

The Staples logo, featuring the word "STAPLES" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a red rectangular background.

Promotional
Products®



SmartPapers™

At Staples Promotional Products, we're dedicated to helping you meet your marketing and promotional goals. That's why we've developed our exclusive SmartPapers™, expert guides that address real world issues facing businesses in every industry.

Your guide to popular apparel decoration techniques

When you think of promotional apparel, what comes to mind? A T-Shirt with a design screen printed on the front? A polo shirt with a logo embroidered on the left chest? What about a jacket with a small logo or message digitally applied on the sleeve? The possibilities are limitless when it comes to customizing bags, caps and clothing for your brand. In fact, there are so many choices that the decision can be overwhelming.

There are many ways to decorate apparel. This document will provide you with a greater understanding of the most popular apparel decoration methods – embroidery, screen print and digital transfer – and when to use them for your projects and promotions.

Increasing Popularity

Embroidery and screen printing remain the most prominent decoration types, but direct-to-garment (5% increase compared to last year) and sublimation (8% increase) have posted considerable gains in the span of a year.

Embroidery	92%
Screen printing	87%
Heat transfer	58%
Direct-to-garment	41%
Sublimation	40%
Patches and emblems	40%
Appliqué	32%
Vinyl (cut) letters/designs	32%
Emboss/Deboss	27%
Rhinestone/Crystals	25%
Laser Etching	23%
Pad printing	22%
Reverse Appliqué	11%

Embroidery

What is it? Embroidery is the method of decorating fabric using a needle and thread or yarn. This traditional method for customizing apparel can be done by hand. However, professional embroidery is now performed by large machines.

Ideal For

- Polo shirts
- Caps
- Bags
- Blankets
- Sweatshirts



Adds Texture



Click for a virtual tour of our decoration facility.

Embroidery Benefits

- Because the process is so intricate, embroidery carries a high perceived value with end users
- Adds texture
- Can be combined with other decoration methods for a more fashion-forward effect

Embroidery Considerations

- Difficult for small lettering and fine details
- Very large embroidered logos can become heavy and sag

The Staples Promotional Products decoration centers in Orange City and Marcus, Iowa, use Barudan embroidery machines, which are the top of line when it comes to embroidery equipment. These extremely efficient, well-built machines produced approximately 15 billion stitches for our clients last year. Fun fact: A single embroidered product includes about 5,000 stitches.

Screen Print

What is it? The process of screen printing, sometimes referred to as silk screening, involves moving ink through a fine mesh screen. The screen is masked in areas where no ink is desired. The item is then sent on a conveyor belt through a heat tunnel to dry or cure the ink. Properly cured screen printed inks will last on a garment or other item through many washes and heavy wear.

Staples Promotional Products screen printed about 8 million items last year at our decoration facility in Orange City, Iowa. Our screen print experts utilize 12 automatic and 4 manual presses. We use M&R presses, the best known brand of professional screen printing equipment available.



Foil Application



Glitter Ink



Puff Ink

Ideal For

- T-shirts
- Bags
- Sports apparel
- Almost anything

Screen Print Benefits

- With specialty inks and creative placement, screen printed promotional apparel can be very fashion-forward
- Almost any design can be achieved with screen print
- Techniques and inks are being improved every year
- Can be combined with other decoration methods for a more retail effect

Screen Print Considerations

- The more colors included in your design, the more the overall cost per item
- Exact quantities may be difficult to achieve (Industry standard 5% overrun or underrun is typical)

Specialty Inks

- Glitter Ink
- Metallic and Shimmer Ink
- High Density Clear Ink
- Gel Ink
- Foil Application
- Reflective and Glow-in-the-Dark Ink
- Puff Ink

Digital Transfer

What is it? The digital heat seal transfer decoration method uses controlled heat and pressure to thermally bond graphics onto a material's surface. Instead of printing directly onto a fabric, your design is printed on a special material designed to fuse with the garment.

Digital transfer is one of the newer decoration capabilities available in the apparel world, and it is becoming a popular alternative to screen print/embroidery. Staples Promotional Products recently began offering this decoration method at our Marcus decoration center. We have already seen great results and growing demand for digital transfer.



Various fabric options



Unique cap placement options



Unlimited Colors

Ideal For

- Almost any apparel
- Bags
- Caps

Digital Transfer Benefits

- Most affordable way to get unlimited color designs produced, even in low quantities
- Photorealistic results
- Unlimited placement options
- Can be combined with other decoration methods for a more retail effect

Digital Transfer Considerations

- Can be costly with logos larger than 15 square inches
- Logos that are too large can result in an odd texture

Every decoration method can be used to accentuate your logo or brand message. The key to making your brand – and your branded products – look great is choosing a decoration method that complements your project. Your promotional products provider can always advise you, but as you consider your product options, understanding some decoration basics will help you plan.

To get started on your next decorated apparel project, contact your Staples Promotional Products account representative today.