

Stitches Annual SOFTWARE GUIDE

It's that time of year again - we talk to the top software vendors about their new and updated artwork and business management software. Plus, users test-drive the software and report back.

By Shane Dale

Embroidery software users report that they want flexibility and simplicity in software that takes care of all of their embellishment needs in one stop.

Peter Giummo, owner of Tri-Lakes Team Sports in Menifee, CA, and user of FastManager PRO software, says he likes programs that address his embellishment offerings. "We do screen printing, embroidery, heat transfers and digital printing in-house," he says. "I also have nine outside sales reps. So, I need a package that can quote our jobs and take the jobs through completion."

Pam Augspurger, owner of Dream Maker Embroidery & Sewing LLC in Easley, SC, says her software of choice - Forté Embroidery Suite from Pantograms - allows her to adapt to all of her customers' needs. "Forté offers flexibility," she says. "The majority of my clients request designs that contain lettering,

especially monograms. I like that I can completely customize all designs to my customers' satisfaction."

A program that's fast and efficient, but can also be counted upon to do a quality job every single time, is crucial for Brent Carlson, a digitizer with The Jamestown Cycle Shop in Jamestown, NY, and user of Proel Millennium III software from Bito USA. "Generally, I'm just looking for my embroidery software to help me digitize my logos quick and easy, and at the same time create nice, quality embroidery designs to be applied to the product," he says. "The most important features to me are easy navigation of the program, great tools, along with good node control, and simulating the look of the design on the screen."

To find these features and more in your next software purchase, read on for *Stitches'* comprehensive software guide.

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EMBROIDERY GRAPHICS AND DESIGN SOFTWARE

