

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO:

STARTING A T-SHIRT BUSINESS



Inside:

What you need to get started; from **picking a name**, to **choosing a heat press**, to **sourcing blank garments**.

Learn how to **build a pricing strategy** for maximum profit.

How to tell when it's time to **grow your business**.



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How to use this eBook:

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Introduction



The Stahls' brand began small, like the family garage it originated in. With true entrepreneurial spirit, husband-and-wife-team A.C. and Ethel Stahl helped plant the roots of today's custom lettering, screen printing, chenille, and apparel decorating methods. Stahls', the once small business, is now 85 years strong and supports small businesses around the world with quality products and innovations.

How has something so long-standing remained relevant and such a modern-day trend? Custom lettering started with sports team jerseys but it has evolved to encompass so much more, including various methods to decorate the undeniably popular T-shirt. Today T-shirts are everywhere from schools, to sports teams, to restaurants and bars, concert T-shirts, tourist T-shirts and even high-end fashion. They are a wardrobe staple around the globe.

Other eBooks in "The Ultimate Guide" series from Stahls':



THE T-SHIRT BUSINESS



Did you know 62% of Americans own more than 10 T-shirts? And while some people wear undecorated T-shirts, most people want a T-shirt that says something about who they are or something they care about. T-shirts with funny or inspirational messages, from a favorite bar or restaurant, to a favorite brand, or even just a cool design, are all as popular as ever.

You can meet the need for unique T-shirts by starting your own custom T-shirt business. To get started, you'll need a business license, a heat press, some screen-printed transfers, and blank shirts. This book will help explain how to get started and be successful.

Planning & Research

Before you start, it's important to do some research and planning. It's tempting to quickly drop money on supplies, get up and running, and learn as you go, but it's smarter to look around and make decisions about your business with forethought.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM YOUR BUSINESS?

Start by thinking about your goals, what do you want from your business? Are you looking to make extra money to pay for college? Maybe you're looking for an extra source of income to pay off debt or to save for a special trip? Maybe you'd like to make your T-shirt business your full-time job.

It's important to know what the goals you're trying to achieve are so you can build a plan to achieve them.

WHO'S YOUR MARKET?

Simple market research is important when starting out in your T-shirt business. You're going to make T-shirts but that's a huge market. You need to think smaller and find a niche. If you're doing inspirational sayings on T-shirts what is going to set your inspirational T-shirt apart from the 100 other T-shirt sellers with inspirational sayings?

When deciding what kinds of shirts to sell, think about who is in your area. Do you live in a community with lots of college kids? How can you build a business around that market? Maybe you'd like to focus on shirts for babies and toddlers? Shirts for school groups or local businesses is also a great place to start. Think about who you know will want shirts and tailor a business around those people.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

You'll need to start with a name for your business, so you can build your brand from there. It's important to decide on the name of your business so you can get the right permits and legal paperwork in place, along with domain names and social media accounts secured, before you begin selling.



Tips

If you don't have a name in mind, set a timer and start brainstorming!

Thought starters:

- Important places or people in your life
- Favorite colors
- What you want to sell
- Hobbies
- Places you've lived
- Mantras or quotes you live by
- Dates or numbers with personal significance to you

Examples:

The
Beachside
Apparel Shop

Steve's
Wild &
Crazy
T-Shirts

Once you have a name (or a few) in mind, it's time to make sure you can own it. You don't want to end up with a business that shares a name with a competitor or something that's trademarked.

Search for your potential business name at the [US Patent and Trademark Office's database](#) to check for conflicts.

Then enter your chosen name, or possible names into a search engine and see what comes up. Don't choose a name someone is already using and try to steer clear of a name that's too similar as well.

**Tips**

Secure usernames for the most popular social media sites, and domain names for your website using [namechk.com](#)

Name Tips

1) *Get Feedback* – Once you have a name or two that are clear of trademark or naming issues, tell a few people the name you're thinking of.

