

## How to Embroider on Denim

Use proper stabilization and hooping techniques to create beautiful embroidered denim products your customers will love.

By Steven Batts, Contributing Writer

**D**enim is one of my favorite fabrics to embroider and wear. There is nothing like a comfortable pair of jeans and nothing beats the way a good embroidery design looks on a denim jacket.

Overall, denim is a great material to work with. It has a fairly smooth surface and is pretty stable, which minimizes the amount of stabilizer required. At the same time, it is thick enough to prevent it from puckering underneath the stitches. All this makes for great-looking embroidery.

That's not to say denim doesn't have its issues when it comes to embroidery. Like any fabric, it has its share of quirks. Most of them involve hooping and color matching. Because denim is a little thicker than some fabrics, it can be more difficult to hoop, especially jackets. Other denim items, like shirts, bags and totes, are pretty easy to work with.

In this Tech Tips Newsletter, we will be working with an array of new denim products from American Apparel. From classic denim jackets to bags and backpacks, the company's denim line is ideal for profitable embroidery if you handle the fabric correctly.

### THE RIGHT COLORS

It has been said that everything matches blue jeans. While that may be true to some extent, there are colors that don't work well with denim. Depending on its shade, some colors can get lost if they are too close to the shade of the denim material.

A lot of colors, such as red, look good on any shade of denim. But denim products range in color from a very dark indigo to — in some cases — a shade that's nearly white. Black and other darker colors should be avoided on indigo-



**Style RSAND401**, the Unisex Denim Jacket in resin dark wash indigo, is a classic denim jacket constructed from durable, heavyweight 14-ounce cotton denim featuring a six-brass-button closure. It also has dual front and side pockets, two inside breast pockets and single-button cuff closures.

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colored denim, while white and other colors don't show up as well on the stone-washed lighter denims. Obviously, the shade of blue used on various denim products needs to be considered in order to ensure it can be seen on the finished product.

This can be tricky, as a customer may order or bring several denim products into your shop and want the same colors on all the items. However, depending on the shade of the denim, the colors may have to be changed or "inverted" (i.e. switch white to black) so that the design will show up properly on the material.

## STABILIZING AND HOOPING

Denim is a woven cotton twill material. As with most twill fabrics, it is fairly stable, but has just a bit of stretch to it. The rule of thumb for stabilizers is the stretchier the material, the more stability you need. This means stretchy items such, as knit T-shirts, require a more stable material like cutaway backing.

Because denim doesn't have a lot of stretch, the amount of stabilization needed is less. A lightweight, cutaway backing or sheer cutaway, such as no-show mesh, is more than adequate. Medium to heavyweight tearaway backing will, in most cases, work just fine.

On items such as denim bags, a tearaway stabilizer is preferred because of the application. While you always want to keep the amount of backing left on the garment to a minimum, bags are handled from both sides, making this more important. Denim jackets are made of thicker material. However they still need some stabilization. Medium to heavyweight tearaway backing should be all that is required.

The next thing to consider is hooping. Lighter-weight denim items such as shirts and bags are fairly easy to hoop. Using conventional hoops is not a problem, as the material will easily fit into the hoop. Various bags can sometimes be a challenge, depending on where the logo needs to be placed. Duffel bags, for example, have plenty of room inside to make hooping a breeze.

Many bags, including the American Apparel backpack, have big pockets that provide a nice place for the design to go. If the design will not fit in the pocket, there usually is a big area above the pocket or a spot for an additional placement, such as a name or initials.

Another option for hooping denim includes frames designed around adhesive backing, or even the EMS

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# UNISEX DENIM JACKET

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Hoop Tech bag clamps. These frames allow you to hoop hard-to-reach places, such as pockets. Bag clamps are particularly useful for hooping thick materials, like the front of a denim jacket.

The thickness of the material isn't necessarily what makes denim jackets harder to hoop. Rather, it's the seams — the numerous ones on the front — that make up the jacket. With a clamp, the jacket slides in sideways and can be clamped down. Align the edge of the frame with the pocket seam or the edge of the placket to keep the design straight.

