



SUBLIMATION QUICK STOP WITH MATT & KEVIN

By Matt Woodhouse & Kevin Lumberg

SUBLIMATION MYTHVAPORIZERS: Sublimation Apparel Myths

With sublimation as with any industry, myths always abound. Sometimes they start based on a partial truth, sometimes they are completely fabricated, and sometimes they may be true. With the huge growth of the internet, sometimes myths can take on a life of their own. The internet can be a great place to learn about sublimation, as there is a boundless amount of information available. Anonymity can sometimes help to foster and spread myths.

The Sublimation Mythvaporizers will attempt to tackle the Sublimation Apparel Myths, and try to determine which myths are true, which are false, and which ones may be a little of both.

NOBODY WANTS POLYESTER SHIRTS

This may have been true ten years ago, and there certainly are people that only want cotton, but as they say, "the times, they are a changing". Performance apparel represents the fastest-growing segment of the apparel industry. Look around, and it is everywhere. On the sports fields and golf courses, athletes and sportsmen of all shapes and sizes are donning polyester, and they probably do not even realize it.

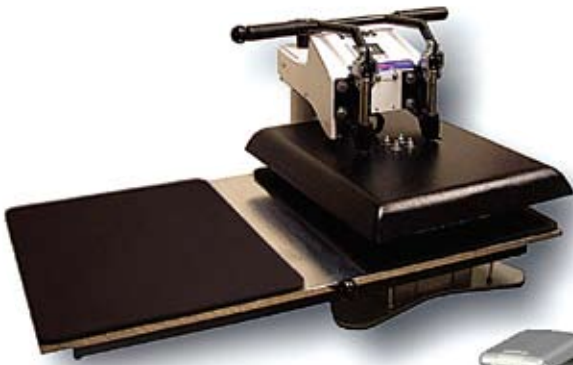
Lance Armstrong was wearing polyester when he won his Tour de France titles. NFL players wear polyester under their equipment. Police officers wear polyester under their bulletproof vests. Everyone has seen the Under Armour commercials. They certainly do not say, "Come buy our polyester garments." They do not refer to them as polyester at all because when people picture polyester in their minds, they either picture one of the scary polyester leisure suites or Grandma's polyester pants suits of the 70's. Under Armour markets them as *performance*, which is exactly what they are.

Cotton garments are made of natural



The complete front of the shirt is decorated, including the straps.

A wide range of colors is available in sublimation shirts.



Heat presses can be set up for quick apparel production.



fiber, and it does absorb moisture very well. However, it really is bad for a person to wear cotton apparel during an activity in hot weather or in the winter when they are trying to stay warm. This is because during hot weather, cotton will absorb sweat, but it becomes saturated and dries very slowly. When cotton fabric is saturated, it does not breathe and becomes very heavy. Therefore, the person wearing it will not cool down, and during cold weather, the dampness will chill the wearer.

The new performance polyester wicks perspiration away from the wearer's body, and dries very quickly. Therefore, it keeps the wearer cooler in hot weather and warmer in cold weather. Since it is lighter and drier, the wearer is more comfortable. Early polyester fabrics would retain odors, but the new performance polyester garments have anti-microbial properties that inhibit the growth of odor-causing bacteria.

The Mythvaporizers talked with Blake Bukowsky of Vapor Apparel, manufacturers of sublimation apparel, and this is what he had to say: "People want polyester. Not only do they want polyester, they want to pay more for it than cotton. Undecorated Under Armour shirts sell for \$25 to \$45 and up."

YOU CAN'T MAKE MONEY WITH SUBLIMATED SHIRTS

We often hear this myth at tradeshows, and it can be true. If you think you can't make money with sublimation shirts, we can guarantee that you positively will not. But on the other hand, if you understand the product and the benefits of sublimated shirts, there is plenty of money to be made.

Blake says, "Learn to sell using *features* and *benefits*. Everyone has heard this before, and there are day-long seminars on this process. Let's make it simple. Most people can identify features; it's the conversion to benefits where most people fall short. The easiest way to understand this concept is that a benefit

follows *so that*. For example: This shirt has moisture-wicking technology, *so that* it stays dry and cool in hot conditions. You can fish all day in the sun and not have to worry about sweating through your cotton T. This shirt is printed digitally, *so that* you don't have to order 144 and store T-shirts and hurt your cash flow. *So that* you can have your employee's names printed on the back. *So that* you can add a photograph of your church. *So that* you don't have to limit the number of colors in your design."

Blake goes on to tell one of his favorite stories: "A woman uses sublimation T's to create an event at a local high school. Every year the senior class at her local high school gets the *privilege* of ordering a custom T or sweatshirt. It has a new design just for that senior class, and the students can pay extra to have their name placed on the back as well. If you've never met a high-school teenager, then you might have missed the sales hook this customer created. Not only

do the seniors not care what these cost, they will pay extra to be different than all the others. She gets orders every August from the entire senior class, and people line up to place their orders. It's a rite of passage to own this shirt/sweatshirt. These opportunities are everywhere—you simply need to find the time to educate your customers and develop your market. By the way, this is the most profitable job she runs all year."

