



SEW IT GOES

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INTRODUCTION

And you want to do Mobile Embroidery... and you're not sure WHY! This article is for people who may be thinking about Mobile Embroidery and are not exactly sure what to do, who to see, or where to go for ideas, concepts, and lots of questions! Mobile Embroidery is not for the faint of heart. It definitely is a two-person (or more – three is nice) effort, to load, roll, and service the masses of folks stopping at you're trailer (or mobile office). This article could be dry and boring, but I will not allow that – so I tender a little quip –every now and then.

First the facts. E-Z Stitches has been in business over 7 years. We entered the rolling world of Mobile Embroidery just over 2 years ago. We are, what is known as casual Mobile Embroiderers. We go out two or three weekends a month for outdoor or indoor shows. There are Mobile Embroiderers who make a living doing Mobile Embroidery full time.

If you are a retired couple, and want to see the USA in your BIG towing vehicle, you could do this full time. It's a little more difficult to explain, but you get inventory shipped to a local holding agent or show office. It takes good logical planning to do this, but it is absolutely possible to do.

You will see the Pros and Cons of Mobile Embroidery. But just like the saying “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder”, I do not want to judge your vision for what you may know is a lucrative effort, just ripe for a Mobile Embroiderer.

This is a lengthy article. But it covers what I feel, are needed topics for the people considering going Mobile. Here is of subjects that you'll find in “Sew It Goes” part 1.

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- Is it profitable?
- Full cost analysis

Mobile Embroidery Thoughts and Considerations

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TWO STORIES

I want to relay two true stories to you, so you can see the depth of the Mobile Embroidery environment. These stories, or their related principles, will appear throughout this article.

- It was a Saturday morning; we're pulling into the driveway of an outdoor horse show – a schooling show, lots of novice riders all ages. We had placed the trailer the night before, so all we had to do was “open up” – place and turn on the generator, open the concession window, set up the computer, put out the hat displays, and finish putting up the tent. All in all – about 20 minutes work. I looked at the possibilities and said to my wife, Betty, “We aren't gonna make \$20.00 at this show. It's empty!”. Grumble, grumble..... We parked the Bravada, (Oldsmobile, like an Explorer- good weight distribution to pull the trailer.), and began setting up the trailer for the looooong day. I had to work, and walk, around a gentleman standing near the trailer. Pardon me, excuse me, and oops didn't mean to bump you, “By the way can I help you?” “Yes, I was wondering if you sell embroider tee shirts.?” “Sure, What would you like?”, “4 dozen gray, in these sizes. I need them by Tuesday, AM.” As luck would have it, we just got in 5 dozen gray tees, in the sizes he needed the preceding day, Bingo - \$500 sale. And we were not even plugged into the generator yet!! I kept my mouth shut the rest of the day!
- We went to an event that was supposed to be “big business” in the world of Pony Clubs. Small horses, small riders, and lots of expected business.

WRONG! \$20.00 1 sale all day! Bad vendor placement. PERIOD. The vendors were up on the opposite end of the event pathway. And as a result, everyone lost out. And we don't go there anymore.

Why do you want to do Mobile Embroidery? Let me tell you, MONEY, We like people, and to have a little fun! I've heard those lines before, "Come here often?" What seems a little cynical is in your best interest, and it should let you look inside yourself for a more reasonable answer, that YOU can live with. Are we having fun yet?

The reality of Mobile Embroidery is a double edge sword. You work hard, make a little money, and try to be upbeat when things go wrong. You meet some great people. From the elderly farm-dressed (polite expression there) gentleman who wanted a hat to match his granddaughter's riding colors, and eventually spent several hundred dollars outfitting his granddaughter in her colors, to the lady who reeked in diamonds and wanted the lowest price available for a hat embroidered on all four sides.... You will meet them all, and you won't see them coming - until it's over! **There are stories to tell that will tell you lessons to learn.** Do you like to "People Watch"?

IS IT PROFITABLE?

Is there money in these events? IS IT PROFITABLE?! Cut to the chase they all said... OK – here are the facts. I sell embroidered hats in the Washington DC metro area from the trailer for \$28.00 each (front side only, add \$5 for each other side). Can you do that? Will your market tolerate those prices? ONLY you can tell. But – do not underestimate yourself, your product or your new feature of "Being Mobile". We sell that same hat from our shop for \$12 - \$16. What did it cost you to get to the event? What was the space rent? Lodgings? Meals? Extra expenses to park your tow vehicle. Are you paying for the expenses of your help at the event? How much do you think that event will yield in gross sales? Is the effort realistic for the profit? And that answer will give you the answer to the second question of this paragraph. In most cases – the answer is yes, BUT, and I must reiterate, BUT sometimes, it's a loss. BUT, you made good future contacts that will provide good sales. AND there is the subjective answer of, It is profitable! Read on.

- A man ordered a 6-panel hat with a U.S. Marine insignia. He was local. I delivered it to his office. Not a problem, when he handed me his business card, I learn he is the president of a large company. Within two months, his firm ordered, over \$2,000 in merchandise. Was the Mobile Embroidery day a success? It was questionable when we drove home. BUT – look at the overall results.

FULL COST ANALYSIS?

If you do not have the ability to perform a full cost analysis of this business venture, then I would suggest you get some assistance from an accountant, or banker. You are about to embark on an expensive effort. Cost estimates are from \$8,000 to \$25,000 to buy and equip a trailer. If you rent a trailer to sell already embroidered material, the financial outlay is substantially less. How often do you want to go mobile? Can you sustain a \$300 to \$700 expense each month? Is it reasonable for you to expect \$400 weekend

revenues? What happens if the event is postponed or cancelled? Lots of financial questions here, and you (and some help) should be able to answer them and make a sound financial decision. In this area, not to bore you – I could write a book!

EXPENSIVE TOYS?