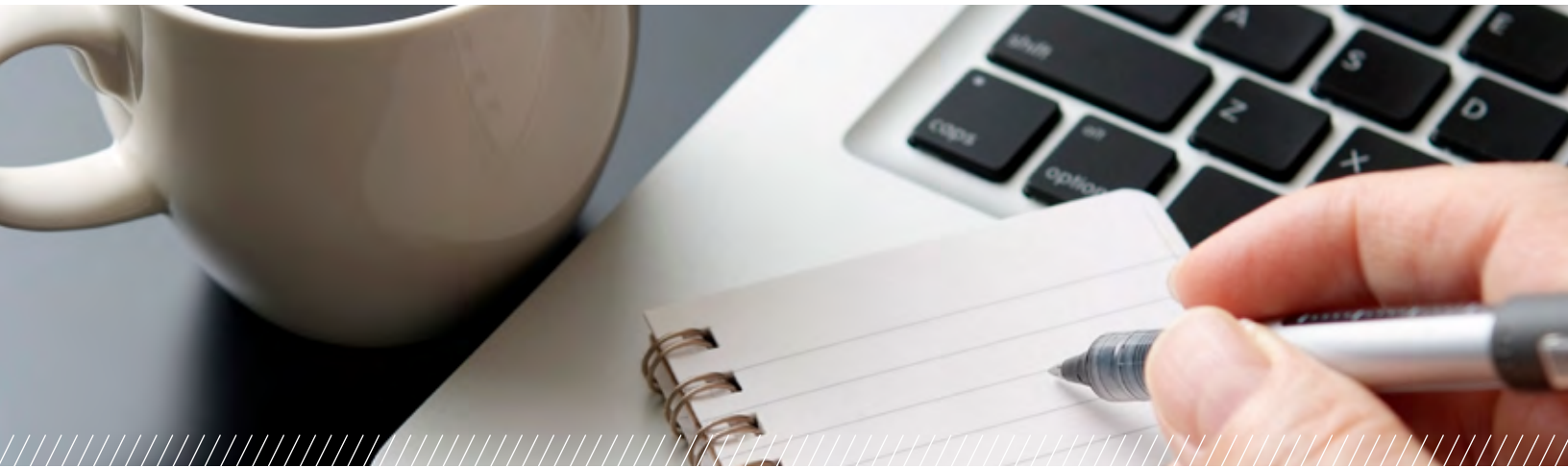
- What comes to mind when they hear the name?
- What do they think you sell?

2) *Unique Spelling* – At first glance “Mary’s Kreationz” seems like a way to stand apart and be memorable. But unique spellings make it difficult for potential customers to find you with a search engine. For that reason alone, consider:

- Designs not Designz
- Creations not Kreationz

3) *Keep It Inclusive* – Don't limit your product offering with your business name. Even though today you're starting a T-shirt business, some day you may want to add hats, bags, uniforms, and other items to your product line up.





GETTING STARTED

Now it's time to think about what you need in order to start making your T-shirts to sell. What kind of volume do you plan to make? How much are you willing to invest? When making your investment consider how you'll be able to expand your business when the time is right.



RESOURCE

For help shopping for a high-quality heat press, download our [Heat Press Buying Guide](#).

EQUIPMENT

Heat Press vs. Iron

No matter what type of transfer you use, you'll always get better results with a heat press over a hand iron. A heat press provides consistent, even, heat and pressure when applying heat transfers to a shirt. Even the most expensive hand iron can't give you this assurance.

The result is a durable, professional finish that won't crack, peel, or fade and lasts through washing. A low-quality product can sink your business before it starts. A heat press is an essential piece of equipment for starting your business.



Hotronix® Fusion® Heat Press

Heat Transfers

You've got options when starting your T-shirt business with a heat press, from screen printed transfers, inkjet transfer papers, and even custom cut and digital heat transfer vinyl with services through Stahls'. Here's what you need to know.



RESOURCE

[Transfer Paper Experts](#) has a wide assortment of professional grade transfer paper for your needs. Their learning library will give you the tools to get started.

