Pet accessories are easily decorated with durable PVC labels. (Image courtesy Flexsystems USA Inc.)

DECORATE WITH PVC LABELS

PVC labels are an easy way to decorate pet items such as collars, leads, beds and pet accessory items. The material is long-lasting, and does not fade, crack, unravel or tear.

The easiest way to apply the labels is to sew them on, either with a regular sewing machine or with an embroidery machine, using a #46 nylon thread, and a size 16-20 needle. Use a narrow or one-sided presser foot (Teflon casted is preferred), and a walking foot sewing machine if possible. You may also use a 3M or similar spray to hold the item in place.

DIANE CHAPMAN, FLEXSYSTEMS USA INC.

PRINT ON BACKPACKS

Backpacks and bags in general are many screen printers' least favorite tasks. Here are a couple tips to put success within your grasp:

Most backpacks are created from synthetic materials and are therefore more heat sensitive than the 100 percent cotton Ts you may be used to printing. There's also more weight hanging off the underneath of the platen. So, as the platens spin and get warmer, the bags have more opportunity to wiggle around. Not great for registration, right? Slightly spreading or "trapping" the colors in the design can give you a little grace.

Use a little higher mesh. Synthetic material isn't going to allow as much of the ink to actually soak into the bag. Imagine the ink lying on top of the bag. If you're normally putting white ink through a 110, try meshing up to the 160 range. Higher meshes will help flash times, too. The less ink on the bag, the less time flashing—which is also helpful because bags tend to be heat sensitive.

Use a little less squeegee pressure than usual, too. You'll be surprised how well it prints and sits on top of the bag. Have a harder durometer squeegee? Give it a try. Especially for darker inks on lighter colored bags. Bonus: this saves a little cost on ink.

Use size-appropriate platens; a 6" sleeve platen or a 10" youth platen should work.

Make sure the customer and the designer know the confines of the printable area on the backpack. Don't get to press with screens only to find out that your 8" image won't fit on the 6" pouch that it was intended for.

Most importantly, do your frontend research on the content of the bag and use appropriate inks. There are inks for every application. Use the correct ink for this particular job.

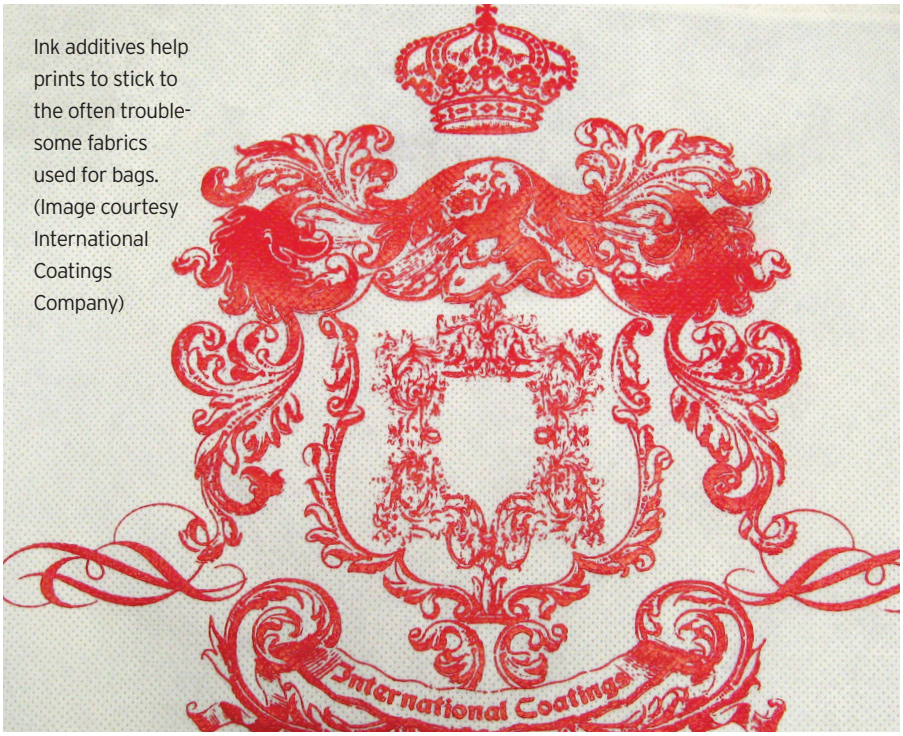
How are you planning on curing these big bundles of fun? Will all those straps, zippers and pockets actually fit through your conveyor? Will all the different materials handle the heat of your conveyor? If the backpack won't actually fit through the dryer chamber, it's time to flash cure. The backpack's cousin, the duffle bag, is notorious for this—there aren't many conveyor dryers out there that a duffle bag will fit through.

Consider a pre flash. Before you ever put the first color on, take some of the heat-induced movement out of the bag by flashing the bag previous to your first color going down. Whether you are automated or manual, this adds very little time to the process.

JOSH WELLS, RYONET

PRINT WITH LOW-CURE ADDITIVES

Non-woven fabrics are sheet or web structures bonded together by entangling fibers mechanically, thermally or chemically. They are flat, porous sheets made directly from separate fibers or from molten plastic or plastic film.



Ink additives help prints to stick to the often troublesome fabrics used for bags. (Image courtesy International Coatings Company)