



4726 Pittsburgh Avenue Erie, PA 16509 (877) 726-9555 www.boardwalkmarketing.com

ASK 12 QUESTIONS

No matter what is sold in the Promotional Products world, everything is decorated with some sort of design. It may be as simple as a logo or as involved as a full color design rendered in 4-color process. Even the inexpensive pen carries a message. The message is delivered via the image we put on the item.

Decorated Apparel is similar to other Promotional Products in that, by definition, we “decorate” the garment. However, decorated apparel is much different from other promotional products in that the area afforded us to convey the clients “message” is huge. A pen can hold an image that is 1/2” x 2-3” or so. A t-shirt has a canvas that can show an image that is 12” x 12” or even larger. Decorated apparel, when done right, can offer immense advertising value to the client.

Therefore, what we as PPD’s need to do is assist our clients in the selection of apparel items that will best meet their needs. Garment selection is critical to the repeat wearability of the garment. The client needs advice from you on which garment will meet his needs while staying within the budget he has to work with.

We also need to assist the client in the creation of an appealing design that will enhance the value of the chosen garment and increase the desire of the end user to wear the garment. After all, the more the end user wears the garment the more their message is delivered to them and others around them.

These two realities go hand in hand. You need a great shirt to start with. And you need a great design applied to that garment to meet your clients needs or deliver his message. You could have the fanciest, most expensive, high-end shirt printed with a boring 1-color logo or you could have a cheap, lightweight, rough t-shirt with a 4-color process print or a special effect print. Both of these shirts will very easily clean the oil off of the end users dipstick. Because that’s what they will do with the shirt. They certainly won’t be wearing it over and over. You have an obligation to help your client select the best garment with the most impressive decoration possible.

To assist your client in the ordering process we have created this list of 12 Questions that will help you guide your client through the information gathering and art creation process. Some of these questions are obvious and apply to most orders. Quantity Needed? Due Date? While these questions are important when processing any order, the answers can be critical for decorated apparel and the creation of art - and for reasons that may not be quite so obvious.

When working with your clients, Ask 12 Questions.

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When working with your clients, Ask 12 Questions.

1. When do you need the shirts?
2. How many do you need?
3. What is the budget - including garments, art, screens and color separations?
4. What kind of garments do you want for your program?
 - T-Shirts (Long or Short Sleeve)
 - Sweatshirts (Hooded or Crewneck)
 - Golf Shirts (Embroidered normally, or Printed?)
 - Fashion Garments (Trendy Men's Styles, Ladies Styles, Specialized Fabrics)
5. What is the desired shirt color? Is more than one color required for this order?
6. What is the garment size range required? Youth and Adult? XXL - 3XL - 4XL?
7. On which location(s) do you want printing? Front? Back? Left or Right Sleeve?
8. What is the final size of the finished design?
9. What does the design need to "say?" What are the actual "words" to be included?
10. Do you have a feature subject for the design? Is there a photo or a graphic element or a logo or a specific piece of art to use?
11. What ink colors are needed? Are PMS matches preferred? Required?
12. Use an adjective or describe a feeling you want your design to reflect or convey.
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1. When do you need the shirts?

This is a fairly standard question in our industry. You need to know when the client wants to receive their order so you can pass that on to your decorator. It is a critical question as it relates to art because a quality design will take time. Not months or even weeks. But time is needed to work with your client and the artist to create the best design possible. If the order is needed quickly, a great design is still possible, but it is best to understand the timeframe as you begin the process.

2. How many do you need?

Again, a fairly standard question. It is important to know the quantity so that you don't suggest a fantastic, high-end decorating process that will incur hundreds of dollars in art fees or screen charges or setup charges for a 12 piece order. It is important to balance the desire for a premium product with the reality of the order.

3. What is the budget - including garments, art, screens and color separations?

Similar to the previous question, it is important to understand the budget the client has to work within. If the client has \$5.00 to spend per shirt on his 50 piece order you won't likely be suggesting a 5-color imprint on a dark color shirt. Conversely, if your client is interested in a premium garment and a high-end decorating technique, the budget will likely be far less restrictive. Understanding the budget will allow you to make suggestions that will meet their needs and allow for a positive, productive interaction.