To revisit the profit picture, and your goal is to make a buck or two, Let me put an image in your mind of “EXPENSIVE TOYS”. (Work with me a minute... you’ll get the picture), EXPENSIVE TOYS... Antique Cars, Horses, Boats, Fishing or Hunting (outdoors men and women sports), Planes, Guns, Motorcycles, Dogs, Cats, Ham radio “Hamfests”, and Race Cars, Tournaments (all types – Martial Arts, Soccer) get the picture... These people spend money, on their toys, themselves, their spouse (don’t let him see it yet), their children, and on their animals (cars and boats included). AS OPPOSED to, much larger crowds, of fairs, and carnivals that the more affluent people walk by with their charges, in order to get to the rides. Ladies and gentlemen, there are magazines on every one of these topics. And magazines lead to lists of events and local clubs, and that leads to a human to talk to about being a vendor at the next show...and on and on it goes... You want to go to an event. Do research, just like Sherlock Holmes, you have to dig a little to get a lot. AND DON’T forget the WWW – Wonderful World of the Wide Web! Got questions, Ask Jeeves, Dogpile.com, Snap.com, and all those other browsers out there. Lists of events are there for the looking. Church bulletins, community events, craft shows (show the embroidery colors... meet people), yellow pages, country clubs (not so much for the Mobile Embroidery, but general stuff too), Do you have a fair grounds in your area that rents its facility to “Special Clubs”?, A Convention center? (Watch for hidden setup costs from unions to set you up to plugging in your systems). I’ll bet there’s a web site for the fair grounds or convention center. How ‘bout rodeos? Yep, pard, we even stitch up the ripped shirts too. Don’t forget a straight needle to mend buttons. (Seems too logical doesn’t it?) There are countless events to go to?

CONS

AND now the CON.... Do not go in over your head. Do small shows first, get a system going and expand from there. Who takes the order? Who sets the design? In what box is that style hat? Where is the yellow hat? This secret will appear in a few more minutes. Our first show was a 10 day county fair. What a mistake that was!! We jumped in at the same time they were handing out rocks to go to the bottom. WOW... What a lesson in pain, strain, and over estimating in inventory, under estimating in staffing, and no lesson at all about rain control. (Learned that lesson – got it whipped now!)

WHAT EVENT SHOULD YOU REALLY GO TO?

Do you know anything about horses? Can you tell a Trakenner, from an Arabian, Do you know the difference between a ’57 Chevy Belair, and a ’58? What do YOU like to do? What do YOU have expertise in? YEP – or you can fake it, and learn real fast!! But you better learn, or the natives will know there’s a tenderfoot in the arena. And when they look in the design books for that special horse image, don’t point to a hunter jumper going over a fence and say “steplechase?” And that’s not to say you can’t learn, ask around, talk to friends, get breed emblems for horse shows (they are thoroughbred design

symbols), and long thin things at car shows are called “Rails”. Can you say, “Street Rod”? Clue, it’s not a gun! It is possible to fit in, just takes a little more learning on your part. Another clue, ... WWW again, damn those computers! Think bigger here. Dogs, cats, any type of show have their idiosyncrasies, you just have to be patient and it’ll come to you fast enough – if you try!

WHAT IS MOBILE EMBROIDERY?

Mobile Embroidery can be presented as two concepts.

- First, You fill up your trailer with goods already sewn, put out a table of nice garments, sell them, take orders for special orders, AND you’ve got Mobile Embroidery.
- Second, You fill up your trailer with one or two sewing heads, take blank goods (and some already sewn stuff), put out a design book, take orders and sew on-the-spot.

I think you get the picture. Why take a machine(s) to do Mobile Embroidery? You would be amazed at the number of people who stop by “just to look at the machine”. And be ready for more questions. How much does that cost (They are talking about the sewing head. We have Toyotas.) Looks heavy? (It is!) Do you buy those designs or do they come with the sewing machine? And you will hear lots of questions! Keep talking; there’s an order in there someplace! And most people want to buy it now, also known as the instant gratification syndrome.

If it’s possible, and you decide to take your machine – YOU HAVE TO READ next month’s article. It will teach you what you need to do to “take your machine on the road” and to the show.

WE EMBROIDER YOUR MATERIAL – HERE!

Another reason for taking your machine is to embroider material the customers bring to you. Sign says, “We embroider your saddle pads”, (or pertinent information to the event, i.e. racing suites). We use an easel white board to post this and 2 or 3 other specials. Be reasonable what you accept to embroider. Is it clean? Is it practical to put 3 initials on a biker cap – just where he/she wants it? Do you really want to embroider that horse blanket NOW? (it just came off the horse – got the picture? Horses shed an awful lot!) Can you put my initials on this saddle pad? It used to take a long time to hoop a saddle pad. Secret here – Now, no time at all with Fast Frames! Don’t know what that is – I suggest a little digging on your part. (email me).

TEAR-DOWN SET-UP TIME

Are you going to sell (and embroider) – just hats? Or are you going to embroider hats and flats? Consider tear down-set-up time. With one head you have to allocate when you sew each type. “We’ll be sewing hats in about 30 minutes, may I suggest you come back

in an hour and it'll be ready for you.” Very important point here – time management – keep it in mind. That is one reason we take two heads, one for flats, the other for hats, and the other, because sometimes a machine may not sew right, and just needs to be unplugged ‘cause it was bad! Is that a good lead-in for equipment repair?

CAN YOU FIX IT?

Are you capable of fixing your machine – on the spot! If the answer is no – respectfully - do not consider mobile embroidery with a machine in your trailer. Just sell pre-sewn goods, and take custom orders for new garments. You have to have the ability to fix-it-on-the-fly! Reasonably quickly. Or declare that you have a “dead unit” and can only take orders. BUMMER, but that is part of the reality of Mobile Embroidery. Sometimes the child acts up – and you lose a round because you’re mobile. We travel with reasonable spare parts, extra monitor, keyboard, mouse, computer, full toolbox, and a few other parts in the repair closet. MacGyver and I went to different schools together!

