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Embroidered Merchandise Logo Digitizing: Artwork to Sew-Out

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Executive Summary

Commissioning embroidered brand merchandise involves three deliverables that buyers often treat as one: approved visual artwork, a machine-specific stitch program (the digitized file), and a physical sew-out (a test stitch on the real product). A vector logo supplies only the first. Vector files describe shapes with "mathematical equations, lines, and curves" (www.adobe.com), while digitizing is "the process of converting artwork into a stitch file" (www.echidnasewing.com.au).

Stitch setup is not reliably portable between suppliers, so the order of purchases matters. One print-on-demand supplier states that "digitized files can only be used to fulfill orders with Printful" (help.printful.com), and another says "Printify cannot accept stitch files such as DST, PES, or EXP" (help.printify.com). Other suppliers accept customer files on conditions: a UK decorator accepts DST files (www.ckl.uk.com), and a US apparel supplier names Tajima, Barudan and Melco files and attaches quality conditions to them (help.allcountyapparel.com). These are individual supplier rules, not industry standards, so the first question for the chosen embroiderer is which files it accepts, before any third-party digitizing is bought.

Design limits also vary by source. One supplier recommends text at least 0.25 inches tall (www.customink.com); a thread maker says its fine thread can stitch lettering "as small as 3mm high" (www.madeira.co.uk); a software maker says each font "has a recommended minimum and maximum size" (help.wilcom.com). No single minimum text size, color limit or resolution rule is safe to generalize. Thread color is approximate too: "there may not always be a PANTONE" match (www.madeirausa.com).

Published digitizing fees come in at least three structures: a per-design fee that depends on type and placement, stitch-count pricing in 1,000-stitch increments (www.printing.org), and flat per-design pricing with "no stitch-count fees" (digitizing.us). Some suppliers waive fees at quantity thresholds, for example "25 or more embroidery items in a single order" (help.printful.com). The decision is driven less by the fee than by whether the setup is reusable, who may receive the file, and whether a sample on the actual garment is approved.

For a single logo conversion, a monthly design subscription is rarely the right purchase: a one-off job is better handled directly by the production supplier, with a designer involved only when the logo needs simplification. A subscription fits when embroidery artwork is one recurring item among many design requests. The worksheet at the end separates artwork, setup and sew-out so first-order and repeat-order totals can be compared on one basis. Figures are vendor-stated as of November 2026 and should be reconfirmed before purchase.

Introduction and Background

Branded apparel is a large part of the promotional goods market. The Promotional Products Association International (PPAI) estimated total 2024 U.S. promotional products distributor sales at $26.78 billion (www.ppai.org), with apparel the top category at 26.6% of sales (www.ppai.org). Multiplying those two published figures gives roughly $7.1 billion for apparel in 2024; that product is this report's arithmetic, not a PPAI statement, and it covers all apparel decoration methods rather than embroidery alone. PPAI later reported 2025 promotional channel sales of $27.1 billion (www.ppai.org), and the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) reported 4.2% growth for North American distributors in 2025 (asicentral.com). The PPAI figure rests on "an independent email/mail survey of U.S. promotional products distributors" (www.ppai.org), so it is a survey estimate. These market figures give context only: they say nothing about how many buyers commission embroidery, or how many pay separately for artwork adaptation.

The buyer in this report is a startup or e-commerce marketing lead, or an agency account manager, ordering embroidered shirts, jackets or caps. The decision is which purchase comes next: logo adaptation by a designer, machine-specific digitizing from an embroiderer, or a physical sample from the production supplier. Existing content on branded merchandise tends to argue promotional value: one design-subscription provider's article, published August 29, 2021, discusses how merchandise can "build and improve brand recognition over time" (www.manypixels.co). It does not divide the buyer's work into artwork, setup and sample, which is the gap this report addresses; its older statistics are not used here.

Scope and method. The report draws on supplier help pages, software documentation, thread and stabilizer makers, trade press and industry association data, each opened and read in November 2026. Where a rule belongs to one supplier, the text says so. It is not a guide to operating an embroidery machine or a general logo design guide. Monetary figures appear only where an official vendor page showed them on the retrieval date, with the currency symbol as displayed; many pages show "$" without naming the currency. The publisher, Tapflare, sells a flat-rate design subscription, which is one possible source of the visual artwork and not a source of stitch files or garments; the worksheet section says when that option does not fit.

