

Give 'Em

What

They

Want

Ditch old-school, 300-page product books for hand-picked digital catalogs that target specific market segments.

By JP Hunt, Contributing Writer

When deciding what products to offer, having too many options is just as problematic as not having enough.

In the decorated apparel market, as in most other businesses, customers welcome an approach that streamlines the selection process, making finding needed products faster and easier. This is especially true online, where convenience and instant access are not only advantages, but also expectations.

A great way to accomplish this is by creating curated collections or categories of merchandise that focus on certain customer needs or market segments. By filtering selections, you not only guide consumers, but you also build credibility through your knowledge and expertise of each niche. And the reasons you choose certain

products become selling points you can make to clients.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

One of the biggest mistakes garment decorators make is offering too many products. Using printed supplier catalogs to show options to your customers is still a common practice. This old-school approach typically is driven by the fear of losing a selling opportunity by not having the exact shirt that cements the deal.

Decorators often are blind to the possibility of missing out on a sale because the customer doesn't have the time or patience to pore over three catalogs containing hundreds of items and make comparisons. By cluttering the field, you're making the decision too much of a chore. Product selection shouldn't be daunting or frustrating, and online curated catalogs offer a solution.

Having a virtual catalog on your website also does away with customers' need to physically visit your shop. And it makes you accessible anytime, anywhere.

Moreover, it enables you to provide up-to-date, user friendly information by allowing new products to be quickly added, discontinued ones to be deleted, and notification of sold-out colors and sizes. Switching out products by season and jumping on hot trends keeps you ahead of the pack. In addition, your sales team members will have an up-to-date selling resource for reference or visuals wherever they are, using their phones or other digital devices.

Curated catalogs make it easy to access the type of products the customer is looking for or the salesperson wants to show. This presents your company as professional and customer service oriented.

An example might be a gallery or landing page targeting motorcycle enthusiasts. It could include motorcycle designs, the most popular shirt styles and staff picks. It lets you explain why your team of

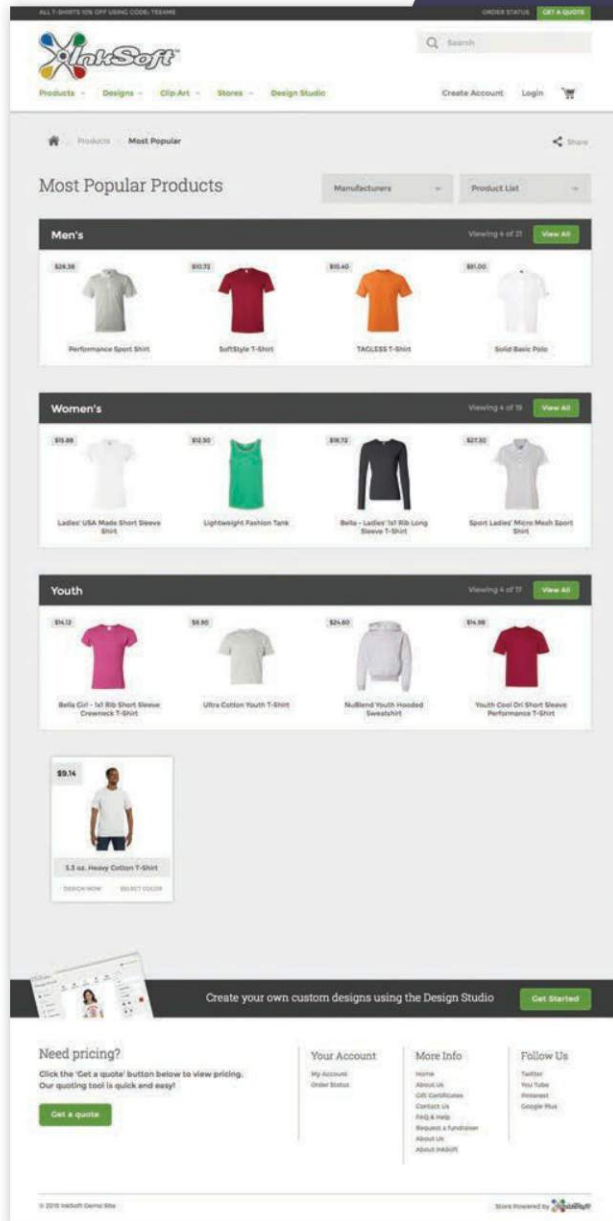
professionals has selected these garments as their favorites for the job. This shows your expertise and may influence the customer to choose a garment that can enable easier and better embellishment.

Products can be segmented in many ways, such as customer demographics, lifestyle, niche interests, professions, seasons, holidays and so on. Grouping can be done by garment, content, market, quality, cost or other commonalities. Possible

collections may include: staff picks, most popular, trending, new, top-sellers, favorites, best values, premium, limited-edition, eco-friendly and seasonal.

