



# Baby, it's Cold Outside

## *Decorating Outerwear*

LON WINTERS

Outerwear has become more popular as people have started to wear it for leisure and everyday activities. (All images courtesy the author)

### **OUTERWEAR AS DEFINED BY WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY:**

1. garments, as raincoats or overcoats, worn over other clothing for warmth or protection outdoors; overclothes.
2. clothing, as dresses, sweaters, or suits, worn over undergarments.

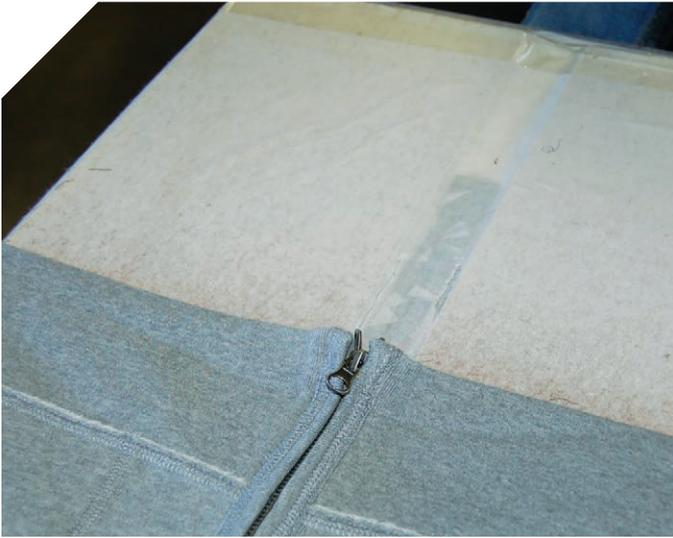
### **OUTERWEAR AS DECORATORS DEFINE IT:**

1. problem garments, as in, hard to print and embroider, needing special parameters or conditions
2. high-dollar invoicing creating better bottom lines

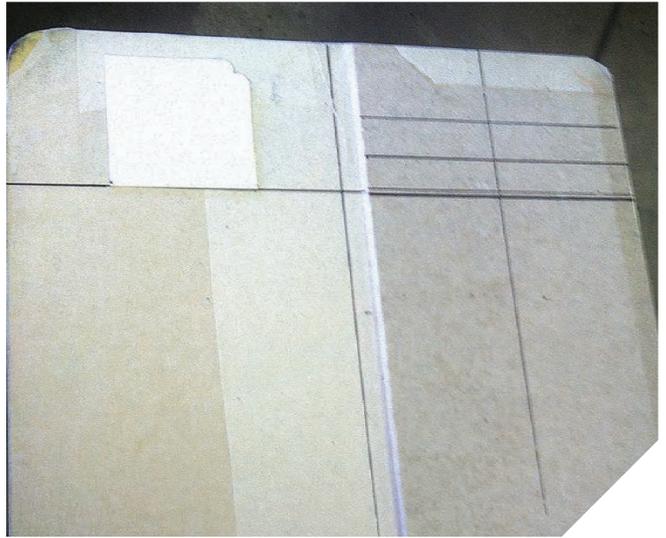
**W**hen it comes to apparel, people have long experimented with what they wear in their free time, in the office, for exercise, and outside in the evenings. Thanks to fabric technology and some of the performance properties introduced in wearables, multiple clothing styles have become acceptable in different environments. When you look at outerwear, it's not just what we wear in the field or on the way to work; it's by and large how people are looking at outerwear and how we incorporate it into our daily life.

While there is a huge segment of lightweight outerwear that is still chiefly used as winter coats and jackets, more people are wearing for leisure, everyday activities, and in the workplace. The popularity of outerwear and layers as an option for casual apparel isn't surprising. People like being comfortable, and that attribute is prominent on the list of features for layered wearables and outerwear.