What Digitizing Is and Why a Vector Logo Is Not a Stitch File

Definition

Embroidery digitizing is "the process of converting artwork into a stitch file" (www.echidnasewing.com.au), a definition a print-on-demand supplier's glossary repeats almost word for word (www.printful.com). The digitizer makes decisions that artwork does not contain. In one software maker's documentation, the operator assigns

"a stitch type to a shape" (docs.wilcom.com). Each object also needs "correct stitch spacing, sufficient pull compensation," and an underlay suited to the fabric (docs.wilcom.com). Each is a place where two competent digitizers can differ:

- **Stitch type:** fills, satin columns and outlines are chosen per shape, so the same logo can be programmed several ways.
- **Stitch spacing (density):** the software maker's term for how closely stitches sit, which affects coverage and stiffness.
- **Pull compensation:** extra width added because "embroidery stitches pull fabric inward where needles penetrate" (docs.wilcom.com).
- **Underlay:** per a university reference wiki, "a set of sparse stitches outlining the final design" laid before the visible stitching (edutechwiki.unige.ch).

Why artwork is not a stitch program

A raster file is "built from pixels" (www.adobe.com); a vector file uses "mathematical equations, lines, and curves with fixed points on a grid" (www.adobe.com). Common vector types include AI (Adobe Illustrator) and EPS (Encapsulated PostScript) (www.adobe.com). Neither describes needle penetrations, stitch direction or thread changes. A sewing-machine retailer puts the raster case bluntly: pixel files are "perfect for screens but useless for a needle" (www.echidnasewing.com.au). Vector artwork remains a clean source for the digitizer, and software documentation shows bitmap sources work when clean: one maker's guidance for automatic digitizing says to "Use 300 DPI high-resolution images, NOT low-res 96 DPI" (docs.wilcom.com). Either way, the artwork is an input to digitizing, and neither a vector nor a PNG file proves the design can be stitched at the intended size on the intended garment.

File formats: DST, PES and editable files

Stitch files fall into two broad groups. One embroidery software maker describes editable design files (its EMB format) as containing "all the information needed to edit an embroidery design" (help.wilcom.com), while machine files "are ideal for production but have more limited editing capabilities than EMB files" (help.wilcom.com). Machine formats include DST, PES, EXP, JEF and VP3, chosen "depending on machine compatibility" (www.printful.com). Three details matter for buyers:

- **DST is a simple stitch format.** The same software maker's page on the Tajima format calls it "a simple stitch file format, however it does not support thread colors or needle assignment" (wilcom.com), and its help center says "machine files do not contain any color information" (help.wilcom.com). A DST sent without a color sheet leaves thread choices open.
- **Format follows machine.** The software documentation says "you need to select a format corresponding to the embroidery machine you intend to use" (docs.wilcom.com). A machine maker lists the formats a given machine accepts (support.brother.com), and a university wiki describes PES as containing a block "entirely intended for brother embroidery machines to use" (edutechwiki.unige.ch).
- **Conversion can lose information.** The same wiki notes that converting an editable file to PES "will produce a PES with only stitches" (edutechwiki.unige.ch). For brand-accurate threads, one software maker says to "always work from an EMB file" (help.wilcom.com).

One open-source package states that it "supports many embroidery formats" (inkstitch.org), but reading a format is not the same as stitching well on a specific shop's machine, thread set and garment.

Digitizing versus vectorizing

Vectorizing redraws a logo as clean shapes (a design-file task). Digitizing converts shapes into stitch instructions (a production-setup task). A vector redraw is a useful first step, and a designer can simplify details so the digitizer compromises less, but only the digitized file is read by the machine.

Three Deliverables, Three Responsibilities

An embroidered order contains three things that can be bought from three different parties, and the buyer's job is to know which one is being purchased at each step. *Table 1* below sorts them by what each deliverable is, who normally produces it, and what evidence of acceptance the buyer should hold.