HOW MUCH, AND WHAT TYPE OF APPAREL DO YOU BRING?

The first few times you go to an event, don’t bring a lot of pre-sewn stuff. You may want to bring a clothes rack with unembroidered stock, i.e. shirts or windbreakers. You may want to sell seasonal garments i.e. are you going to an event early in the fall and want to display Halloween sweatshirts? Maybe it’s springtime and you may want to show your “Mother’s Day or Father’s Day” wares. It’s OK to run out of the blue sweats – not a problem – take orders and ship it to them. Remember that you ran out and remember the time of year and the event. Do you want to come back to that event again? Make points with the promoter; donate a garment, hat, blanket, or a gift certificate, something to the cause. It will come back as a benefit later. And I have to say this, If you’re going to a horse show – don’t bring shirts embroidered with antique cars! Bring event related material. “We don’t dial 911” sewn on a sweatshirt, under an image of a 357 Magnum, is not realistic at a Western cowpoke, cowgirl, happy trails event. See the Dakota, Floriani, or Great Notions sections of western style sew-outs. Be practical. After a couple of events, you should get the feel of what it takes to sell your goods. You add to the profit picture if you have pre-sewn material there for immediate purchase. “Would you like you dog’s name under that Schnauzer design?” - thank you very much. What product can you bring – already sewn with a design that will sell – because it’s there! Affectionately known as the “impulse purchase”. Tote bag? CD case? Ideas please? Have an eye-appealing tent or selling area, colorful, 1 or 2 chairs, a message easel – for the “specials”, display grids to hang merchandise, etc.

A very important point in the preceding paragraph to reiterate – Do you want to come back to that event next time? Time being, next month, next year, or when ever the event is sponsored again – just down the road. Sometimes the event is moved from place to place. Car shows (usually put on by the Lions Clubs, or Rotary Clubs) set up in school parking lots or open farm areas. If you want to return next time – impress on the promoter to let you know the next date and time. Make a note – KIT! (Keep in Touch)

QUESTIONS – THAT NEED ANSWERS

So you picked an event, and got an idea on what to show and sell, Okay, now it's time for Q&A. Regardless of whether you sew-on-the-spot and sell or only sell your wares, these questions are pretty generic – and important. I will offer a suggestion to help answer the question, but you'll have to finalize the answer.

- Do you need a permit or license to sell your wares? Vendor permits are usually obtained from your county offices. That also goes with sales tax certificates. Need one?
- Is this an indoor or outdoor show? – It makes a difference on weather precautions, how far you may have to lug your material, tables, chairs, cooler, etc. to your booth area. Need a hand cart? Plan ahead. Can you drive in, unload or load up, and go park?
- Do you need to bring a power generator? Even some outdoor events have outside power. If you're indoors, generators may not be allowed due to ventilation factors, or noise. Do you need a long extension cord for a cash register, fan, or extra lighting? Also duct tape to keep the cord "on the floor" and no one trips over it!
- Any limitations on what can or cannot be sold at this event? Hats only? Or Tees too? There may be someone else selling only flats?
- Is security provided for the "over 1 day shows"? Do you have to package up everything before you depart the premises, or can it be modestly left out, only covered with a tarp and bungies
- How long has this event been running? How many people usually attend this event? These give you some idea as to event's popularity. Is it every year – for how long?
- Can you capitalize on any pre-event advertising? Flyers? Handouts at the door – "Be sure to see – My Embroidery Company in booth 123". Check with the promoter for permission to have entrance flyers.
- Do you want to give a vendor's discount for the other vendors at the event? You may need a floor runner passing out a vendor flyer, or you can mention it to the potential customer if they are wearing a "vendor badge – like you".
- Have you previously attended this event as an observer? Been there before? Familiar with the occasion? Have a friend who was a vendor there? Comments?
- Is there a food concession near your area? That's good and bad, we were too close to the eatery, and all day we smelled the BBQ. Ate a late BBQ lunch that day! This is normally a good place to be, ensure there's adequate space between the food space and yours. Be mindful of people holding drink cups, and then handling your material.

TRAVEL DISTANCE

And how far are you willing to drag that trailer to get to a show? (Can you see, Mobile Embroidery is full of questions to keep asking you and your partner?) We travel about 100 miles. After that, I don't feel it's worth the road time and effort. But, you may be 100 miles from the next event, so – go sew. The folks in the western USA or Canada may have to go that far for a large scale, 3 day event. Extra costs to consider when

pricing and estimating gross profit. Gas, lodgings, wanna eat? All part of the expense numbers.

BE READY – JUST IN CASE

And what do you do, if you get there and at the same event and there is another Mobile Embroider? After I came down from the celestial orbits of fury and rage, I went over and introduced myself. Sometime during the first full day of rabid activity, the other embroiderer came over and asked if I had an extra cone of white thread – yep, and I gave it to him too. He had a 10 x 10 spot, and one head and was modestly busy. We had 30 x 10 spot, 3 heads slamming away. At the end, we parted mutual friends. Sometimes you pull up your tent and get the hell out of Dodge, sometimes you stick it out – for better or worse, and like the words imply – longevity holds firm and you get over another small hurdle. After 22 years of marriage, we're pretty offsetting, and we vote a lot. I vote we leave – Betty votes for staying. We stayed - only because we didn't have two votes the same. It's a mathematic axiom. Plus and minus equal minus, plus and plus equals plus. We have to have two votes the same. Had Betty voted to leave, we would have pulled out and left for home. Be ready for the situation, just in case you meet E-Z Stitches, we'll stick it out too.

EVENTS?