Building multiple curated product collections both expands your marketing reach and improves your ability to serve different customer segments. When developing curated catalogs, the key is making it easy for your customers to do business with you.

A GREAT WAY to group your website's products to make it faster and easier for customers to choose is by a "Most Popular" category. Other good examples of this technique are "staff picks," "top sellers," "best values," and "eco-friendly." All photos courtesy of InkSoft, Albuquerque, N.M.



CURATING GUIDELINES

In determining your product groupings, there are several rules you should follow. For starters, consider the general orientation of your business. Are you doing custom/retail sales or business-to-business work?

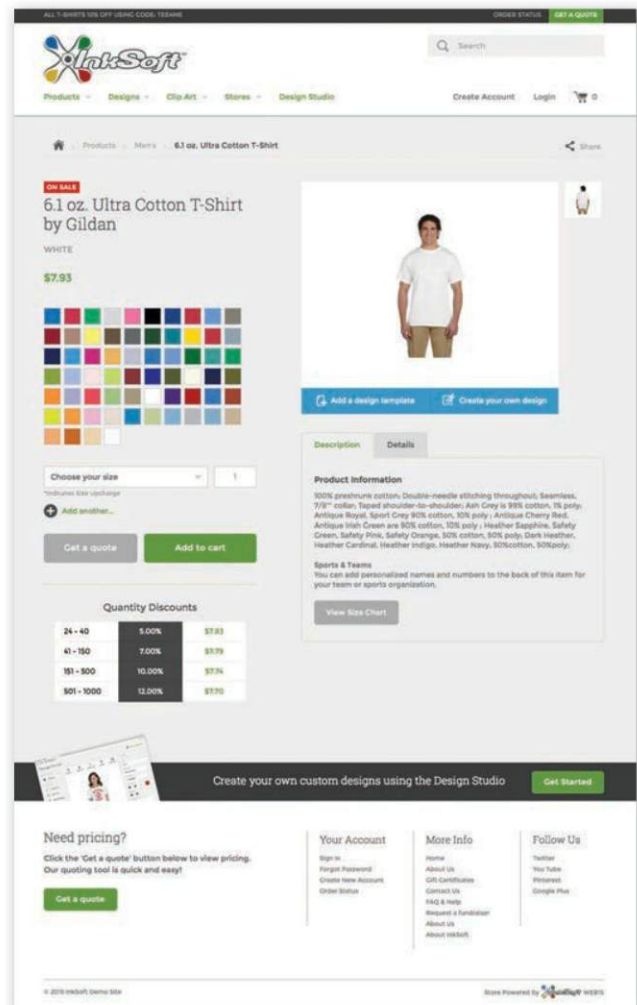
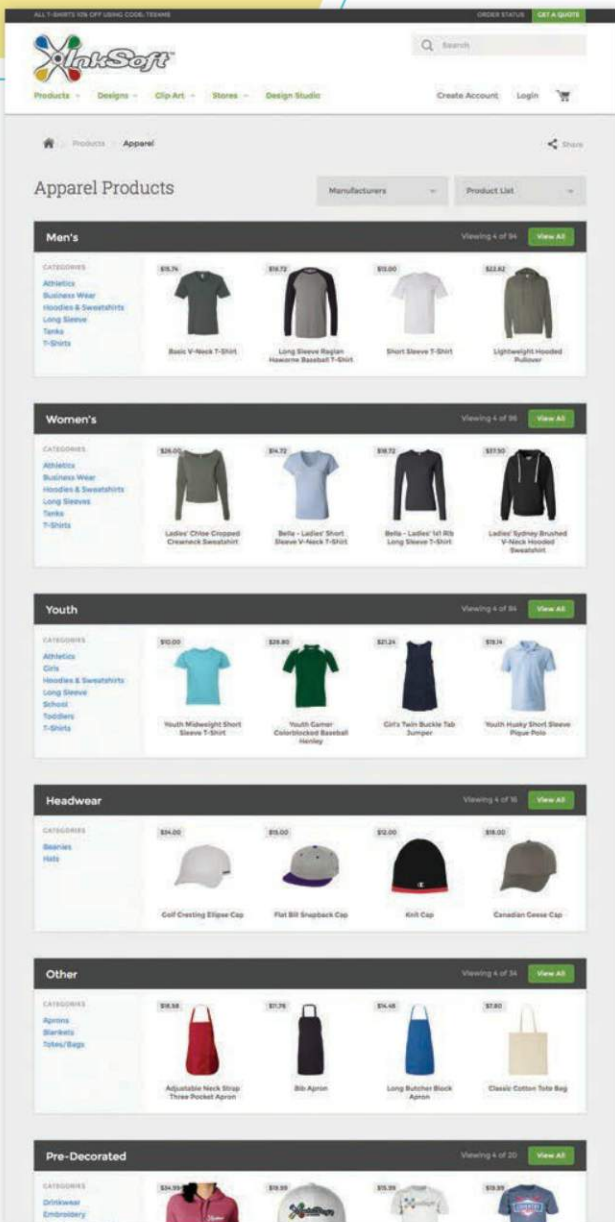
This is a good opportunity to take stock of what is and isn't working optimally in your company. Ask your salespeople to identify your top-selling products and talk to your production team about decorating issues posed by various garments. Conversations like these can provide a lot of data-driven direction.