4. What kind of garments do you want for your program?

- T-Shirts (Long or Short Sleeve)
- Sweatshirts (Hooded or Crewneck)
- Golf Shirts (Embroidered normally, or Printed?)
- Fashion Garments (Trendy Men's Styles, Ladies Styles, Specialized Fabrics)

A t-shirt is a t-shirt is a t-shirt, right? Hardly. In this single category alone there are seemingly endless varieties - 6.1 oz., 5.6 oz., 5.3 oz., 5.0 oz., 4.5 oz., 100% Cotton, 50/50, Tri-Blends, Ringspun, Open End, Jersey Knit, 30 Singles, 40 Singles, Moisture Wicking, Performance Fabric, not to mention the myriad options available in Ladies shirts! Ask your client what he is looking for in a garment and steer him to the best possible option for his program.

The decoration is just as critical, if not more so. Simulated Process and 4-color Process printing, for example, will produce imprinted garments that will wow your client. And the end user will be far more likely to wear that shirt over and over. However, these processes benefit from a smooth, stable printing platform. Sweatshirts do not accept these techniques as readily (if at all) compared to t-shirts. Inexpensive, rough, poor quality t-shirts do not print as well as those shirts whose construction allows for a great imprint. Also, if your client is interested in golf shirts, you likely won't suggest a full chest imprint. Understand the clients garment needs.

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5. What is the desired shirt color? Is more than one color required for this order?

Make sure the shirt color or colors your client wants to use are available in all of the items they want for their order. For example, they could be interested in Carolina Blue shirts. You advise them that Carolina Blue is a very nice, very popular color. The client is pleased as you leave their office. Unfortunately, you forgot to check to see if the sweatshirt they wanted was available in the color (or colors) they chose. Or maybe they want oversize shirts (3XL, 4XL, etc.) or youth size shirts. Did you confirm that ALL the items the client wants are available in the color selected? It is easier to warn the client of the possibility that all colors might not be available than to have them disappointed when you call back and tell them their first choice is not possible. Be aware - not all garments come in all colors. Just because a manufacturer makes one item in a certain color doesn't mean all items are available in the same color. The best advice is to start with the item that will be most restrictive - oversize, youth, sweats, long sleeve shirts, etc. Pick a color offered in the restrictive item first, then verify all other items are available in that color as well.

The color of the shirt often has a direct impact on how a design is created. If the design is simple and straightforward, the shirt color may not matter. But if the client has a design, for example, that has a black outline on some element, will that print well on a white shirt? Probably. On a Black shirt? Hmm. That might be an issue. Be sure to understand the shirt color. You may need to use two "colorways" for their order. For example, use white ink on dark color shirts and black ink on light color shirts. Now all you need to do is confirm which color is considered light and which is considered dark.

6. What is the garment size range required? Youth and Adult? XXL - 3XL - 4XL?

The most obvious reason for this question is so that you can verify that the items and colors that the client has selected are available in the sizes he needs. But there is far more to the size range question.

When your client tells you they want a full chest imprint, that should be a fairly simple instruction to follow. If your printer's typical full chest design is 12" x 12", for example, you can convey that to the artist. However, if the shirts being printed are all youth sizes (YS, YM, YL), you will have to adjust the final design size. Simple enough. Your printer has told you a typical full chest imprint on youth shirts is, say, 9" x 9".

But what if your client is having a family reunion, or a church retreat, or a company family picnic. And then they tell you that they need to order shirts for both kids and adults. They want shirts in sizes YS-YL, S-XL, and XXL, 3XL and 4XL. Not a problem, right? Well it is for the artist and the printer. The full chest imprint that will fit on a YS shirt will look a bit small on an adult XL. It will look really small on a 4XL shirt. If you try to print an adult size design on all the shirts it will cover the entire front of the YS shirt. Depending on the brand, it may not even be possible to print the YS with an adult design. Or you could compromise and pick a design size somewhere in the middle.

