

# FRUHAUF UNIFORMS INC. BUYERS GUIDE

## PROLOGUE

The purchasing of uniforms for your musical organization will be one of the largest single expenditures you make as a director. Many times this purchase is also the most confusing decision you will make. Many directors have stated they feel more knowledgeable of a \$1.00 clarinet reed they recommend to their students than they are of the \$25,000 uniforms they recommend to their school board and band boosters.

Your position of responsibility mandates that you become as knowledgeable as possible when designing uniforms and selecting your vendor. This booklet is prepared with that task in mind. We've provided straight forward answers to many questions that you will be asked. Occasionally the answers are not black and white and we've tried to present information that will help you with your decision.

After you've read this booklet we're sure you will have other questions. PLEASE CALL and discuss those questions. Our job is to provide you all the support you need while working on your project and we want to provide you with definitive answers to your questions before you allow supposition to fill the void.

## WHEN SHOULD I START MY UNIFORM PROJECT?

The biggest disappointment you can experience once you've ordered new uniforms is the dreaded news that they won't be finished by your big performance date. Avoid this disappointment by carefully planning your project. Planning not only assures that you won't be disappointed by your delivery date, but you will also impress your administration with your professional approach to the task.

Consider the following sequence of events and the amount of time you should allot for each.

**Step 1. - INITIAL DESIGN MEETING.** At this time you and your representative sit down and discuss your needs, desires and preferences. This meeting usually takes approximately two hours and should be scheduled when interruptions will be at a minimum.

**Step 2. - PREPARATION OF A COMPUTER COLOR SKETCH.** At the initial design meeting decisions are made that result in the production of a computer color sketch of your uniform. The professional sketch will accurately portray the color combinations selected in your design. Depending on the time of year, this could take from 1 to 3 weeks to generate.

**Step 3 - APPROVAL OF THE SKETCHED DESIGN.** After you receive the sketch show it to your administration, boosters, whoever will be involved in the funding and/or decision making. Of course nothing is written in stone and if the design is only loved by you, we scrap that one and start again with the new knowledge we gained from the first sketch. This step will probably take up two weeks of your time.

**Step 4. - PRODUCTION OF YOUR EXACT SAMPLE** After you have made the necessary changes to the sketch, it is time to order an exact sample of your creation. We will produce a sample for you at no cost or obligation. It is imperative that you see an actual uniform utilizing your design before you order. The time needed for this step will vary depending on the time of year you make your request, but you should probably allow 3 to 4 weeks.

**Step 5. - DETERMINATION OF DESIGN** Once you receive your sample put it on a student and view the suit in simulated performance situations. You can't really evaluate what a uniform will look like on the 50 yard line from row 20 if you only hold it out at arms length on a clothes hanger. Likewise you won't know how effective the garment is on the stage, in a parade or wherever unless you put it on a person and put them in those situations. Allow yourself 2 to 3 weeks to complete this important task.

**Step 6. - PREPARATION OF BID AND CONSTRUCTION SPECIFICATIONS.** If you are in a situation that requires you solicit bids for your uniform project, you must prepare specifications to allow a vendor to properly bid your contract. These specifications contain explicit instructions pertaining to when, where and how to submit the bid, and most importantly detailed instructions on how you want your uniform made. Specifications are discussed in more detail later in this booklet but for now consider that this step will take 1 to 2 weeks to complete.

**Step 7. - SOLICITATION OF BIDS.** Your school's business office can direct you on the bidding procedures used by your district. This step can take anywhere from 2 to 4 weeks to complete.

**Step 8. - EVALUATION OF SAMPLES.** Each vendor is required to submit a sample for evaluation to your school. THIS IS THE MOST CRITICAL STEP IN THE PROCESS. At this point you must determine which vendor will provide your school the quality of uniform you desire. Evaluation is discussed in greater detail later in this

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booklet, but you should plan on doing your evaluation approximately one week PRIOR to opening your bids. After you have completed your evaluation, you should prepare a written sample evaluation that recommends a vendor, based on quality, for submission to your boosters, administration, school board or whoever is involved in the decision making process.

**Step 9. - OPENING THE BIDS AND AWARDING THE CONTRACT.** After the evaluation is complete and your report submitted, the bids are opened and the companies pricing is exposed. Based on your evaluation and the pricing submitted, you are now in a position to award the contract.

**Step 10. - MEASURING THE STUDENTS AND PLACING THE ORDER.** After you have awarded your contract, the successful bidder will send a representative to measure your students and complete the order. Completion of the order involves obtaining your approval of a pilot sample, determining the sizes desired, and finalizing the payment method. Once those three items are received at the factory, your order is placed and the production time schedule begins.

### ARE THERE "GOOD" TIMES TO BUY?

Of course your organization's financial situation often dictates when you can purchase BUT if you are flexible there are advantageous times to buy. If you are making a purchase of a full set of suits, your best time to purchase is in the "off" season.