Deliverable	What it is	Usual producer	Acceptance evidence to hold
1. Approved visual artwork	Logo adapted for thread: simplified detail, final dimensions, thread color intent, in a format the embroiderer accepts	Designer (in-house, freelance or subscription) or the embroiderer's own art team	Artwork version number, dimensions per placement, color list, written confirmation of which file types the chosen embroiderer will take
2. Machine-specific stitch setup	The digitized file, with stitch types, density, underlay and compensation set for a machine, product and placement	Embroiderer, or a third-party digitizer if the embroiderer accepts outside files	Format (for example DST), digitizer name, machine and product it was built for, whether the buyer receives the file, reuse rights
3. Physical sew-out	A test stitch on the actual product, fabric and stabilizer, representing production	Production supplier	Sample photo and physical item, production version identifier, substrate and placement recorded, named approver

Table 1: Responsibility and acceptance matrix for embroidered merchandise. Row structure compiled by the report author from the supplier practices cited below.

The matrix has one structural implication. Deliverable 1 can be bought anywhere, but deliverables 2 and 3 are tied to the production supplier's machines. A sew-out is defined by one thread-and-fabric vendor glossary as "a preliminary embroidery run used to evaluate settings, materials, and the design" (www.emborado.de), and the same glossary says "only a real test stitch reveals actual material physics" (www.emborado.de). A digitizing vendor describes its own version as "a scan or photo of the design actually stitched on fabric" (digitizing.us). These are vendor definitions, not a standard, so the buyer should write down what the specific supplier means by "sample" or "proof".

Who adapts the logo and who digitizes

Some suppliers fold deliverables 1 and 2 into their own process. A print-on-demand supplier says "digitization is handled as part of production, so you only need to supply the artwork" (www.gelato.com). A UK decorator keeps the artwork on file after the one-time setup (www.ckl.uk.com). In those cases a separate third-party digitizing purchase has no use, because the supplier will not accept it or will not need it. Other suppliers

separate the roles: one specialty decorator will "send us whatever file type you have" (threadlogic.com) and says it will say so if the file cannot be used. A design subscription can handle deliverable 1, and at least one provider lists "digitized embroidery specs (DST, EMB)" among its apparel deliverables (flocksy.com). Whether that file would suit a particular embroiderer's machines remains a question for the embroiderer.

Ownership and reuse

Who receives which file is rarely visible at checkout. One supplier says it "retains exclusive ownership of all digital embroidery files" (www.onlineworkwear.com.au) while charging "a one-time (per unique logo) Embroidery Set-up Fee" (www.onlineworkwear.com.au). Printful says its digitized files "can only be used to fulfill orders with Printful" (help.printful.com). Both are documented terms: the buyer should not plan to move that file to another producer. The practical rule is to ask in writing whether the file will be delivered, whether it may be used elsewhere, and who holds the reuse right if the supplier changes.

What Suppliers Say: Outside Files, Reuse and Redigitization

Supplier policy varies enough that no general answer to whether a buyer can bring a DST or PES file is safe. *Table 2* lists documented positions from supplier pages read in November 2026. The suppliers range from print-on-demand platforms to regional decorators, and several pages carry older dates, so the table is evidence of variation, not a survey.

Supplier (as documented)	Outside stitch files	Setup fee and reuse	Sample or proof
Printful (print-on-demand)	Does not accept externally digitized files (help.printful.com); recommends a high-resolution PNG (help.printful.com)	One-time fee per new design that depends on type and placement (help.printful.com); files reusable only for Printful orders	Samples at a discount, with account eligibility limits (www.printful.com)
Printify (print-on-demand)	"cannot accept stitch files such as DST, PES, or EXP" (help.printify.com)	Digitization free of charge to the seller (help.printify.com); reused when design, product and size match (help.printify.com)	Sample recommended before selling (help.printify.com)
Gelato (print-on-demand)	Page read does not address customer stitch files	Digitized once per design per embroidery type (www.gelato.com)	Not stated on pages read
CKL (UK decorator)	Accepts DST files (www.ckl.uk.com)	Artwork held on file for future orders (www.ckl.uk.com)	Artwork proof before production (www.ckl.uk.com)
Storm Creek (US apparel brand)	Prefers vector files or DST with outlined fonts (retailer.stormcreek.com)	Not stated on page read	Digital proofs; "Orders do not move forward until you approve all proofs" (retailer.stormcreek.com)
All-County Apparel (US; page updated 2023)	Accepts DST for named machine brands (help.allcountyapparel.com)	Customer-supplied file avoids setup fee (help.allcountyapparel.com)	Attaches a quality condition to customer-supplied DST files (help.allcountyapparel.com)

