

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO LOGO EMBROIDERY FOR CUSTOM APPAREL



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Manufacturers of Decorated Apparel

INTRODUCTION

Embroider's craft origin gives it a air of refinement, elegance, and respectability. For this reason, designers utilize embroidery for custom embellishment in many applications from functional uniforms to high fashion. Technology advances in the embroidery industry have made high quality custom garments an affordable option for even more casual affairs like golf tournaments and trendy retail items. These days, we add versatility to the list of words that describe embroidery.

Embroidery is beautiful, no question about that. As with any art form, it is most successful when you work with the material and process. By understanding the advantages and limitations of embroidery, you can go into your custom apparel project with confidence that the finished product will be nothing short of remarkable. This guide will equip you with a strong foundation in embroidery basics from art that works, fabric options, and thread choices through the ordering process.



ART



Illustrator vector file for embroidery.

In general, the embroidery art department can accept any type of artwork you provide right down to a sketch on a napkin. The important thing to remember is this: the better the art, the better the embroidery. The process for converting artwork to embroidery is called digitizing and the artists that do it are called - you guessed it - digitizers. Basically, digitizing is redrawing a logo or design as stitches in a special embroidery software program designed to do just that. Cleaner, more exact digital files allow the digitizer to be more exact with the stitch placement. The stitch instructions are saved to a disk by a digitizer. An operator takes the disk and inserts it into the embroidery machine, which reads the instructions.

The ideal formats are either Adobe Illustrator files (ai, eps, pdf) or high resolution Adobe Photoshop files (psd, eps, tiff, jpg). Chances are, your digitizer can work with any other file type, Microsoft Word, for example, but there will likely be less art feed incurred in order to redraw or re-create the image so the image can be cleanly digitized.

If your artwork involves lettering, you'll want to be sure the smallest letter is at least 1/4" tall. Smaller lettering will look messy or squashed. Super fine detail often does not translate well to embroidery. This can really only be assessed on a case by case basis. Should you have any questions about how well your logo or design with sew, just ask your decorator. Embroidery experts can help you make adjustments to maintain the integrity of your image or logo while improving the quality of embroidery.



Logo redrawn as stitches with text added.



FABRICS

Before we get into various fabric types for embroidery, there is a term you should be familiar with - backing. Backing is a specialized piece of fabric used as a foundation for stabilizing embroidery stitches. Fabric, by nature, is very flexible. Backing has a stiffness and gives the stitches something stable to hold on to. There are various types of backing for different fabrics and purposes. You don't need to worry about selecting the proper backing. The embroidery experts will do that for you. Backing comes in white for light garments and black for dark garments to reduce visibility. In most cases, the backing is undetectable.

Just about any fabric can be embroidered. Your decoration rep, digitizer, and embroidery machine operator are key in making sure the art is prepped and garment is sewn for the best results on whichever fabric you choose. Sturdy fabrics like twill and canvas tend to produce the best embroidery. Examples of apparel and accessories that are twill or canvas are work shirts, oxfords, caps, and bags or totes of all kinds. Many caps and bags are sturdy enough that the use of backing is not even necessary.

The fabrics least suited for embroidery are thin or flimsy fabrics like silk, rayon, or super fine t-shirts. Holes from the sewing needle are likely to show on these very fine fabrics. Backing can be visibly noticeable on these garments, especially if they are white or light in color.



THREAD

There are two main thread types used for embroidery. They are rayon and polyester. Each type of thread has its advantages and is selected based on the logo or design and type of fabric to be sewn.

Rayon thread is shiny and smooth. It has a soft finish and is best for more delicate or high end clothing including corporate apparel, polos, and garments intended for retail sale.

Polyester thread is more of a utilitarian thread and is used more often in uniforms for sports teams or industrial industries. It has a more matte appearance and is durable and strong. Polyester thread is also known for its ability to withstand bleaching, detergent, and hot water.

Most designers and graphic artists refer to Pantone colors when assigning specific colors in logos and art files. However, not all Pantone colors are available in threads. Chances are there is a thread color that will make a close match to the Pantone color that has been called out.

Thread manufacturers provide thread books that have a quick reference chart for Pantone conversion if you have specific Pantones selected. You can always consult with your decorator and even stop in to view the book and select from the thread colors that are available. There are even specialty thread options you may not know about, such as metallic, rainbow, color-changing, reflective, neon, and glow-in-the-dark.



STITCHES



There are 3 types of stitching used in embroidery. Each type of stitch has a different function and has a different look.

Satin Stitch - This is the most common stitch type. It is used for most lettering and design outlines. It's sturdy and can hold some detail.

Fill Stitch - This is the most utilitarian of all stitches. It is most efficient and economical for covering large fill areas. This stitch is also used to create an underlay or foundation for flimsy material like silk or rayon, and can be used to create a foundation on high pile fleece - the fuzzy type fleece - to help maintain detail.

The Nuclear University logo at the top left shows the use of satin and fill stitches. The text, outline, and details are satin stitches. The background blue and white areas in the shield are fill stitches.



Walking Stitch - Fine detail is where the walking stitch comes in. This type of stitch can resemble the dashed line look of hand sewing that is so prevalent in contemporary retail and fashion. It is also referred to as a running stitch. This type of stitch is shown at bottom left.

Embroidery logos are often digitized to incorporate all three stitch types for the best quality application.





PROCESS

Now that we've covered the basics of embroidery, let's take a quick look at what you can expect from the ordering process. The following is a typical scenario for ordering custom embroidered apparel and accessories.

1. Price Quote. Start with a price quote - this will not only make sure that you are staying within the budget for your project, but it is also an opportunity to troubleshoot your art and any garment obstacles. To request a quote, have these pieces of info available:

- Garment type that you would like decorated, If you have exact style number, product or brand, go ahead and specify.
- Quantity of items including a breakdown of sizes.
- Final artfile or description of art that you would like crated. Include sizing if you have a preference.
- Location of embroidery on the garment. For example, left chest on polo, or center of pocket on bag.
- Folding, finishing, and fulfillment. Need the shirts folded? Tagged? Bar-coded? How would you like them shipped? The quoting phase of your project is the perfect time to find out what other services your decorator offers.

2. Submit the Order. Make any changes you'd like to the art, garment, quantity, or services provided and then pull the trigger. Your decorator should have most of your order info at this point. You may just need to tie up a few loose ends.

3. Digitizing and Sew Out. The embroidery art department will digitize your logo for you. Most reputable decoration companies will offer a sewn sample swatch or proof for your approval before sewing the entire order. If this is not offered, you may want to request a proof, sample, or digital mock-up prior to approving your order.

4. Production. Once you have given the thumbs up, the embroidery house or decorator does the rest!

