higher price point and more features, it may not be as well-suited as another jacket with different properties. When evaluating the worth of a piece of

"Many times the branded jacket is not better, but it has a higher perceived value and thus can bring in the higher-priced purchase."

Jane Munro,
As You Wish Promotions (*asi/125450*)

outerwear anywhere along the price scale, advises Chris Turner, vice president of sales for Ash City (*asi/37143*), "first and foremost it's the level of the components you put into a garment."

Customer Choice

For those customers fixated on a budget item, there may not be a lot you can do to kick their purchase up to the next level. But despair not. Opportunities to upsell on these items improve depending on whom the client is targeting. Nigro suggests a few questions to help determine what the upsell potential is for a jacket: "Does it need to be warm at 25° Fahrenheit? Does it need to be waterproof? Who's wearing it?"

Consider that last question. If the client is simply trying to outfit rank-and-file employees, it may be tricky to angle for more features than are really necessary, at least if the item is destined to become merely functional uniform apparel. But "if the client or employees are high-end or executive, that's a whole other ball of wax," Nigro says. "Then you can laser-etch a wooden hanger and every time they put that jacket back in the closet, they're going to think of your brand. It's a good feeling that is worth huge points."

Determining customers' needs is, of course, the science that separates the men from the boys when it comes to selling such serious gear. Turner points out that "there are a lot of generic components in the marketplace that perform to almost the same standard" as those found in higher-end, brand-name apparel. But just because you can have it doesn't mean you need it. "Typically, we don't need to put in that same high-end performance – it's like taking a Formula One racing car to go to and from work every day," says Turner. "But if you're going skiing, you might want to have that high-end retail Gore-Tex jacket."

What about when clients want that Ferrari performance just to putter around the street? "Sometimes the client has preferences that they want to meet," Munro says, "and will be very specific. That makes the transaction very easy, whereas if a client isn't specific, it can take quite a lot of time and samples until a choice is made."

That equates to staying warm ("We women hate being cold in New England," points out Nigro, who is based in Foxboro, MA), which doesn't have to mean losing a sense of style. Once all those impressive performance features kick in, there might be a tendency to forget the sexier aspects of outerwear.

"Some companies treat a woman's body like a box," Nigro says. "The cuts are awful, they are stiff and uncomfortable, they aren't flattering. It can feel like they're just putting insulation on you." So maybe all the kinks aren't quite worked out yet, but if there are some suppliers who still don't quite nail it, there are many more who do.

With each season, the lag between the promotional industry and retail shrinks further. As a result, the price-option grid gets wider, wilder and more fraught with the demands of customers who are wiser and more deeply informed than ever before. "Today's consumer wants it all," says Turner. Too true. It's up to the distributors to give it to them.

Chuck Zak is a staff writer for Wearables.

THE EXTRA MILE

Distributors who go above and beyond can earn blockbuster deals and long-term client relationships.

BY CHRISTOPHER RUVO

A lot of distributors say they go the extra mile for clients. Tom Savio recently went an extra 1,500 for one of his.

Faced with an imminent deadline, the owner of Caliendo Savio Enterprises (*asi/155807*) packed up an order, hopped a flight from Wisconsin to Miami and hand-delivered 150 jackets for a client's golf tournament.

Savio was compelled to make the last-ditch delivery after a string of mishaps beyond CSE's control nearly torpedoed the sale. First, the client ordered late. Then, the supplier mis-shipped the first jacket batch and short-shipped the second. By the time CSE got all of the correct goods in-house and embroidered, it was too late to make even the late pick-up at the airport for overnight freight. That was a problem, since the client needed the jackets the next day.

With the primary sales rep for the account out of town at a convention, Savio volunteered to buy a plane ticket and make the delivery. The client – one of CSE's 10 biggest – got its jackets on time. "The true test of a company," says CSE's Chief Operating Officer Mark Ziskind, "is not in how day-to-day business is handled, but in how quickly and effectively problems are resolved."