Supplier (as documented)	Outside stitch files	Setup fee and reuse	Sample or proof
OnlineWorkwear (Australia)	Creates and keeps files	One-time fee per unique logo (www.onlineworkwear.com.au); supplier keeps ownership (www.onlineworkwear.com.au)	Emailed artwork proof included (www.onlineworkwear.com.au)
Threadlogic (US)	Accepts any file type and says whether it can use it (threadlogic.com)	Not stated on page read	Not stated on page read

Table 2: Documented supplier positions on outside files, setup reuse and proofs, retrieved November 20, 2026. Positions are supplier-specific, and the All-County page was last updated in 2023.

Three patterns appear. First, the print-on-demand platforms in the sample hold digitizing inside their own process, while regional decorators more often take outside files with conditions. Second, even where outside files are accepted, the conditions differ: a DST with no color information needs a color sheet, and one platform that accepts DST files requires "the colorway details" to travel "in a separate file that accompanies the DST file" (sensariahelp.gooten.com). Third, a setup fee may apply regardless of the file format: one UK supplier says "a setup fee applies for digitising designs regardless of format" (www.surridgesport.com). A buyer who purchases third-party digitizing first can therefore end up paying twice.

What triggers redigitization

The documented triggers are consistent in direction, though not in detail. Printful states that "any meaningful change to your embroidery design may require digitization again" (help.printful.com), that depending on type, product or placement "the same design may need to be digitized separately" (help.printful.com), and that re-uploading the same artwork as a new file is "treated as a new design, and digitization, including fees, will be required again" (help.printful.com). It also lists a smaller adjustment charge because "hat embroidery files need to be adjusted to work on apparel and bags" (help.printful.com). Printify says future orders skip digitization when design, product and size match. A digitizing vendor's pricing page states that a different image "counts as a new order with its own digitizing charge" (digitizing.us). The common lesson is that a change of garment, placement or size should be priced as a possible new setup until the supplier confirms otherwise. A software maker's help page supports the technical reason: "embroidery designs are not infinitely scalable" (help.wilcom.com).

Ask the embroiderer first

The sequence that follows from Table 2 is simple: choose the supplier and product, then ask what files it accepts, then decide what to buy. Questions to send before any third-party purchase:

- **Accepted inputs:** which artwork types (vector, PNG) and which stitch types (DST, PES, none) do you accept for this product?
- **Fee interaction:** if the buyer supplies a stitch file, is any setup, adjustment or correction fee still charged?
- **Ownership:** does the buyer receive the digitized file, and may another producer use it?

- **Repeat orders:** what exactly makes the setup reusable (same design, product, size, placement)?
- **Quality terms:** what applies if a customer-supplied file stitches poorly?

Design Limits, Thread and Fabric

Size and detail limits are source-specific

Published minimums differ by supplier, thread and font, so they are best used as questions to put to the embroiderer, not as rules. Printify warns that "Smaller text, thin outlines, or fine details may be automatically enlarged or simplified during digitization" (help.printify.com), and Printful says "small details may be enlarged, converted to run-stitch, or removed" (help.printful.com).

- **Custom Ink:** "text height of at least 0.25 inches" (www.customink.com).
- **Gelato:** text "at least 0.25 inches" (www.gelato.com).
- **Inkthreadable (UK, metric):** "a minimum width of 0.5cm per letter" (help.inkthreadable.co.uk) and "an absolute minimum line width of 0.125 cm for flat embroidery projects" (help.inkthreadable.co.uk).
- **Madeira (thread maker):** its fine 60-weight thread can stitch lettering "as small as 3mm high" (www.madeira.co.uk), a figure tied to that thread.
- **Software maker guidance:** "Each font has a recommended minimum and maximum size" (help.wilcom.com); a software maker's blog says "different fonts have different parameters" (hatchembroidery.com) and that lowercase is about 70% of the height of uppercase (hatchembroidery.com).

