How To Sew Patches & Emblems

Jimmy Lamb
Tajima Sales & Support
jlamb@tajima-hirsch.com

INTRODUCTION

Patches or emblems can be an excellent profit center for a small embroidery shop. Most companies that specialize in this product are quite large and require minimum quantities in the range of 100 pieces or more. However there are many customers looking for small quantities in the 5-24 piece range, who are not being serviced. You can take advantage of this, by offering small runs of custom patches. The processes are quite simple and can be used to embroider virtually any patch of any shape or size.

TRADITIONAL PATCH PRODUCTION PROCESS

The production process used by Companies that specialize in making patches from scratch involves special tools and processes that are not readily available to the average Embroidery Shop. The process begins with cutting out the fabric to be used to form the patch. (The most common fabric is twill.) This is done using specialty cutting machines such as die-cutters or lasers. Then a merrowed edge is applied (looks like a satin border, but it's not) using a merrow machine. Depending upon the sophistication of the operation, embroidery is applied either before the cutting or after the patch is finished.

Many Patch Production Companies also offer patches that are sold "blank" and are referred to as "finished blanks."

Unless you are going into patch production as a full-time endeavor, there is no need for you to invest in expensive and elaborate production systems. There are some simple methods that any Embroiderer can use. We will discuss two of them.

EMBROIDERING ON FINISHED BLANKS

By far, the simplest and cheapest method of producing patches is to embroider on finished blanks. As described earlier, blank patches can be purchased from a patch manufacturer then you add the embroidery to complete the process. The challenge is to get the patch onto the machine for sewing. Hooping is virtually impossible and while there are special patch frames available, they typically are designed to hold one specific size of patch and thus offer no versatility for handling a wide range of shapes and sizes.

But never fear, there is a simple method that uses ordinary hoops and materials, plus a touch of digitizing.

FINISHED BLANKS - THE DIGITIZING PROCESS

A. Create A Patch Template File
Scan the patch to be used. Digitize a running stitch around the outside edge of the scanned image. Be sure that the segment starts and stops at the TOP of the patch. Save for use as a Patch Template.

B. Create A Patch Sew File – Single Patch
Create a new design file and bring in the Patch Template File, created in Step 1. Merge/Paste/Create the desired logo and/or add lettering where you wish it to sew within the patch. Ensure that the lettering or design has a color change at the beginning. Save this as a Patch Sew File – Single Patch.

C. Create A Patch Sew File – Multiple Patches (Optional)
For runs of more than one patch, you can sew multiple patches in one hoop. Choose a large hoop and determine how many patches can be placed inside of it, without touching each other or the hoop. Create a new design file and plot the location for each patch. Use the copy function to insert the Patch Sew File – Single Patch, created in Step 2, in each of the plotted positions. Save this as a Patch Sew File – Multiple Patches.

TIP – Pulse users can display actual hoops on screen and use these images to help plot the multiple patch locations.

TIP – If using a contract digitizer, have him set up some Outline files of basic patch shapes for you. Then you can re-size them as necessary to create your own patch templates. Thus, when you are doing just basic names, you can set them up yourself, using the MERGE function.

FINISHED BLANKS - THE EMBROIDERY PROCESS

A. Hooping
Obtain backing material that has an adhesive coating on one side. Hoop the backing with the <u>adhesive side up</u>. Be sure to choose a hoop of adequate size, especially if you are sewing multiple patches. If using peel and stick adhesive backing. Lightly *score* the protective paper coating and remove it to expose the adhesive portion. Remove only the portion of coating inside the hoop, not outside.

B. Sewing

Sewing Single Patches:
1. Program your machine to stop at the first color change, which occurs at then end of the outline running stitch.
2. Start the machine and it will sew the outline running stitch and then stop.
3. Place the blank patch down onto the adhesive backing using the outline running stitch as a template.
4. Restart the machine and it will sew the entire logo and then move back to the center of the design.

When finished, simply unhoop and tear off the backing. You will notice that the outline running stitch does not attach itself to the patch, rather it stays with the excess backing.

Sewing Multiple Patches:
1. Program your machine to stop at the first color change for each individual patch, which occurs at then end of the patch's outline running stitch.
2. Start the machine and it should sew the outline running stitch for the first patch, then stop.
3. Place a blank patch down onto the adhesive backing using the outline running stitch as a template.
4. Restart the machine and it should sew the entire logo. Upon completion it will move to the location for the next patch and sew the outline running stitch, then stop.
5. This process will repeat until you have finished all of the patches that you programmed to fit in one hoop.

When finished, simply unhoop and tear off the backing. You will notice that the outline running stitch does not attach itself to the patches, rather it just goes with the excess backing.

NOTE: When sewing multiple patches, do not attempt to remove any patch from the adhesive backing until ALL patches have been sewn.

There are several companies that offer finished blank patches in a wide assortment of shapes, sizes and colors. Prices start at about $0.25/each.   Here are some sources:
1. Ensign Emblem: 800-521-0575
2. EMC: 800-443-9553
3. Salem Patch Shop: 877-362-5333

ATTACHING A FINISHED PATCH TO A GARMENT

In many cases the customer will handle the attachment details. However, if you are asked to provide this service there are a number of ways to handle the process.

1. Use a regular sewing machine.
2. Hire a local seamstress to sew the patches on.
 Use the Direct-Sew (appliqué) process to embroider the patches on.

NOTE: Heat seal backing is not considered a permanent means for attaching patches to garments.

DIRECT SEW – THE DIGITIZING PROCESS

A. Create The Direct-Sew File
Create a new file and merge/paste in the Patch Template file that was created for this patch, which is nothing more than a running stitch outline of the patch.

