
Embroidery and DTG Marketing Guide

Starting your business off with both an Embroidery Machine and a Summit DTG Direct to Garment printer is one of the best decisions you will make. It gives you the opportunity to go after any market or niche with the ability to capture at least 90% of their needs.

There are going to be requests for regular silk screening, promotional items that you can't print, maybe stickers, signs, etc. However the real money is in the clothing and larger promotional items you *can* embroider and print.

When marketing your new abilities you need to stress the fact that you can do both embroidery and dtg printing. Then take the time to in pre-embroider and pre-print some products (hats, tshirts, bandanas) with the logo of some local groups, companies, clubs and businesses that you'd like to solicit business from. Drop by the group or business to offer your free gift (one or two shirts or bandanas – if you give them too many, they won't have any need to order from you!)

Embroidery and DTG Marketing 101

Have you ever wondered why some technically superior decorators go out of business while mediocre ones make healthy profits? Often, the answer is marketing.

An ineffective or non-existent marketing program can doom even the best business, while a strategic marketing effort is essential to success. So why don't more decorators develop and implement a marketing plan? Perhaps they think that if their work is technically accurate and looks good, clients will beat down their doors. Unfortunately, it usually doesn't work that way.

A carefully thought-out marketing plan, however, can increase your sales. A planned marketing approach helps you sell an identified product at a predictable gross sales level. Before you create a marketing plan, be sure you've determined what you'll sell, how you'll sell it and who you'll sell it to. Until you've made those decisions, you and your salespeople are just spinning your wheels.

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Many business owners make the mistake of confusing marketing with sales. Although the two functions are intimately connected, there's a distinct difference between them.

Marketing is identifying target clients and developing strategies to sell your products to them. Good marketing means keeping your name in the customer's mind so when he has a need, your company is the first one he calls.

Sales involves implementing such strategies and focusing on those customers who can bring the highest return on investment. The information gathered about potential clients will help you develop a plan to get you headed in the right direction. Without such knowledge, you are forced to use hit or miss methods to identify and sell to potential clients.

Identifying the Customer

The first step in developing a marketing plan is to identify the target customer. It's important to focus on a certain category of customer and develop a plan to make that group aware of your business. Don't take a shotgun approach by sending out marketing materials and hoping they land in the right hands. This is a waste of time and money.

Instead, identify those customers who have the greatest likelihood of being a successful, profitable partner with you, and concentrate your efforts on them. A shotgun approach may net one client who places a \$50 order. However, a marketing piece targeting 10K race directors may land several \$5,000 orders.

Look at the types of companies you're doing business with and identify those that are the most profitable, require lowest maintenance on your part and offer the highest return. This is the ideal market segment in which you want to expand.

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Once you've identified that market segment, look at the demographics of customers you already have in that segment. Then find new clients with similar characteristics.

If you have a customer who meets the above criteria and spends, say \$5,000 a year, it's a safe bet that within 50 miles you'll find another company with an identical profile.

It is relatively easy to purchase information about companies you're interested in contacting. Just provide criteria about your target market to a sales leads or list Management Company, which will check its database and compile a list of matching firms. You may pay as much as \$3 to \$10 per name, but you'll have a list of what may become your most profitable customers.

Reaching the Client

With your list of target customers in hand, the next move is determining how to reach them. Try the following proven, five-step promotional technique:

First, mail an introductory letter from your company's owner or president.

Second, within 10 days to three weeks, follow up with another piece reinforcing your desire to do business with them.

Third, send a "lumpy envelope"—a printed piece with a promotional product included. The printed piece might include a limited-time offer to waive setup charges or provide free digitizing. It should also have a theme, a call to action and a short list of products and services you offer. The promo product should be something the target customer will put on his desk and see repeatedly, increasing your name awareness.

By the third mailing, people truly interested in your company will have responded. Don't offend uninterested people and waste money by continuing to send them materials.

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The fourth step is a personal visit, during which you show samples and collect information on the company's needs, number of employees, type of business, etc. Ideally the visit results in at least a small sample order.

The last step, a letter mailed shortly after the order is filled, thanks them for the order and requests feedback. Ask them, "How did we do? What can we continue to do for you?"

Strategically, you should have two or three promotions like this going on at the same time, but targeting different markets. The goal is to diversify your prospects because typically you will enjoy wild success in one market, note average performance in another and bomb completely in a third.

Each market has a unique cycle. Tapping into several markets with different cycles can continually bring in business during the year. For example, you may do business with high school marching bands. During the school year, bands usually participate in an event every other weekend and frequently need T-shirts printed with special designs. But before school is out, you should identify another market, perhaps 10K race directors, who will send sales your way during your slower months. By diversifying your target markets, you can fill holes in your production schedule throughout the year.

Audit and Review

Determine whether your marketing plan meeting is expectations. By reviewing your marketing plan, you can decide whether it was effective and how you can improve future efforts. This process is invaluable because it lays the groundwork for possible changes.