It's in those instances – the times when distributors go above and beyond – when clients find out who they can truly count on. While doing so can be stressful, inconvenient and even expensive, it can earn a lucrative deal and help solidify a relationship with a valuable client for the long haul.

Strangers On A Train

Nina Shatz was on a train from Boston to New York, trying to mind her own business. But she couldn't help but take notice of the frazzled woman next to her. Ashen-faced, the woman was muttering, arguing with someone on the phone, and frantically finger-stabbing her laptop's keyboard. From the snippets she heard, Shatz ascertained that something had gone terribly wrong with an order of imprinted canvas bags.

Sensing opportunity, Shatz – the director of sales at Canton, MA-based Red Ball Promotions (*asi/346567*) – introduced herself and told the woman she might be able to help. The

5,000

The number of canvas bags Nina Shatz sourced and got imprinted in a matter of hours for a stranger she'd met on the train.

full story then emerged: The woman was the owner of a high-powered advertising agency. The agency had ordered 5,000 canvas bags for an event for one of its biggest clients – Gerber. Unfortunately, someone had packaged the bags while the imprints were still wet, effectively destroying the product. And the biggest kicker? The woman needed all 5,000 bags for a next-day event. Says Shatz: “She was very worried that she was going to lose her client.”

But the Red Ball sales director wasn't about to let that happen. Dropping everything else, Shatz called LBU Inc. (*asi/65952*), a supplier of bags based in New Jersey, not far from where the event was taking place. Shatz explained the situation and asked if the supplier had the necessary number of bags to meet the ad agency's need. Fate smiled, and indeed the bags were in. Because of Shatz's strong working relation-

ship with LBU, the supplier agreed to flip the order in less than 24 hours. Committed to seeing the deal through, Shatz got the artwork over and coordinated the details of the project with the supplier. When the next day rolled around, Gerber had its bags.

“She called me a miracle worker,” says Shatz of the agency's owner, who became a loyal client. “If you put yourself out there for people and have good relationships with vendors you can count on, more often than not your clients will be happy.”

To China With Love

Some salespeople proclaim they would go around the world for their clients. Brandon Kennedy literally did.

To ensure a \$700,000 order of custom apparel for an international nonprofit organization was produced without a hitch, Kennedy flew to a factory in China to personally inspect the sportswear while it was in production. It was a good thing he did. While there, the owner of Bakersfield, CA-based Proforma Progressive Marketing (*asi/490211*) caught and corrected several issues pre-production. Had he remained stateside and hoped for the best, the cut-and-sew project, which needed to be completed within a month's time frame, would have born costly errors. “It was imperative for me to make the trip,” says Kennedy, who spent a week overseas.

The fact that he would voluntarily jet across the Pacific to guarantee that quality clothes would be delivered by deadline was a driving reason the client decided to work with him in the first place. “They saw the lengths I was willing to go and that made a big difference,” he says. Indeed, Kennedy distinguished himself from the start on this deal, using his expertise and resources to come up with retail-inspired custom shirts, shorts and more, all of which

24 HOURS

The time Brandon Kennedy spent on an airplane flying to and from China – a trip he made to ensure production of a massive custom apparel order went perfectly.

were to be given to end-users as part of a wellness initiative. “I wanted it to be custom apparel pieces so I didn't corner myself into being a commodity provider,” says Kennedy. “Once the client saw that what we were suggesting was cool and unique, they were on board.”

All of Kennedy's front-end hustle is poised to pay off big time. Not only did he secure the \$700,000 initial order – he expects re-orders every three to four months. Says Kennedy: “When you take the commodity aspect out of the selling process and exceed the client's expectations with service, you're going to have success.”

\$37,000

The amount a company spent with Peggy Peugh over just a few months after she pulled out all the stops to deliver the perfect shirt in a difficult-to-find hue of blue.