Backs of denim jackets can be a bit of a challenge because of the material thickness and the size of the area. When hooping backs of jackets, it is a good idea to hoop them upside down. This puts less material toward the back of the machine where there are more restrictions.

## LINE IT UP

While the seams on denim jackets may make them more difficult to hoop, they make lining up the design easier. For instance, the seam across the shoulders of the back of a denim jacket provides a straight line to use when hooping. The seam across the top of the pocket on the front of a denim jacket also provides an ideal straight line to use.

Even with denim bags, the zippers can provide a reference line, whether you're using a bag clamp or a traditional hoop. It gives a frame of reference to make sure the hoop is square to the bag.

Seams may provide a good reference for hooping,



but they should be avoided in the embroidery area. Whenever possible, align the design so that it doesn't sew over the seam. The seam on the back of a denim jacket is typically made by folding the ends of two pieces of material and then sewing them together. That means the seam is four layers thick. Attempting to sew over this can sometimes cause stitching problems. Even if the machine sews through it with no problem, the design can

appear distorted as it goes over the seam. All in all, sewing on denim is a lot like a comfortable pair of jeans. Usually pretty easy to work with, sometimes hard to get on and everything looks good with them, especially embroidered designs.

## STEP-BY-STEP



**STEP 1** When hooping backs of jackets, it is a good idea to hoop them upside down. This puts less material toward the back of the machine where there are more restrictions.



**STEP 2** Since denim doesn't have a lot of stretch, the amount of stabilization needed is less. A light-weight cutaway backing or sheer cutaway, such as no-show mesh, is more than adequate.



**STEP 3** Align the design so that it doesn't sew over the seam. Attempting to sew over seams can sometimes cause stitching problems. Even if the machine sews through it, the design can appear distorted as it goes over the seam.



**STEP 4** One option for hooping denim jackets are the EMS Hoop Tech bag clamps. Such clamps are particularly useful to hoop thick materials, like the front of a denim jacket.





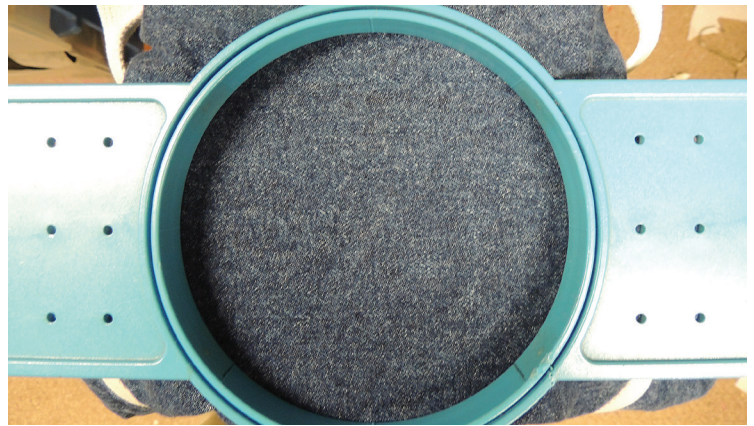
**STEP 5** Zippers can provide a reference line when hooping so that embroiderers can ensure the hoop is square to the bag.



**STEP 6** There are a lot of colors, such as red, that look good on any shade of denim. But denim products range in color from very dark indigo to, in some cases, nearly white. Thread color should be considered.



**STEP 7** The seam across the shoulders of the back of a denim jacket provides a straight line to use when hooping. The seam across the top of the pocket does the same.



**STEP 8** Duffel bags have plenty of room inside to make hooping a breeze.



**STEP 9** Backpacks have a big pocket that provides a nice place for the design to go. If the design will not fit in the pocket, there is usually a big area above the pocket to place the design.



**STEP 10** By using correct stabilizing and hooping techniques, you can create beautiful embroidered denim products your customers will love.