While we're on the subject of events, and how many events do you want to go to, and is there a "circuit or special route" to follow? Here are my thoughts. If you are going to do this full time, you should get associated with circuit of events for your specialty. If you frequent car races or shows, get to know the head people, find the troupe leader, and follow the dust. Be part of the caravan that sets up before the racers come in. You may only want to go to "every other show". Not a problem, you will establish yourself – and believe it or not – you will create a following for your wares. Do the words; "repeat business" put a smile on your face? Again, we go out about 2 or 3 times a month. You may decide that you have to be out every weekend. Decision time that can only be answered at the time of the planning stage for the spring, summer and fall – or do you like cold too? You have to plan ahead on what events you'll be doing and when. Driving around "looking for someplace to park this trailer", is not going to cut it! Keep in mind the entry fees for each event. Sometimes the fees are several hundred dollars for a 10 feet x 10 feet space. Your trailer should be at least 8 feet x 20 feet, and if you put up a tent, you'll need 30 x 10 area. Do they want cash, check, or equivalent donations? Layout concepts will be presented next month. It's a good article too, you'll enjoy it.

NEED HELP?

Regardless of whether you pull and sew, or pull and sell material already sewn, how many people are needed to support the selling, sewing, and customer service efforts at this event? Most of the time, we get by with Betty and I. And for the big 3 day event, we bring our son, Vincent (he gets a day off from class – Sophomore at Catholic University of America – Architecture), and we get a much needed set of hands on the keyboard for designs, and setups. If you don't have a family member to share in the fun, but need to bring an extra employee, it's an expense that will have to be factored into the profit equation, lodging and meals (when you get a chance to eat) will be your most concern.

Think of when you go to Bobbin, or another ISS show, and watch the company personnel doing the sewing on the manufacturer's equipment – showing you their capabilities. You'll have an employee there, helping you fill orders. Payment is payroll or contract labor charges. You have to work that out with your staff member.

PRODUCTION CONTROL

This begs the next questions, how much can you sew, and how fast can you sew it? Ladies and gentlemen, if you have no concept of production control, and do not know the sewing capacity for a one or two head installation, you are going to have a difficult time determining your profit potential. That is a lesson for another paper. But you will need to be flexible in meeting the orders of your customers. Maybe you cannot sew the order there – for whatever reason – you'll sew it and send it to them, and YOU pay for postage (shipping). If they ASK you to ship the material to them, OK shipping is an extra \$4.50.

NEW TRAILER CONCEPT

There are people doing Mobile Embroidery from mobile homes. The biggest problem in mobile embroidery is moving the equipment in and out of the trailer. It is very difficult to tilt the sewing head to fit into a mobile home with a twenty to twenty-four inch doorway. As you know, it's very heavy, and sometimes it just won't fit through the doorway. (Unless the sewing head is an EP1 – and I don't recommend that machine for Mobile Embroidery as a stand-alone unit.) There is a unit I saw last year that open from the rear, (used by car buffs) so they can drive their car into the mobile home. YESSS – roll that 200 pound dog into the mobile home and let's set up a Mobile Embroidery shop! Well – almost. But the reality is you can now sew from a mobile home environment, and not pull a trailer. Very do-able now. Our trailer is a concession trailer. The equipment is rolled up ramps, and is strapped down on the inside. Customers look through the concession window and view the sewing and work area. They are not allowed on the inside of the trailer.

STORAGE

Our inventory is also in the trailer in shelving I made from store fixtures. Boxes of hats slide on the shelving, and these hatboxes are numbered. Remember the earlier part of the article when I asked you to locate the "yellow hat"? SECRET here, as the hat sits on the display rack outside of the trailer, with all the other wares of the day, we tape a hatbox number under the visor, so when someone orders the yellow hat, I look under the visor, write the number on the order form, and Betty pulls the yellow hat from one of the many different hatboxes on the inside of the trailer. Magic, and the customer gets a yellow hat.

If you rent a trailer to haul your pre-sewn goods, you may not be allowed to install shelving affixed to the trailer frame. Construct a modest shelf device – PUT IT ON WHEELS – and roll it where you need it. Everything in our trailer is on wheels. Test the waters with this rental unit before you dive into the water. We knew (Betty did anyway), we were in the Mobile Embroidery segment of "Sew It Goes", that's our Mobile Embroidery logo you see in the beginning of the article.

HEAVY IT UP

We tow our double-axel, 20 foot long trailer, with an Oldsmobile Bravada. We installed an extra transmission cooler, and had stronger springs installed on the rear axel of the vehicle. Whatever tow vehicle you have, be sure that you can handle the full weight of the trailer, its contents, and whatever else you put into the tow vehicle itself. SAFETY is paramount. A lot more on this next month.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A SUCCESSFUL MOBILE EMBROIDERER?

GUTS! Never let'em see you wince when you pull the splinter from your pinky. Be brave, go where no man has gone before, and leave a trail! And remember, Pioneers get the arrows! Sew?

- Signage, lots of it. Around – on- and in- the trailer. Signboards put 20 to 40 feet away pointing to you trailer. Signage to read “Embroidery done on site”.
- Balloons, helium filled hanging around whatever you can tie it too.
- And be ready for the rain. It will rain on your parade, at least once.
- Have lots of business cards. We pass out colorful pens too.
- You need an inside person (Betty) working the equipment, and an outside person (me) working the crowd – well 1 or 2 people strolling by, And at the larger shows (no joke) the third person to work the designs, and customer service, “do you like that style of lettering”.
- Don't offer too many fonts. Just a few fonts on a felt sew out (laminated in plastic) gives a pretty good representation of font selection.
- You need a great order form – well designed and helpful for the customer, and the sewing team. Ours has undergone several revisions. Make one you and your team, can work with. Our form is 8.5 x 11, has lots of information for the customer and the sewing team, and pricing too. Keep the pricing simple and easy.
- For the real pain in the xxxx, there's always one of them – count on it – they'll show up, learn to say, “How would you like to pay for that?” You will get a good size order, or they will leave.

MORE QUESTIONS

I know someone is reading this saying, “But he didn't mention (fill in the blank) – yea what does he know!” Well, as in life, it's just full of learning experiences, every day, in every way, it's something new. I've tried to show you the little, and major concerns related to Mobile Embroidery. The primary key – planning. And that's where I hope this article leads you. It should help you to be “A master of the obvious”, and the rest will come in time. You have to experience it, to appreciate it.

