

PENN EMBLEM: 70 YEARS OF ID INNOVATIONS

A certified woman-owned company—now in its fourth generation of family leadership—celebrates its achievements

By Randi Blumenthal-Joseph

The garment-embellishment industry is constantly evolving. Brands are challenged with staying up to date with the latest industry and fashion trends to match their customer's ever-changing needs. For 70 years, the Philadelphia-based brand decorator, Penn Emblem Co., has served as a driving force for innovation in the identification, identity and image market.

Incorporated in 1947, Penn has reformed the custom-embellishment and corporate-identity business based on the uniform market's requirements. Founded to provide embroidered products, the company has rebranded itself to meet the demands of today's business needs, reworking the industry with cutting-edge technology and techniques.

GARMENT DECORATION INNOVATION

One of the first products that we developed that revolutionized the textile industry was our introduction of the first industrial-laundryable, heat-sealable emblem backing. PennBond® is an adhesive backing that enabled the heat sealing of emblems to garments. Previously, most emblems were sewn directly onto uniforms and apparel, which was time consuming and prone to shrinkage and puckering. With the ease and efficiency of durable heat sealing, it became an industry standard and is still used today.

As the rental uniform industry expanded, image became increasingly important. Branding on uniforms was introduced to the back end of businesses, where exposure to customers was limited. They called it the "Dirty Clothes Business." Over the years, image became important to everyone wearing a uniform. Today, uniforms are an integral part of a company's image; they often are the first thing a customer sees. This makes the importance of high-quality embellishment crucial to a company's successful brand, giving brands the look of cleanliness, trust and integrity. While embroidery

was recognized as the highest quality and a classic approach to garment decoration, it was costly and couldn't capture all of the fine detailing and colors of customer logos. We introduced PennText®, which used the already established process of silk screening to create clear and detailed emblems. This silk-screen ink was developed as a proprietary product for industrial laundering. We made it available to the rental uniform industry.

As technology expanded and personal computers became more prevalent in businesses and homes, we taught customers how to utilize modern technology using the Colorprint® system known as the Emblem Factory. The system used dye sublimation to print photo-realistic images onto emblem blanks. Rental uniform facilities wanted faster, quicker service to their customer, and this technology allowed them to make their own products on-site. Introduced at the 1991 Clean Show, Colorprint® was appealing because it placed emblem production in the hands of customers. It enabled customers to create emblems instantaneously in their facilities to meet their service-turnaround times. When acquiring an emblem factory unit, rental plants

could produce custom, multicolored emblems on demand at a low cost. They no longer needed to maintain inventories and could serve new customers almost immediately.

Beyond emblems, we also developed the first label tape that could be used in a dot-matrix printer, a crucial element of the garment when going through the industrial-wash process. Originally, labels were text only and man readable, making the process very time consuming. The company brought the first-ever ExpressPrint™ thermal labels into the industry, which allowed for better tracking of garments, utilizing a barcode-label reading system. ExpressPrint™ became an industry standard, evolving to thermal label technology, which allowed laundry operators to print more labels at a faster rate.

PENN EMBLEM TODAY


As the industry continues to expand, we continue our leadership role in embellishment decoration. The decoration of apparel and garment embellishment has changed with new fabrics and markets. Safety workwear has become an increasingly important part of the uniform


industry. These garments protect wearers in a variety of environments. We introduced a glow-in-the-dark emblem that appeals to the safety and security market. Glow emblems add another layer of security to garments for transportation and construction workers. They charge in daylight and glow at night, thus making it easier for drivers to see workers and avoid accidents. We also have introduced reflective and flame-resistant emblems that meet the specifications of the safety and security market.

As rental uniform facilities have expanded their use of technology, radio frequency identification (RFID) chips have revolutionized the business by allowing for bulk scanning and increased efficiency. We recognized the need to attach RFID chips to garments in a secure and professional fashion. Pennlock™ is a woven/thermal chip cover that we developed for this purpose. These labels secure the RFID tags in place, thus making them a permanent part of the garment.

Now in our fourth generation as a family-owned business (Tyler Joseph recently joined the business as logistics coordinator), we oversee the company with the same core values that have been in place

since its founding. The company is always finding new and innovative ways to create solutions and products that are at the forefront of industry trends. It's also a Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) certified business. We have many women in leadership posts, and our diverse workforce brings many unique perspectives and ideas to life. We encourage and support women to be outstanding in their careers, and they contribute to the success of our business every day. The company also is involved in many outside organizations, bringing its vision of fulfillment and service to an array of customers.

As the rental uniform and garment-embellishment industry moves forward, we continue to advance with it. It's important to never stop learning and listening to your customer's needs. For 70 years we've created new and cutting-edge products to stay ahead of industry trends, and we look forward to doing so for the next 70 years to come! 

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BELOW: Current Penn Emblem President/owner Randi Blumenthal-Joseph appears with her father Robert Blumenthal next to a portrait of company founder Frank Blumenthal. Her son Tyler Joseph recently joined the business as well. In the late 1960s, Penn employees place merrowed edges on emblems by hand.