The figures cluster near a quarter inch (about 6 mm) for ordinary text, with fine thread supporting smaller work. That is an observation about these sources, not a standard; a tagline below the supplier's stated minimum is a candidate for simplification or supplier confirmation before purchase.

Colors: thread is a limited, approximate palette

Printful offers "a palette of 15 available thread colors" (help.printful.com), Printify says "up to 6 thread colors per design" (help.printify.com), and Custom Ink notes that "thread colors are more limited compared to ink colors" (www.customink.com). Gradients are a specific limitation: "gradients, color blends, and subtle shading cannot be replicated with thread in standard embroidery" at one supplier (help.printful.com). Pantone matching is approximate: a thread maker says "there may not always be a PANTONE" match (www.madeirausa.com), and Pantone's own textile page notes that each material has "a uniquely achievable range of colors" (www.pantone.com). Thread makers publish color cards and conversion charts across brands (www.gunold.com), and one says screen and paper colors "may not precisely match actual thread colours" (www.madeira.com). A brand-color requirement should therefore be approved against a physical thread card or sample, not a screen proof, and the color list should state the thread brand and number. One supplier adds that "some colors in the final embroidered product may look slightly different" (help.printful.com).

Garment behavior

Fabric and stabilizer change results. A stabilizer maker says that for stretchy fabrics "the embroidery will also stretch" unless cutaway stabilizer supports it (support.oesd.com) and that too little stabilizer leads to "puckers, holes in the fabric" (support.oesd.com). Trade press says "all embroidery distorts, albeit to differing levels depending on the design, garment and stabilizer used" (impressionsmagazine.com). Caps are a separate case: "Cap embroidery requires its own thoughtful digitizing strategy" (impressionsmagazine.com), and a thread-maker webinar transcript attributes most cap problems to design: "Most issues with sewing are in the design, not the needle" (s3.amazonaws.com). These are trade and maker commentary, not controlled tests, but they agree with the supplier rules above that chest and cap files are separate setups.

The Sew-Out: Accepting or Correcting a Physical Sample

What a sample can and cannot prove

A screen preview is not a sew-out. Printful's own help text warns that "the finished product may look a bit different from the mockup" (help.printful.com) and that its design-tool preview "may look slightly different from the final product" (help.printful.com). A trade magazine recommends sampling with "a material and stabilizer combination matching that of the final intended garment" (impressionsmagazine.com). A sample is therefore evidence for the exact combination of design version, product, fabric, size and placement it was made on. It is weaker evidence for a different garment, and the supplier decides whether it represents production: one supplier says production "may occasionally" show "slight variances due to the nature of embroidery" (help.coastalreign.com); another warns that "embroidery proofs may appear slightly different than printed artwork or digital logos" (leadapparel.com). Even identical artwork digitized twice "can produce slightly different results" at one supplier (www.printful.com).

Who approves, and what happens next

Approval practices differ. Some suppliers hold orders until the customer signs off: "Orders do not move forward until you approve all proofs" (retailer.stormcreek.com), and "production typically begins only after proof approval is received" (leadapparel.com). Printful puts a first-time design needing changes "on hold with an embroidery approval sheet" (help.printful.com); Printify gives "7 days to approve the suggested changes" (help.printify.com). A trade magazine describes the revision loop as an edit, a new sample and the digitizer securing "approval from the customer for any necessary changes" (impressionsmagazine.com). Samples are not always required or always available: one supplier says "pre-production samples/sew-outs are not required" (help.coastalreign.com), and Printful's own sample program says "sample orders may not be available to all accounts" (help.printful.com) with eligibility starting at "1 sample order per month, up to 3 items per order" (help.printful.com). One apparel supplier offers a photo of the stitched design within 3 business days of a new design (intercom.help), which shows that "sample" can mean a photograph rather than a shipped garment. The buyer should ask which they are getting.

Record the sample

When approving, record the following so that a later order can be compared with this one:

- **Production version:** the digitized file or design identifier and revision, as named by the supplier.
- **Substrate:** garment style, fabric, color, and any stabilizer or topping the supplier discloses.
- **Placement and size:** location, width and height in the unit the supplier uses.
- **Thread list:** brand and color numbers actually used, so a reorder keeps the same thread.
- **Approver and date:** the named person who approved, and what was corrected.
- **Changes since approval:** any later edit, which the supplier may treat as a new setup.