Mobile Embroidery Thoughts and Considerations

As I have eluded throughout the article, there is more to come. This article does not address the “trailer setup, and getting to the event”. That article will appear next month. What does it take to pack a trailer with equipment, inventory, selling tools, and a whole checklist of things? I’ll bet you thought I forgot the obligatory checklist. It’s in the next issue.

As you can see, the world of Mobile Embroidery is just a little more than hitch-it-up and tie-it-down. And you do need a good sense of humor to meet the crowd, and a strong sense of creativity to fix the infamous Murphy’s interruption, BUT is it profitable? And that’s where we came in. It all depends on what YOU CALL PROFITABLE?

THOUGHTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

These are typical questions that should be answered BEFORE you “Go Mobile”. You’ve heard them long ago, but now you get to ask them before taking the jump into the drive away embroidery operation.

- Who goes mobile?
- What am I going to sell – HATS & STUFF
- Where – Name the events near and around you
- When – like working weekends?
 - Outside
 - Inside
 - Or how long is the event 1,2, 3 or more days??
- Why –exposure, meet more people who need more embroidery

The world of mobile embroidery is all based upon a single word, PLANNING. How well do you plan? Once you pull off the driveway, it’s very difficult to go back and get something! A lot of planning must go into the entire concept of a mobile operation. Hopefully, this planning is before any thought of the trailer is purchased (unless you’re buying a ready to go trailer – then you’ll modify it until it just suits you to a tee!). This paper will address several topics all related to becoming a mobile embroiderer. These topics include:

- The trailer
- The layout
- Outdoor setup
- The Checklist
- Internal traveling
- Traveling safety
- Summary

Before you load up - embroidery equipment and supplies, these are things you need for the trailer. Some are thoughtful planning; others apply after the trailer is purchased.

THE TRAILER

- Size – Most events spaces are in multiples of 10 feet. A 20-foot trailer will take up 3 spaces. 30 linear feet is what you’ll use for the trailer, tent and tongue. (You’ll see the tent later in the text.) Vendor space is provided in 10-foot increments. It may be rented, provided for free, provided for a modest donation or contribution of a door prize, or it may be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis.

Mobile Embroidery Thoughts and Considerations

- Access – Large barn doors for easy access and ramps. You may want to consider the new style trailers that open from bottom to top and contain a car or truck driving system. Will your trailer have a people-door?
- Ramps –either built in or removable. GOTTA HAVE RAMPS
- Power distribution panel (just like at home, a circuit breaker box with 4 or 6 circuits) its best to place the trailer power access plug in the front or rear of trailer. – Where are you going to get the power for the trailer? Mobile power from an electric generator is a must -- 4 – 5 KW should do the trick. Don't forget the power cords from the generator to the trailer distribution panel. (And a few extra cords don't hurt either) Some events will allow you to plug-into their power source, be sure to bring enough cord!
- Tow-ability – What are you going to pull this beast with? Be sure the pull capacity is there in your intended vehicle. Does the pulling vehicle have a transmission cooling system too? If not, consider a transmission cooling system. It costs about \$250 - \$400 installed depending on the usual particulars.
- Tow vehicle suspension – Depending upon the age of the tow vehicle, you may need to “heavy-up” the suspension system in the tow vehicle. Your options could include, heavier springs, new springs, additional shock absorbers, and who knows (depending on the vehicle).
- Outside mirrors – Either the type that go on the car – called outriggers, or the smaller ones that attach to the current rear-view mirrors. If you have never driven a trailer before, please go to Uhaul and rent an empty one for a day and drive it around. GOTTA HAVE MIRRORS.
- Trailer brakes – There are several versions to consider, manual, electric, or slowing hydraulic weight sensitive. There are pluses and minuses for each one. Listen to the salesman, and then you decide what's comfortable for YOU. I prefer the slowing hydraulic, less driving trouble – I brake the pulling vehicle and the trailer begins to slow itself. No battery drain, no remembering to pull a manual lever at the same time my foot is working.
- Axles – either a single or double axel trailer are your options. Double axle trailers work better all the way around. Less bounce – and there will be bounce, more durable and more stable, and you can drive with one tire flat. Double axle trailers are stronger for on and off road towing. A single axle on a 20-foot trailer is not recommended.
- Concession window – IF you have one -make it big enough for 2 people to stand there and not feel real crowded together. Six feet is OK, don't forget the concession counter – the computer terminal should sit on it, layout

books, a few supplies, (pens, order forms, etc.) OR you may prefer to just tow the equipment to a spot and work on the inside, OR from the rear of the trailer. (Things to think about!!) If you are purchasing a new trailer, check with the manufacturer for concession window options.

- Mastered locks – You will use 3 to 5 locks on the trailer. You may want to consider mastered locks – so you won't have to carry 3 – 5 separate keys. It's a good idea to have 2 complete sets of car and trailer keys every time you travel. One for you and your partner, and put an extra key in the car – that opens the trailer – you get the message!
- Head cushions – The doorways of the trailer are often short and hurt when you hit your head. And you will hit your head! So, get pipe insulation foam tubing. It comes pre-slit. You have to cut it to the doorway width, then cover the head doorjams. Use this same tubing (in colors to put around the concession window (if you have one), so people won't hit their heads, and if it's colorful, it will add as an attraction device to future customers.
- Flooring – Usually the trailer flooring is one-half to three-quarters plywood. My suggestion is to double it. Whatever they install, reinstall a second layer of three-quarter inch plywood. You can thank me later. It will add uniform weight throughout the entire trailer, but the extra overall strength it provides the trailer, installed (or tied down) equipment, and your rolling office chairs is a positive benefit for everyone.