Company and Software Package	What's New	Key Features	Cost		Who Should Use It	Who Shouldn't Use It	User Review	Contact
Bito USA Proel Millennium III	Different levels of digitizing software: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lettering • Basic, intermediate and advanced editing • Standard, professional and advanced digitizing • AutoPunch digitizing program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers a direct connection from the computer to all embroidery machines that have serial and USB interfaces. • Digitizing software works with any embroidery machine brand, and is compatible with modern and older machines. • Fifth-generation software offers the capability to combine embroidery with laser cutting to do auto laser lettering. The programming necessary for an embroidery machine to sew out a digitized design and automatically cut out an appliqué shape using a laser bridge machine or a single-head laser attached to an embroidery machine is included. 	Lettering with Basic Editing: \$1,000; Standard Digitizing with Mid-Level Editor: \$4,995; Pro Level with Top Editor: \$9,995; Full Option Advanced-Level Digitizing: \$18,000		Any digitizer or decorator who performs lettering, editing, digitizing and laser cutting can use Proel Millennium.	Any decorator who outsources digitizing	<p>“The features in Proel Millennium III that I really like are the ‘show as real’ option in the toolbar and the great transfers of vectored art from CorelDRAW to Millennium III,” says Brent Carlson, digitizer with The Jamestown Cycle Shop in Jamestown, NY.</p> <p>There are, however, a couple of things about Millennium III that Carlson would like to see improved. “Not too many fonts come with the program, and there are a few glitches in the program that sometimes leave me having to recreate unsaved work,” he says.</p>	Bito USA, Oceanside, NY; (866) 248-6872, www.bitousa.com
Brother International ApS-Ethos Embroidery Software	The Version 11 upgrade of ApS-Ethos from GS-USA is scheduled for release this spring; the software comes in two versions – a basic package called Artisan Plus, and Virtuoso Plus, which is designed for more advanced decorators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Version 11 is fully compatible with the Windows 7 operating system. • New features include that the existing snapshot feature now has a check-box beneath each film strip, enabling the user to easily select and deselect multiple blocks within a design for quick reordering and block selection. • Accidental deletes can be easily recovered in Version 11. • All start and exit points will be visible through the program’s full-render view. • When editing a stitch effect for multiple sections, if the selected sections already have different effects, the software will ask the user if she wants to combine them into one new effect. 	Upgrading from Brother’s BES-100 software to Artisan Plus costs \$995 (the BES-100 software must be traded in to receive this price). Purchasing Artisan Plus costs \$5,440; Virtuoso Plus, \$12,400. All prices include four days of online training.		Satin digitizers will benefit from Version 11, since the reflect tool can now be used when they’re digitizing satin stitches. Those who work with lettering and editing will also be able to take advantage of the software’s Smart Text, which automatically adjusts text to suit the lettering size chosen.	Inexperienced digitizers	<p>When he was looking for decorating software, Dennis Sutton, owner of Dunellen, NJ-based Digital Production Studios, picked ApS-Ethos because he found it to have the “quickest, easiest and most precise methods for digitizing manually,” he says. “The ApS-Ethos software package gives the best representation of how a design will stitch out when using the full-render view. It also makes it fairly easy to differentiate between jump and trim stitches.”</p> <p>One downside to the software, according to Sutton, is that there isn’t a single button on the toolbar that allows him to quickly switch between full- and quick-render modes. “Also, it would be a tremendous advantage for the user to have a way to instantly highlight and then navigate to the exact point where a stitch trim and/or the stitch jump starts and ends for quick editing,” he says.</p>	Brother International, Bridgewater, NJ; (800) 432-3532; www.brother.com
Dalco Athletic StockStitch	StockStitch 6.1A is compatible with Windows 7 and StockStitch is compatible with 2000 XP Vista and Windows.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windows-based, standalone program that’s designed for automated sewing of stock letters, numbers and appliqué shapes and comes with more than 40 fonts. • Software can be used with any of the most popular materials offered by Dalco. These include twill, designer fabrics like polka dots, pebble grain – which simulates the look of a basketball or football – and Dal-Chenille, which is a material that looks like real chenille. • Users can select multiple sizes of each font, along with multiple stitch types, including bean, satin and zigzag. • Users can control stitch width and density. 	\$295		Decorators who create award jackets, spiritwear, team uniforms and fashion appliqué. Software is designed to be easy to use, since users don’t have to cut lettering – all of the component parts are pre-cut to fit the StockStitch pre-digitized program.	Users who want to digitize or edit.	<p>M.J. Shockley, owner of Spiritwear in Richardson, TX, likes the ability to customize school logos with StockStitch. “You’re able to go in and letter your own name,” she says. “So, if you need to have eagles or bulldogs, you have that capability to go in and customize it right then on the spot.”</p> <p>Shockley says the program saves time because she doesn’t have to order the material and wait for it to be cut. “It’s right there at your fingertips,” she says. “You can type it in, put it to disk and put the disk in the machine.”</p>	Dalco Athletic, Dallas; (800) 288-3252; www.dalcoathletic.com
Digital Art Solutions Smart Designer X4	More than 140 new features have been added to CorelDRAW using Corel’s new seamless docker technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart Designer X4 automates more than 100 complex design and production tasks, including text effects, circle text, arches, athletic tails and weathered effects. • Software automatically creates virtual samples from a library of stock product templates in vector and high-resolution photographic formats. • Key benefit of Smart Designer X4 is its integration with more than 30 titles of Digital Art Solutions digital art volumes; software can interactively edit stock design templates to create custom graphics. 	\$699		The target user is someone who wants a combined design and marketing tool. Businesses that use the software include embroiderers, engravers, sign- and screen printers, direct-to-substrate digital printers, and promotional products distributors.	Non-graphic artists	<p>Jan Calahan, owner of Oakland, CA-based Oak Tree Embroidery, says one of the reasons she bought Smart Designer was for its ability to easily allow her to create split-front tackle twill and vinyl. “Also, with Smart Designer, I can launch my cutting and rhinestone program right from there, and the images are automatically transferred,” she says. “Honestly, the program was such a time-saver for our company, and that by itself was more than worth the investment.”</p> <p>Calahan also loves the training manuals and high-quality tech support that come with the software. “I haven’t had a bit of trouble trying to find a solution to any problem,” she says.</p>	Digital Art Solutions, Tempe, AZ; (800) 959-7267; www.smartdesigns.com