B. Create The Direct-Sew Segments
Using the running stitch outline of the patch as a starting point, digitize a Direct-Sew file for this patch. It will consist of three stitch segments:
1. **The Outline Stitch** - A running stitch outline of the patch.
2. **The Tack-down Stitch -** A running stitch parallel to and just inside of (no more than 2mm) the outline stitch segment.
The Border Stitch - Either a zig-zag or run stitch.

DIRECT SEW – THE SEWING PROCESS

A. Hooping & Sewing
1. Hoop the garment that is to receive the patch.
2. Program your machine to stop at the first color change, which occurs at the end of the outline running stitch.
3. Start the machine and it will sew the outline running stitch and then stop.
4. Apply a light coat of adhesive spray to the back of the finished patch (away from the machine.) Place it down onto the garment using the outline running stitch as a template. Allow the adhesive to dry.
Restart the machine and it will sew the tack-down stitch, then the border stitch. The end result will be a patch that is firmly attached to the garment.

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CREATING A PATCH APPLIQUE

If you only have to do one or two patches per size and shape, then consider using the same basic process, but modify it to sew like an applique.

You will need to create three design files for the direct-sew patch – The Patch Template File, The Patch Creation File and The Patch Sew File.

PATCH APPLIQUE - THE DIGITIZING PROCESS

A. Create A Patch Template File

Create a full-scale image of the desired patch. Scan or import this file into your digitizing program and digitize a running stitch around the outside edge of the patch image. Be sure that the segment starts and stops at the TOP of the patch. Save for use as a Patch Template.

B. Create A Patch Creation File
Create a new file and bring in the Patch Template File that was created in Step 1. Merge/Paste/Create the desired logo and/or add lettering where you wish it to sew within the patch. Ensure that the lettering or design has a color change at the beginning. Save this as a Patch Creation File.

C. Create A Patch Applique File
Create a new file and merge/paste in the Patch Template File, created in Step 1, which is nothing more than a running stitch outline of the patch.

Using the running stitch outline of the patch as a starting point, digitize an appliqué file for this patch. It will consist of three segments:
1. **The Outline Stitch** - A running stitch outline of the patch.
2. **The Tack-down Stitch -** A running stitch parallel to and just inside of (no more than 2mm) the outline stitch segment.
The Border Stitch – A satin or column stitch.

Be sure to assign a separate color change to each segment so that you can force the machine to stop at the beginning of each segment. Save this as a Patch Applique File.

PATCH APPLIQUE - THE EMBROIDERY PROCESS

A. Create The Patch
Select and hoop a piece of twill fabric suitable for making a patch. Sew the Patch Creation File on it. The result will be a running stitch outline that defines the boundaries of the patch, followed by the logo itself within the boundaries.

Unhoop and cut out the patch with scissors, carefully following along the running stitch outline.

B. Sew The Patch Applique Onto The Garment
1. Hoop the garment that is to receive the patch.
2. Program your machine to stop at the first color change, which occurs at then end of the outline running stitch.
3. Start the machine and it will sew the outline running stitch and then stop.
4. Apply a light coat of adhesive spray to the back of the finished patch (away from the machine.) Place it down onto the garment using the outline running stitch as a template. Allow the adhesive to dry.
5. Restart the machine and it should sew the tack-down stitch, along the edges of the patch.
After the tack-down is complete, it will sew the border stitch along the edges of the

patch, providing a secure and neat border to the patch.

CREATING A FREE-FLOATING EMBLEM

Free Floating Emblems do not involve patches, rather they are designs sewn on a minimal piece of supporting fabric, from which all excess has been removed, such that the edges of the emblem end where the embroidery ends. The embroidery supports itself and appears to be freely-floating in mid-air.

This is more of a novelty product, but you may be able to find some commercial applications. One draw-back is that it only works well with solid designs. Lettering and designs with individual components are not good candidates. In fact, the best ones to use are those with a solid border that encompasses the entire design. The end-result is a high stitch count, which may make the product economically unfeasible.

A. FREE-FLOATING EMBLEM - THE DIGITIZING PROCESS

There is no special digitizing required, other than creating designs that are solid, with few if any holes or gaps between the elements. For example, a soccer ball would work well, but lettering would not. Preferably the design will have a solid border composed of a heavy running stitch such as a bean or a dense satin.

B. FREE-FLOATING EMBLEM - THE SEWING PROCESS

A. Hooping
Hoop a piece of heat-activated topping (like water soluble-topping, but more durable and dissolves at high temperatures or tulle, which can be found at most craft and or sewing stores. Add at least one layer of tear-away backing.

B. Sew The Design
Sew the design as you normally would.

C. Apply Adhesive
Upon completion of sewing, remove the design from the hoop. Remove the excess backing, then apply a permanent adhesive such as Okay To Wash Glue (found in Fabric Stores) or Fray Block to the backside of the embroidery.

D. Finish The Emblem
1. Once the adhesive is dry, finish the emblem by removing the excess tulle/topping.
2. Cut away the excess as close to the embroidery as you can.
Apply heat using a heat gun (not a blow-dryer) which can be obtained from a Home Improvement Center or Hardware Store. The topping or tulle will dissolve/shrink up against the edges of the embroidery.

BEYOND PATCHES AND EMBLEMS

The Finished Blank process discussed earlier is not limited to patches. The same concept can be used for a variety of hard-to-hoop items such as:

Belts
Sashes
Leashes
Pet Collars
Military Nametapes
Chenille Letters & Numbers

Overall, these methods can open doors to new products and services for you to offer, thus expanding your customer base and your profits. But keep in mind that just because you can embroider something doesn't mean you can make money on it.

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