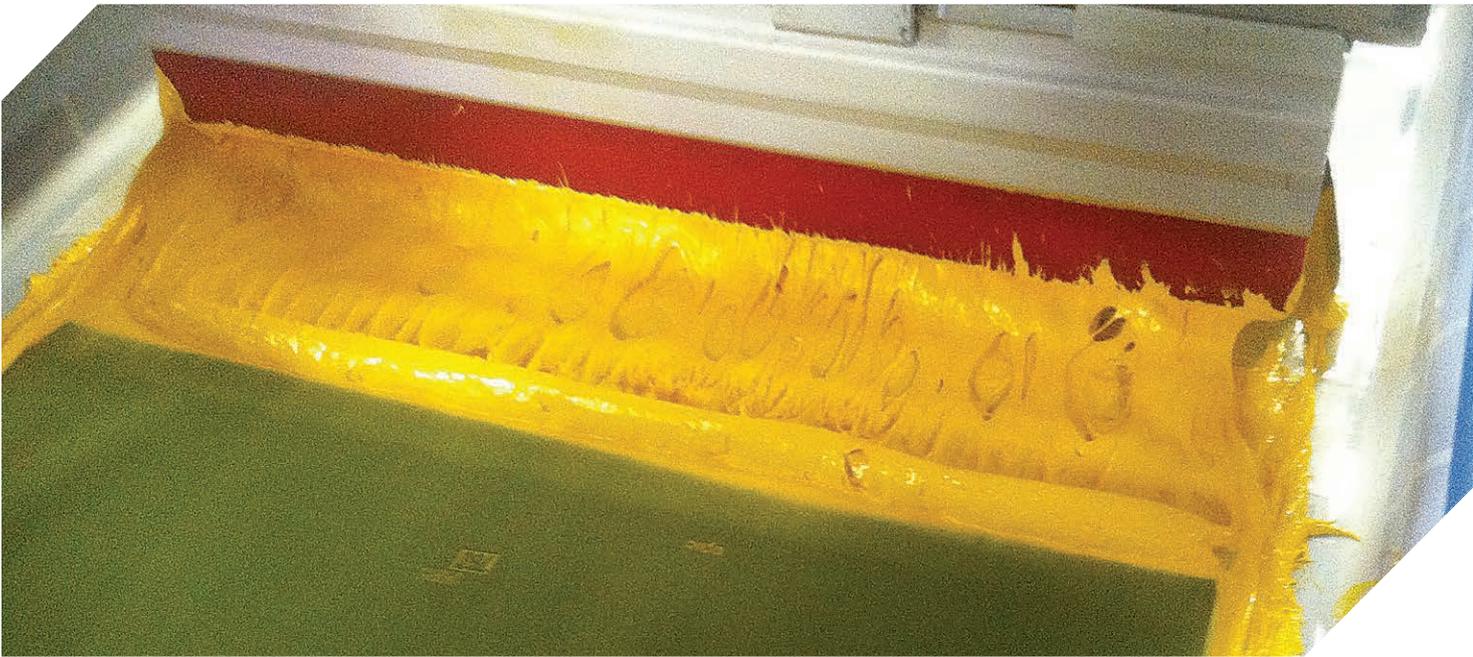
The beauty of outerwear is that, in many instances, the garment can be used for multiple purposes. Apparel worn to warm up or go for a jog can later be worn out to a casual dinner. This versatility makes the garments even more valuable to the customer.



Outerwear and jackets often have features that can make the garments harder to decorate, like unusual fabric blends or zippers.



Making some adjustments to your equipment might be necessary before you start decorating outerwear.