EMBROIDERY GRAPHICS AND DESIGN SOFTWARE

Company and Software Package	What's New	Key Features	Cost		Who Should Use It	Who Shouldn't Use It	User Review	Contact
Melco Industries Inc. DesignShop v9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DesignShop has new digitizing features, including the UnaFill splicer that allows the user to splice multiple directions of fill stitches for one object. • New auto-underlay feature with multiple choices of underlay styles for any digitized object or font; objects will maintain color properties so that copy and paste won't require re-sequencing colors. • New vector graphics-to-embroidery assistant provides easy point-and-click conversion of any vector file to be digitized quickly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With DesignShop v9, design information may be printed with bar codes. Users can use a bar-code reader at any time to recall the design, eliminating the need to search for design files on hard drives or disks. • DesignShop's LogoExpress feature allows users to link directly into an online digitizing service portal. Digitizing turnaround times can be as short as 24 hours, and users can purchase the LogoExpress feature during times of heavy volume. 	Contact vendor directly for a price quote.		Anyone who can benefit from production tools, such as fabric profiles that allow users to save design information, or the ability to apply fabric profiles to specific designs	Decorators outside the U.S., as the LogoExpress feature is limited to U.S.-based decorators.	<p>"When we were looking to upgrade our software, we looked for tools that made it easy to offer our customer unique fills, patterns, outlines and decorative stitches that sew well each and every time," says Chuck Northcutt Jr., co-owner of The Digiguy and CPI in Seattle. "The DesignShop v9 software is easy to use and easy for us to train new users on. In the most recent version, all of the adjustments, such as stitch length, density and underlay, are available right from the design window. There's no need to leave the design and click in a separate window or menu."</p> <p>Northcutt says the auto-digitizing features are another great benefit of DesignShop v9. "You have the choice of completely automatic or choosing the order and stitch type of each individual element," he says. "The auto-outline feature saves an incredible amount of time, both on design elements and fonts. The amount of control DesignShop gives us allows us to create detailed and striking designs that allow us to stay a step ahead."</p>	Melco Industries Inc., Denver; (800) 799-8313; www.melcousa.com
Pantograms Forté Embroidery Suite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgraded Forté Embroidery Suite is a fully loaded embroidery software program that includes lettering, editing, and digitizing capabilities. • User-friendly interface so new users can adapt quickly, and advanced digitizers have complete control over their designs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forté has 250 keyboard fonts and a large selection of fill patterns and running stitches. • Includes has a built-in database, so you can keep track of designs and orders. • Includes thread charts for major thread manufacturers. • Forté gives advanced users full control of their designs, by editing the keyboard fonts, fill patterns and running stitches built into it, and even creating their own for future use. • Software is compatible with 16 different embroidery formats, from home machines to commercial units. • Allows for 17 different types of images to be imported for digitizing. 	Forté Lettering and Editing: \$1,495; Forté Intermediate Digitizing: \$3,495; Forté Professional Digitizing with Auto Digitizer: \$5,495		Apparel decorators and digitizers who want to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digitize logos by tracing lines through e-mailed or scanned files • Auto-digitize vector artwork • Create embroidery art without any preset design to trace • Create different monogramming and lettering styles 	Commercial embroiderers and hobbyists	<p>Pam Augspurgen, owner of Dream Maker Embroidery & Sewing LLC in Easley, SC, says Forté gives her the flexibility she needs to meet her new clients' demands. "In addition, some specific features that help me include Real View and Slow Draw," she says. "I rely on the Real View feature where I can get a glimpse of how the design might look sewn out on the actual color of the background; it saves me from doing more test-sews than I might otherwise. With Slow Draw, I can watch the design sew on the screen and look for potential problems in the sewout."</p> <p>Augspurgen hasn't run into any major issues with the software. "The only thing I can suggest is perhaps a little more flexibility with the auto-digitizing feature," she says.</p>	Pantograms, Tampa, FL; (800) 872-1555; www.pantograms.com
Pulse Microsystems Ltd. Tajima DG/ML	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unveiled in January 2010. • Designed to be faster as it uses Quad-Core technology. • Uses new interface, with personalized workspaces and dockable windows. • New features include Quotation Maker, which allows users to send a quotation to their customers by using a 3-D image rendering on the chosen garment, along with variable stitch density in satin and fill segments. • Version 2010 supports the new Windows 7 taskbar and the Windows 7 Libraries feature to quickly access embroidery designs and artwork stored across multiple folders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software has more than 200 professionally digitized embroidery fonts and monogram features. • Users can vector import and cut-and-paste from programs such as Adobe Illustrator and CorelDRAW. • Offers AutoTrace wizards, and numerous other advanced automatic features. • Pulse reads and writes all popular commercial and home formats, communicates with all brands of commercial machines, and offers support for Tajima's LAN machines, gearing it for commercial embroiderers. 	Contact vendor directly for a price quote.		The software is most commonly used for embroidered apparel, caps, and sports and team uniforms. The software has been put to use in many challenging projects, including making aircraft seats, horse jackets, sofa covers, sequined denim, embroidered linens and designer home furnishings and shoes.	Users who want to manage or track orders or perform shop-management tasks	<p>Sandra Rodgers, owner of Branson, MO-based Works of Art Embroidery, uses the interface between Tajima DG/ML and CorelDRAW to create all of her chenille, tackle twill and appliqué designs. "This feature makes my life so simple, as well as my screen-printing application, since I'm much better with my artwork in Pulse than in Corel," she says. "I also use the vector art tools tremendously to redraw or create in Pulse. This gives me the vector formatting needed to screen print the exact designs I use for embroidery. It's a great tool."</p> <p>Rodgers adds that she loves the easy-to-use zoom feature. "What a great way to see up close and far away with just a click of a button and without ending my segment," she says.</p>	Pulse Microsystems Ltd., Mississauga, Ontario, Canada; (905) 821-8300; www.pulsemicro.com

EMBROIDERY GRAPHICS AND DESIGN SOFTWARE

Company and Software Package	What's New	Key Features	Cost		Who Should Use It	Who Shouldn't Use It	User Review	Contact
Wilcom International Wilcom DecoNetwork Version 2	Gives decorators access to business management, sales and marketing tools, to drive traffic to their T-shirt design Web sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular brands of embellishable products are already configured with various stock designs and fonts are available on DecoNetwork, a Web site, shopping cart and online T-shirt designer. Decorators' customers can design their own shirts online with this software; end-buyers can order 24/7 on the Web. 	The vendor offers flexible pricing plans: Solo Plan starts at \$147 connection fee plus \$49 per month; Solo Plus Plan starts at \$237 connection fee plus \$79 per month; Affiliates plan starts at \$297 connection fee plus \$99 per month. (Get complete rates at www.deconetwork.com/pricing.aspx .)		Established embroidery and printing companies, promotional product distributors, new and upcoming T-shirt designers, and those who are new to digital garment printing or embroidery.	Decorated apparel providers who aren't interested in selling online (and setting up and maintaining a Web store)	<p>Nick Sanders, marketing director for Direct Print LLC in Logan, UT, loves the "create function" that comes with DecoNetwork. "All of our products are based around the idea that you can customize it and make it your own," he says. "We wanted a feature in which people could come and create something that's unique to them and have an experience with it. We also wanted a system that would allow us to grow quickly, and the Affiliate program allows us to do that."</p> <p>The software's inability to create promo codes or gift certificates has been one of its drawbacks, Sanders says; however, he notes that the Version 2 update has resolved that issue.</p>	Wilcom International Pty. Ltd., Alexandria, Australia; www.wilcom.com.au