Custom Screen Printed Transfers

Screen printing is the most well-known apparel decorating method out there, but the cost of equipment is high, at least \$10K to get started, and the learning curve for this equipment requires hours of training.

[Goof Proof® screen printed transfers](#) from [Transfer Express](#) are the easiest way to get your T-shirt business started fast and economically. These are our most versatile, durable, and easy to apply transfers. Screen printed transfers are created with the same plastisol inks used in screen printing, printed onto a release paper giving you the same soft feel and durability of screen printing at a fraction of the cost. The *Easy View Designer* allows you to customize hundreds of designs for your customers.



Stock Art Screen Printed Transfers

Screen printed transfers with stock art designs are an easy way to get artwork quickly, easily, and affordably. Creating artwork in Corel Draw or Adobe Illustrator is a skill that takes many years to develop, and requires money to hire out. [Wild Side Graphics](#) has a catalog of thousands of transfers to get you started.

Heat Transfer Vinyl

Heat transfer vinyl (HTV) is another decorating method to consider for your T-shirt business. You can create your own designs with a vinyl cutter and a variety of heat transfer vinyl designed specifically for different fabrics and blends. With the [CAD-CUT® Online Designer](#), you can create your own designs using CAD-CUT® Templates and have your vinyl cut to order without making an investment in a vinyl cutter.



RESOURCE

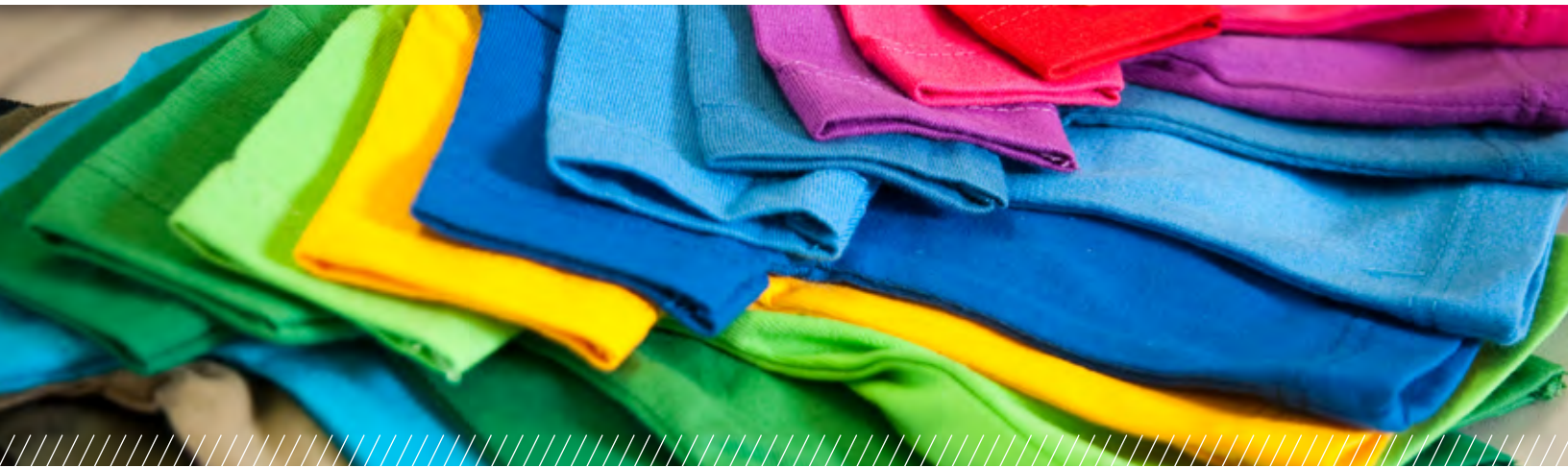
Looking for design ideas, tips and tricks for efficient application? [Subscribe to Stahls TV](#) to stay up to date in the industry.

Transfer Paper

It's important to get professional-grade transfer paper for your business. The quality and durability of professional grade paper will make the difference between repeat and word of mouth business and dead end sales with disappointed customers.