If the sample fails, the corrections divide cleanly by deliverable. A shape that is too fine to stitch is an artwork problem (back to deliverable 1), a puckered or uneven stitch pattern is a setup problem (deliverable 2), and a mismatch between sample garment and production garment is a sample-scope problem (deliverable 3). Naming the category before replying keeps a correction from becoming an unnecessary new purchase.

Data Analysis and Evidence

Digitizing fee structures

Published digitizing fees show structure more than a market average, and no neutral benchmark exists. The list below compares models documented on official vendor pages retrieved November 20, 2026. Currency symbols are as displayed; many pages show "$" without naming the currency, and none of these pages states an effective date beyond a copyright line unless noted.

- **Per design, by type and placement (Printful):** a one-time fee per new design, with standard embroidery listed at USD 6.50 (help.printful.com).
- **Free to the seller (Printify):** digitization is free of charge to the seller, per the supplier's help page cited in Table 2.
- **Per 1,000 stitches, with a cap (EmbPunch):** the page lists $1.50 per 1,000 stitches and says "the maximum charge is capped at $65" (www.embpunch.com).
- **Stitch count, with a floor (Absolute Digitizing):** the page lists a "Minimum Digitizing Charge (up to 10,000 stitches)" (absolutedigitizing.com).
- **Flat per design (Digitizing.us):** "Flat prices before we start. No stitch-count fees, no surprise add-ons" (digitizing.us), with simple left-chest designs starting at $15 (digitizing.us).
- **Flat range by complexity (EMDigitizer):** "embroidery digitizing from $10 to $30 per design" (emdigitizer.com).
- **Waived by quantity (a custom hats retailer):** the fee is "waived on orders of 12 hats or more" (customlids.com).
- **One-time per logo (a uniform retailer):** a "one-time charge of $20 USD" (help.wearfigs.com).

An independent trade description is consistent with the stitch-count models: "embroiderers who charge by stitch count" typically do so "in 1,000-stitch increments" (www.printing.org), though that 2019 article concerns production pricing more than digitizing. Two points follow from the list. First, the listed fees for a single logo are modest, so the cost risk is less the fee itself than paying it twice (for a third-party file that the chosen embroiderer will not use) or paying it again after an avoidable change. Second, "free" and "waived" fees depend on conditions: quantity thresholds, account types, or the supplier's own process. Revisions are also

priced differently: one digitizing vendor lists "Free Revisions Within Original Requirements" (absolutedigitizing.com), while another supplier charges a smaller adjustment fee to move a file between product types (see the redigitization section).

Totals the buyer should compute

Use supplier quotes, not averages. The first-order total is:

First-order total = artwork adaptation + setup (digitizing) + physical sample + (quantity x quoted decorated-unit cost) + freight and tax.

The repeat-order total uses only elements the supplier has confirmed in writing as reusable:

Repeat-order total = (quantity x quoted decorated-unit cost) + freight and tax + any setup the supplier says is not reusable.

Never assume setup portability: the repeat-order formula gives a zero setup term only where the supplier confirms the same design, product, size and placement are reusable. If the garment or placement changes, add the supplier's stated adjustment or new-setup fee.

(Hypothetical Example) Illustrative inputs only, not market prices: 40 pieces at 18 each, setup 25, sample 30, artwork adaptation 0, freight and tax 60 gives 40 x 18 + 25 + 30 + 0 + 60 = 835. A repeat order with a supplier-confirmed reusable setup is 40 x 18 + 60 = 780; if the logo moves from a shirt to a cap and the supplier prices an adjustment at 20, it becomes 800.

Subscription pricing versus a single conversion

Design subscriptions are priced per month. As one scale reference, Design Pickle's page states "From $2,200 a month for 2 hours of design time every business day" (www.designpickle.com), and Superside states "a $15,000 monthly minimum on an annual term" (www.superside.com); currency is shown as "$" without a name, and the pages carry no effective date. Penji states "No contracts, no cancellation fees" (penji.co), ManyPixels advertises "Flat monthly pricing with unlimited design requests and revisions" (www.manypixels.co), and Flocksy advertises "One flat rate, every month" (flocksy.com). Against the digitizing fees listed above, which are one-time amounts from single digits to a few tens of dollars, a month of subscription is many multiples of a setup fee. That comparison is cost only: a subscription delivers designer time unrelated to stitching, and it does not include the embroiderer's setup or sample. The subscription pages read for this report (Penji, ManyPixels, Design Pickle, Kimp, Superside) did not mention embroidery digitizing, although Design Pickle's scope page lists "merchandise designs" as an example of vector graphics (help.designpickle.com). Flocksy's apparel page is the exception found, listing DST and EMB specs (flocksy.com).