EMBROIDERY BUSINESS MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Company and Software Package	What's New	Key Features	Cost		Who Should Use It	Who Shouldn't Use It	User Review	Contact
Shopworks OnSite	Recently released Version 7.1 includes a point-of-sale system, a touch-screen interface and bar-coding enhancements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OnSite is an integrated product that allows decorators to manage their entire business, from customer relationship management to quotes, order entry, purchasing, inventory and accounting. OnSite is specific to the decorator business model, to include decorator-specific orders, embroidery designs and production. 	\$4,900 for the first license; \$990 for each additional license		Decorated apparel-related companies – embroiderers, screen printers, promotional products suppliers and distributors and digital printers – that earn between \$250,000 and \$50 million per year in revenue can benefit from OnSite.	OnSite isn't designed for companies that aren't in the decorated apparel industry. Also, OnSite can store design file images, but isn't used to create the images. You'll need CorelDRAW, Photoshop or other digital art software to do this.	<p>Mary Shaw, owner of Your Image Works Inc. in Indianapolis, IN, bought OnSite because she wanted all of her company's information to be linked. "OnSite 7.1 allows us to track where we purchased items from and how we're decorating them," she says. "The most important feature is being able to see our profits before we process the job. It's also great because we're able to do reorders in no time."</p> <p>Shaw says that there are still a few glitches in the software that need to be fixed. "This can be frustrating because you don't know if it's a user error or a glitch," she says. "Also, I'd love to see specific things adjusted, like our net-cost screen on the front end of order entry."</p>	Shopworks, West Palm Beach, FL; (561) 491-6000; www.shopworx.com
JCW Software LLC FastManager	The latest updates include a point-of-sale system, improved QuickBooks integration, and well as compatibility with ASI's new ESP Orders (www.asicentral.com).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Software helps users manage entire process of selling embellished apparel, including creating a professional quote by using information from a user's preferred vendor catalog directly from FastManager. Once the quote is accepted, it can be converted to an order, which creates a work-in-progress that allows a purchase order to be created and sent to the supplier of choice. Artwork creation and approval process is managed by the system, keeping the artwork associated with a job as it moves to production and onto delivery. All data is displayed in a centralized job board for easy viewing by any member of a user's staff. 	FastManager SMS (for small to mid-size shops): \$1,495; FastManager PRO (for large, multi-departmental operations): \$4,900		Small to large apparel decorators or promotional products distributors who sell embellished wearables as a primary part of their business	Decorators or promotional products distributors who don't focus on selling decorated apparel	<p>Peter Giummo, owner of Tri-Lakes Team Sports in Menifee, CA, says the FastManager PRO software allows all nine of his outside sales reps to quote the same prices to all potential customers – "the prices I established to make the margins I wanted to make," he says. Giummo also likes being able to use FastManager to download the catalogs from all of the companies from which he buys. "This feature is worth the price of the software by itself," he says. "I don't have to enter any of the products; all new products and prices are updated automatically."</p> <p>Giummo says FastManager's easy purchase-order system and its ability to automatically submit invoices and payments to QuickBooks made it a great buy for him.</p>	FastManager, West Palm Beach, FL; (888) 728-8718; www.fastmanager.com
ASI Computer Systems ProfitMaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Version 9.2, out in March 2010, offers users the ability to print, e-mail and fax an invoice and schedule various reports to run unattended. Can access ASI Computer's knowledgebase, customer forum and online videos. Users can also now post Twitter alerts from the system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Software focuses on offering solid ordering, tracking and accounting abilities. Detailed accounting system is able to comprehend complicated orders. Software is updated semiannually. 	Basic package starts at \$5,000		Decorators, distributors or suppliers that need a more robust way to process and track their orders	Decorators, distributors or suppliers that won't benefit financially by improving the efficiency of their ordering or accounting processes	<p>Mark Briggs, team leader at Boulder, CO-based Distinctive Threads Inc., says ProfitMaker's best feature is its easy billing ability. "I can account for an invoice from a vendor in six clicks, rather than manual input," he says. "The ability to make Web stores for customers is great, as well. It's nice to have the ordering and accounting software integrated."</p> <p>Briggs does say, however, that he finds the software "clunky" and says it needs to be upgraded to work with such programs as ESP. He says the software lacks the ability for him to customize it to his individual needs.</p>	ASI Computer Systems, Cedar Falls, IA; (319) 266-7688; www.asicomp.com