In the band uniform business the "off" season runs from mid- November through the end of February. If you place your order so that manufacturing will take place during our "off" season, you will reap the rewards.

Another consideration is the timing of price increases. Since we are reactionary with our price increases (we increase our prices when our suppliers increase their prices), our increases usually take place around the first of the year. So to achieve the ultimate advantage for your order, you should time your schedule to allow for an order to be placed around the end of November.

The least advantageous time to order is in the middle of the busy season - the first of April to the end of September. Sadly this is the time most schools must order, however if you can order in the "off" season it is to your advantage.

### HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO MAKE MY UNIFORMS?

The length of time necessary to produce your order is affected by many factors. Each order requires materials from over 40 different suppliers. We have to allow time for delivery of the materials and then schedule your actual production time. Depending on the garment design this production time can vary a great deal. Of course, WHEN you order plays a significant role in delivery time also.

The actual production of your order does not begin until the approved sample, measurements, and purchase order and/or deposit are received in the factory. It doesn't make

any difference if you decide to buy in March but don't clean up the order until June, the clock of production time doesn't start ticking until all three items listed above are in the factory.

When you receive your bid or exact price quote, you will be given a delivery time frame. Usually this will be anywhere from 120 to 150 days. REMEMBER, this clock doesn't tick a tock until the order is complete.

If you order in our "off season", you might receive uniforms in 90 days. If you place your order in late spring, expect delivery to take the full amount of time listed in the quoted delivery time - usually 150 days. As you can see, to insure delivery for that first ball game you should complete everything no later than the end of March the preceding spring.

### HOW MUCH WILL NEW UNIFORMS COST?

Several factors go into pricing a garment. Some of these factors you can control through design, other factors are constant. The first complex question asked a uniform representative meeting with a group is "What is it going to look like, when will I get it and how much will it cost?"

The biggest factors affecting price that you can control while designing a garment are:

1. Type of fabric used.
2. Quantity of uniforms purchased.
3. Amount of braid and detail work on the garment.

Only after these question are answered we are able to give you a price estimate. Usually a pretty realistic estimate can be made when a computer sketch is produced.

### WHICH FABRIC SHOULD I USE?

There are three basic types of fabrics used:  
1) 100% wool,

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- 2) a blend of wool and polyester - often referred to as Dac-Wool, and
- 3) 100% polyester.

Each material has strong points and weak points. As far as costs go 100% wool is by far the most expensive fabric with 100% polyester being the least expensive by comparison. However, cost per yard is not necessarily the rule when determining "cost". Your school's performance schedule as well as climate and budget should all be factored in when choosing your material.

Many times we hear the mistaken notion that you don't want trouser wool because it is too hot and the polyester would be cooler. In fact, the wool allows for better air

transfer "breathing" - than polyester. You can also purchase different weights of each type of material, throwing another variable into your equation. Your fabric decision should be made only after extensive consultation with your uniform representative.

### HOW DOES QUANTITY AFFECT PRICING?

If you have ever visited a uniform manufacturing facility the answer to this question is obvious. If you haven't toured a manufacturer's facility we strongly encourage you to make such a trip a priority. However the answer to the question lies in the fact that manufacturers are set up to produce large quantities of an item. In many ways it is just as easy for a manufacturer to make 100 uniforms as it is to make 1.

The "fixed costs" in manufacturing, order processing, purchasing, etc., have to be factored into each order. If these costs can be factored into 100 units instead of 10, the cost per unit is greatly affected. The uniform manufacturers have discounts at various quantity levels. At Fruhauf these quantities are 1-29, 30-49, and 50+. The amount of the discount varies, but many times if you are within three or four units of reaching the next pricing schedule you can order the additional suits at no additional expense once the discounts are factored in.

One of the biggest shocks experienced by a band director is when he calls to order 5 more uniforms just like those he ordered 100 of last year. He can't understand why the \$250 uniform of last year is now close to \$400. The increase is a result of the loss of the quantity discount and the price increases that have occurred since the last order.

### HOW MANY SHOULD I BUY?

The industry recommends the purchase of 20%-25% more

uniforms than the number of students you plan to outfit. If you are trying to put 60 students in uniform, you should purchase 75 uniforms. These additional uniforms are necessary to provide stock sizes that allow for fitting your organization in the future. Each year your 60 students are not going to be built exactly like last year's 60, so the additional 15 suits are going to be a variety of sizes that will accommodate your needs.

Your decision on quantity should also be based on your projections of future needs. If you currently have 40 kids in your performing organization but you can project 60 students in two years, base your purchase on 60 + 25%, or 75 uniforms, due to cost factors discussed earlier. It is less expensive to buy the additional suits now than it will be after price increases and the loss of your quantity discount.