If you go with transfer paper, you'll need an inkjet or laser printer and good quality transfer paper. [Great Dane Graphics](#) is a great resource for artwork to create unique designs to then print and heat apply. If you're just starting out, we suggest using an inkjet printer because the process is simple and much more affordable than a laser printer.





RESOURCE

[A Complete Guide to Blank Apparel Vendors – This guide from Stahls' TV will give you the lowdown on their favorite vendors for high quality blanks.](#)

RESOURCE

[The Ultimate Guide to Design Size & Placement will help you get professional results no matter what you're decorating. Download Now](#)

The Right Blank

Picking the right T-shirt blank is an extremely important decision as you start your business. There are so many styles and options for T-shirt blanks it's intimidating to choose the right one. This decision can mean the difference between a dead end sale or repeat and word of mouth business in the future. Some of the things to consider when sourcing your blank garments are fabric type, T-shirt fit and sizing, and price + quality.

Fabric Type

- **Cotton** – Cotton is the most popular material for T-shirts, but keep in mind just because a T-shirt is 100% cotton doesn't mean it's top of the line. You'll want to know if your shirt is 100% cotton or 100% ringspun cotton. Ringspun cotton is softer and usually feels nicer, and you may find it results in a better-quality print.
- **Cotton/Polyester Blend** - There's also the option of cotton/polyester blends, the most common being a 50/50 blend. These blends tend to be softer with spots of other colors like gray or black.
- **Tri-Blend** - Another type of blend that's growing more and more popular is the Tri-Blend, which is very soft and has a stretchy feel. They're typically made up of 50% polyester / 25% cotton / 25% Rayon and will often have specks of other colors in them. These T-shirts are usually in the higher price range than other available materials but because of their growing popularity you may be able to draw a premium price.

Fit

The way a T-shirt fits may be even more important than the material it's made from. The kind of fit you want will be determined by who your target market is. After all, no matter what your design, if it's not the kind of shirt your market wears, they aren't going to buy.



CONNECT

Join the Stahls' community at [Facebook](#) for inspiration and advice from other garment decorators.

- *Street Wear* – This market is looking for a more baggy or box-cut T-shirt.
- *Humor Shirts* – T-shirts with funny sayings on them are popular with many markets. Here it's a good idea to go with an all around blank anyone would wear, not fitted and also not too baggy.
- *Fashion Shirts* – For the fashion market, particularly when targeting women, a fitted shirt is ideal.

Price + Quality

You want to offer the best quality possible, but when you're starting out budget can be an issue. If you have the capital, source the best T-shirts you can, if not find the best quality you can at the price point that works for your brand and your target market. This will take some research but it's well worth the time.

Business License

You can start a business without a business license but this simple step will allow you to purchase at wholesale prices and gain access to other industry perks, like tradeshow (which we'll discuss in chapter 4).

Make sure to verify if you'll need local, state and federal licenses and permits based on the location of where you'll be operating your business. Go to the [Business Licenses and Permits](#) page of Business.gov to find out more.

PRICING STRATEGIES

The price you charge your customers for your T-shirts can make or break your new business because it directly affects your bottom line — profit. There are lots of variables that go into pricing your merchandise: your costs, overhead expenses, and what your competition is charging, to name just a few.

There's a delicate balance setting a price that's high enough to gain a reasonable profit margin, but low enough to remain affordable and competitive in the marketplace.

Pricing strategies can be complex but the basic rules are straightforward:

- Your price must cover costs and give you profits.
- The most effective way to lower prices is to lower costs.
- Review your prices often to make sure they're still in line with your costs, market demand, competition, and profit objectives.



Stahls' TV has many resources to help you navigate the pricing game for your business. Here are a few to get you started.

- [The Ultimate CAD-CUT® Cost Calculator](#) – Accurately calculate your costs when creating T-shirts with heat transfer vinyl including production time, cost, and yardage required.
- [Pricing Screen Printed Transfers](#) – Learn how to price your costs and the finished garments you sell with this tutorial.
- [Team and League Business](#) – Pricing your garments for teams and leagues requires special considerations. Learn more with this video.

