

# That Time Of The Year

Fall is here, and customers are thinking about wovens.

BY DAVID J. BEBON



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**W**e're just about to enter autumn, and as we put the last seven months of record-breaking heat behind us, our thoughts inevitably turn to long sleeves and heavier fabrics. Although we in the ad specialty industry have always prided ourselves on the fact that we don't follow the traditional retail seasons, the truth is we actually do sell more wovens and long-sleeve products in the cooler months.

As a bonus, we are seeing lighter-weight fabrics, finer yarn constructions, topical treatments to enhance comfort and performance and (most importantly) more variety in the woven sport shirt mix. What was once a scant selection of denims and heavyweight 8-oz. twills has become a multitude of woven sport shirts for today's corporate, hospitality and service industries. Let's examine which wovens make sense for each of these markets.

## Corporate Apparel

Historically, this category was of little importance in the imprintable apparel world. "Corporate" apparel in the 1990s, for example, was represented by solid twills and a few blended oxfords. But as our marketplace began to attract retail suppliers and brands later that decade, we saw a huge increase in woven products: nailheads, pinpoints, pinpoint oxfords, polynosics and some subtle plaids and stripes. The growing demand for corporate woven apparel fueled the expansion of those product lines.

Today's offerings in corporate wovens run the gamut: 100% cotton finer fabrics, 80s two-ply yarns, fine line tonal stripes, windowpane and mini checks, solid poplins and more. Performance finishes like wrinkle-free and no-iron flourish in this sphere. It's no stretch to offer a high-end shirt at a reasonable price point that will suitably impress your corporate clients.

## Hospitality

Lifestyle and comfort lead the way in the hospitality category. Hotels, resorts, conference centers and more are on the constant lookout for unique looks that also offer comfort and easy maintenance to their managers and staffs. Camp shirts are my personal favorite in this category. Predominantly constructed in rayon and polyester blended fabrics, these shirts offer wrinkle-resistant performance,

comfort, great "drapability" and home laundry capability. You can find all sorts of constructions and patterns.

Even better, the camp shirt today is found in just about all of the leading private-label/house brands, as well as leading retail brand names in this industry like Cubavera and Jockey. The goal should be to accentuate fun and lifestyle, and woven shirts in hospitality achieve that with a wide range of color palettes, unique silhouetting and younger looks.

## Service and Food

These industries offer woven product lines that tend to take a little from both the corporate and the hospitality markets – less traditional and conservative than corporate, but far less sexy than the flamboyant, colorful aspects of hospitality looks. Performance finishes like wrinkle-free, no-iron and stain- and soil-release are hugely popular here; these shirts must be completely home-laundryable and easily maintained. After all, how many 25-year-old employees at your local phone store are bringing their shirts to the dry-cleaner?

Here we find blended cotton/polyester oxfords, end-on-ends, poplins and some checks and stripes – mostly in button-down collar models for men and spread/point collars for women. (Let me add that the blended cotton/poly oxfords represent the true workhorse of our industry in the woven sport shirt arena. They are durable, dependable, distinctly American in heritage and always easy to wear and maintain.)

However, it should be noted that the food service industry will always be led by the T-shirts and less-expensive knit polo shirts due to the exceptionally high employee turnover. Good news, though: Your managers and supervisors here will always be dressed in that blended oxford or solid poplin long-sleeve.

The overall picture in wovens is very bright. Greater variety, more fabric variation, more color, more texture. No-iron 100% cotton dress shirt constructions are leading this newness. Stripes and plaids are finally here, and finer yarns and lighter fabric weights help reinforce the comfort story. Plus, autumn has arrived, and that means now is the time to think wovens. Don't forget to sample, show and sell. See you on the road.