

Three Cheers for Cheer Bows!

WHY YOU SHOULD BE DECORATING AND SELLING CHEER BOWS

By David Gross

As my daughter, Victoria, has proven to me time and time again, following the trail of money often leads to the young female demographic. At the heart of this important marketing segment are highly committed young female athletes participating in a variety of competitive sports including softball, soccer, basketball and cheerleading. Although an iconic hair accessory for all types of young female athletes, this article will focus on making and selling colorful cheerleading, dance and drill team hair bows that stand out from the crowd.



What is a cheer bow?

From middle school to college, bows are not only popular with cheerleaders of all ages, they are an essential part of their uniform. Members of middle and high school cheer teams may wear two or three decorated bows for the school year and separate bows for summer cheer camp.

Bows are especially popular with competitive cheerleaders that spend thousands of dollars per year on travel, competition fees, uniforms and matching accessories. At the beginning of each season, most teams typically order a large number of bows that match their team colors and the theme of their major competitions. For example, if they have a competition at Disney World or the beach, the bows will complement those themes.

Competitive cheerleading gyms don't have just one team—they may have hundreds of girls competing each season grouped by age or skill level. That is a huge amount of bows. Many of the girls prefer to wear these bows during practice, too, so they may order styles that do not necessarily match their uniforms. Popular designs for these include a monogram, name, sports logo or favorite athletic team.

Production

Traditional hand-made cheer bows unfortunately have limited design potential and require a lot of time and effort to produce. Using a dye-sublimation system, digital decorators can transfer gorgeous full-color designs, logos and photographs onto polyester grosgrain ribbon in minutes. Once the bow design has been created, you are ready for printing, pressing and then assembly.



IMAGE COURTESY
DAVID GROSS

Artwork

Not familiar with cheer bow designs? Searching for "Cheer Bows" on Etsy (www.etsy.com) will show a huge variety of designs that incorporate team colors, logos, monograms, chevrons and photographs—some designs even include rhinestones and glitter. For those among us (like me) who are artistically challenged, I recommend partnering with a local starving artist or contacting your local college's graphic design department. These folks are highly talented and can create awesome designs quickly and at a low cost.

Marketing and Selling

Gym owners and coaches usually pick out the designs and order the bows. Since large gyms have websites and Facebook pages that make it easy to get in touch with them, setting up an appointment to meet and show samples to the primary buyer should be straight forward. Be sure to bring samples with you.

For middle and high school teams, the coaches are the ones who choose and order the bows. Calling the school and getting an email address would be the best way to go about contacting them. Cheer bows sell from a low of \$15 to as much as \$40 depending on how great they look and who you are selling to.

Matching the organization's colors is absolutely critical. Since your monitor will never display accurate colors, I recommend printing and sublimating a color swatch chart. Once you have printed and sublimated the swatch chart to ribbon, you will need to obtain something from the organization that accurately represents the desired colors (a uniform or a Pantone reference number). You then hold the desired color up to your sublimated chart to find the correct match.



IMAGE COURTESY KAREN SCOTT