

## *Spice Up Your Appliqué With Singlehead Embroidery Lasers*

*The creative possibilities of a singlehead embroidery laser are endless.  
Find out how you can gain a creative edge using laser technology.*

**F**or any shop looking for a competitive edge, a proven strategy is to offer a unique product or service. Not only does this help separate your business from the masses, but it also allows you to make a higher profit on something that no one else has.

For a handful of pioneering shops, a singlehead embroidery laser has proven to be just what they needed. With the laser, which is attached to a singlehead embroidery machine, they can now offer a much wider array of unique looks and produce them quicker than with traditional methods.



Caps also can be laser cut on singlehead embroidery lasers.

Photo courtesy of BITO USA, Oceanside, NY

Take, for example, the case of Brian Dolecki, president, Dee's Sport Shop in Roseville, Mich. His core market is serving teams and schools in his tri-county region. He originally was considering adding a digital direct-to-garment printer. Then his rep showed him and his daughter some videos of a singlehead embroidery laser in action.

"When my daughter saw it, the light went on," says Dolecki. "The laser made a lot more sense for our shop than a digital printer."

Within a month of having the laser installed, Dolecki created some samples to show to his biggest category of team customer, hockey organizations, for which he was doing team uniforms.

"We already had the logos and team names. We just had to convert them for laser cutting. Essentially, we were taking what we put on the team uniforms and transferring that to a T-shirt," says Dolecki.

For the appliqué fabric, Dolecki used T-shirt material. "The best part about that," he says, "is if you make any mistakes on the embroidery end, you can cut up the T-shirt for appliqué material so there's no waste."

Although no T-shirts go to waste, Dolecki doesn't depend on misprints for his main source of jersey material. He buys roll goods at local fabric stores like Minnesota Fabrics.

Using a 50% cotton/50% polyester T-shirt, the president is putting the team name on the front with "Property Of" or "Established" and the year.

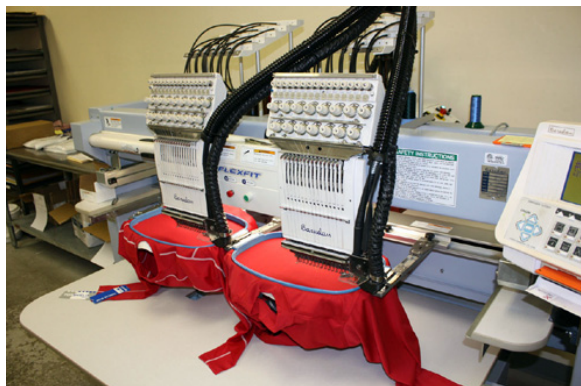
Dolecki estimates he does hockey uniforms for approximately 15 organizations that range in size from 75 to 500 members. He is in the middle of what he expects to be at least a 4,000-piece run to be ready in time for the Christmas season.

The shirts will be offered in Dolecki's shop, in three stores he supplies in local ice arenas, and for some of the bigger hockey clubs that own their own ice rinks and have pro shops with hockey sticks, pucks, tape, and apparel.

One of the benefits Dolecki likes best about his new singlehead embroidery laser is the profit. ▶



The first market Brian Dolecki targeted for apparel produced with his new singlehead embroidery laser was hockey teams. Located in Roseville, Mich., hockey is Dee's Sport Shop's biggest niche. Dolecki took the team name from the uniforms he was already creating and put them on T-shirts using a distressed technique of laser cutting.



**In addition to a singlehead embroidery laser, BITO also offers two-head and a four-head embroidery laser models.**

*Photo courtesy of BITO USA, Oceanside, NY*

One production trick Dolecki has used is to do all the sewing on his six-head and eight-head embroidery machines, then, leaving the shirt in the hoop, it's transferred to the singlehead laser for cutting. The only glitch that had to be overcome early on was registering the hoop so that the cutting would be in the right place.

This was accomplished by leaving the needle down in the garment and using a pen to make a center mark. When the hoop was inserted into the singlehead, this mark was used to get it in the right position.

Dolecki's shop is not the only one that is finding a singlehead laser a profitable proposition, and team and spiritwear are not the only markets. Greg Gaardbo, president, Shockwaves Promotional Apparel, Des Plaines, Ill., has found a thriving niche for his singlehead laser in the boutique market.