You'll discover which "bargain" products

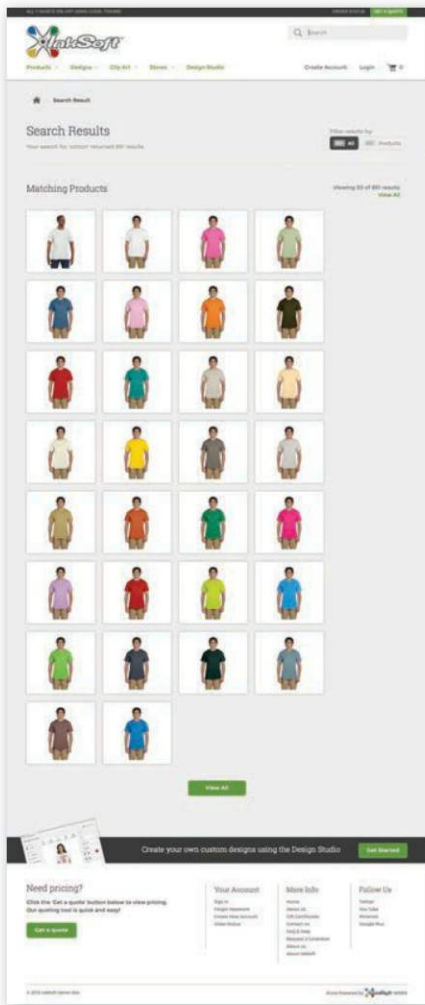
may be costing you and gather the needed input to create collections incorporating merchandise that yields the best overall return. Looking at your sales history and data also will indicate what's trending with your current clients so you can promote that to your prospects.

In integrating your findings into categories and subcategories, be critical. Ditch underperforming products and have a solid reason for adding new ones. Also, be mindful of seasonal items. Consider creating good, better and best categories, and limit the number of items in each category and subcategory.

BY ORGANIZING YOUR products in a digital catalog using categories and subcategories tailored to specific niches, you allow clients to save time and avoid frustration.



YOUR WEBSITE'S SEARCH engine needs to be created with the goal of helping customers find what they want quickly. Show all relevant items with the ability to narrow the initial results to more specifics.



LESS IS MORE

There is a lot of information at the product level, and part of the curating process is taking the time to consider the products you are recommending and the reason for which you are doing so. Variables include the brand/manufacturer, cut/fit, color, sizes and fabric attributes (content, quality, ink/process capability, etc.). Answering these questions in your product descriptions can make your company stand out.

The average consumer probably doesn't know the difference between ring-spun and open-ended yarn. This is extraneous information that's as apt to impede a sale as it is to promote it. In general, it's wise to adhere to the old adage about keeping things simple. Only provide the answers to the questions your target audience is likely to ask.

For example, having a photo of "Justin" holding up a shirt with a quote about why he prefers it can create a distinctive,

A GOOD PRODUCT description that focuses on the information of most interest to the customer is the ultimate goal.

personal connection with your company and differentiate it. Depending on the software you're using, you may be able to fine-tune your product descriptions by tracking cart feedback. This is where consumers comment on their shopping experiences. This can tell you what customers want to know more about and even why they're purchasing — or not.

The customer's ability to find a curated collection also is an important consideration. Keyword search ability is critical. Consumers expect to enter a keyword and find relevant designs, clip art, etc., on your website, just like they do when using an Internet search engine. This requires intelligent category and subcategory structuring. It all comes down to metadata. A search engine sees your website, SKUs, colors, prices, and company and domain name. This is the same information you have as part of your search SKU. Your content management system and e-commerce software need to respond to relevant keywords.

If a consumer is searching for something, show him all the relevant results. Depending on the filtering system, these results can then be narrowed from matching garments or products to matching designs, clip art, etc., and further filters can be provided for an even narrower focus. However, if you offer too many search controls, you may be more likely to lose a customer.

In today's fast-paced environment, an online or digital catalog really is the only practical way to keep up. With the growing number of people using mobile devices, viewing products online has become comfortable and familiar. By taking advantage of all the tools that technology and software now offer, you can ensure you are maximizing every sales opportunity by presenting customers with exactly what they want. ▲

J.P. Hunt is one of the founders of InkSoft, which offers a comprehensive business suite including an online designer, e-commerce platform and other business tools. He also is the vice president of sales and marketing. For more information or to comment on this article, email Hunt at jphunt@inksoft.com or visit www.inksoft.com.

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