CUSTOMERS JUST WANT CHEAP SHIRTS

Some customers probably do want cheap shirts, and for those customers, sublimation would not be the answer for them, so you would not want to target that demographic. However, luckily for us, the apparel industry is changing, in favor of digitally decorated performance wear. Blake says, "If customers only want cheap shirts, why are American Apparel, Vapor Apparel, Alternative Apparel, Bella and other T-shirt manufacturers growing? None of these manufacturers sell *cheap shirts*. The U.S. has become more casual across the board. T-shirts are no longer lounging wear. Quality is paramount, and new technologies are being incorporated into shirts that allow them to hold higher price points."

Another point to remember when quoting a potential customer is the long-term quality of the digitally decorated sublimation shirt. The quality is unmatched by any other means of decoration. After a hundred washings, the sublimated image will be unchanged, while most other processes will see a severe degradation. They will fade, peel or crack. Also, the sublimated image does not change the breathability or moisture wicking of the fabric like other processes. As a matter of fact, you cannot feel the image at all on the fabric. Ask your customer how long they would like a positive, quality message about their company or organization to be projected, because

with a sublimated garment, the look will remain high quality longer than for any other decorating process.

Blake asks this question: "What is the difference between the Bruce Springsteen shirt that sells at his concerts for \$65 and the Myrtle Beach shirt that sells for \$2.50 at a convenience store? The answer is *intrinsic value*. Vendors need to learn how to build intrinsic value into products. It only costs a fraction more to print the Bruce Springsteen shirt; however, the customer doesn't care that it's a cotton T with ink printed on the surface. It's a memory, a placeholder or a gift for someone who couldn't make it to the show.

IT'S TOO HARD TO PRESS SHIRTS

Shirts can be harder to press than many other sublimated products, mainly because of alignment and speed issues, but with the correct equipment and a little practice, they can be mastered relatively quickly. First of all, using a larger press helps you to line up the shirt. You have to get the shirt straight on the press before you place the transfer onto the press. Be consistent with how you line things up.

If you are consistent, you will be able to work yourself into a rhythm. Teflon wraps are available that can make your life much easier if you like to dress your press (pulling the shirt over the bottom platen so that one side is on top of the platen and the other hangs below). The Teflon wrap is a piece of Teflon with fabric wraps sewn into it. It works like a fitted bed sheet, and holds the Teflon sheet onto the press bottom. This also covers all the rubber on the bottom of the press and allows you to easily slide the shirt around to get it aligned.

One problem that sublimated garments had in the past is the press marks that you would get where the edge of the press clamped together and also where the edge of the transfer paper was. These marks are permanent. The good news is that you can avoid them. Use either a Teflon pillow, or the Vapor Foam under the shirt. You then use a piece of sublimation transfer paper larger than the Teflon pillow or Vapor Foam, so that the edge of the paper hangs off into the air so you will not get a press mark.

There are some improved equipment options that can also speed up your production and make sublimating shirts easier and quicker. If you



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have a Geo Knight DK20S Digital Swingaway press, there is a Twin Shuttle attachment available. Also, many new presses on the market have a top heat platen that shuttles between two different bottom platens. All of these options allow you to be setting up a shirt and transfer on one side of the press while a second side is sublimating, which speeds up your production.

CUSTOMERS WANT MORE THAN JUST WHITE SHIRTS

A few years ago, you could have any color sublimation shirt you wanted, as long as it was white or gray. But now that has all changed. Vapor has over 70 different apparel styles and colors available currently, and they are listening to the sublimators and adding new ones all the time.

Some people think that you can only sublimate onto white, but that is not true, and Blake adds, "Vapor light colors work great and allow you to print up to 90% of the color gamut of a white shirt. Another trend we're seeing is printing solid black on darker shirts."

I CAN'T COMPETE WITH SCREEN PRINTERS AND I DON'T WANT TO DO SMALL RUNS

You cannot compete directly with screen printers, and you shouldn't want to. The good news is that on some shirt orders, when you leverage the strengths of the sublimation printing process, screen printers cannot compete with sublimation. We talked to Steve from Titan Apparel and Supreme Sportswear, who is a screen printer. He has been doing sublimation for over a year, and he tells the Mythvaporizers he has found that sublimation printing is extremely good for team uniforms.

Steve says that, for instance, if he is doing a team of 15 people, with a three-color front logo, a two-color number and a sponsor listed on the back, he can do the entire team order beginning to end with sublimation, in about one third of the time that it would take to screen print the order. Steve further states that when he tallies the profits at the end of the order, sublimation is more profitable, and if the team comes to him later with new players, he can quickly print additional uniforms.

Blake builds on this point: "You are not competing with screen printers if you can sell the customer on short-run, customized shirts. Do you think that a local restaurant wants to pay for 144 shirts at a time to sell at their counter? Cash flow is everything to a small company. Sell this advantage and watch the orders come flying in; you only order what you need."

RECAPPING THE SUBLIMATION MYTHVAPORIZERS RESULTS

- Nobody wants polyester shirts. *FALSE*
- I can't make money with sublimated shirts; they are too expensive. *FALSE*
- Customers just want cheap shirts. *FALSE*
- It's too hard to press shirts. *FALSE*
- Customers want more than just white shirts. *TRUE*
- I can't compete with screen printers, and I don't want to do small runs of shirts. *TRUE and FALSE*

These are the Sublimation Mythvaporizers results, but you can have the same results yourself. We found that the most important thing is to educate yourself about the product you are selling. There are a lot of strengths in sublimation apparel, and the current trends are working in your favor. So there is nothing to be scared of. Please attempt this at home. You don't have to be an expert or have years of experience!

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Comments? Respond to aefeedback@nbm.com.

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