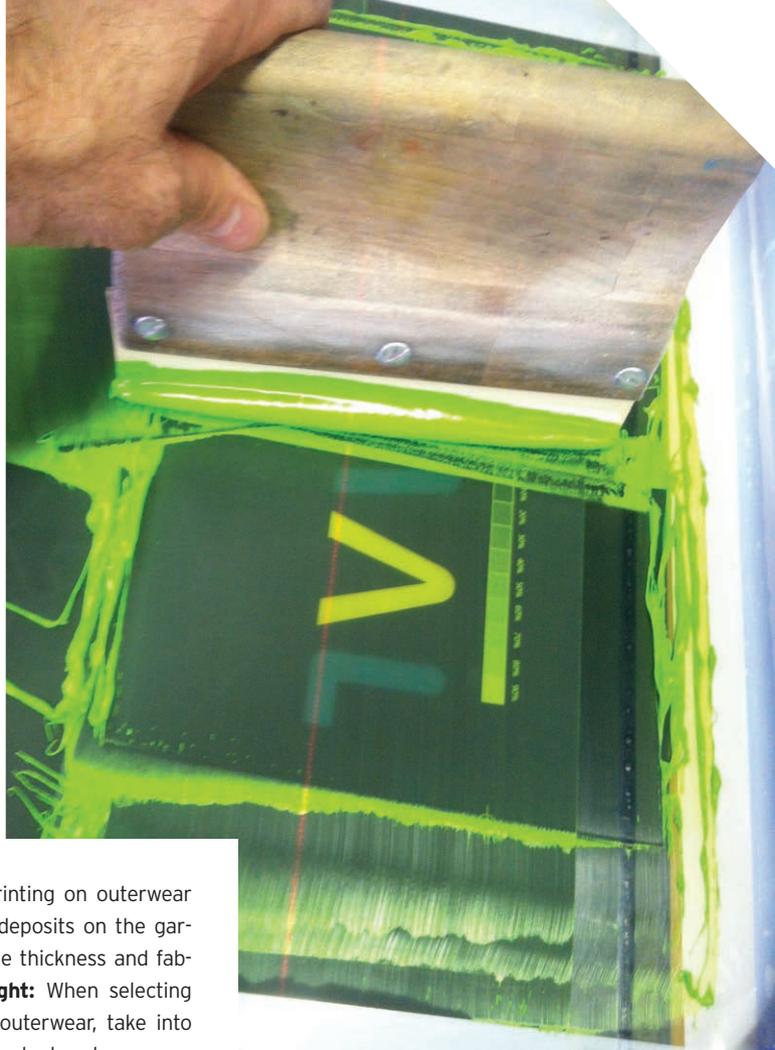


One way to stand out in the outerwear market is to offer processes that others won't.



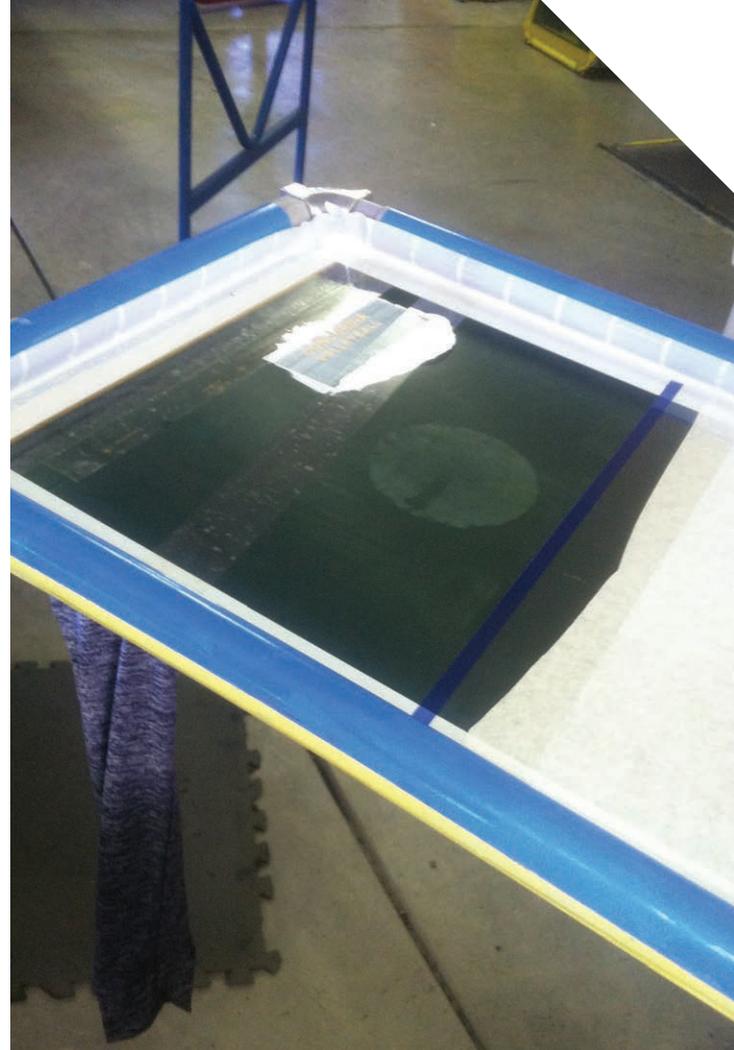
Specialty platens and equipment can help expand your usual range of placements.

