

# Apparel Decorating Business Survival Guide

Josh Ellsworth

*Senior Vice President, Dealer & Enterprise Sales, GroupeSTAHL*



# Introduction

Helping you and your business to survive in the face of COVID-19 is our top priority. One of our mottos is STAHL'S® Helps You Win. It's true we've always believed that your success is our success. And frankly right now its most aptly said that your businesses survival is also our businesses survival. This guide contains advice, special product offers and ideas to help you survive.



# 1

## MUST HAVE DURING PANDEMIC: WEBSITES

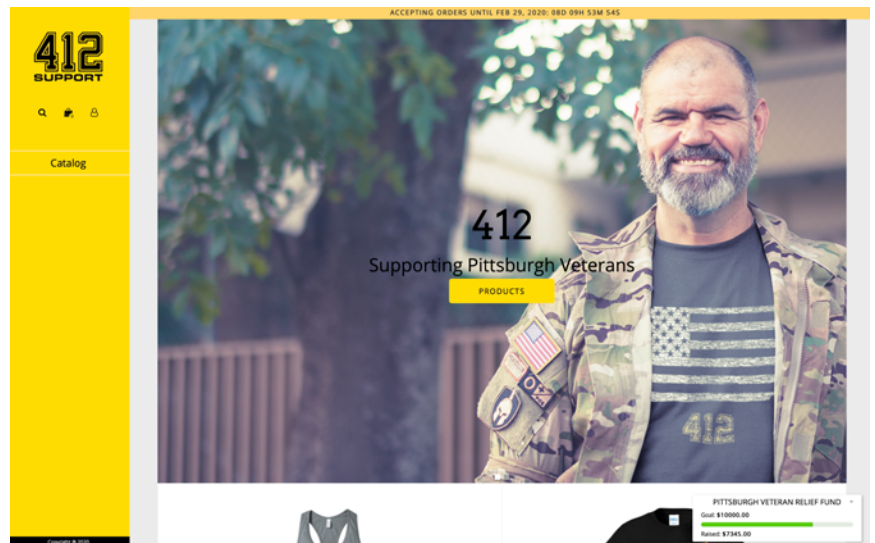
That's right, the word websites is plural. Due to health risks, government forced closures and the like it's a critical time for a business to be able to sell online. Late in 2019 we launched Spirit Sale™, an online web platform that allows business owners like you to easily build individual websites for your customers. Some ways your customers may value this service in today's environment is to generate support through decorated apparel sales.

**Try This:** Contact local business owners whose doors are closed due to the pandemic and offer them a free fundraising site to help them generate extra income. With Spirit Sale™ you can launch unlimited webstores. Check out a few of our concept stores here to help get your creative juices flowing. Feel free to share them with your potential clients as a sample.

Concept Store 1 – Coffee Shop (<https://just-brew-it.spiritsale.com>)

Concept Store 2 -- Church (<https://the-bridge.spiritsale.com>)

Be sure to point out that these stores can be created with a fundraising meter to track their earnings, while you make money too!



*Fundraiser bar example*

## SECTION 1 CONTINUED:

People are home and internet use is surging. Another way to use websites during this time is to launch business to consumer stores.

**Try This:** Launch a B2C (Business to Consumer) element of your business that commands retail prices. If you have existing apparel inventory, create a store and add the ability for a consumer to personalize products. Or just consider launching a site with made to order designs that can be based around anything from hope to appreciation to humor. Promote these on social media through free posts or paid advertising.

Check out a few concept stores here as a sample:

Concept Store 1 – Monogram Shop (<https://adeline-lane-boutique.spiritsale.com/>)

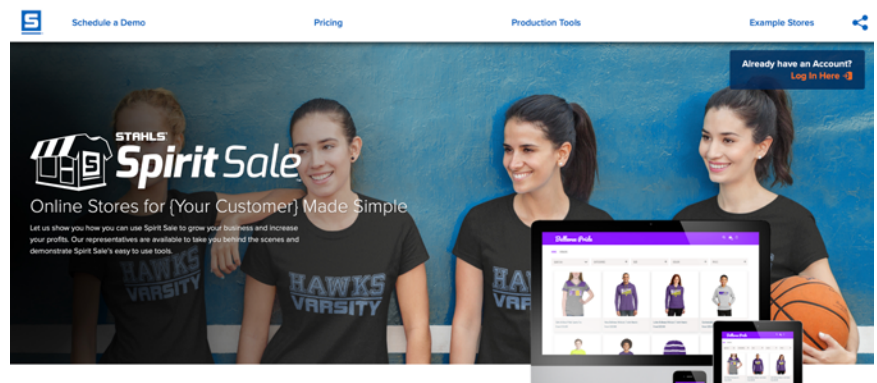
Concept Store 2 -- Humor (<https://staying-home.spiritsale.com/>)

**Here is How STAHL'S' Can Help:** You should be monitoring your cashflow in times like these. Spending money up front on a solution like Spirit Sale™ may hold you back. This is why we've decided to give you Spirit Sale free for 90 days. At the end of the 90 days you can make a decision to buy it for \$599 for a year or cancel with no penalty or return fees. We're so confident in webstores for everyday business that we know you'll like it once you try it.