Gaardbo has been designing limited-edition shirts, typically 24 to 36 pieces, and selling them to boutiques for around \$56 a piece

Originally, he was thinking of charging around \$20 per shirt. Then his daughter, Megan Dolecki, went to the mall and saw similar merchandise at Abercrombie & Fitch for \$50. The decision was made to set the selling price at \$29.95 and there's been no price resistance at all so far, according to Dolecki.

"You've got probably no more than a \$5 investment in labor and materials, and we're seeing a \$25 return on it," says Dolecki. "I like those dollars."



**This example was done on a laser bridge, but it shows the capabilities of a singlehead embroidery laser as well. With a laser, multiple layers and intricate designs can be production friendly.** *Photo courtesy of Image Apparel Solutions, Wheeling, IL*

wholesale. "They take a day or two to produce," he says.

"The singlehead laser is not meant for high production," he notes. "So you have to get top dollar. With the shirts I've designed for boutiques, I can get that."

Most recently, for the summer season, Gaardbo has been creating designs for ladies' ribbed tank tops. Designs are usually simple, consisting of script words in a shiny or sparkling material he gets at the local fabric store.

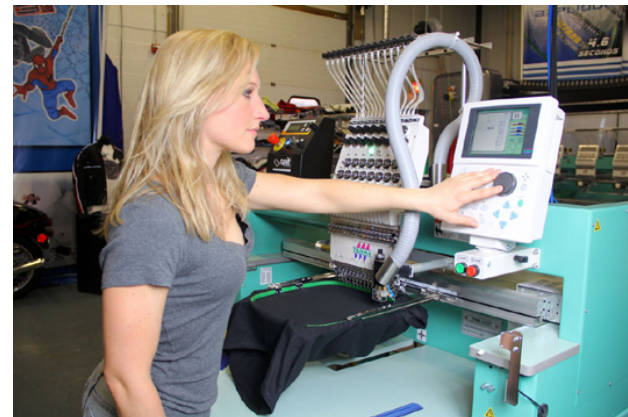
For one design, he screen printed a guy playing a guitar and then over it added the words "Rock N Roll" in appliqué. Creating a multimedia look with a screen print as the base and appliqué over top has been a winning combination for Gaardbo.

He is already starting on some fall designs. For one of his first pieces, he's chosen a ladies' long-sleeve thermal top that he custom dip dyed to create a tie-dye looking pattern. Then he laser cut an abstract rose out of crushed velvet for the appliqué. "It will be an upper left chest design," he says. "It looks really nice."

The singlehead laser has been a perfect solution for Jay Butterfield's niche. His business, Silkscreen Ink, Storm Lake, Iowa, offers contract decorating and fulfillment services for Internet-based businesses. "We do onesie-tosie orders for companies that have no equipment. They just take the orders," he says.

For some clients he supplies the shirts, sometimes they supply the shirts, or he stocks inventory for them.

"I saw the direction that market was going, and I decided to cater to it," he explains. "It is more of an expense to produce small orders and not many decorators want to deal with one piece."



**Laser owners agree that learning how to use a singlehead laser machine takes about a day if you already know how to operate your singlehead embroidery machine. Some trial and error is required to get the right power settings and cut depths, but otherwise, it's very easy to learn and use.** *Photo courtesy of Hirsch International, Hauppauge, N.Y.*

**Greg Gaardbo, Shockwaves, Des Plaines, Ill., is having great success with his new singlehead embroidery laser, creating apparel for boutiques. This example was dip dyed and then Gaardbo found a shiny material at the local fabric store to create the rock 'n' roll appliqué lettering. He's getting \$56 per shirt wholesale.**



Butterfield's business model has been successful because, in addition to charging the true cost of decorating one piece, he charges a handling service. "People who want to start an Internet business can come to us and not have to touch a thing. They just collect the money and pay us," he says.

He estimates that approximately 50% of his overall business is strictly Internet, and the other half is the traditional local schools, teams, and companies. He caters to these customers with automatic screen printing, Kornit digital printing, and traditional embroidery as well as his singlehead embroidery laser services.

"We do polyester and cotton twill appliqué on team shirts and sweat shirts," he says. "We also do reverse appliqué on T-shirts and sweat shirts. We cater to just about any sport including baseball, football, and hockey. One of the newer sports is dryland hockey where the kids play in a field in the summer. Whiffle ball leagues also have been popular customers on the East Coast."

Susan Sapra, owner, True Grits Uniforms, San Clemente, Calif., purchased a singlehead laser for creating school uniforms, spiritwear, and sports uniforms for private and parochial schools.