## DECORATING OUTERWEAR



**Above left:** Screen printing on outerwear requires different ink deposits on the garment depending on the thickness and fabric content. **Above right:** When selecting the proper mesh for outerwear, take into consideration the off-contact and squeegee pressure needed for thicker or slick fabrics. **Below left:** Correct relative tension is also an important factor in screen printing on outerwear. **Below right:** Simple logos and designs are best suited to outerwear.





**Above:** Screen printing on outerwear can be difficult depending on the knit of the fabric. Zippers can make outerwear even more difficult to decorate and sometimes require special platens.

**Top Right:** Not properly accounting for a zipper on your garment can result in blown screens. **Right:** Bold, simple designs work best with outerwear, rather than intricate embellishments.



With all of its positives and opportunities for increased profits, outerwear can be a challenge to embellish. One way to stand out from competitors is to offer processes that others won't. This will not only create a specific demand that can land you clients who appreciate higher levels of creativity, but it also develops a strong customer relationship. We always talk about how important it is to be prepared with a solution to a problem rather than just identifying the problems. So, let's take a look at some examples of the types of outerwear items and the problems, then let's look into some of the solutions.

### **SCREEN PRINTING**

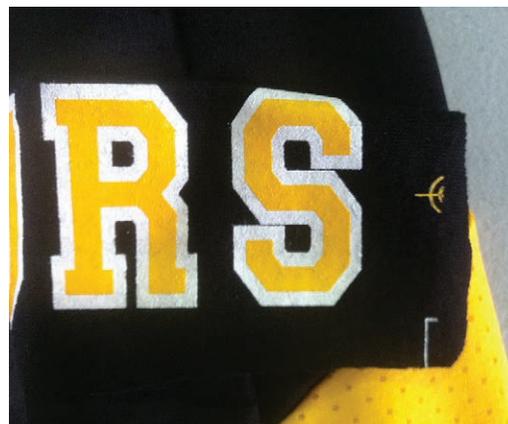
Screen printing on outerwear can be difficult because the fabric can be more loosely or tightly knit, made of a variety of fabric contents, and be thicker or thinner, so it requires a differing ink deposit on the garment. Bold or distressed prints work better on outerwear, as compared to more detailed designs. Correct relative tension and mesh selection

in relationship to off-contact and squeegee pressures are particularly critical in this category as compensation to the thickness of the fabric must be made. Adhesive and special hold-downs are more common with outerwear as these garments tend to move or shrink slightly, particularly after a flash.

Double lined, weather coated, nylon-shelled wind breakers are a great light-



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**Top left:** Embroidery is ideal for heavy jackets and coats, but the thickness needs to be considered. **Top right:** Heat transfers can be a useful solution for many issues with outerwear and jackets. **Left:** Left-chest designs still reigns supreme for embroidery. **Above:** However, other areas such as the shoulders and back of the garment are also popular decorating spots.

weight option. Some of the challenges to overcome with these styles are the weather coating, the double lining, and the nylon shell's propensity to melt before some inks even cure.

The weather coating or waterproofing can sometimes keep the ink from adhering to the nylon, acting as a repellent. This can cause the printed ink to peel off like a fruit roll-up. This can be overcome by treating the print area with alcohol or acetone, literally wiping off the coating before printing. Like anything, wash testing is important.

With double lining, the inner lining of the garment will adhere to the platen glue while the outer shell will move freely, making multicolor screen printing nearly impossible without the solution of a hold-down or clamping jig for the platens. These clever contraptions let you hold down the multiple layers of the garment without any glue. They can be purchased in all shapes and sizes and can even be customized for special pocket locations and more.

Finally, most printers have put a nylon windbreaker down the tunnel of the dryer, only to watch it come out doll-sized on the other end. A nylon additive can be added to the ink to cross link at a lower temperature and allow the nylon to remain cooler and make a chemical bond. The caveat is that this additive will dry the ink in the screen and give it a shorter shelf life.

