

## What Should You Think About When Ordering New Costumes Or Uniforms?

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(As published in MADT Spring Newsletter 2004)

### 1. Your Budget

- ♥ Do you have set a budget, or is it "yet to be determined" because of future fundraising options?
- ♥ Will you have the same budget next year, or will it be higher or lower?
- ♥ Are your funds available immediately, or will they not be available until at a later time?
- ♥ Will you need to get pricing quotes from more than one company?

### 2. Who has influence on what your team will choose for uniforms?

- ♥ Do you, as coaches have the final say?
- ♥ Do you need to answer to a parental booster club?
- ♥ Does the athletic director or school board influence or have stipulations for your decision?
- ♥ Is your school community very influential in what is "proper" for your team?
- ♥ How much influence do your team leaders have on the decision - will they support your decision or undermine it?
- ♥ Is there extreme loyalty to a particular costume company or "sewing Mom" that your team has used in the past?

Many bad experiences for a coach in dealing with getting new uniforms can be eliminated if you know exactly where you stand in regards to all of these points. At Satin Stitches, we have probably seen it all. We have seen "in-fighting" between parent groups and coaches and team captains. We have seen coaches very disappointed that their grand plans could not be supported by their budgets, because they had an unrealistic idea of what those budgets were. As a coach, you need to be aware of all of the answers to these questions.

**Budgets:** Many costume companies, including Satin Stitches, offer discounts for being able to order during their "off season". For high school dance teams, including in Minnesota - the peak delivery season is from August through February. Our slow season is in the spring, when no one wants to think about dance team! We all need to keep our employees working, so we give these promotional deals for this reason. If you have money available to spend in the spring, from March through June, you can save money. Something else to keep in mind: If you are getting any funding from your school - be aware that school budgets generally run from July 1st to July 1st. Schools may have money left in their budget in June that they need to spend, or they may not release funds until July 1st.

Some discounts are given for cash payments instead of school purchase orders. If you have the cash in your account - you may be able to take advantage of these discounts. Prepayment discounts of any sort - remember that these are for checks actually received. A purchase order is not the same as prepayment.

Additionally, Satin Stitches offers special discounts that are only available by reading about them on our web site. We have a SPECIALS PAGE that each one of you should be checking at least once a month. We have been advertising since last spring - our Internet specials. How many of you have checked them out? They range from free shipping to discounts on a certain type of garment or even a color or by sending us a photo of your team in our uniforms or buy something, and get something else free. Do other companies offer similar specials? I'm not sure - but it's something you should be checking out! Also, it is important to understand delivery timeframes for peak seasons. Costume companies, including Satin Stitches, can only complete so many orders during any given week. You must be aware of delivery guarantees during the peak season. If you demand quicker delivery than quoted times - you may be assessed a "rush fee". This will increase the price of your uniforms, all because of poor planning on your part. December 1st has been the traditional start of the competitive season for many years, now. Almost every dance team in the entire state is looking for something new for this date. If you plan ahead, you won't be disappointed. If you don't - you will either not get your new uniforms when you would like, or you will pay more for them. You must also understand that you need to allow enough time for the design process. Your delivery date is determined when the order is placed, NOT when you first start the process! You will need to allow time for initially designing your uniform. You will need to allow time for your company to be able to produce a sample - if you are needing to approve the sample before you place your order.

And then you need time to critique the sample. You then may need time to get everyone's approval first, before you actually place your order. The fastest time for this entire process may be 1 month, but 2 months is more the norm. And sometimes it takes even longer than this.

### **3. Do you want your uniforms to last for only one season?**

If this is the case - perhaps you are looking for inexpensive costuming - your resources should include catalog companies that specialize in recital style costuming. You can make it suitable for Minnesota costume rules by wearing the costume pieces over long sleeved leotards. If you are working with specific themes for your costuming - brainstorm to come up with inexpensive accessories that you can incorporate with basic pants, skirts and leotards. However, if you are wanting something unique and creative, custom may be necessary.

If you are wanting costuming to last for several seasons, you will need to be much more aware of the limitations of some fabrics & trims. Quality construction is necessary for the longevity of a uniform, but so is making informed choices for fabric and trims. Be sure and ask your company about the life of fabrics and trims that they are showing you. Regular fringe will not stand up to hand washing - you must either dry-clean the garment or not clean it at all. Hologram surface prints - that are so popular right now, and have been for several years - will NOT dry-clean - the hologram effects will disappear. Hand washing CAN cause problems if the hand washing is too rigorous or done too often. Ask your company about laundering options of any fabrics that you are choosing. You can lengthen the life of your costumes by very careful laundering ("gently rinse" does not mean, "soak") and using a great product like Fresh Again®. We (Satin Stitches) offer a

Costume Care Service - where we can launder your costumes for you. You can refer to our design booklet or check online at [satinstitches.com](http://satinstitches.com).

#### 4. Do you want to build a wardrobe of uniform pieces?

Work with basics that you can mix and match, and add new costume pieces to. Again, plan ahead so you have enough of your basic pieces if you increase the numbers of your team. Make sure you have ordered enough originally, or know what your reorder options are. Also be aware of what your options are, if you have a new talented dancer that may not fit into any of your current uniforms. If your basic pieces are an unusual fabric - the fabric may be discontinued. "Fashion" fabrics are generally discontinued after a season or maybe two. If you plan ahead, and order additional fabric for future orders, you will be able continue wearing these uniforms. If you do NOT plan ahead - you may need new uniforms simply because you don't have enough for your team. Being able to add 2 or 4 or 6 new uniforms is much less expensive than starting over, and having to order an entire team's worth of uniforms. At Satin Stitches, we let you know up front, what the chances are that your fabric will be available in a year or two. Again, planning ahead can save your team lots of money.