Purchasing Worksheet and No-Buy Cases

Copyable worksheet

Copy the block below once per product and placement. Fill every field from written supplier answers, not assumptions.

```
EMBROIDERY PURCHASE WORKSHEET (one per product + placement)
Supplier:                      Product / style:
Fabric and color:              Placement:          Final width x height:
Quantity:                      Artwork version:
Input format accepted by supplier (write the supplier's own words):
Who adapts the artwork:        Who digitizes:      Machine/format built for:
Supplier accepts outside stitch files?  yes / no / conditions:
Buyer receives stitch file?  yes / no      Reuse elsewhere allowed?  yes / no
Thread brand and color numbers:
Setup fee quoted (currency, date, eligibility):
What triggers a new setup fee (size, placement, garment, edit):
Sample type: physical / photo / digital only    Sample cost:
Sample made on same product and fabric as production?  yes / no
Production version ID on approved sample:
Sample approver (name, date):  Corrections requested:
First-order total = artwork + setup + sample + (qty x unit quote) + freight/tax:
Repeat-order total (only supplier-confirmed reusable setup):
Change-of-garment or placement quote:
```

Which purchase comes next

Table 3 is not a ranking of providers; it shows which party can supply which deliverable according to documentation read for this report. The publisher of this report, Tapflare, offers a flat-rate design subscription for artwork; this report makes no claim to supply machine digitizing or garment production. The other subscription providers are listed because each is a common alternative for the artwork step.

Source	Can supply visual artwork	Can supply stitch setup	Can supply sew-out on the product	Best fit
Production supplier or embroiderer	Some do; ask	Yes, and often required to be its own	Yes (type varies: physical, photo)	One-off orders; first question to ask
Third-party digitizer	No	Yes, if the supplier accepts outside files	Rarely; proof is usually a scan or photo (digitizing.us)	Only after the supplier confirms it accepts such files
Freelance or in-house designer	Yes	No, unless trained in digitizing	No	Logo needs real simplification, brand rules
Flat-rate design subscription (Tapflare and named alternatives such as Penji, ManyPixels, Design Pickle, Flocksy)	Yes, for artwork and variants; Flocksy also lists DST and EMB specs (flocksy.com)	Not established for most providers' pages read	No	Ongoing design needs, not a single conversion

Table 3: Source options by deliverable, based on provider pages retrieved November 20, 2026.

The table supports a decision rule. If the production supplier digitizes in-house and refuses outside files, buy artwork adaptation only if the supplier's guidelines say the logo cannot be stitched as drawn, and skip third-party digitizing. If the supplier accepts outside files, ask for the machine, format and quality terms, then compare supplier-made and third-party setup on total cost. If the logo has gradients, thin outlines or text below the supplier's stated minimums, a designer's simplification is worth buying before setup.

No-buy cases for a subscription

A monthly subscription is not recommended when:

- **The need is one logo conversion.** A single conversion is better handled directly by the production supplier, whose setup is the version its machines will use.
- **The supplier already digitizes in-house and refuses outside files.** The subscription cannot produce a file the supplier will accept.
- **The only gap is a sample.** A sample is made on the production supplier's machines; no design service can substitute.
- **The reader needs a brand-strategy engagement.** That is a different service from adapting one logo.

A subscription is a reasonable fit when embroidery artwork is one of many recurring requests (apparel mockups, packaging, decks, web graphics) and the buyer wants a consistent source of editable artwork files across them. The publisher's own subscription is described in this report only in that proportion and is not cited as evidence for any claim. Prices and plan contents on all subscription pages change, so confirm them before purchase.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is embroidery digitizing? It is "the process of converting artwork into a stitch file" (www.echidnasewing.com.au), including stitch types, spacing, underlay and compensation set for a machine and fabric.