THE LAYOUT

- Floor plan – Have you given any thought for a operational or workflow floor plan? You get an order in here, put it there, work on it here, sew it and put it on the side for pickup. What “Workflow” concept do you have in mind? It's a real mess when you get 6 orders and mix up who belongs to whom. We use plastic bags; the material and the order go in the bag. In case we can't sew the order there, we take it home, sew it and mail it back to the people. Everything is still in the bag when we get home and unload the trailer.
- Shelving – Be sure you leave enough space for shelving. The type that fits nicely is the grate shelving that fits into vertical holders that are screwed into the trailer frame. These are very useful in tying everything down with the fantastic BUNGEES.... Learn the word, and get a least 3-dozen of them in various sizes. Take a 14” bungee – put it through the center of a roll of paper towels, stretch it “a little” and put it on the outside of the shelving – a paper towel holder that won't unroll the towels – except for

one at a time! Secret – tie wrap the shelf to the horizontal support bar to eliminate shelf bounce.

- Placement – Of equipment, of racks, of computers, of text holders, and all the things that you think might go into the trailer. You can use “D” rings, or “O” rings, or “half rings” (what I use – get them at Home Depot). These are bolted everywhere in the trailer into the vertical trailer frame.
- Ratchet ties – These are long 1” web belts with an automatic ratchet device that tighten the item –something on wheels – to the walls of the trailer and stops it from rolling around inside. A DEFINITE NO NO!
- “E-BAR”, Straps, and Ties – In the interior design of the trailer, you’re going to roll in your sewing machine(s) [we take two with us – for hats and flats], and you have to secure them to the trailer. We use E-BAR mounted on the sides of the walls with supporting side frame so as not to collapse in the trailer sides when the tension is applied to the sewing machines by the ratchet webbing (2”wide). We also “tie the machine to the trailer floor” using 1” or 2” webbing straps. The machines do not move from either side to side, or up and down – in case of bumpy roads or pastures. (The sewing machines are firmly bolted onto their respective table tops attached to 4 legged rigid tables (or stand). “H” frame table structures are not recommended if you’re going to a horse show out in the fields somewhere...) Note: I only know this fastening system as E-Bar, but it is the commercial system used in most truck transports used for securing their load in the trailer. I bought our bars and straps at a commercial truck supply center. There are other commercial suppliers that will sell pieces of E-bar that can be secured to the flooring as well.
- Where are you going to put the trailer toolbox? You need one. In the car, or van – OK, just so you have one. Or allow for a little floor space for it. Be sure to include a least 1 carpenter level – more on that later.
- Computer placement (and monitor) when you’re traveling. Leave space for it on the floor. You can use the Styrofoam containers that the computer and monitor came in, or padded blankets (on the floor, with the monitor face down secured on all sides so it can’t move). Or it may be in the car. **DON’T FORGET THE COMPUTER CABLES AND power cords!** If you are going to use a computer laptop, you may want to consider an attached external monitor or ease of use and customer visibility. If you do use a computer laptop, don’t forget the security restraint cable!
- Where is the placement of the terminal, keyboard, mouse, scanner when you’re up and taking orders? Can you work in the small office environment – reasonably comfortable?

Mobile Embroidery Thoughts and Considerations

- What about the internal cabling from the computer to the sewing machines? The computer may be on one side of the trailer, and the sewing machine may be on the opposite side. Think about the internal cables. I tie-wrapped ours to the trailer frame, up out of the way, secured and not flopping around. Buy extras, and leave them in place.
- Where are you going to put everything? Order forms, credit card machine, charge slips, catalogs, books, extra toilet paper (you'll only forget that ONCE), keyboard, mouse, and on and on.... We use a small 4 drawer dresser (3'wide, 18"deep, 40" tall, mounted on wheels and reinforced drawers, with external handles and a vertical outside 1x2 on hinges to secure all the drawers when we're moving) and one of these small plastic 1 foot wide, 2 feet tall 4 drawer catch all for the small stuff. The dresser is secured to the trailer walls by the 1" webbing attached to the half circles (presented earlier).
- Are you going to have a thread rack? Or you could put the threads in a dresser drawer? Or in a box.... Lots of options here... don't forget it (the thread) of course. If you decide to have a thread rack, here's another traveling hint – cut a piece of cardboard to cover the entire thread rack and bungee the cardboard to the thread rack to eliminate any bouncing. This will also reduce most of the threads becoming unraveled while traveling. Also, take a small rubber band, loop one end around the spool, and make an "X" with the rubber band before looping it around the other end of the spool.
- Lighting – Our 20 foot trailer has 4 4-foot double fluorescent light fixtures attached to the trailer frame on the roof. We have 2 over the preparation area and sewing machines, and 2 on the concession counter side. They are installed lengthwise parallel to the length of the trailer. They are on separate circuit breakers. Be sure to put at least two pieces of Duct tape on the underside of the lights (taped to the reflector of the light), just in case a light should come loose from its socket. It will drop onto the sticky side of the tape and stay there until you can tend to it. Also, there are high intensity working lights mounted to each of the sewing machine tabletops.
- Does your layout include a "people size door"? Where? Ours is at the tongue side of the trailer. It opens "OUT" from inside the trailer. If so, allow for it. AND get some step up boxes or 1-step step. Once the trailer is "in place", you'll remember the step up box so you can "EASILY" get into your new office. It's best to have one on each end of the trailer.
- Where are you going to put your hat samples while you're traveling to and from the event? We have hanging hat frames, and let them hang from 2 of the trailer wall areas, and we have hanging lightweight chains hanging

from the ceiling frame, on which we attach the hanging hat racks. We also have rolling hat storage shelves for 36 boxes of hats (laying flat).

