

Submission to Review of Textile, Clothing and Footwear industries
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A unique subset of all three of the above industries and one that touches all three at times is the embroidery industry.

Machine embroidery has grown to be a massive value adding product to textiles, footwear and clothing over the last decade. Computer generated designs that are digitised for the embroidery market and the machines themselves have become user friendly and simplified.

Overseas, the market tackles massive input from industry giants such as Nike and Disney. Whole townships dedicated to just embroidery machines have sprung up and go about embroidering millions of items per year. Nearly every piece of Nike footwear (or its competitors) and many toys from Disney and Mattel have some aspect of embroidery on them.

Work wear clothing or even retail fashion clothing now has many pieces that go through the embroidery process.

Here in Australia, the industry is fragmented and insular. Someone buys a machine and starts touting for business and away they go. Training only from suppliers of the machinery or software and then proprietors are supposedly ready for business. However the professionalism and quality can be quite different depending on who the service provider is. There are no industry standards set, no benchmarking of customer service or even the customer expectations and no quality markers that tell either the customer or the industry what is bad or what is good embroidery.

There is no industry representative body in place for embroidery. There is nothing in WA and I would say nothing exists in any of the states or territories.

This would seem to be huge gap in such a big and expensive system. And certainly one that can have a huge effect upon the clothing and footwear suppliers.

Considering the investment value of capital required to get into the embroidery industry and the time required to correctly train staff to handle the computer software and sensitive machinery, one could ask why industry representatives haven't come up with the idea before. But, the industry is mostly dictated by unreal time schedules for production runs and catching up with backlogs...so from someone who knows the industry inputs quite well, I can say, most proprietors just get on with each day and think about tomorrow...well ...tomorrow.

And this does not bode well for the embroidery industry. As we grapple with the production times and pressures that would make the most hardened factory worker get an instant headache, there are professional issues that we must deal with.

If the industry can adequately come to terms with the problems, then it can take time to address the nature of the competition, and other variables such as training.

For example, we in Australia could become more competitive within the Asia-Pacific Region in regards to embroidered products. Whilst the big Asian embroidery houses churn out the millions, we in Australia could fill certain markets based on innovative designs and smaller production runs. Also, there may be other products that serve the embroidery market that could be made in Australia and exported. Eg. Threads and backings or lubricants for machines. Currently, just about everything is imported.

However, the problem seems to lay in the insular qualities of the embroidery trade. And the setting up of an industry representative body that spans the states and has a national body, would be a positive step in the right direction.

It would seem that the time is ripe to bring together the representatives of the embroidery industry, in each state. Mostly the people I have spoken to welcome the suggestion...they are proprietors like myself and are in it for the long haul. A professional body is a welcome suggestion.