Trim on a uniform can be an expensive part of the cost. Yes, design your "perfect costume". If it doesn't fit your budget, discuss with your designer - what can be modified to save money and still keep the essence of your idea? Look at your design from "performance distance" (if not in actuality – in your mind) to see if less trim will still "do the trick". Can more trim be added at a later date, when you have more funds? Perhaps you have a talented team member or booster parent that can help.

#### 5. Can you utilize your old uniforms?

Transformations! We have been doing transformations for many years. Salvage your old, tired, out of style costumes and update them - for very little money! A general rule of thumb - is to determine if most of the change involves ADDING something, rather than lots of ripping. A talented sewing Mom may be able to help you determine this. If not – check with us - submit an old uniform and discuss what you'd like to achieve. We can give you an estimate of the costs and make other suggestion of what might work better.

We believe in honesty, at Satin Stitches. If in our opinion, your idea would not be worth your money invested - we tell you. We don't just take an order for the sake of getting the order. We will give you alternative suggestions for you to decide what is right for you. We lost a very big customer because of maintaining this integrity. This dance team did not want to hear that the transformation they had in mind would cost too much for too little a value. Would we have done the transformation if they had insisted? - Yes, we would have. But I felt it was not money well spent. What happened? The team chose to go forward with the project by hiring someone else. Do I regret this? Losing business, yes, but being honest with a valued customer - no. Having one uniform transformed will determine the visual results and the costs involved. This is the best way to determine what works and what doesn't, and how costly it will be.

So never throw out your team's old costumes and uniforms - they may be able to be updated. If you feel that they cannot be saved - offer them for sale on eBay or through other venues such as madtcoaches.org or other dance web sites.

Examples of great transformations:

- ♥ Burnsville High Kick - they have been wearing fluffy danceline dresses that have been transformed to jackets. They have paired them with black pants and leotards.

- ♥ Coon Rapids has transformed two of their old danceline dresses. One set became leotards and the other set became jackets. They are wearing them with black pants.
- ♥ Armstrong - transformed an A-line dress into leotards and they are wearing the leotards with black pants.
- ♥ Stillwater - transformed a red and gold danceline dress into a leotard, added black pants, a matching red & gold A-line skirt, and another red and gold leotard for the ultimate mix and match set for both high kick and jazz.
- ♥ Chaska transformed danceline dresses into jumpsuits and now we are transforming them into jackets!
- ♥ Pierz transformed their velvet jumpsuits into leotards, to wear with new pants, because the knees and seats of the uniforms were showing wear.
- ♥ Many teams have added sequins or rhinestones to update and sparkle up their uniforms.

These transformations are very cost effective because the teams started with investing in a very high quality costume - with fabrics that will last for years. Basic Lycra/spandex fabrics are the "work horses" of the dance uniform industry. Velvets will not hold up as well. Why? Knee and seat areas on velvet uniforms can look worn, if too many knee drops are done, or the team sits on bleachers that snag or otherwise harm the fabrics. Many of these problems are more visible in velvet than regular Lycra/spandex.

## 6. Saving money by hiring "home sewers" to make your costumes?

Home sewers may save you money in the short run, but generally not in the long run. Home sewers do not have the same expertise that companies that have been in business for a long time, have. They may have sewing construction expertise, but do they also have fitting expertise and patternmaking expertise? Do they have as many fabric sources? At Satin Stitches, and most custom companies - we have experts in each category of the costume design and manufacturing area. We don't expect one person to be an expert at everything:

- ♥ Design (including sourcing for the fabrics and trims)
- ♥ Patternmaking (including sizing and fitting)
- ♥ Cutting
- ♥ Sewing
- ♥ Trimming

Patternmaking expertise, three with Cutting expertise, eight with Sewing expertise and two with Trimming experience. The expertise can overlap a few categories, but not all of them. You may have heard the expression "Jack of all trades" - well, the rest of the saying is "...Master of none". The most difficult to master is the design, patternmaking and sizing or fitting. Not to say that you should never use the services of a home sewer, you can. If you need something sewn that is simple and they are willing and able, by all means – take advantage of them - especially if they have a connection to your team. Don't hesitate to use a talented home sewer for any alterations or hemming that you may need. Or for any "wear it once or twice" project that doesn't need to withstand seasons of use, you may be very lucky to have someone willing to lend their services to your team. You need to have it perfectly clear, as to what is expected from them and what they are expecting in return. The art of sewing is rapidly disappearing in our world, so treat any talented volunteer with respect. But don't assume they can "do it all". Sewing with costume fabrics and trims is perhaps the most difficult sewing of all. Stretchy fabrics are very tricky to work with. We have developed our professional sewing techniques over the

more than twenty-five years of being in the costume business. We continue to update and refine our procedures to make good quality garments.

**7. Protect your investment.** "A stitch in time saves nine." This is another old saying. If you cannot take the time, or do not have the expertise to maintain your team uniforms, find someone who can. Any repairs should be done before a uniform is stored until the next performance. Your team should be wearing your performance costumes as little as possible. Wear warm-ups whenever possible, especially when traveling and when your team is eating or putting on makeup. Be aware of how your uniforms should be laundered and stored. I won't go into detail on this - as I have written many articles on this subject that have been published locally and nationally. You can refer to them in our Satin Stitches' ordering booklet or go to our Costume Care page on our web site: [.satinstitches.com](http://satinstitches.com).

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