- If you are going to carry clothing samples, use large plastic tubs while traveling. Hang the garments on a display rack (foldable) and place the empty tub under the trailer when not in use. Don't forget to tie the tub down to the trailer with bungies or straps.
- Flashlights – We put a high beam flashlight next to each door in the trailer. When you get where you're going, it may be dark. And you'll know that when you unlock the trailer door (either door) you'll have a light to further help see the matter at hand. You definitely need this after an event and you have disconnected the generator and you're on the last step in packing up the wheel chocks – these are the last items packed into the trailer before you pull away for home. The flashlights hang from a bungee attached to the trailer next to each door. They are always there when you open the door in the dark.

The internal layout of the trailer is VERY important when you think about traveling to and from the event and AFTER you're there and have to work from your trailer. If, of course, you only use the trailer to “get you there” and you work from outside the trailer, then all the external setup must coincide with the internal layout for packing, unpacking, and repacking. I suggest you sketch the trailer layout for concept and placement design.

OUTDOOR SETUP

This setup deals with how you display your merchandise so as to attract customers! Remember why you did this – to sell stuff. What you do and how you do this is up to your marketing abilities. But remember, everything came out of – and has to go back into the trailer – easily!

- Folding tables, one maybe two.
- Chairs, we use director chairs, embroidered with our logo, and put a price tag on it, so people know, they can purchase these here, and delivered to them in a week or three.... We carry 3 directors' chairs, in boxes so as not to damage the chair frames. Put the boxes under the trailer when not in use or back in the tow vehicle.
- Signs and banners. You need them. You need to let the walking population know you are there to do their embroidery. Tall signs attached to the trailer, short sandwich-standup-boards, or banners tied to a tree. A sign store can best help in this area. Don't put signs on the trailer 'cause your hat displays will cover them up.

Mobile Embroidery Thoughts and Considerations

- Display racks. We use Grid bars (2 sets of 2, each 5 feet tall). We don't always set these up, depending on the event. They can make a stand-alone "v" or we tie-wrap them to the uprights of the tent. You often see these types of stands in mall stores.
- TENT – get one – best of all – an E-Z UP erected in 20 seconds 10'x10' tent. No discussions here... just do it. Put most of your setup under the tent. For stability, tap the tent pegs in about two-thirds. Secret, put an "S" hook on the tent peg BEFORE you tap it into the ground. Then when it comes time to lift out the peg, put a piece of nylon cord in the "S" hook loop and pull straight up, you'll have one loose tent peg!
- RAIN contingency.... Have one (if of course you're outside –duh), but most important, be sure to include rain gutters on your trailer that extend several inches beyond the edges of the concession window. Also place a rain gutter on the concession window – near the top of the window, so when it rains and the window is raised, the large raised window will catch the rain and send it back toward the trailer. The rain gutter will stop the water flow from going into the trailer.
- Leveling jacks – hydraulic devices that go under the trailer to ensure that the trailer is level. Sounds simple. Bring blocks of wood (9" long, 2" x 6" type, at least 6 to 8 of them). And learn to level the trailer. Remember the carpenter level in the toolbox. Be sure the jacks have a handle to them. The handle is a security device - explained later.
- Parking block of wood. This is a large wood block that the trailer tongue stand rests upon after the trailer is unhooked from the towing vehicle. Do not let the trailer rest on the front pad. It may sink into the ground – and possibly below the level of raising the trailer onto the tow hitch.
- Remember the leveling jacks? Hint – they go in the rear of the trailer and level out 3 points – just like the LEM – Lunar Excursion Module – a tripod. It is recommended that you follow my sequence, or you'll be doing extra duty in raising and lowering the trailer tongue.
 - Pull into the space you want to park your trailer
 - Put the front parking block under the trailer tongue pad
 - Set the wheel chocks under the tires (in the rear of the tire so that the trailer does not roll away from you, and in the front of the tire so the trailer doesn't roll toward the tow vehicle when its unhooked). Wheel chocks – use them EVERY time you get ready to unhook the trailer from the tow vehicle.
 - Lower the tongue pad and unhook the tow vehicle
 - Lower the front of the trailer, below the level point

Mobile Embroidery Thoughts and Considerations

- Set the rear hydraulic jacks into place, place a block of wood on the ground, put the jack on the wood, raise and balance the jacks
 - Re-raise the trailer front end to level (or just slightly above level)
 - Ensure the rear of the trailer is solid, secure and level (adjust as needed)
 - DONE
 - Optional – if you prefer to use 4 hydraulic jacks, balance the trailer on the three points described above, then add the two front jacks under the front corners for additional stability.
- THE PRECEEDING PARAGRAPH IS THE FIRST THING YOU DO WHEN YOU GET TO THE EVENT. I realize that this is substantially buried within the paper, but it had to be put into the proper sequence of setup and display.
 - The next steps are to secure the trailer against theft, from either at the event (if its more than one day, or in the case you leave the trailer over night for setup the day before the event, OR while the trailer is parked on your front lawn ready to go to the next calling)
 - Always have a trailer tongue lock – use it every time the trailer is unhooked from the tow vehicle
 - The tow bar hitch should have a lock if you leave the tow bar in the hitch for an extended period of time. We put it in place when we start packing up the trailer, and remove it when we get home from the event. Don't leave it in permanently. It will rust in place and you'll have a devil of a time getting it removed.
 - The trailer wheels should have individual tire locks on each wheel; these are called “lug nut locks”.
 - Consider under frame rings. These are 2-inch rings welded to the underside of the trailer frame on all four corners. They are optional but if they are present it makes the next paragraph a little easier to visualize when securing the long chains and jacks.
 - The wheel chocks should be secure on LONG chains. One chain could be short (4-5feet), the other chain should be long enough to reach from the tire it is under to and through the handles of the hydraulic jacks and back to the other chain of the wheel chock. Lock them together. And you have a secure trailer that cannot be easily stolen. Remember, locks only keep an honest man HONEST. Does that say something about insurance?
 - Insurance – get enough. Enough said.