**Important Reminder:** Keep in mind that cash is extremely important right now. You can't afford to give a percentage of your sale price to an ecommerce provider. Spirit Sale™ won't take a percentage of your profit.

To take advantage of this offer, set up a demo at this link to ensure you understand how it works as well as support tools available to you:

[m.stahls.com/spiritsale-demo/](https://m.stahls.com/spiritsale-demo/)





# 2

## MUST HAVE DURING PANDEMIC: A WORK FROM HOME PLAN

As of the writing of this, I'm in a work from home status. Now I don't have to run a shop, but I do have to continue to produce educational videos, and I have produced many garments from my garage in the past 4 years. During this process, I started asking myself what is the MVP (Minimum Viable Product) that we would need to provide our customers for them to stay in business from home? And next, how should their business respond to any potential lack in supply chain due to this potential status for their suppliers?

### Consider This:

Forced closures and an economic downturn will mean smaller runs. Gatherings aren't happening and people aren't spending money at the rate they were (perhaps with the exception of life sustaining items). Screen printing is geared for higher runs and jobs aren't running on many screen-printing presses across the world - certainly not optimal jobs. Therefore it's not important to get your screen printing presses or your 12 head embroidery machines home. It is important however to start to shift your work to your heat press so you or an employee can begin to prepare to do it from a garage or spare bedroom with heat transfers.

### Do This:

Start shifting your art to a product that can be made with your heat press. Heat Transfers come in many styles, including Screen Printed. A screen-printed transfer is made by screen printing onto a carrier paper. The transfer is then shipped to you (the decorator) and heat applied to the garment using a heat press. We make Screen Printed Transfers from two locations in the US for redundancy (Ohio and Arizona). We expect to continue supplying our customers with transfers for short, medium or large run jobs as long as we can. Transfers often ship same day or next day with guaranteed 2-day shipping.

If you've never used screen printed transfers and want to check the quality, we're offering our sample pack for free during this time. Request it here:

[transferexpress.com/marketing-tool/free-samples](https://transferexpress.com/marketing-tool/free-samples)

This is also a super, simple guide that walks you through what you need to know about our ink formulas:

1. [Goof Proof®](#) > Most Popular, Traditional Plastisol Look/Feel
2. [Hot Split](#) > Softest Plastisol Style, Less Opacity than Goof Proof
3. [Elasti Prints®](#) > Best for Heat Sensitive Fabrics like performance wear

## SECTION 2 CONTINUED:

### **Also Do This:**

During this unpredictable time, have a decorating insurance policy! While we expect to continue to sell transfers during this time, there is always a potential of forced closure which would interrupt supply. For this reason it's important to consider "made to order" products as well when creating your designs. Businesses who design with versatility of the manufacturing process in mind will be able to quickly pivot between technologies when they realize the sale, which is especially important for ongoing web stores. This means, launch your stores with designs that can be made with screen printed transfers or your vinyl cutter. Remember to keep artwork simple enough for the weeding process. Keep reading...

A must have manufacturing method for business owners during this time is CAD-CUT® Heat Transfer Vinyl. A vinyl cutter will allow a business to create made to order products. When paired with a heat press and CAD-CUT® heat transfer vinyl, the results for apparel are high quality and cost effective in quantities as little as one. Stock a roll of heat transfer vinyl, equip your home with a vinyl cutter in addition to the heat press and you have what you need to make apparel, even while sheltered in place.

While CAD-CUT® materials do come with thousands of choices, it's important that decorators limit their choices during this time to control their on-shelf inventory costs. This means, centralizing on just a couple product styles with limited colors in each. Having on shelf inventory means you will be able to continue to print shirts. So stock up on core offerings and do it now!

You know your customers, but across the US, here are the most popular colors that we would recommend stocking by percentage of sales:

White 50%	Royal 7%
Black 20%	Navy 7%
Red 10%	Yellow or Gold 6%

You should be stocking larger quantities of white and black at all costs since these two colors can enable putting a logo on any color shirt. Think similarly about your t-shirt colors and inventory.

## SECTION 2 CONTINUED:

As a way to offset the cost of your potential supply order, STAHL'S' is offering free shipping on orders over \$199 (Promo Code: SHIP2020) and \$5 flat rate shipping on smaller order sizes of heat transfer vinyl.

This is also a super, simple guide that walks you through what you need to know about our CAD-CUT® heat transfer vinyl formulas:

1. [Eco-FILM](#) > Soft Look/Feel, good all-purpose material
2. [Premium Plus™](#) > Softest Style, Low Temperature Application
3. [Thermo-FILM®](#) > Athletic Look/Feel

### **Remember This:**

The Spirit Sale™ platform previously mentioned includes a production management tool. This production management tool helps workers in a business to collaborate on a job and also move that job/order through various production stages. Consider setting up multiple users on Spirit Sale™ and connect your necessary staff from their homes on the work that needs completed.

