

HANDBOOK:

# PERFORMANCE WEAR



## Inside:

Learn about **current trends** happening in the performance wear industry.

Get tips on **marketing and selling** performance wear to your existing clients.

Understand **best practices** to use when making performance wear garments.



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# Introduction



Performance wear is generally any garment designed to perform or function for a specific purpose. Performance wear helps athletes and active people keep cool, comfortable, and dry by use of its moisture-wicking technology, high stretchability, and compression, among other methods.



## Did You Know?

*The market for performance wear is valued at \$78 billion and is growing at 6-7% each year.*

Made from polyester, polypropylene, poly-blends, or other synthetic fibers, these garments are generally sold to the sportswear market for athletes and other active people like runners, cyclists, and yoga enthusiasts. Many people wear these garments as casual wear as well – think yoga pants and fleece jackets. Performance wear is, as the name says, built to perform.



But it's not just functional, it also needs to be stylish – which is where the garment decorator comes in. The market for sports and performance wear is growing. It's a big opportunity for garment decorators who know how to handle these sometimes tricky synthetic fabrics.

# Trends



## Inspiration from Brands

Once dominated by sports apparel, performance wear has shifted to include leisure and athleisure wear, resulting in a market boom. What used to be limited to polyester wicking tees, and compression shirts and shorts, now includes warm-ups, leggings, performance tights—even polos and socks.

With consumers wearing performance wear beyond the gym and into everyday life, many major retail brands, like Kate Spade and Zara, have begun to branch into this rising market. Powerhouse athletic brands Puma and adidas have expanded their lines, collaborating with celebrities like Kayne West, Rihanna, and Stella McCartney.

Being the decorator to quickly innovate and offer on-trend styles is a big competitive advantage in the custom apparel market. Keeping an eye on top brands and their styles is a great way to keep your custom apparel on trend. Use inspiration from these large brands and shop wholesale styles to match. Never copy, but use popular styles to create custom designs for your customers to mimic their look or placement.



### Athleisure Brands To Watch

- Nike
- Under Armour
- Adidas
- Victoria's Secret
- LulaRoe
- Lululemon
- Fabletics

# Blank Garment Trends

Loose, comfortable styles that easily transition to any occasion continue to rise in popularity. Fashion meets functionality with prints, patterns, and seasonal shades dominating.

## Transitional Styles

Consumers want fashionable performance wear to seamlessly translate from shopping to the gym and back again. When sourcing blank garments for performance wear, choose transitional styles easily worn for any occasion.



## Seasonal Colorways

Athleisure now follows seasonal trends. For many years, performance wear came in black and more black. Today, consumers want to stand out and are looking for seasonal looks with color, mesh accents, color blocking, and big patterns.



## Incorporate Neutral Shades

Following the trends in fashion, lighter colors are coming in hot with pretty neutrals like nudes, blush pinks, seafoam, and pale gray.

## Mix in Bright Hues

Bright, neon hues are also popular thanks to athleisure brands like Lularoe and Nike. Source performance garments in bold shades or mix in neon decoration.



## Loose, Comfortable Styles

The rise of athleisure is heavily influenced by the loose, comfortable fit consumers desire. Garments with flowing silhouettes are increasingly popular, inspired by meditation and nature vs. hard core workouts. Tri-blend fabrics made up of polyester, cotton, and rayon have the perfect composition to achieve this loose fit and drape.



### Did You Know?

Pantone's color of the year is Ultra Purple. CAD-CUT® Fashion-FILM® in Matte Purple is a match. [Read more](#) at the blog.

## High-Quality Fabrics

High-quality performance fabrics are key for today's consumers. They want reinforced leggings and pants to provide extra coverage when flexed and want to avoid unflattering low rise cuts.

## The Bomber Jacket

Drawing inspiration from the revival of '90s and hip hop underground culture, the bomber jacket is a new staple in athleisure. Bomber jackets are a statement piece in breathable fabrics. Perfect for adding lightness to outfits while keeping bodies covered, these casual pieces make for an easy and cool athleisure look.

## Bold Prints

Along with bright neon colors, bold prints are trending in leggings. Pairing a solid top with colored bottoms featuring camo, leopard, geometric, and retro color block is a fun way to add flavor to athleisure fashion.

## Fresh Styles that Flatter

Athleisure is trendy and changes fast. Keep your items fresh with new and flattering styles. This includes tops with unique necklines, high and low hemlines, short sleeve hooded sweatshirts, and joggers.

## The Rise of Cropped Styles

Another fashion flashback creeps into performance wear through cropped tops and hoodies. These short styles pair perfectly with high-waisted leggings, jeans, or skirts.

## Matchy-Matchy is on Trend

Once seen as excessive, coordinated pieces worn together as one outfit is now an in-style trend. Source tops and bottoms to create a full matching outfit.

## Japanese and Linear Florals

Eye-popping bouquets of florals are the latest trend energizing performance wear with prints and patterns. Performance wear styles incorporating Japanese and linear florals will be a hit in 2018.



### Wholesale Sources

- *SanMar*
- *Pennant Sportswear*
- *Bella+Canvas*
- *BAW Athletic Wear*
- *Boxercraft*
- *Next Level Apparel*



## Decoration Trends

### Reflective Accents

Influenced by athleisure's popularity with outdoor enthusiasts, reflective accents are incorporated throughout performance wear in garment blanks and added decoration. This trend creates a fashionable metallic look with a practical safety application by adding reflective in unique locations on the blank such as the yoke, sleeves, or pant leg.

### Futuristic Foil Imprints

Modern, metallic imprints are undeniably trendy and becoming a staple in performance wear printing. Futuristic performance wear with bold foil finishes create a cutting-edge look. Bright, neon shades mixed with metallic create bold, eye-catching imprints.

### '90s Inspired Patches

Nostalgic athletic looks inspired by the '90s and a desire to express individualism bring patches into performance wear. This trend is popular on everything from shirts and jackets to pants and sweatshirts.

### Minimalistic Tonal Prints

Inspired by urban wear, tonal prints deliver a retail-ready minimalist look on performance wear. Tone-on-tone prints created with matte or wet glass-like finishes elevate logos to create a slick, edgy look. This futuristic finish is created by matching a like color garment and decoration such as black on black or a clear heat transfer on a dark blank garment.

### Color-Block Split Text Effects

Creating a unique design out of text by splitting it in half horizontally or diagonally is a great way to make simple text designs stand out. This trend is a top seller in apparel designs by large sportswear and spirit wear retailers.



#### Learn More!

Check out this color-block split text effect with foil + adhesive, and [learn how to get the look.](#)

# Placement Trends

Performance wear and athleisure styles are all about breaking the rules. Unique placements of logos and graphics keep performance wear light-hearted and fun. Create original styles by incorporating these placement trends in your designs.

## Understated Placements

Subtle logo placement in unusual locations such as sleeves, yokes, and hemlines are popular among large performance wear brands. These placement areas are ideal for adding additional branding for your business or the client's.

## Oversized Prints

Big, bold prints that take over garment areas like the pant leg or across the shoulder continue to dominate performance wear in the spirit and athletic market.

## Vertical Prints

Horizontal prints are the norm, but vertical prints with the side seam of the shirt are a fun and creative way to add design to the garment. This trend is on the rise in performance wear because it complements the lightweight, comfortable fit of the item.

## Hemline cutoffs

Matching the trend of crop tops and hoodies, performance wear leaders use the hemline of the shirt to create a cutoff effect giving the illusion the wording was cut off along with the rest of the shirt.

## Wrap-Around Print

A popular urban trend turned into mainstream fashion and athletic apparel is the wrap-around print. This logo placement takes a large image and wraps it from the front to the back of the garment. The latest application for this trend is a wrap-around print on pants such as leggings or joggers.

## Pant Cuff Alignment

With the popularity of longer length garments in performance wear, moving the logo placement to the bottom is a smart placement for logo design. Work the design up from the pant cuff using vertical text.



Get more ideas for design size and placement with

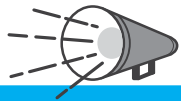
[The Ultimate Guide to Design Size & Placement.](#)



# Market & Sell Performance Wear



## Tips for Marketing & Selling



### Talking Points

- *Moisture-Wicking*
- *Antibacterial*
- *Stretch*

**Show your authority for performance wear & create a competitive advantage.**

Understanding the desirable attributes of performance wear and how to position them alongside your other products is crucial to selling and marketing these garments.

While the popularity will cause some demand, understanding performance capabilities and how to pitch them to your customer will help you sell more and make a higher profit. For athletic customers, talk about the moisture-wicking effect and the antibacterial properties of the material. These aspects keep the garment fresh throughout out the day by limiting the growth of odor and stain-causing bacteria. Some performance garments have stretch properties to enhance performance, so make sure to pull those to the front of your messaging if available.

Performance wear's breathability and lightweight feel make it perfect for keeping customers cool, dry, and comfortable all day long, regardless of activity. The comfort of the polyester fabric should be highlighted for all customers from athletic and fan apparel to event and corporate customers. For corporate partners, the high quality, prestigious look of performance wear makes it a perfect upgrade from standard cotton fabrics.



**Performance Wear Benefits**

- Breathable
- Lightweight
- Moisture-Wicking
- Upscale Look

A strong understanding of performance wear benefits will allow you to pitch the product alongside your other garments making it easy for the customer to choose the best product for their needs. Deploying a “Good, Better, Best” selling strategy will give you a way to successfully show the benefits of the new product to all customers without leaving your customer’s favorites off the table. This allows the customer to see three clear options, their benefits, and the pricing to make an informed decision. In this strategy, a “good” garment could be the usual cotton T-shirt, a “better” garment would then be a moisture-wicking performance T-shirt, and then “best” product would be a high-end, brand name T-shirt or jacket.

The widespread popularity and versatility of performance wear makes it a perfect product category to pitch across all industries and customers. Its high-end look and unique performance capabilities offers a chance to make a higher profit when selling at the expected higher price. Make sure to take the market value and perception into consideration when setting your price to make sure you are pricing accordingly to make your profit.

**Corporate**

**Sports**

**Athleisure**



**Learn More**



Looking for more tips for marketing your business? Check out [The Ultimate Guide to Marketing Your T-Shirt Business](#).

# Performance Wear Terms



## Terms To Know

Get educated about performance features and how they're applied to a garment to pitch successfully. Start with performance wear terms to know in this guide.

**Breathability** - The movement of air from one side of the fabric to the other to keep the wearer comfortable.

**Moisture-Wicking** - The ability of a fiber or a fabric to disperse moisture and allow it to pass through to the surface so that evaporation can take place.

**Antibacterial "Odor Fighting" Properties** - The use of antibacterial treatments to fight odors in performance fabrics.

**Blend** - Yarn or a fabric made up of more than one type of fiber.

**Dri-FIT** - Fabric that helps keep the wearer comfortable and dry by moving perspiration from the skin, through the layers of fabric, to the outside layer for rapid evaporation across the outer surface area.

**Vents** - An opening in a garment to assist breathability.

# Best Practices



## Follow The Instructions

The key to a successfully decorated shirt lies in proper application. Always follow the application instructions included with your transfers or heat transfer vinyl. The instructions do not change based on what you are applying to. In this case, if your apparel is unique, you may need to change the transfer or heat transfer vinyl type, not the instructions.



### Did You Know?

*Time, temperature, & pressure are the most important values to know, no matter what you're heat applying.*





### Common Heat Press Mistakes

- Temp Too High
- Too Much Time
- Too Much Pressure

# Cool Down Your Heat Press

We sometimes hear from customers who tell us their heat transfer vinyl is falling off. After a little troubleshooting we often learn they've applied their materials at too high a temperature, for too much time with too much pressure.

It's a misconception that if some heat is good, more is better. As the industry moves away from 100% cotton or cotton/poly blends, you can no longer smash on transfers and vinyl at 350 degrees and hope it won't ruin the garment. Hot melt adhesive is designed to adhere under specific conditions. If too much heat is used the adhesive will literally burn off without proper adhesion.

When dealing with fabrics that can scorch, always use the lowest recommended temperature for the material you're applying to.



### Learn More



Learn more about fabric types, low-bleed and high-bleed polyester with the [Dye Migration Handbook](#).

# Read Your Care Label

Performance fabrics, like nylon or Lycra®/spandex, require special consideration when heat applying. Too much heat ruins garments by leaving scorch marks and the dreaded heat press box. Before decorating it's important to read and understand a garment's care label.

The garment's label will tell you its fiber content along with the percentages of each type of fiber. When working with performance fabrics, it's important to know these values so you can choose your heat transfer vinyl or transfer type based on the highest percentage on the label.

For example, if your shirt's care label lists the fiber content as 30% Polyester, 20% Rayon, and 50% Spandex, choose heat transfer material based on the Spandex.



# Use the Right Tools

## QUICK CHANGE HEAT PRESS PLATENS

Heat press platens come in a variety of sizes for different purposes. Using the right heat press platen on your garment means you get heat only where you need it reducing the chance of scorching while ensuring a good application.

[Shop Quick Change Platens](#)



## SILICONE UPPER PLATEN COVER

This silicone cover attaches to the upper platen of the heat press and helps reduce marks and indentation on heat sensitive materials like polyester, neoprene, and spandex.

The silicone upper platen cover alters the heat delivered to the application. It's recommended you test the transfer and garment for wash durability after application. As a general rule, add approximately 10-20 seconds to the application to achieve success.

[Shop Silicone Upper Platen Cover](#)

## POWER PLATEN

This platen heats the underside of a threaded garment, so less heat is required on the outer facing fabric. Heat applied from underneath melts the adhesive from below, reducing the risk of scorching performance wear fabrics.

[Shop Power Platen](#)



# Getting a Soft Hand

When designing your artwork for the softest hand on thin and stretchy performance fabrics, the more open areas that “show through” to the shirt, the better. No matter which type of screen printed transfer or heat transfer vinyl you choose, the least amount of ink or material coverage will give you the best hand.

Distressed patterns can also loosen up the ink coverage. Use a lighter weight typestyle or a text outline instead of solid text for a softer hand.



## Recommended Materials

### **CAD-CUT® Heat Transfer Vinyl**

Best for spot color graphics where low quantities or personalization is needed. Cost rises with each additional color.

#### Premium Plus™

A popular go-to for performance wear because it applies at 280 degrees and has excellent stretch and rebound.

#### Silicone Dye-Block™

The first silicone-based solution for dye migration. It also applies at a low temperature so it will prevent scorching of performance wear fabrics.

### **Screen Printed Transfers**

Best for spot color graphics where mid-sized or high quantities are needed. Cost rises with each additional color.

#### Elasti-Prints™

The screen printed transfer solution for single color or spot multi-color application on performance wear with its super low 275 application temp and great stretch and rebound.

## Digital CAD-COLOR® Transfers

Best for multi-color and full color graphics, where low quantities or personalization are needed. No additional cost for colors.

### SuperTEK® Opaque

Full color designs on light or dark fabrics. Lightweight and stretchable for an incredibly soft hand.

### SuperTEK® Clear

High gloss, lightweight, and stretchable finish for white or light fabrics only.

## Hybrid Transfers

Best for multi-color and full color graphics where high quantities are needed. No additional cost for colors.

### Stretch Litho™

Full color, digitally printed graphics in a transfer for cotton/polyester performance wear garments. It has a soft hand and low application temperature so it can even be used on 100% polyester.





# Combating Dye Migration

Dye migration, or bleeding, occurs when the ink used to dye the fibers of a polyester garment are reheated to temperatures above 280 degrees. At this temperature the inks are reactivated and released from the fibers. When they are released the dyes will come through heat transfer vinyl and cause discoloration, like a faint red (or pink) number on a red jersey.

Check the label to determine the polyester content in the performance fabric you're applying to and determine whether you have a low-bleed polyester or a high-bleed polyester. Always test your application before completing a job.

With the industry's move toward high-tech, sublimated, and performance fabrics – the Stahls' laboratories have invested heavily in low-temperature adhesives, heat transfer materials, and heat press technology to deal with migrating dyes from these fabrics.



*Dye Migration & Opacity*

### Silicone Dye-Block™

The first silicone-based solution for dye migration using heat transfer technology. Because it's stretchy and pliable and applies at a low temperature, it's perfect for preventing scorching on performance wear fabrics. It also fully blocks dye on sublimated fabrics to stop dye migration from ruining your garments.

[Silicone Dye-Block™](#) is available in rolls, ready to cut on a vinyl cutter, and in Pre-Cut Letters & Numbers (3" & up), Any Word. Any Way., CAD-CUT, and Pre-Spaced.



### Power Platen

When paired with materials meant to block dye migration, this platen not only eliminates scorching on delicate performance fabrics, it can also help to reduce the risk of dye migration.

Shop for the [Power Platen](#).



# Conclusion



Performance wear is a trend not going anywhere. These clothes represent more than just fitness and exercise, it's also about comfort, health, and wellness. Performance wear and athleisure represent a lifestyle consumers are willing to buy into. Decorated performance wear is an opportunity for your business to create premium looks with premium prices (and premium profits). Get on board and decorate performance wear confidently for more sales in your existing and new markets.



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## About Stahls'

Stahls' is the leading resource for business-to-business garment and product identity at every level. Stahls' creates solutions, technologies, products, and services needed to start, run, and grow any garment imprint or personalization business.

Whether you're interested in learning how to use a heat press or how to decorate a soccer uniform, our [educational resources](#) will give you the information you need.

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