How should a logo be prepared for embroidery? Start from clean vector artwork or a clean high-resolution PNG, set final dimensions, reduce the colors to what the supplier's thread palette allows, and remove gradients. One supplier recommends a PNG with a transparent background (help.printful.com) and "at least 300 DPI" (help.printful.com), but those are that supplier's input rules. Ask the chosen supplier for its own.

What is an embroidery sew-out sample? A test stitch of the digitized design on the actual product, defined in one glossary as "a preliminary embroidery run used to evaluate settings, materials, and the design" (www.emborado.de).

Is digitizing the same as vectorizing a logo? No. Vectorizing creates shapes; digitizing creates stitch instructions. Vector files do not carry stitch data (www.adobe.com).

What do DST and PES mean? DST is a widely used machine stitch format that "does not support thread colors or needle assignment" (wilcom.com); PES is associated with Brother machines (edutechwiki.unige.ch). Whether a supplier uses either is that supplier's decision.

What is the minimum text size for embroidery? There is no universal figure. Suppliers cited here recommend about a quarter inch (www.customink.com), a thread maker states 3 mm for fine thread (www.madeira.co.uk), and software makers say limits vary by font (help.wilcom.com).

How much does embroidery digitizing cost? Structures range from per-design fees to stitch-count pricing and flat prices (see the fee list above), with some fees waived by quantity. Use written quotes.

Can I order embroidered merchandise without buying digitizing separately? Often yes: some suppliers digitize as part of production (www.gelato.com). Confirm before buying outside files.

Implications and Future Directions

For buyers, the implication is procedural: purchase in order of dependency, which is product and placement, then supplier rules, then artwork, then setup, then sample. Buying artwork adaptation or digitizing first risks paying for output the production supplier will not use. Supplier policies change and several cited pages carry no effective date, so repeat the worksheet for each new supplier and at reorder.

For agencies, Table 1 works as a scope statement: "artwork delivered" does not imply "stitch-ready", and "sample approved" should name the garment and production version the sample represents. Briefs should state who owns stitch files and whether the client may move them.

No public benchmark measures how often a sample reveals a needed change. The usefulness of the worksheet is a hypothesis, not a measured saving; the main uncertainty is supplier and product variation. For contractual brand-color obligations, readers should consult the supplier's production staff and, where contracts are involved, a qualified professional.

Conclusion

An existing vector logo is an input to embroidery, not a portable stitch program. Embroidered merchandise involves three deliverables: approved visual artwork, machine-specific setup and a physical sew-out. They can be sourced from up to three parties and should be accepted separately.

The documented supplier rules show wide variation: some suppliers accept customer DST files, some accept them under conditions, and some refuse them and keep digitized files inside their own production. The decision therefore starts with the chosen embroiderer: ask which files it takes, who receives the digitized file, what makes the setup reusable, what triggers a new fee, and what kind of sample it provides. Only then buy artwork adaptation or third-party digitizing, and only if the answers justify it.

Size, color and fabric limits are real but source-specific, so figures such as a quarter-inch text height or six thread colors belong to the suppliers that state them. A physical sample tests the exact combination of design, product and placement, and its record (version, substrate, thread list, approver) makes a reorder comparable.

For a single logo conversion, a direct request to the production supplier is usually the better purchase than a monthly design subscription. For recurring design needs that include embroidery artwork among many other assets, a subscription can supply the editable artwork while the supplier handles setup and sample. Compute first-order and repeat-order totals from written quotes, and treat every figure here as vendor-stated and dated.

Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

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THE PUBLISHER

About Tapflare

Tapflare gives companies an on-demand design and web team for a flat monthly fee.

How it works

Each subscriber has a dedicated project manager who learns the brand, assigns every request to a senior specialist in that kind of work, and reviews the result before it is delivered. Requests are submitted and discussed in the Tapflare portal, each plan includes a daily allotment of design or development time, and the client keeps full ownership of the export and source files.

What it covers

Graphic design, custom illustration, presentation design, logos and brand guides, video editing and motion graphics, website and mobile-app mockups, and website development, from design mockups to HTML, to drag-and-drop builders or custom code.

What it is not

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