On to avoiding those pesky zippers. We have blown our fair share of screens on zippers. A zipper gutter can help save screens, as it gives the zipper a place to sit in on the platen. Zipper platens can be purchased with the gutter machined into them, or custom platens can be made. Using the smoothing screen in head one will help flatten the zipper seams into the gutter for a cleaner final print.

How about the polyester content? Much of the polyester dyes in performance fabrics and blends are somewhat unstable; that is to say, they are sometimes unstable at a lower temperature than our typical inks

cure at, and those dyes can bleed through the inks. Typically, this is 325 degrees F or higher. We've all been there when the white ink turns pink on red garments. The solutions here are low-cure and low-bleed inks, as well as blockers, and perhaps a silicon solution that cross links at just 250 degrees F. Keeping flash and dryer temps down is critical, and stacking in rotation at the end of the dryer can help in cooling garments quickly.

### **EMBROIDERY**

Most of the time, we like to embroider heavier jackets and coats. But in addition to the wind shirt issues previously discussed with lining, some of the additional issues with outerwear are difficult locations, pockets, and garment thickness.

The unique decoration locations that are available on outerwear are limitless. There is a wide variety of popular locations that vary from the standard front or back prints. Some of the unique locations are front and



**Top left:** Heat transfers allow you to decorate with more colors than you might with other methods. **Top right:** Making sure your left-chest embellishments are properly aligned is important for any method. **Bottom left:** Odd-sized hoops might be required in order to embroider locations like the upper back of the garment. **Bottom right:** Screen printing on nylon can have some challenges, since the garment can shrink and waterproof coatings can make it difficult to screen print onto the jackets.

back shoulder, hip, lower back, ribs, triiceps, biceps, pockets, over zippers, over the shoulder, upper back, cuffs, waistband, collar, or on the hood. The pockets and special locations can be difficult. For typical embroidered polos we all have plenty 5–7" standard hoops. This isn't all that helpful with many jackets. Though there are hidden pockets for embroidery in some cases, fast clamp and odd-sized hoops are often the best solutions. They allow us to get inside of a small pocket or clamp a collar. They are a little pricey, but they pay off in the quality of the final sew out.

Jackets are too thick to hoop traditionally. Magnetic hoops will hold down these thick jackets without pinching the thick lining that will ultimately pop out during sewing. On those thicker jackets, a heavy gauge 80/12 needle will keep from breaking when penetrating through the jacket.

When embroidery is the solution on lighter outerwear, we use a special backing or easy-cut, 2.5-oz. stabilizer to help reduce

distortion. We will usually use a smaller gauged 65/9 needle which is great for detail and not perforating the edges of the image. On fuzzy or furry outerwear, we use topping to hold down the fibers to keep them from pushing through the fill stitching and to keep the detail stitching from sinking in.

### HEAT TRANSFERS AND DIRECT-TO-GARMENT

Another solution for garments with hard to reach locations, funky fabric, or jobs with a small run size is heat transfers. A solid transfer source can find a good solution for almost any outerwear. Consider this method for expensive outerwear and smaller orders.

Heat printing has come a long way, and low-temperature adhesives with stretch capabilities are a popular technology for outerwear of all compositions and colors. Whether it's screen-printed transfers, print-and-cut digital transfers, dye sublimation, or heat-transfer film, there are many options for a decorator.

Additionally, digital solutions that can offer unlimited colors are delivering large profit margins in this arena. Direct print technologies have come a long way and direct-to-garment is certainly an option for outerwear. It is just as important to be mindful of fabric composition as this can dictate whether or not direct-to-garment will be a good fit. Work with your supplier or equipment manufacturer to get the specific details on printing unique jacket fabric compositions.

Tackling the outerwear apparel market certainly has some embellishment hurdles to overcome. Learning the characteristics of typical outerwear fabrics as well as the common difficulties in decorating them is critical. We can gain an edge in the outerwear category by understanding some of the nuances in embellishing them. There is more and more opportunity here. Whatever decoration technique is chosen on outerwear, we can agree on its bright future in our business.