Grow Your Business

START MARKETING

Marketing your business is imperative to your long-term success. With the right tools you can expand your business to new markets you never thought of before. The Stahls' family of companies has many resources to help.

[Download *The Ultimate Guide to Marketing Your T-Shirt Business*](#) – This 28 page eBook is an invaluable resource in jumpstarting the marketing of your business.

The [Transfer Express Marketing Kit](#), also called a “T-Shirt Business in a Box”, comes with everything you need to create samples and show your customers what you can create for them.

This kit comes with:

- 30 Sample Transfers
- A Free T-shirt
- Price Guide
- Ink Color Selector
- Window Cling
- Application Wall Chart
- Personalized Easy Prints® Idea Book™ with YOUR Company Name
- A Sample Black & White Generic Idea Book for Customer Use
- A \$10 Off Coupon



The Transfer Express Marketing Kit – A “T-Shirt Business in a Box”



ATTEND A TRADESHOW

Once you get started with your T-shirt business you should consider attending an apparel decorating tradeshow.

Tradeshows are an excellent way to stay up to date on garment decorating trends, new products, and decorating methods. It's a way to get hands-on with the entire apparel decorating industry in one place for two to three days.

Because tradeshows can be expensive, particularly if you need to travel for them, it's a good idea to have a plan of action when attending so you can get the most out of your event.

Tips For Tradeshows

Register in Advance

Many shows offer big discounts for registering to attend early. Booking travel and hotels early can also maximize your discounted rates.

Make a Plan

Going to a show unprepared is a recipe for wasted money. Start with your goals and objectives for this show. Do you want to learn more about new decorating techniques? Is there a piece of equipment you're considering for your business? Do you want to find show-only deals on heat transfer materials? Are you sourcing new apparel blanks to expand your product line?

Once you know how you'd like to use this tradeshow you can plan accordingly. Locate classes, research vendors who will be at the show, reach out to vendors early to find out what kinds of show discounts they'll be offering, or request an appointment if there's an exhibitor you're very interested in doing business with.



CONNECT

There are several popular tradeshows for garment decorators. Check out where Stahls' will be by visiting the [Events page](#).

At the show get your hands on a map and a directory and map out which booths you'd like to visit by priority. It may be helpful to categorize these as "Must See" and "Want to See" companies.

These shows are massive so it's important not to wear yourself out needlessly. Once you've visited your priority booths, feel free to walk the floor at a more leisurely pace to find new suppliers and products you may not even have on your radar yet.

Don't be shy about skipping booths that don't interest you. Exhibitors won't mind, they'd rather devote their time to potential customers.

Be Comfortable

Don't discount how much walking you'll be doing, bring two pair of comfortable shoes and wear them on alternate days. Plan to check your coat and bag, you won't want to be juggling them as you make your way through the show.

Bring a bag to collect literature and samples, some vendors will mail these to you to save you the hassle of carrying these materials through the show. Take regular breaks to take notes and hydrate, water will keep you healthy and moving. Bring lots of business cards to avoid wasting time filling out forms.

Popular Industry Tradeshows

DAX – The *Decorated Apparel Expo* is one of the top-rated regional tradeshows in the garment decorating industry with informative seminars, many exhibiting suppliers, and excellent networking opportunities.

ISS – The *Imprinted Sportswear Shows* are the largest tradeshows dedicated to the decorated apparel industry. This nationwide tradeshow showcases the newest products, apparel and equipment featuring new technology, sublimation, and techniques with hands-on demonstrations.

NBM – The NBM show, is produced by *National Business Media*, offers lots of business enhancing information with the very latest equipment, supplies and services for apparel decoration and more.

SGIA – The *Specialty Graphic Imaging Association* produces this international trade show with leading imaging professionals showcasing new technologies, methods, and applications.



