



FIRST THINGS FIRST, WHAT IS DECORATING?

Decorating is the act of customizing or personalizing a promotional product to display a logo or marketing message on an item.

What are the types of decoration methods?

There are many different types of decoration methods for all types of promotional products.



Embroidery



Screen Printing



Heat Transfer



Embossing/Debossing



Laser Engraving



Custom Patches



Foil Stamping



Digital Printing



3D Puff Embroidery



Pad Printing



Applique Embroidery



Vinyl Transfer

Decoration Methods Guide



www.sundancepromos.com

Don't know how to decide which type of decorating method to use when so many possibilities are available for customized apparel and products?

Each decorating choice has various advantages. In this guide, we'll break down the most common decoration methods so you can make the best possible choice for your business.



TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR EMBROIDERY:



Omni Mens Polo Shirt
Item # MYOKO-MYMVI



Sherpa Blanket Item
SXPEV-LHIHL



Marketplace Jute Tote Bag
Item # BCPBQ-MZZOS



WHAT IS EMBROIDERY?

Embroidery is a decoration method that uses a needle and thread on fabric or other fibrous materials to incorporate a design. First, the logo has to be “digitized”; essentially, this is a process that converts a logo image into a stitch file for an embroidery machine using the specifics of the design’s colors and details. After that, the correct thread colors are selected, a trial stitch out is performed, and embroidery machines are then used to stitch your logo precisely to the requirements in the final digitized file.

Benefits

- There is an added texture to the design.
- The product does not need to be laid flat like in printing, making embroidery suitable for hats and bags.
- The intricate design evokes a high perceived value and sense of professionalism.
- More durable and resistant to damage from washing than most decoration methods.

Cons

- Depending on the level of detail, embroidery can be substantially more expensive than other printing methods.
- Not all designs are suitable for digitizing/embroidery such as intricate designs or gradients.
- You may encounter an added cost for digitizing a logo.
- Embroidery is not suited for large areas.

WHAT IS SCREEN PRINTING?

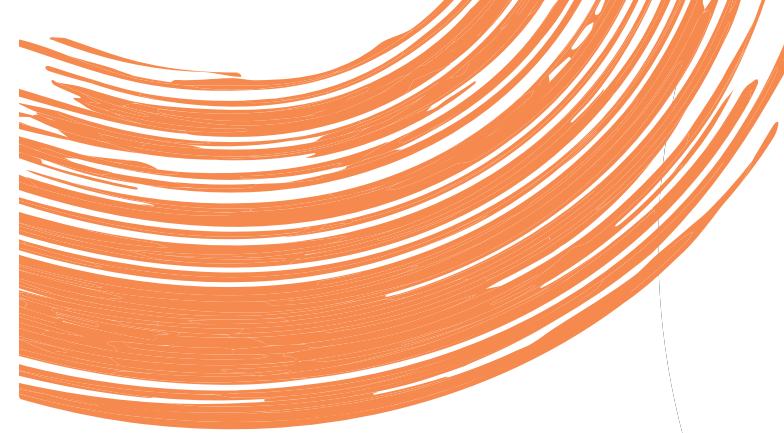
An easy way to think about this is as a photographic stencil process. The most common method of screen printing is to create a stencil on a mesh screen and then apply layers of ink directly onto a product by stamping or scraping the ink on top of the stencil, transferring the logo or design to the print surface underneath. The result is the screen's image transferred to the print surface, except in the areas that are impermeable to the ink. The versatility of this decoration method allows it to be used on a wide variety of items.

Benefits

- Most cost-effective decoration method for larger custom apparel orders.
- Just about any design and ink color can be applied to any product through screen printing.
- Ink is applied thicker than digital printing, making your design more vibrant and easier to see on darker fabrics or surfaces.

Cons

- You may incur additional fees for more than one color.
- Less cost-effective for smaller orders due to extensive set up.
- Screen printing uses a lot of water and is not considered environmentally friendly.



TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR SCREEN PRINTING:



Unisex Cotton T-Shirt
Item # AZODO-MLJFK

Cooling Towel
Item # CBOFP-KUOTP



The Rebel Umbrella
Item # KVPBV-PQCHJ

WHAT IS HEAT TRANSFER PRINTING?

Heat transfer, recognized as digital transfer and thermal printing, stands as an excellent selection for affordable design alternatives, boasting limitless color possibilities for decoration. This type of printing uses heat or pressure to transfer an image to a product or apparel. The two most commonly used methods use vinyl or ink.