With marketing, your goal is to help customers promote their ideas using decorated apparel—whether it be a product rollout at a trade show, an anniversary promotion or a grand opening event. By identifying your target customers, reaching them, getting customer feedback and evaluating your efforts, you can become an invaluable resource to your clients—which spells success for your business.

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Existing Business

If you have an existing business, there is no need to look further than your existing customer base. Everyday you are delivering orders or servicing your customers; why not add a little advertisement in the form of a printed shirt to the order? Create a few good designs for the major holidays, print them on t-shirts, then include one with every order you deliver. Make sure you put your logo on the shirt (small is okay) and include a brief note “introducing” your customers to the direct to garment process, maybe even offer a discount on their first direct to garment order for a limited time if they mention the note you included. If you want a more generic approach (for times other than the holiday season), try coming up with a collage design that shows a family reunion, little league sports team, In Memory Of, Look Who’s etc.. Any type of event that may merit a t-shirt to commemorate it would be good on this shirt. Use your imagination and watch the orders start coming in.

If you are starting up a business with the direct to garment printer and embroidery machine, more than likely you had some direction prior to your purchase. It doesn’t hurt to “fish” a bit for more business, however. If you have a passion (soccer, football, fishing, dogs, cats, etc.), try to find a local group that will provide a venue for you show custom t-shirts that you can produce either onsite or by taking orders. Going to a dog show or a custom car show with a “generic” custom shirt, a digital camera and an order pad can be a good way to get orders. Make sure to include enough profit in the order to be able to Priority Mail the finished garment to the customer.

You can also try taking out ads in small, local periodicals as well – they are usually inexpensive and target specific geographic areas or demographics. If your business model is more business to business (B2B) – like promotional products companies – then a slightly different approach will work. Invest in one of the inexpensive business card scanners (they are available for less than \$150) and simply pick up business cards from prospective clients and generate a custom shirt with their logo on it and bring it in to them. This is a great ice breaker and can very easily open doors for you, maybe for even more business other than just your direct to garment printer.

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With a little cleanup you may also be able to pull this feat off from potential customers' websites (be aware that most web graphics are only 72 DPI – so you may need to do a bit of magic with your graphic software). These are not the only ways to make money with your DTG and embroidery machine, but they are a good start. If you notice one thing – all of these methods involve actually printing a sample shirt and showing or giving it to a prospective client. They need to be sold on this process, just as you were when you bought your machines. Odds are that you requested and received a sample prior to making the commitment to “go digital”. Besides, it's good for your machines to print and embroider everyday, so why not turn maintenance into advertisement!

Wearing Your Work

The number one rule in marketing your decorating business is wearing your work. The second is putting business cards in or on all of the products you embellish.

In this industry, some of your best advertising is through word of mouth. Something as simple as picking up your child at basketball practice can lead to thousands of dollars in sales.

True Story from D.A. in Lake George, NY :

I picked up my kid at practice not to long ago, of course wearing my embroidered polo shirt with my business name and logo on it. The coach saw my shirt and asked if I could give him a quote for 20 bags and hats embroidered for the team. I gave him a price the next day and got the order. When the parents saw the work and noticed my business card in the bag, they inquired about having shirts embroidered to support their kids and the team.

Now this is just the tip of the iceberg. When team pictures came along, I took that team picture and printed it on a shirt

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using my direct to garment printer and wore it to the game. Parents saw it and couldn't resist. I was taking orders in between innings.

One of the kids parents owns a car dealership in town and with all the commotion surrounding me, inquired about making promotional shirts. Before you know it, I'm delivering 500 printed t-shirts and getting connections with other dealers in the area. The domino effect is endless and that steady stream of business came from picking up my child from baseball practice. Any embroiderer or screenprinter who takes the time to make garments for themselves can tell the same...It's as simple as wearing your work.

Using templates for marketing

To make marketing your business easier, design some T-shirt templates as a sales aid. It can save a tremendous amount of work and make the whole custom advertizing process take up less time. In fact, this also allows you to test different approaches to see what works best. You'll know right away when a prospect sees the design placed on a template whether they are impressed or not.

Tweak that template and find the one that gets the best results and use it over and over again. This also carries over to taking orders when they become your customers. Besides a T-shirt template working as a sales aid, it can liberate the shop designer to work on artwork for other jobs and still leave the sales team with the tools they need to complete client approval. The process can be almost automatic with every job, and it also helps in copyrighting artwork, organizing printer guides and eventually it becomes an effective press reference for placement and colors.

The steps for creating a T-shirt template are surprisingly simple. Once it's done, it will probably be used so often that you will find it indispensable within a week or so. All you have to do to start is find the most common shirt forms that you use, create simple outlines of them in CorelDraw or

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Adobe Illustrator, organize them for quick retrieval and then add any extra information or logos.

The uses for well-designed T-shirt templates are as numerous as the marketing and presentations that a busy shop can think of. Properly creating, organizing and utilizing a well-made T-shirt template will save hours every month and create a standard that is very professional and also a great sales tool.