BEYOND T-SHIRTS

Once you get your T-shirt business off the ground, you can begin adding other apparel and promotional items to your product line. By adding other garments and accessories you'll be able to expand profit opportunities with add-on sales. Growing your product line isn't just another way to grow profit, it will help drive sales in general, and meet the needs of your customers. Here are 4 reasons to expand your product line, networking, and all the latest from vendors.



Market Opportunity

If you're making T-shirts for the fashion market, think about other kinds of apparel your customers like to wear to show off their personality and style. Sweatshirts, hats, and performance apparel all come to mind. If you're working with schools or other organizations think about the other kinds of gear people may want to buy to show off their spirit.

Competitor trends

What are your competitors doing? Is there a gap in the market you can fill?

Customer Needs

Perhaps your T-shirt customers are asking about new products. That's an excellent indication you should be adding new products to your business. If you're getting requests for decorated duffel bags or uniforms for local small business, that's an indication it's time to expand.

Customer Loyalty

By providing all the decorated apparel your customer needs, you're able to build loyalty. Providing a one-stop shop gives your customers the ease of purchasing from one place.

Conclusion



With a little research and planning, your T-shirt business will have a strong foundation to grow from. Stahls' is here to help you build a successful business providing your customers with quality decorated apparel and merchandise.



Connect with us!

-  STAHLs.com
-  [STAHLs' Blog](#)
-  [Ted's Blog](#)
-  [Facebook](#)
-  [Twitter](#)
-  [Pinterest](#)
-  [LinkedIn](#)
-  [Instagram](#)
-  [YouTube](#)

About STAHL'S'

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. (stahls.com/help-education)

Choosing A Name

The name of your business is an important step in the process of starting your T-shirt business. Keep track of the process with this worksheet.

STEP 1: BRAINSTORM

Set a timer and start brainstorming. (Use another sheet if you need more room.)



Thought starters:

- Important places or people in your life
- Favorite colors
- What you want to sell
- Hobbies
- Places you've lived
- Mantras you live by
- Dates or numbers that have personal significance to you

Choose 3 or 4 possible names and list them here:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

STEP 2: CHECK AVAILABILITY

Make sure no one has already used your name and see what domains and social media handles are available.



Name 1:

- US Patent & Trademark Database: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Web Search (i.e. Google, Bing, Yahoo!): No Conflict Conflict _____
- Web Availability: No Conflict Conflict _____
 - Domain(s): No Conflict Conflict _____
 - Twitter: No Conflict Conflict _____
 - Facebook: No Conflict Conflict _____
 - Pinterest: No Conflict Conflict _____
 - Instagram: No Conflict Conflict _____

Name 2:

- US Patent & Trademark Database: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Web Search (i.e. Google, Bing, Yahoo!): No Conflict Conflict _____
- Web Availability: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Domain(s): No Conflict Conflict _____
- Twitter: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Facebook: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Pinterest: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Instagram: No Conflict Conflict _____

Name 3:

- US Patent & Trademark Database: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Web Search (i.e. Google, Bing, Yahoo!): No Conflict Conflict _____
- Web Availability: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Domain(s): No Conflict Conflict _____
- Twitter: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Facebook: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Pinterest: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Instagram: No Conflict Conflict _____

Name 4:

- US Patent & Trademark Database: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Web Search (i.e. Google, Bing, Yahoo!): No Conflict Conflict _____
- Web Availability: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Domain(s): No Conflict Conflict _____
- Twitter: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Facebook: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Pinterest: No Conflict Conflict _____
- Instagram: No Conflict Conflict _____

STEP 3: FEEDBACK

After you have your available business names, make sure you get feedback from family and friends on your top choices. Jot down their feedback to help you determine your name.



Name #1: _____

Name #2: _____

STEP 4: NAME IT

Now that you've got options and feedback it's time to choose the name and secure your online accounts. Use this section to keep track of these domains and accounts as you secure them.



My business is called: _____

Domain(s): _____ Secured:

Facebook Page: _____ Secured:

Twitter Username: _____ Secured:

Pinterest Username: _____ Secured:

Instagram Username: _____ Secured:

Startup Checklist



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Notes:

