

Pressing Matters

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Going Pro

Heat Press Like a Professional

Profitability is a key component for all businesses. Making the number needed to keep the doors open, pay the employees, and invest in the future are driving forces behind why we do what we do. Naturally, costing and pricing strategy plays into our success in this endeavor, but product strategy does as well.

I've often subscribed to the idea that easy things attract competition. Competition creates price pressure and often a race to the bottom that nets lagging profits or losses on the financial statements.

To truly succeed in any business, it's important to find a place where unique value can be created. Creating unique value must start with a firm understanding of the customer and what drives their decision making on the purchase. In many cases, you'll find that there is more uncontested space in the premium side of the market because many aren't willing to take the risk to exist there. Heat press decorating is no different. Which begs the question, what is the premium market of heat printing?

Premium heat printing on quality garments and bags helps create bigger profits, although the jobs can take longer. (All images courtesy Stahls')



PREMO PRODUCT

In the case of many successful businesses, premium heat printing means elevating the finished product. Since all finished products include a blank item plus a decoration, you can choose to elevate one or both. In the case of apparel blanks, this means going with a premium brand or a higher quality. Try selecting the jacket, bag, or polo with the extra details and premium fabric construction versus the lowest cost solution. In the case of decorating, it may mean selecting elevated finishes and materials or combining products to create unparalleled looks. Often, it's as simple as the logo placement that generates a high-end look. And for a heat decorator, this is a secret weapon that is tough to replicate with other decorating technologies. While there are many ways to create something different, let's get into a practical example of what premium heat pressing may look like:

The Job: Track jackets and bags for a local dance school

The Goal: Create something that stands out at dance competitions

The Delivery: A mixed media four-logo placement track jacket with a bag to match

The above example represents a real scenario. A local dance studio wanted to stand out from the crowd and outfit dancers with something that looks great on stage. While glitter remains a popular finish and one that has been used in the past for jobs like this, the studio owner was interested in what's next. With permission to exercise creativity, we began thinking through materials and finishes that would deliver. The final result is something that was difficult to make but profitable nonetheless.



A bag capped off this premium dance school job.

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Top: While glitter is popular in the dance market, there are other options that help make a blingy job stand out even more. **Above:** The combination of reflective transfers, glitter transfers, and rhinestones added interest while also being practical.



The tonal reflective transfer looks subtle normally, but lights up beautifully when exposed to light.

The jacket was sourced to offer a tailored fit, which would be different from loose-fitting tracksuits of old. With a premium blank product, the art creation began. In following design and apparel trends, I know that the runways at fashion week showed a lot of reflective. The idea of reflective for a decoration finish made a lot of sense for a few reasons. First, the material reflects light back to the source which would create amazing photos and a great look on stage during awards at competitions. Next, reflective would be a real functional material as well. The dancers are often heading out into parking lots and streets during the night time, so the reflective logo would provide an element of safety. After considering this further, it became clear that for some added low-light visibility we would add a cuff print to each sleeve featuring the dance school's initials. Tone on tone, with charcoal reflective would be the right fit against the black fabric of the jacket. Pink reflective, the dance school's color, would be the choice for the primary logo. With reflective imagined as the primary finish, we would need to include something that added a pop during the day. To not depart too far from what seems to be a standard, glitter and rhinestones were selected to complement details within the design.

To coincide with the sale of the new track jacket, a new dance bag was created as well. Since the jackets were the hero piece, the bags needed to coordinate. To accomplish this, the primary pink reflective material was used for the decoration. Now, rather than relying on just a jacket for profit, we increased the value of each sale by completing something relatively easy with a heat press.

The production workflow from cutting the materials, preparing them for application, and heat applying them to a jacket consumed about 5–8 minutes per piece. For those heat printing a lot of T-shirts with screen-printed transfers, you could do 10 shirts in that amount of time. However, the profit of a single, premium jacket can eclipse a typical profit on 10 shirts. When adding in the bag, the profit per set yields tremendous returns. In these scenarios, calculating a profit per hour of machine time can be extremely beneficial and will help to drive future sales and marketing decisions.

While this is one specific example to inspire, there can be many ways to play in the premium end of heat printing. The first step is to find a customer type that values this. Once found, we can start to imagine and create an offer and items that stand out from the crowd. With one job comes more jobs and with more jobs comes a competency. Once a decorator starts to create a competency with high-end looks, it's tough for the next start-up or hobbyist to catch up. Go and decorate like a heat press professional. **PW**



Josh Ellsworth has been on a mission to help GroupeSTAHL customers of all shapes and sizes build their businesses for almost 20 years. Throughout his career, Josh has helped implement heat printing production systems in some of the largest garment factories in the U.S., as well as set up thousands of small businesses with their very first heat press machine. Josh has been with GroupeSTAHL since 1998, most recently holding the position of vice president of Sales, Dealer Channel. Various other positions included roles in maintenance, sales, production and general manager Stahls' CAD-CUT direct, and general manager Stahls' TV.

Zach Ellsworth has been helping heat printers for the last 15 years. From hopeful startups to seasoned professionals, Zach's advice and insight has helped them all increase productivity and profitability. Zach is currently serving as the general manager of Imprintables Warehouse and is focused on his favorite thing: helping decorators succeed.