Benefits

- Minimal setup costs and equipment make heat transfers ideal for smaller order sizes.
- Affordable individually personalized decoration, such as sports uniforms.
- Allows for finer details and smaller text than embroidery.
- Heat transfer is available in many different finishes and styles.
- Environmentally friendly.

Cons

- Not ideal for large orders.
- Designs don't last as long due to fading, wrinkling, or peeling.
- The imprinted portion of a fabric heat transfer can feel stiff.
- Colors are not as bright as screen printing.

TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR HEAT TRANSFER PRINTING:



Canvas Tote Bag
Item # UWRDR-NAISL



Pet Fetch Tennis Ball
Item # BCRHO-KIAGI



Polyester Drawstring Backpack
Item # FWMGR-PIBER



Polycotton Table Throw
Item # AXTBP-PGILD



TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR DEBOSSING & EMBOSSING:



*Journal with Magnetic Closure
Item # QCPIO-OCZXI*

WHAT IS DEBOSSING / EMBOSSING?

Debossing / embossing gives your logo a 3D element. Dies are constructed from metal in the shape of a logo. Debossing incorporates heat and pressure pushed into the product to form the material into the logo impression. Embossing is where the pressure will be applied from the back to create a raised impression of the image on the front. This decoration method produces stunning and sophisticated results and is perfect for leather decorating.

Benefits

- Creates dimensional depth and detail by depressing a design onto the material.
- Doesn't create holes in fabric like embroidery, making it ideal for water-proof apparel.
- Works extremely well on leather apparel or surfaces.
- Can be done in conjunction with other types of decoration.

Cons

- Materials that can be debossed / embossed are limited. Debossing works best on paper, leather and some plastics.
- Debossing / embossing is prone to wear and tear over time.
- Changes are irreversible, as correcting mistakes is not an option.

image source: curiousbookco.com



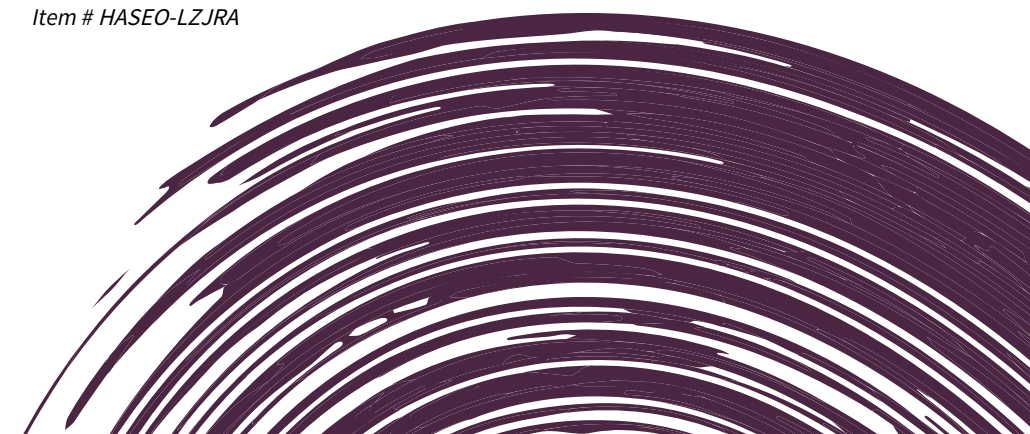
*Debossed Silicone Wristband
Item # GTMIQ-NBBDG*



*Genuine Leather Patches
Item # AXSIM-NZIEU*



*Arrow Zippered Padfolio
Item # HASEO-LZJRA*





TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR LASER ENGRAVING:



Bamboo Cutting Board
Item # IWVEP-LPJTJ



Textari Comfort Stylus Pen
Item # MYUIV-MABQZ

WHAT IS LASER ENGRAVING?

A unique application where the laser removes a thin layer of fiber or pigment to create a design dye. By adjusting the intensity and speed of the laser, it sculpts dimensions into the design, resulting in stunning clarity and precision.

Benefits

- Go-to decoration method for metal products.
- The engraving process itself is cheap and can be done very quickly.
- Designs are extremely durable, making them ideal for frequently handled items.

Cons

- You may incur a high initial setup cost.
- Materials that can be laser engraved are limited. Laser engraving works best on wood, glass, acrylic, and metal.
- There can be design constraints limiting the level of detail or complexity of the design.