"The appliqué samples make an impressive presentation," says Sapra, "and it gives an impression of quality. If you know a good digitizer who understands the machine, the laser can be used to create exciting designs."

#### **Laser Specifics**

Currently, there are only two brands of singlehead embroidery lasers on the market: the Proel E-Laser and the Seit singlehead embroidery laser. Both are priced around \$25,000.

The Proel laser can be mounted to any brand of embroidery machine, and the Seit laser will work only on a Tajima embroidery machine. It's preferable to have the Seit installed in the factory, however, in some cases, if the Tajima is an M series, it may be possible to retrofit it to an existing machine in a shop.

On both machines, the laser is connected to the first needle on either side of the head.



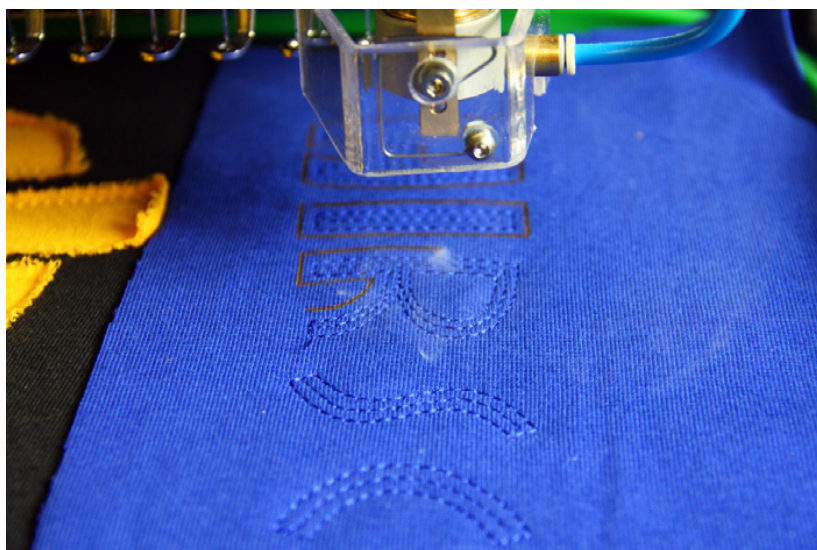
**When Megan Dolecki saw a video of the singlehead laser bridge in action, she immediately knew it had potential for her dad's shop, Dee's Sport Shop, Roseville, Mich. They are now creating distressed appliqué T-shirts in time for Christmas.**

The design is digitized to instruct the first needle to cut in a similar fashion that it might instruct that needle to sew.

"The laser works off an XY access, but the movement of the laser is done by the embroidery machine pantograph so the cut movements are similar to the stitch movements," says Henry Bernstein, North American director, Seit Laser. "The machine doesn't know the difference. It thinks it is still stitching, but in reality needle one has been converted to a cutter.

The Proel singlehead machine can be expanded to work on a two-head too. According to Ed Balady, president, BITO USA, distributor of the Proel system, if you purchase a singlehead E-Laser, it can be configured to work on a two-head machine or on two heads of a larger multihead machine, but not two separate singlehead machines. But you can run lasers on both heads of a two-head machine from a single base.

The Seit laser comes with 10 watts of power, and the Proel laser comes with 25 to 30 watts of power, which is one of the reasons it can be split to work on a two-head machine.



The singlehead embroidery laser sews the design or lettering first. Then it comes back and laser cuts out the shape. If you want a distressed look, you do not embroider a border. If you want a traditional, finished look, the machine then sews a satin stitch around the cut edges.

*Photo courtesy of Hirsch International, Hauppauge, N.Y.*

Balady explains, "We split the beam, boost the power supply, run an additional fiber optic line, control the laser beam focus, and add a second driver to the second head. It's similar to if you want to add a TV to your house and you need a signal booster. You need more power supplies, splitters, and so on."

Both machines can do caps. The Proel requires the purchase of a separate cap attachment. The Seit does caps without an attachment.

If you already have a singlehead embroidery machine or are considering adding one, a singlehead laser can only incrementally increase profitability and expand your business into new markets. The most exciting aspect of this technology is it's so new, it has only begun to be explored. There are so many directions it can go -- from experimenting with new and more varied patterns and fabrics, to multiple layers, to cutting more intricate designs than has ever been possible before.

If you want to differentiate your business, a singlehead laser may be just the way to it. Take the time to research the possibilities and see if it just might be a profitable addition to your shop.

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