# 3

## MUST HAVE DURING PANDEMIC: SUPPORT & COLLABORATION

This thing is difficult. The most difficult business circumstance that I've faced in my life. There is no perfect playbook, and we're all trying to make it together. I'd encourage you to seek advice and share your perspective with other decorators during this time. There are hundreds of business groups on Facebook with great discussion and ideas. Our group is called Heat Press for Profit ([facebook.com/groups/heatpressforprofit/](https://facebook.com/groups/heatpressforprofit/)). The group has conversation threads right now on this topic and is a safe space to be able to ask a question or share an idea with fellow entrepreneurs in the industry. I'd encourage you to join the conversation in the virtual world while we wait for our favorite events to open back up.

Additionally, we're hosting live events on Facebook during this time at 11am EST on weekdays called "Making it Together". These events are for those who wish to use this time to plan for the future.

### **Making it Together – Live Educational Events**

With everything going on in the world a lot of you are feeling immense pressure and anxiety, including us as well. We're making a choice to use this time to plan for our future and support you in doing the same. Join us in our "making it together" live educational events throughout the month of March where our educational experts will be teaching you what they know about heat transfers including projects, pricing, sales tips and more!

### **Spend this time:**

- Strengthening your knowledge on the basics of heat printing
- Seeing some of our favorite projects and learning how to make them
- Gaining insight into costing, pricing, sales and marketing techniques
- Getting answers live to some of your biggest questions

Let's make it through together and come out of this trying time stronger as an industry.

Here is the event link to sign up: [tinyurl.com/makingittogether](https://tinyurl.com/makingittogether)



# 4

## MUST HAVE AFTER PANDEMIC: CUSTOMERS

Perhaps most important, this is the time where your mission, vision and values come to life. Who are you as a company? Once we come out of this time, your customers will remember who helped, tried to help or extended a small gesture of kindness in this time of crisis. They'll also remember who was insensitive to their situation.

Here's a list of 7 things you can do to gain lifetime loyalty and increase your lifetime customer value right now:

1. Write your customer a handwritten note and mail it to them. Let them know you're thinking about them, that you appreciate the relationship you have with them and that you're there if they need anything at all.
2. Give them something you make. Yes, cash is king and we all need sales in our business, but if you are working with small business customers especially their stress is just as high as yours. Send them a mug, a hoodie or a t-shirt along with your simple note of thanks.
3. Buy from them. Purchase a gift card from your best local customers and send them to each other. This allows you to not only support their business, but also give them a gift to show how you are supporting other small businesses in the area.
4. Write a review for them. Now is great time to write reviews online, whether through Facebook, Google, Yelp, OpenTable and the like. Consider writing a review on these platforms to let others know about how awesome their business is and let them know you've done it.
5. Make an introduction. While we can't shake hands, we can exchange emails and text messages. Consider connecting customers with others who you know can have an impact on their business or whose content they would appreciate. Don't do it to benefit yourself, think about what benefits your customer and colleagues.
6. Don't ask for the sale. Shocking right, especially from a lifelong "salesperson" - I firmly believe in "asking for the sale" but only when the moment is right. If you ask for the sale at the wrong time, you not only lose a sale but you risk creating a negative experience. This experience can ruin a relationship and is much more likely to be shared via word of mouth. During this time give more than you get. Make opportunities for customers to buy but do it on their terms.
7. Write a Survival Guide. You get it right? We're doing this for the livelihood of our business and yours. Hopefully you appreciate the contents. I'd encourage you to move into action on some of these points. Hopefully you've connected the fact that you can "regift" a lot of these ideas and solutions.

# Closing Thoughts

To review, these are your 4 survival steps –

1. Begin bolstering your online sales with websites to help raise money for local businesses as well as B2C websites for personalization, humor and causes.
2. Create a work from home plan that protects against forced closures of your business and your suppliers. Start with moving your work to print processes that can be completed with a heat press and a vinyl cutter as a fail-safe method. Be sure to stock up on vinyl.
3. Plug into a community of like-minded apparel decorators by joining Heat Press for Profit on Facebook or another industry group.
4. Begin reaching out to your impacted customers with a gesture of kindness they will remember. Choose from our 7 ideas or create your own.

Lastly, remember - this is a moment in time. Survive in your business, but more importantly survive as a human. Take care of yourself and be sure to spend plenty of time doing some of things you've always wanted to do that bring you joy. Spend that extra minute learning, teaching, reading, praying, meditating, taking a walk, exercising or maybe all of the above. Your company and families need you safe and healthy as we come out of this time together. Stay safe, we appreciate you!

**Josh Ellsworth**

[josh.ellsworth@stahls.com](mailto:josh.ellsworth@stahls.com)