Leatherette Keychain
Item # NWPHS-PKXOY



30 Oz. RTIC® Tumbler
Item # PYQIP-LYIRN

WHAT ARE CUSTOM PATCHES?

Custom patches are a great way to add some texture and depth to a logo! Either a logo is debossed on a leather patch and then the patch is embroidered to the product OR an embroidered patch is created, and it is attached to an item via sewing, adhesive backing or heat transfer.

Benefits

- Patches have a three-dimensional effect and add texture and depth to a design.
- Patches are much tougher and sturdier than traditional embroidery.

Cons

- Custom patches can be more expensive than other forms of customization and you may encounter an added cost for digitizing a logo.
- Production time can be longer due to the multistep process of creating the patch itself, then attaching it to the product.



TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR CUSTOM PATCHES:



Eco Friendly Backpack
Item # QZSBO-NNGRS

Straw Hat With Custom Patch
Item # FCQGV-OKKKF



Full Zip Hoodie Item
WCUFV-PJLXB



TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR FOIL STAMPING:



Foil-Stamped 2 Pocket Folder
Item # EXTCT-KYVAH

WHAT IS FOIL STAMPING?

Foil stamping is a specialty printing process in which a metallic or pigmented foil is heated with a magnesium dye and then stamped with enough pressure to seal a thin layer of foil to the surface. Metallic foils are typically gold or silver and pigmented foils are most commonly red or black.

Benefits

- The polished and glossy finish stands out on any color surface.
- Foil stamping does not use ink, so the colors of a design will not be influenced by the surface color.

Cons

- Foil stamping can be relatively expensive compared to other imprinting methods.
- Design intricacy and color options are limited.
- Not all materials are compatible with foil stamping, such as porous or textured materials.
- Foil stamping is not durable and can be scratched or wear over time.



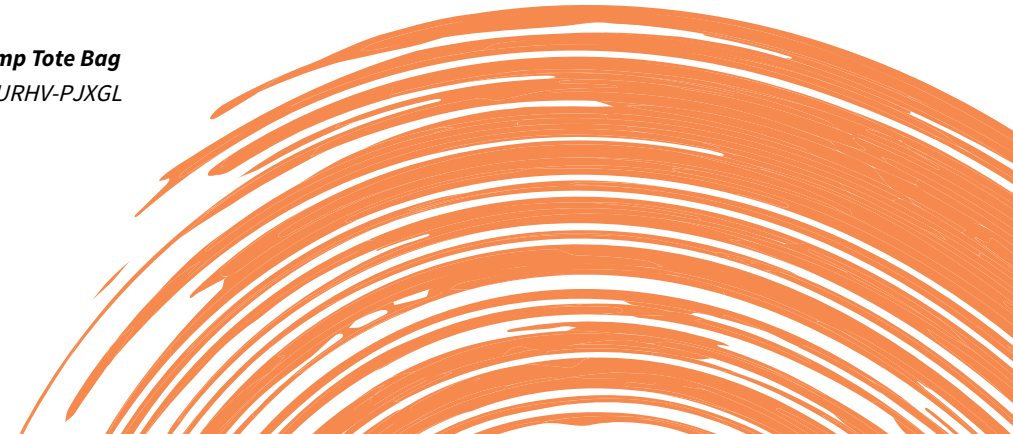
Foil Stamped Beverage Napkin
Item # YTRBU-LOKBM



Classic Cover Medium NotePad
Item # NVVCQ-DBO AQ



Foil Stamp Tote Bag
Item # EURHV-PJXGL



WHAT IS DIGITAL FULL-COLOR PRINTING?

You can think about digital printing, or direct to garment printing, as a similar process to printing a document from your computer. An image is created with no restraints to the number of colors or type of artwork used, and the image is printed or affixed directly onto the material. With embroidery and screen printing, you are dealing with physical resources (thread and ink) to create a logo; with digital printing, full color, high-definition logos can be done economically, even in small quantities.

Benefits

- Easier set up than screen printing – no screen creation or color separation required.
- Ability to print more precise details in a broader range of colors.
- Great for smaller order sizes.

image source: soardistusa

Cons

- Not ideal for large orders as the production speed can be slower than other methods.
- The printable area is limited to the printer's size, which means larger designs can not always be accommodated.
- Depending on the fabric of the item, digital printing sometimes requires a pre-treatment solution to help the ink adhere to the fabric, this can add to the cost and production time of your project.
- Limited washability as the design may not hold up over a long period of time.

TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR FULL-COLOR PRINTING:



Ladies Racerback Top
Item # GTMGT-QBOPB



Full Color Custom Jigsaw Puzzle
Item # ZUMFN-OBEED



Phone Stand
Item # GYPKT-NEEXN



Hard Surface Mouse Pad
Item # JZREP-IKRTJ



WHAT IS 3D PUFF EMBROIDERY?

3D puff embroidery is done by placing a foam pad, or “puff”, onto a product and then having an embroidery machine sew an outline of a logo or design. Once this is complete, the excess puff is removed around the outside of the embroidered outline, and now it’s a 3D design.

Benefits

- Extremely durable – the design should outlast the garment itself.
- The logo is more noticeable because of the 3D design.

image source: hittnskins.com

Cons

- Design detail can be limited due to the potential loss of definition.
- 3D puff embroidery requires a higher stitch count than regular embroidery and an additional setup for the foam inserts, which can increase production costs.
- Limited washability.

TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR 3D PUFF EMBROIDERY:



Chino Twill Cap
Item # KAOET-IIIRB



Striped Knit Scarf
Item # EBMHS-IZIQE



3D Print Hoodie
Item # JBND0-PSAGI



Cuff ToqueBeanie
Item # XARJU-PIKTQ



WHAT IS PAD PRINTING?

Pad printing is a decoration technique in which ink is transferred from a silicone pad onto the desired surface. The pad printing process can be thought of as a more advanced version of stamping – a pad with ink is pressed onto the product and then left to air dry.

Benefits

- Superior image clarity.
- Easier than screen printing for printing on unusually shaped objects.
- Improved resolution on smaller fonts and designs over screen printing.
- Pad printing is a gentle decoration technique, making it ideal for delicate materials and fabrics.
- Low set-up costs and minimal equipment required.
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Cons

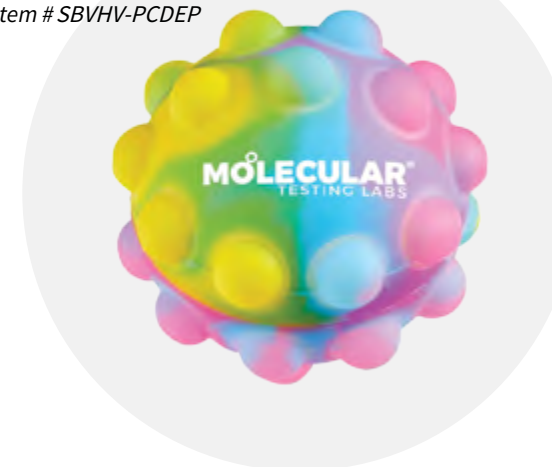
- Pad printing is typically used for a one- or two-color design, limiting color options.
- Ink adhesion, especially on certain materials like silicone or plastic, can wear or fade over time.
- Printing irregularities or inconsistencies are more common with pad printing.

image source: deconetwork.com



TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR PAD PRINTING:

Popper Ball
Item # SBVHV-PCDEP



Popper Silicone Phone Wallet
Item # AWOBP-PIBOF



Aqua Pearls™ Hot/Cold Pack
Item # SYUKP-HWNTR

WHAT IS APPLIQUE EMBROIDERY?

Applique Embroidery, also known as digital applique, takes the 3D texture of embroidery and combines it with the visual impact of full-color printing to create something different and unique. This application uses a process that allows an imprint full-color photo images directly onto a single layer of twill.

Benefits

- Applique is a great way to save on stitches and money for a larger embroidery design.
- The layered embroidery really pops on any color fabric.
- Great for highly detailed logos.

Cons

- Setup includes both laser cutting and embroidery, making it more costly than time consuming compared to traditional embroidery.
- Design alignment can be challenging, especially for intricate designs.
- Not suitable for delicate or lightweight fabrics.

image source: targetda.com



TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR APPLIQUE EMBROIDERY:

Vansport Zen Pullover Shirt
Item # WZMFU-MCUZY



**Women's Full-Zip
Sweater Fleece Jacket**
Item # OUOHO-OBELC



Scarf with Elite Fringe
Item # PURCR-NGDPX



WHAT IS VINYL TRANSFER?

This transfer process uses heat to activate and attach a vinyl sticker to a fabric. Vinyl is soft to the touch with great stretch and is durable enough for sportswear.