Into The Blue

What's in a shade of blue? That may sound like an abstract philosophy class question, but the answer for Peggy Peugh was real-world practical: the difference between sales success and failure.

Not long ago, Peugh tirelessly pursued a shirt in a difficult-to-find hue of blue for a client – a study in persistence that (because of its ultimate success) demonstrates how sticking to a difficult project can pay off handsomely in the end.

Through a referral, Peugh, an account executive at Sterling, IL-based HALO Branded Solutions (*asi/356000*), earned the opportunity to provide logoed shirts to a Japanese manufacturing company. The client needed the 200 shirts for employees to wear at the grand opening of a plant in Illinois – an event that would be attended by corporate dignitaries from Japan as well as Illinois state officials.

While the project sounded straightforward, it was complicated by the fact that the company was emphatic that the shirt color had to be an exact match of the corporate color – a particular blue – worn in Japan. “The Japanese

colors are different from our PMS colors, and it became very difficult to find a match,” says Peugh. Over the course of several meetings, she showed the client 15 to 20 different shirt samples, none of which were quite right in color or style.

While Peugh feared she was going to lose the sale, she nonetheless persisted. And then it happened: She found an Oxford shirt the company loved which was also the correct blue. The monkey wrench? It had long sleeves, and the grand opening was outdoors in June. Frustrated but resourceful, Peugh pulled out her final stop: She asked the supplier if the shirts could be cut into short sleeves. She was in luck; it could be done.

The manufacturing company got the shirts in the correct color with short sleeves for its event. And Peugh had established herself as a valuable go-to resource for the company’s buyers. In the handful of months following that first deal, the client spent about \$37,000 with Peugh – a tally that’s sure to keep rising. “I now have their entire wearables program,” she says. “I’ve been repeating uniform orders with them frequently.”

It Takes A Family

Scooter O’Cain is a friendly Southern gentleman, but you’ll get his blood boiling in a hurry if you don’t take him seriously when he says that Geiger (*asi/202900*) and its preferred suppliers are a family. “If it weren’t true,” says O’Cain, director at Chapin, SC-based Geiger O’Cain Advertising, “we wouldn’t have been able to do this.”

“This” was an order of polo shirts for an international manufacturing client – an order that seemed doomed after a shipping mistake. But thanks to a collaborative effort between Geiger personnel, SanMar (*asi/84863*) and Emerald City Embroidery, the client received its shirts on time for an important annual trade show.

While the order consisted of only 70 shirts, it was complicated by the fact that the wearables had to be shipped to different locations across the country. The problem reared when the decorator who embellished the logos mistakenly shipped the whole order by ground;

some of the pieces needed to be air-shipped since their destinations were more than a two-day drive from South Carolina. Fortunately, O’Cain’s office manager Renee Richardson caught the mistake. The trade show was just days away. “We felt nauseous,” says Richardson.

Nonetheless, the O’Cain team immediately started hustling to find a solution. Amid the tumult it became clear that getting a new batch of shirts decorated and shipped on time was going to be difficult. Still, O’Cain suspected Laura Holt, Geiger’s West region vice president, might be able to help. He was right.

Holt happened to be attending a trade show in Seattle – the backyard of SanMar, the supplier from which O’Cain had ordered the shirts. After learning of O’Cain’s plight, Holt went to the SanMar booth to see what could be done. The supplier was happy to help, not

LESS THAN A DAY

The time it took Scooter O’Cain and others in the Geiger (*asi/202900*) family to orchestrate a cross-country collaboration with SanMar (*asi/84863*) and Emerald City Embroidery that ultimately saved an apparel order, which had seemed doomed to miss a client’s event date following a shipping mistake.

only coming through with the OGIO polos, but also connecting the Geiger team with an apparel decorator near Seattle that could embroider them.