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ASK 12 QUESTIONS

6. Size Range (continued)

Frequently two designs are created - one for youth shirts and one for adult shirts. This is the best solution but also adds cost. Now the printer has to make two sets of screens, set up each design and print each set of shirts separately. You've basically split one order into two separate orders. Each will be billed at their own quantity breaks. For example, your client wants to order 320 shirts with a 2-color imprint. He wants 160 shirts in YS-YL and 160 in S-XL. You ask for the youth shirts to have a design that is 9" x 9" and the adult shirts to have a design that is 12" x 12". Instead of paying for two screens and paying a run charge at the 288 piece price break, you will be paying for 4 screens and the run charges will be billed at the 144 piece price break.

Simple enough. But what if this order is for a youth summer camp. They want 320 shirts - 290 in YS-YL for the kids and 30 in S-XL for the adult leaders. In this example you will still have two sets of screens, but the youth shirts will be billed at the 288 piece price and the adult shirts will be billed at the 24 piece price. This reality can have a fairly dramatic impact on the final price. It is best to understand the size range before creating the design.

Something else to consider. If your client wants to order, for example, Hooded Sweatshirts, there can be issues when printing even just adult sizes. An adult XL will accept a full chest 12" x 12" design. However, there may not be enough room between the collar and the top of the pouch on an adult Small hoodie. If the design does fit, it might look like it is jammed in the available space. A similar problem can occur when printing sleeves - both long and short. If there are both youth and adult garments to be decorated it may affect the size of design that can be printed. Take into consideration the item being decorated to determine if the design will fit on all size shirts.

7. On which location(s) do you want printing? Front? Back? Left or Right Sleeve?

Clients come up with all kinds of crazy ideas for printed shirts. There are occasions when the client may want the design to print all the way around the shirt. Or they may want a print from the shoulder seam to the waistband. Odd locations are sometimes possible - often not. The reasons are varied. Some of the techniques they want may be possible if the garment is printed before it is assembled. In other words, it is printed, then cut and sewn. This really isn't a typical order and will need to be dealt with by a manufacturer.

Another possibility is specialized equipment that is used to accomplish special location printing. The easiest to understand is belt printers or all-over printing presses which are designed to, well, print all over the shirt. Be sure to speak candidly with your client before committing to certain specialized printing locations.

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7. Locations (continued)

The reality is, the overwhelming majority of shirts are printed on standard locations - Full Chest, Full Back, Left Chest, Right Chest, Left or Right Sleeve, Back Yoke, etc. But these locations too can introduce possible problems. As printers, we have our standard specs that we use when locating an imprint. If a design, for example, is 2" tall and 12" wide, the distance from the bottom of the collar to the top of the design will be greater than the distance when printing a 12" x 12" design. We use our home grown guides to locate the design. But more importantly, we have mannequins dressed with shirts and grids that relate to our design placement system. When needed we actually pin a printout of the design on the mannequin (or on a real human) to confirm the location when we are unsure of proper placement.

If your client specifies a Full Chest imprint, please convey that to us. We will use our best judgement to locate the design in the most appropriate place possible. If your client specifies a Left or Right Chest imprint we will, once again, place the design using our best judgement.

If your client is concerned about design placement please ask them to be specific with actual dimensions. For example, "Left Chest - they would like the top of the design to be 7" down from the shoulder seam and the edge of the design to be 3" from the center of the shirt." We can work with such specifics. However, be aware that such strict placement instructions can have unintended consequences. When they made their determination of the specific location, did they only place the design on a man wearing a size XL shirt? If there are also Adult Small shirts in the order, did they take that into consideration? It may be that their design, at 3" from the center of the shirt, will be fine on an XL shirt, but it will be nearly under the armpit on a size Small. Before using specific dimensions, consider all shirts to be decorated before making the final location determination.

8. What is the final size of the finished design?

When your client asks you, "how big should my left chest print be?", how do you respond? We suggest a very hands on approach. Print out the final design at several sizes or use a copier and make several copies at various sizes. Then show them to the client. Ask *them* to pick a size. Hold the printouts up on your shirt. Tape them to someone else's shirt - while they are wearing it!! There is no substitute for seeing the design at actual size.

This hands on approach goes hand-in-hand with design location. Do they have a specific placement request? If so, write down the measurements. Take into consideration all shirt sizes and styles before determining the final size (and location).