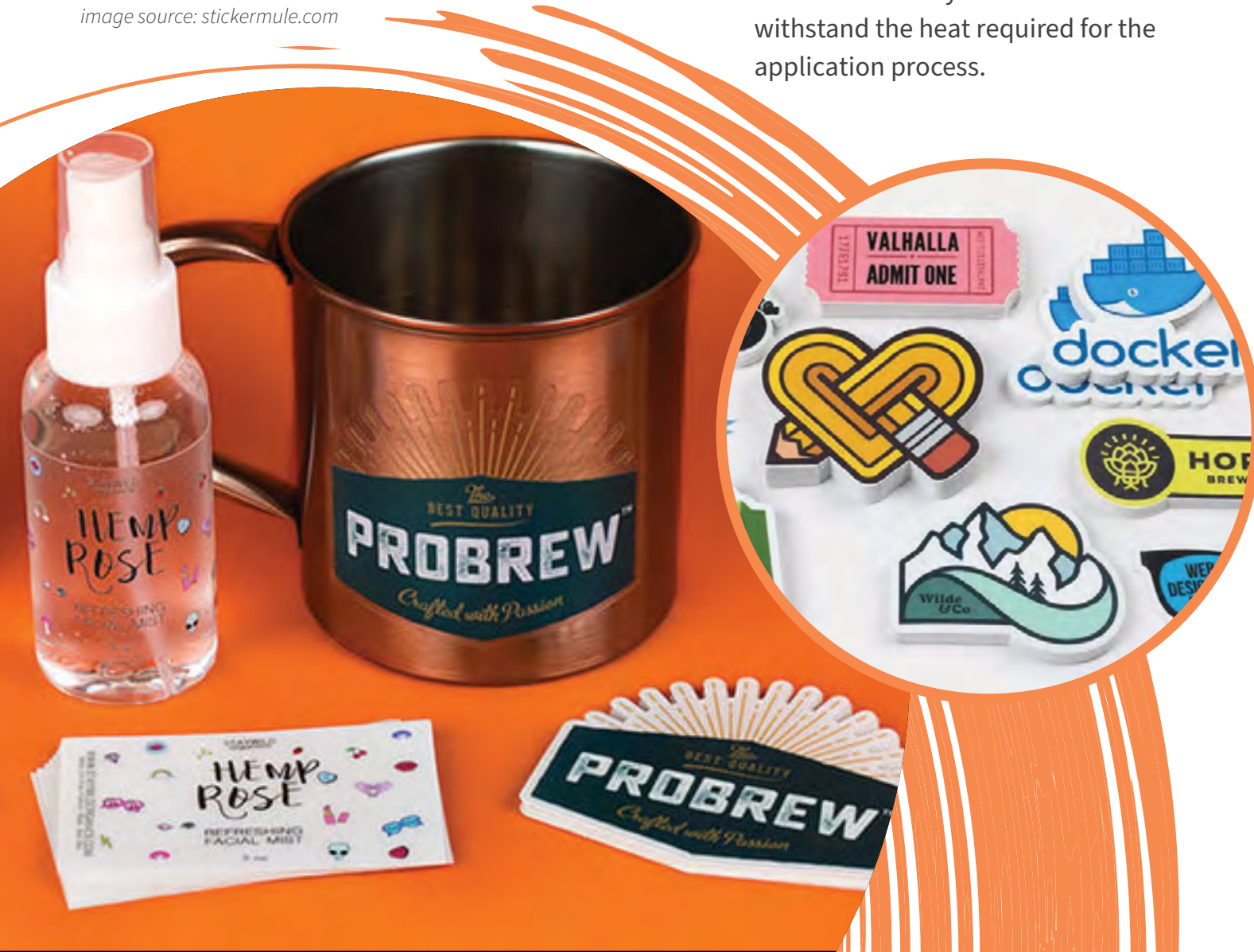
Benefits

- The image is long lasting and durable.
- Your company logo or custom design is easily applied to any fabric or material that can absorb color.
- Vinyl transfer is a very affordable decoration method.

Cons

- Vinyl transfer comes in a wide variety of colors but may not offer the same color range or gradients as other printing methods like screen or digital printing.
- Vinyl transfers add a slightly raised or rubbery texture to garments where the application is adhered.
- Time-consuming and not cost effective for large and bulk orders.
- Some fabrics may not be able to withstand the heat required for the application process.

image source: stickermule.com



TOP PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS FOR VINYL TRANSFER:



Removable Die Cut Decal Stickers
Item # CBUKQ-OEUME



Tabletop Banner Stand with Vinyl Graphic
Item # STRKN-LUBVX



Circle Sticker White Vinyl
Item # QWUFP-BRQKJ



Select Your Sticker Sheet
Item # CTUHM-OCZEK

DECORATOR AND ARTWORK TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **4-Color Process:** The reproduction of full-color artwork through the combination of four process ink colors- cyan (blue), magenta (red), yellow and black. (CMYK)
- **4-Color Separation:** The breakdown of full-color copy into individual color plates so that when printed in register, they produce a full-color illustration. Four-color separations refer specifically to the process colors: CMYK.
- **Acid Etching:** A chemical process where a strong acid, known as an etchant, is applied to the surface of a piece of metal to remove a portion of the metal's surface to create an image, design, or component.
- **Blank Goods:** Refers to promotional products without decoration/imprinting.
- **Contract Decoration:** The process of embellishing a product with one of the many and varied decorating processes whereby clients provide the goods and the decorator provides and charges only for the decoration/embellishment.
- **Die Striking:** A jewelry-manufacturing process that utilizes an enormous amount of pressure to form metal into a die struck mold.
- **Digitizing:** The process of scanning printed text or logos into a computer. Also, the process where a design is plotted in a computer language that an embroidery machine can read. This is the process needed in order to take art from camera ready to a readable format in order to reproduce an embroidered design. Often a cost is associated, but once the original is created, you can reuse the file and avoid costs in the future.
- **Direct To Garment:** Direct to Garment, or DTG printing, is a process by which a digital image is printed directly onto your apparel using cutting edge printing technology and inks.
- **Engraving:** The cutting or etching of designs or letters on metal, wood, glass, or other materials. There are three engraving techniques. Hand engraving, hand tracing and computerized engraving. Engraving is performed with a diamond point or rotary blade that cuts into the surface of the product.
- **Etching:** The product to be imaged is coated with a resist. An image is exposed on the resist, usually photographically, leaving bare metal and protected metal. The acid attacks the exposed metal, thus leaving the images etched into the surface of the metal. Very fine lines can be reproduced by this process and the only tooling is a piece of film, so spec samples are easily made.
- **Flexography:** A form of rotary printing in which ink is applied to various surfaces by means of flexible rubber (or other elastomeric) printing plates.
- **Full Bleed:** This print method is used when you want a design to touch the edge of the material leaving no white edge. Edge to edge printing is used for different projects such as business cards, magazines, books, flyers, brochures, posters, and so much more.

DECORATOR AND ARTWORK TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **Laser Etching:** How cool would it be to say your project was created using lasers? Well, you absolutely can with laser etching printing. With this method, an image or text is engraved onto the item and give it a contrast against the material.
- **Lithography:** A generic term for printed material. Most typically used to refer to offset printed paper that is intended to be mounted to a display.
- **Offset Printing:** A method of mass-production high quality printing in which the images on metal plates are transferred (offset) to rubber blankets or rollers and then to the print media.
- **Pantone or PMS Color Match:** PMS, or Pantone Matching System, provides a universal system for identifying colors across the life of projects from design to manufacturing to the consumer. A PMS number tells the printer how much of each color to use when printing an image. That way you will never have to wonder if the color is correct on a project.
- **PNG:** A .png file (pronounced 'ping') does not lose quality during the editing process. The .png file type was designed to transfer images via the internet and, therefore, is the ideal file type for web graphics.
- **Print-Ready File:** The print-ready file, depending on the size of the item, could be extremely large and possibly take a long time to download or even require a special delivery method such as We Transfer, Dropbox, or Hightail.
- **Proof:** A proof is a much lower resolution version of the actual print file, which is ideal for sending via email so the recipient can see a visual representation.
- **Sandblasting:** Uses a pressurized abrasive stream to etch into a glass surface, creating a deep and permanent mark.
- **Special Effect Printing:** The special printing effect gives the stamped lettering or graphics a shiny, professional appearance.
- **Sublimation:** To convert a solid substance by heat into vapor that on cooling condenses again to a solid form.
- **Vector Image (EPS):** A vector image is made of points instead of pixels. What that means in layman's terms is that a vector image can be blown up to a much larger size without being blurry. The reason for this is that the points join paths (think, connect the dots), whereas with pixels, there is only a finite amount – the total amount that makes up your image. Generally, vector artwork is preferred for imprinting so that it can be sized up or down without losing image quality.