Next, Holt and Tara Praven (a Seattle-area Geiger office manager) drove to SanMar, picked up the shirts and personally delivered them to Emerald City Embroidery. Back in South Carolina, Richardson made a slew of phone calls to the intended shirt recipients, finding out if they needed the polos mailed to different locations in order to have them on time. She then speedily sent the shipping information – along with the embroidery files – to Emerald, which deftly stitched the logos and correctly shipped the shirts.

In the end, employees for the client – one that spends more than \$1 million annually with O’Cain – had their polos for the show.

MEETING THE DEMAND

Crazy client demands are unfortunately nothing new for distributors. Here are a few tips for how to handle over-the-top requests:

Determine The Client’s Real Goal: First, thank buyers for coming to you. Then try to identify their underlying need – the objective they’re trying to accomplish, says Deborah Gallant, owner of Baltimore-based Bold Business Works, which consults with businesses in a range of industries. If you probe further, you may find the client’s goal can be accomplished without having to pull a miracle order out of thin air.

Don’t Yea or Nay Right Away: Before dismissing a client’s idea as unfeasible, ask if they can give you a short window of time to see what can be done, says Gallant. This will give you a chance to determine if what’s being requested is truly undoable.

Provide Alternatives: If a client’s request simply can’t be accomplished, call back and honestly say so much – but don’t do so empty-handed. Instead, present creative alternatives that can still help buyers achieve their objectives. “You can always find something that will work,” says Kathy Whitburn, a strategic marketing consultant for American Solutions for Business (*asi/120075*).



Says O'Cain: "I'm proud I can say we've never missed an event date."

Website Wonders

Kathy Whitburn is fearless. Nothing intimidates the strategic marketing consultant for American Solutions for Business (*asi/120075*). And that assuredness, which translates into a willingness to do whatever it takes to complete a project for a client, is an essential reason why the 2012 *Counselor* magazine Hot Lister has carved such a successful sales career.

Whitburn's tenacity on behalf of her clients was evident on a daunting project she executed for a health-care association last year. In mid-September, the organization asked Whitburn to create a secure, password-protected website from which its 5,100 members could order logoed apparel and other products. The site, which needed to feature a number of bells and whistles, had to be completed so the client could launch it for members at a national conference.

That gave Whitburn only a month to com-

plete the project. In the few weeks she had, she identified a range of apparel and hard goods to stock on the website. It was no small feat, as the products had to be carefully selected to ensure they would appeal to association members. Whitburn also performed extensive research to find a reliable decorator – Louis-

ABOUT 4 WEEKS

The tight time frame Kathy Whitburn had to create a turnkey e-commerce website featuring a range of products for a large health-care industry association.

ville, KY-based Stitch Designers (*asi/741145*) – that would quickly digitize logos and perform sew-outs after association members placed orders. This was necessary to meet the fast turnaround time for member orders that the client desired.

Whitburn determined what was needed to meet the association's technological demands

for the site. Those included having the solution built into the client's current website with a mechanism for allowing members to upload their logos and place orders online. For the nuts and bolts of the site construction, Whitburn partnered with ASI, which used its ESP Websites technology to quickly create a solution that Whitburn personalized for her client.

While the website was finished by the Oct. 18 deadline, the client had a list of "20 or so" minor tweaks it needed completed within several days. Whitburn made the changes by the deadline, and the site launched at the client's conference. Within days, Whitburn already had more than 30 opportunities from the association's members. "There is a lot of potential," says Whitburn, who credits her team at ASB and others for helping her complete a quality site on time. "If I were to capture only 10% of their member base and they each ordered an average of \$1,000, that's a half-million-dollar account."

Christopher Ruvo is a staff writer for Wearables.

coming next issue

what's coming up in the March issue of *Wearables*



A World of Color

Bold, bright, nuanced, neutral – color of every type is all the rage in fashion. Our Spring Fashion Preview taps into the color craze to spotlight the rules you should pay heed to and the trends you should follow.

Pressing Engagement

Looking for that unique little something to push your customer engagement over the top? We spotlight the exceptional things that distributors are doing that have clients buying from them again and again.

A Light Touch

When the weather runs warm and cool, light jackets prove the perfect versatile item to get everybody through the day (and night). Our Hot Products showcase features the leading styles from this category.

Tension or Retention?

Time and money are just two of the major expenditures distributors must make when they lose good employees. We explore the secrets for good employee retention that help create significant savings in the long run.

And much, much more!



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ARTWORK

Decoding the secrets of creative decorated apparel

BY SARA LAVENDUSKI

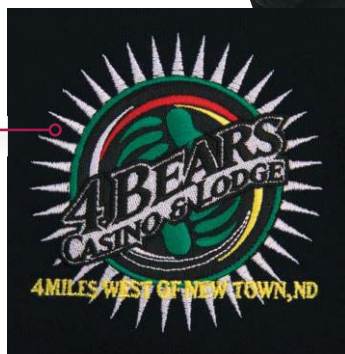
Bearing the Cost

President Mike Little and his decorating team at Team Mates Inc. (*asi/90674*; circle 126 on Free Info Card) recently designed 290 jackets for employees of 4 Bears Casino & Lodge in New Town, ND. The original jacket back design called for it all to be embroidered. But because it would have been so costly to embroider the logo so big, Little instead used a twill patch, also known as tackle twill. These fabric patches are heat-applied and then sewn to the garment for reinforcement. "This reduces cost and sewing time," says Little, whose company is based in Eagan, MN. "We incorporate our two primary media – thread and twill – into the design and are often able to save a good amount of money."

"All of the blank areas inside the zigzag stitching became twill, and the overall stitch count was dropped to 85,000 stitches," says Little. "We used twill to remove all of the fill stitches. The center of it was converted to twill to save additional thread."



"The original design was 190,000 stitches," Little explains. "The two crest designs appear identical, but the large jacket design has a twill background substituted for the sewn stitches."

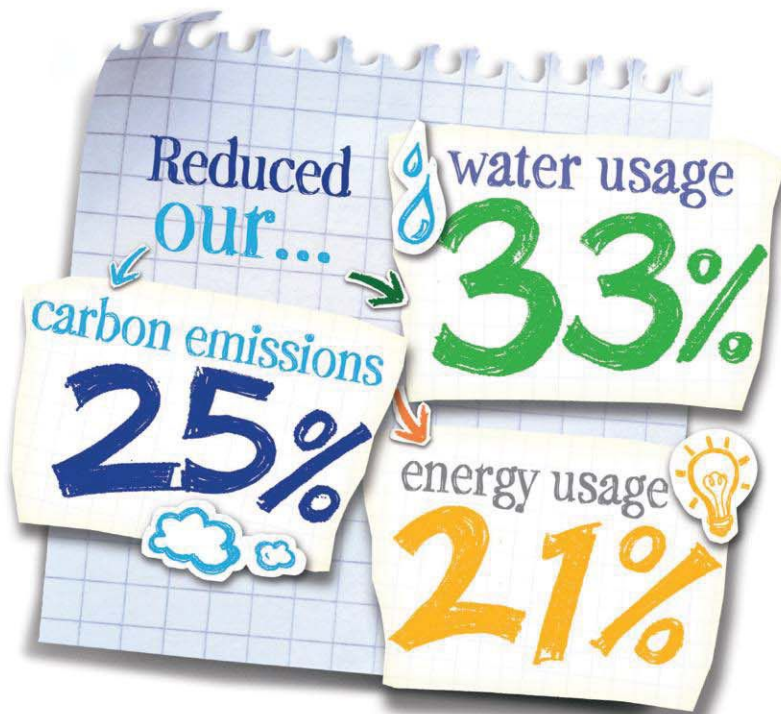


Overall, Team Mates was able to cut the job cost in half and save the client a huge amount of money. "We were able to reduce the cost by enough that the jackets, each of which included one embroidered crest and one large thread/twill design on the back, were economically affordable and didn't lose any of the effect or size," says Little.

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