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8. Final Design Size (continued)

If your client emails you the art and states "the final design size is in the art file" please understand that, while all images are saved at a particular size, it may not be the size that will print properly or look best. When you convey the instruction to us to "use the size in the file" we will retrieve the design size and note that info on your art approval form. It is incumbent upon you to verify that size with your client. In extreme cases we will notify you when something is obviously amiss. For example, you state the design location as "Full Chest" but the image size in the art file is 4" x 5". There seems to be a mismatch. We'll call you on that one. But if the image size is 9" x 10" that can be considered a full chest design. If your client actually wanted it to be as big as possible, you might now have a problem. Ask for the actual design size.

9. What does the design need to "say?" What are the actual "words" to be included?

You need specifics. Your client could be a Plumber, or an Electrician, or a Credit Union, or a Hospital. They have something they want to convey. They have a message. It might be as simple as their slogan, or their new marketing campaign tagline, or their claim to fame. Whatever it is, find out what they want to say.

Also, try to understand the relative importance of the various things they want to say. Is the slogan really important to them? Do they want the slogan to be bigger than their name? Is it something they want included, but it really isn't that vital? Do they want their phone number, or email address included? Remember, apparel has the ability to convey a message just like a billboard. But the design on the shirt should not be the same as a billboard. The goal is repeat wearability. Make the design attractive. Maybe the address and phone number can be eliminated. Or maybe they are important elements, but can be made to be a less obvious part of the design. Ask your client what is most important in his message.

10. Do you have a feature subject for the design? Is there a photo or a graphic element or a logo or a specific piece of art to use?

Design elements are just as important as the words in a design - maybe more so. Is the logo or graphic element a single color or is it multi-color? Will the colors in the element compliment or conflict with the shirt colors? Will the number of colors in the element increase the overall number of imprint colors in the final design? What is the relative importance of the element compared to the words and other elements in the design?

If the element to use is a photograph, is it to be printed in full color? If so, this will require a 4-color process or Simulated Process imprint. If you intend to use the photo as a halftone image, is there sufficient contrast in the photo? Will this idea work on the color of shirt selected?

These feature subjects sometimes make the creation of a design much simpler because they can be the focal point of the whole design. All that is needed is to add the other components (words, slogans, taglines, etc.) and the design is complete. Other times, these subjects are roadblocks to the creation of a great design. Identify your clients interest in including such elements right at the beginning of the process.

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11. What ink colors are needed? Are PMS matches preferred? Required?

"That's MY blue. The print has to be done in MY blue." If that is the instruction you receive from your client a big red flag should go up in your head. Today's ink mixing systems allow printers to use specific formulas that are referenced by PMS numbers. However, the PMS system was developed for paper printers. Textile inks can "approximate" a PMS color. They cannot MATCH the PMS color. We suggest using the term "PMS Approximation" to describe a textile printers ability to match colors.

- When an ink is custom mixed and sitting in the bucket we can put our PMS book next to the ink and it looks great. It's a MATCH!! However, we haven't printed that ink on any garments yet. If we print that ink on a white shirt it will probably look really good. Maybe even perfect...sort of. The cured ink will have a bit of a sheen, but it will not have the same finish as the printed paper in the coated section of the PMS book. And it will definitely not match anything in the Uncoated section. But still, it looks really good. However, if we print that same ink on an Ash shirt, or a Yellow shirt or a Light Blue shirt, the garment color may alter the final appearance of the ink...just a little. Our MATCH just became an APPROXIMATION.

And if we need to print that same ink on a dark color shirt using an underprint, all bets are off. The final print will likely be a very close approximation. But it will no longer be a match. Counsel your clients to this reality to avoid any misunderstandings.

12. Use an adjective or describe a feeling you want your design to reflect or convey.

Simple - Edgy - Funny - Minimal - Traditional - Like Old Navy

This question is very different from the others. The answers you receive may surprise you. The answers reflect emotion or feelings or expectations that are tied to something other than the elements of the design. This question alone may completely alter the direction of the design process. It may be last in our list here, but it might be one of the first questions you ask your client. If you get the sense that they are looking for something a little different from the ordinary, ask this question.

You may get answers like, "I want a design that looks like it was created for Cirque de Soleil" or "I want a South Pacific type design" or "Something that feels like Margaritaville" or "I want it to look powerful and strong." Convey these thoughts to the artist so they may use that reference when creating the design.