THE CHECKLIST

All articles similar to this should have a “Checklist”. Here is our representation of the obligatory checklist for your consideration. When its time to load and unload the trailer, some of this material can be placed back into the trailer for storage purposes, ie the tent, or rolling stock cart. Some of it you’ll have to lug back to the shop for use with your day-to-day operation. You’ll be able to figure out what you need, and where you need it. So, here’s the checklist....

| |
|--------------------------------|
| Backing |
| Binder clips |
| Bobbins |
| Bottled water |
| Bug repellent |
| Bungies – lots of ‘em |
| Business cards & holders |
| Calculators |
| Cash envelope or box |
| Catalogs & prices |
| Cell phone & charger |
| Computer & attachments |
| Computer laptop etc |
| Cooler with ice & ?? |
| Credit card machine & slips |
| Display grids |
| Duct tape |
| Easel & pens |
| Exhibitor information |
| Flares |
| Flashlights |
| Folding chairs |
| Folding tables |
| Generator & gasoline |
| Generator oil & supplies |
| Handouts |
| Hooks to display merchandise |
| Hoops & frames |
| Inventory – hats, shirts, etc. |
| Jacks |
| KEYS –trailer & car |
| Machine oil |
| Manuals –software/hardware |
| Note paper |
| Order forms |
| Padlocks & keys |
| Paper towels |
| Pens |
| Power extension cords |
| Rain gear |
| Ramps |
| Ratchet straps |
| Ropes & ties |

| |
|------------------------------|
| Rulers |
| Sewing samples |
| Sewing stuff scissors etc |
| Sewn out alphabets |
| Signs |
| Solvy |
| Stapler & staples |
| Step-up boxes |
| Stock designs & books |
| Storage dresser or container |
| Surge suppresser |
| Tent & pegs |
| Threads – lot of it |
| Toilet paper |
| Toolbox – your selection |
| Trash bags |
| Wheel chocks & chains |

Additional thoughts here >>

INTERNAL TRAVELING

The internal traveling segment of the paper is to remind you that you are pulling about 1500 to 3000 pound of dead trailer weight. If you have never pulled a trailer before, please get a few lessons. Get refreshed on the following terms:

- Tongue weight – The amount of pounds being exerted on the tongue of the trailer’s back hitch device attached to the towing vehicle. You want to minimize that as much as possible. You want tongue weight but you don’t want it so heavy that the towing vehicle front tires don’t touch the ground. This weight distribution comes from packing the trailer too heavy in the front or rear, or too much on one side of the trailer. The placement of equipment and inventory will have a bearing on the overall tongue weight and weight distribution.
- Consider heavier springs in the tow vehicle OR external trailer leveling devices.
- Take wider turns than you would normally take. SLOWLY – don’t be quick, remember you have your business in the trailer, and you don’t want to shake it up too much, if possible.
- Is EVERYTHING tied down? If it’s loose in the trailer – you’ll know it after the fact. And that may be too late. Recheck the equipment tie-downs.
- Backing up with a trailer attached – Do you know how to backup with a trailer attached. Here is the easiest lesson you’ll ever see. Seated in the driver’s seat of the tow vehicle, place your right hand at the 6 o’clock position of the steering wheel (near your lap). For example, consider backing up and wanting the trailer to go to the right. Grabbing the steering wheel at the 6 o’clock position, move your hand (while holding the steering wheel) in the direction to the 3 o’clock position. “Move right- turn right, move left- turn left”! Back up slowly. You won’t handle an 18-wheeler doing this, but you’ll be able to park your trailer when you get there.

TRAVELING SAFETY

You cannot be too safe when pulling a trailer. When you are hooked up and ready to pull out for the grand event, do one more safety check. It won’t hurt.

Recheck the chains and electrical connector for the trailer. Is the trailer ball LOCK secure in the down position? Is there hydraulic fluid in the slow to break system? Are the break-a-way safety chains secure and in place? Are the Break-a-way chain hooks extra

durable in the event of a snap-release? (The chain should break apart, not the hooks come off the tow vehicle in the event of a separation). Consult with your dealer or trailer provider to describe the emergency trailer break systems. It varies based upon which breaking system you have installed on the trailer.

Have your partner (oh did I forget to say that it will take two people – at least to load and setup this animal at the event – therefore your partner should help out with the safety check too) stand in the rear of the trailer. Check your break lights, and individual turn signals. If they're not right – fix them. Drive to a gas station and get new bulbs. Be considerate of the trailer height – Do you have an air conditioner on top of the trailer?

Put the extra gas for the generator in the tow vehicle. Do not drive with a full generator gas tank. Half is Ok, but not full – it splashes around with the vented air cap. Fuel the generator when you unload it and place it on-site at the event. Put the gasoline container under the trailer, out of the sun when not in use.

When it's time to come home and turn off and unhook the generator, let it cool off at least 30 minutes BEFORE repacking it into the trailer.

Tie down everything – AGAIN. And if you're not exactly sure of what you are doing ... get advice. It's usually free, and surly can't hurt.

Now that you're all hooked up and ready to go.... Where you going to go?

IN SUMMARY

I hope this helps take the mystery out of “getting there”. You have to take the initiative on “where to go” by contacting lots of groups and letting them know – “YOUR MOBILE Embroidery trailer is available for shows.” Some people survive nicely from place to place with Mobile Embroidery. As with any business venture, there are the pluses and the minuses. RAIN is a minus! You will meet some great people at any event, and therein is the surprise order for 50 shirts in 3 days.... Or do you scan in logos here... or can you do... Marketing exposure is the ultimate key to mobile embroidery. And that is the biggest of the pluses.

Another important point that must be stressed is safety. From the wheel chocks, to the step-up boxes, to the power generator, and gasoline storage, you have to keep in mind your safety, as well as your customer (padded concession window corners), ramps – do not lift it – push it, etc. etc. With common sense and a little luck, you'll be fine.

If for some reason you would like to chat about your particular mobile situation, I can be reached at E-Z Stitches, 301-253-3971, or email – jim@ezstitches.com

Best regards to all and - Happy Mobile Embroidering!