NEW RELEASES

Company and Software Package	What Is It?	Key Features		Cost	Who Should Use It	Who Shouldn't Use It	Contact
Floriani Commercial Floriani Total Control	Total Control is a full-featured digitizing and advanced editing program that is designed to be easy to use. Software will be released April 1, 2010.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software will work with non-native formats such as .dst files, as it does with files created in the software itself. • Users will have total control of editing the outlines, points and nodes, stitch angle directions, and start and end points for an element when working with native and non-native design formats. • Another key feature, Save2Sew, which gives a digitizer or embroiderer the ability to modify the density, underlay and compensation values of a design based on the fabric type they're embroidering onto. For even more control of the Save2Sew feature, users can select only the areas of the design – density, underlay and compensation – they want to modify for the given design and fabric type; a user would just check the areas of the design he wants modified during the process. The Save2Sew feature ensures a user has the proper design values for the fabric type she's embroidering. 		\$2,999	All commercial digitizers and embroiderers, regardless of their experience level	Home digitizers and embroiderers	Floriani Commercial, Knoxville, TN; (865) 459-5115; www.rnkdistributing.com
SWF East Stitch Era Universal	Stitch Era Universal from Sierra Technology Group is a free, full-featured digitizing software program. Software will be released fall 2010.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stitch Era Universal's "ribbon concept" is designed to teach decorators the software. The ribbon follows a user's actions and presents her with options, so she avoids rows of toolbars, or menus with additional layers of submenus. • Software includes embroidery fonts, monogram templates and unlimited true-type fonts. • Has different modes for manual or auto digitizing, along with more advanced effects, such as auto color blending, cloning and other power features. • Software brings vectorizing tools inside the embroidery software screen, so a user doesn't have to convert graphics into stitches through two different applications. 		\$995 for Stitch Era Liberty, the dongle-based upgrade	People who need a cost-effective way to have software in more than one station	Stitch Era Universal doesn't come with quoting, invoicing and inventory capabilities, although those features are available as optional modules for other Sierra products. Also, people who don't have a permanent broadband connection available at all times should look elsewhere. In lieu of the free software, users can upgrade to the USB-dongle-based Stitch Era Liberty software, so they can skip the permanent online connection requirement.	SWF East, Tampa, FL; (877) 793-3278; www.swfeast.com

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WHAT'S THE RIGHT ARTWORK SOFTWARE FOR ME?

Software creators and users agree that the number one question that decorators should ask themselves before they purchase decorating software is: What kind of decorator am I?

"For example, are they screen printers, embroiderers or digital graphics artists?" says Peter Giummo, owner of Tri-Lakes Team Sports in Menifee, CA. "Each function requires different capabilities. For printing, the company needs to use a graphics program that can convert and produce graphics in a vectorized format. This is much more detailed than a bitmap and .jpeg format. It's probably the hardest thing we have to explain to our customers – that we can't just take their bitmap logo and put it on T-shirts, because the quality will be terrible; it's along the lines of watch-

ing TV in regular format compared to HD format."

Similarly, Jay Malanga, president of Shopworks, which creates OnSite software, says decorators need to ask if their software will be used for screen printing, embroidery, promotional products or something else. "This is important because the answer will dictate the type of software they'll need," he says. "For example, someone who's developing artwork for embroidery will need a program to create the original artwork – typically CorelDRAW, Adobe Illustrator or another vector-based program. In addition, if they intend to do the digitizing themselves, they'll need a digitizing software package, plus the training on how to use it."

Here are four other important questions decorators should ask themselves before making that important software purchase:

1 What kind of computer will I be using? It's important to find out if the software is compatible with a PC and/or a Mac, says Zach Lawson, graphic designer for Your Image Works Inc. in Indianapolis, IN.

2 How much artwork will I be subcontracting? "Subcontracting may actually be cheaper and more effective in some cases, especially when it comes to embroidery digitizing," Malanga says.

3 Will I waste money on features that my company won't need? "For example, if you need to do basic editing on bitmap files but don't need all of the bells and whistles, there's no need to purchase Adobe Photoshop, which is a \$600 piece of software," Malanga says. "Photoshop is very powerful and is excellent software, but if you need basic editing capabilities only, then it's overkill."

4 Does the software include a tracing function? "Illustrator has a very nice Live Trace function that can convert raster images into vector with a click of the button," Lawson says. "That's big in this industry, because you get a lot of companies that will send you bad images of their logos, and you'll have to redraw the logos in order for them to print well."