### HOW DOES BRAID AND ORNAMENTATION AFFECT PRICING?

The biggest cost in braid and embroidery is not materials but rather labor. Remember each uniform manufactured is an "exclusive" for your school. Unlike "civilian manufacturers", we cannot manufacture several hundred 38R male charcoal gray band uniforms. Each order is unique and distinctive, and that fact requires intensive "hand work" which translates into added costs.

When trying to determine how much ornamentation is correct, consider if the detail will be effective when you view the uniform in actual use. Many ideas that look great from two feet away are lost when you are twenty yards away from the uniform. By viewing a computerized color sketch, and ultimately an exact sample uniform, you will be able to determine the effectiveness of the trim work.

### HOW IS BILLING HANDLED?

The terms of your account depends on who will be responsible for payment. If your school district will issue a purchase order for the total amount of the order, no money is due for 30 days after delivery of the order. However, if your booster club is responsible, all uniform companies require a deposit at the time the order is placed with the balance due on delivery of the uniforms.

If your district wants to place the order in the spring of the year with billing to take place in the fall after the commencement of the new fiscal year, you should specify that when you go to bid. Uniform companies understand this situation and will usually work with the district.

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Don't assume however, you can place an order with delivery in January and the bill due in September.

The deposit required of a booster club is 50%. If your total order is \$20,000 and the boosters are responsible for the full amount, they must submit a check for \$10,000 to finalize the order and start actual materials acquisition and construction. If the booster club is responsible for \$10,000 of the \$20,000 bill, they would have to submit a check for \$5,000 at the time of order placement to secure their portion, with the remaining \$10,000 secured with a school purchase order.

If your booster club is responsible for any or all of the bill, we strongly recommend that you enter into an agreement with your school district that will allow the school to issue a purchase order for the full amount and the boosters pay the school their portion. By doing this, no money is due until 30 days after delivery of the uniforms AND your boosters can keep their money in the bank drawing interest until the school has to pay the bill.

### WHAT ARE BID AND CONSTRUCTION SPECIFICATIONS?

After you have determined exactly what you want your uniforms to look like, what you want them made of, and how many you want, it is time to find out how much the manufacturers are going to charge to make them. You accomplish this by soliciting bids. Through this process you let the manufacturers know exactly what you want and they in turn let you know exactly how much it will cost. Prior to this time you will have received BALL PARK pricing to be used during your budgeting sessions, but before you can receive an exact quote you have to tell the companies exactly what you want.

Your Fruhauf representative will be happy to prepare bid specifications for you. These specifications must outline in detail exactly what you want your uniform to look like AND exactly how the garment is to be constructed. As mentioned earlier, all companies can make uniforms that look very similar, however, the way they accomplish this is as different as a Cadillac is from a Yugo, they can both make a white car but they aren't the same. Your bid request must stipulate exactly what you expect so that pricing can be figured as accurately as possible.

Your bid packet consists of essentially two different parts,  
1. construction specifications and  
2. styling specifications.  
Let's look at each individually.

**CONSTRUCTION SPECIFICATIONS.** These specifications deal with such items as the type of material to use, the quality of zippers, buttons, lining, etc. This is also the area where you will find the description of how the sleeves are to be set, how the collar frame will be covered, what length adjustment zipper will be used on the trouser sides, the quality of material used to make the hat frame, and on and on. All samples, exact or stock, submitted for your evaluation must meet these construction specifications.

These are truly the items that make the difference between manufacturers. when you manufacture an item there are two major ways to lower costs, use lesser quality materials or just leave certain items or sewing operations out. Your construction specifications are your protection against such practices. Construction specifications generated by Fruhauf call for the quality of construction found in a Fruhauf garment. By submitting your bid requests using Fruhauf construction specifications you are assuring your school of receiving the highest quality product available.

Through evaluation of the samples you receive, you can determine the quality of the garment offered by the different manufacturers. Failure of a manufacturer to meet construction specifications is grounds for elimination of their bid. After all, you wouldn't buy a school bus simply because it is yellow if it didn't have enough seats, regardless of price, and the same is true for band uniforms. If the suit does not contain all of the necessary items it is simply not what you requested.

By going over your exact sample with your uniform representative, you can become familiar with the construction demands you should make. The level of quality you will accept is purely a decision made by you and your school. When making a purchase of this magnitude you should not accept less than the best.

**STYLING SPECIFICATIONS.** Many times the styling specifications are considered more important than the construction specifications. Your interest in design is understandable, however you must remember that it is much easier to duplicate design than construction. Your design can quickly deteriorate if the foundation it is built upon is not strong enough to afford you years of service.

Styling specifications are the items that detail what colors you want where on the uniform, the exact placement of the school logo, which braids to use where, etc. We don't mean to minimize the importance of styling specifications, however they are only a part of a complete bid package.

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Stock samples submitted for a bid evaluation do not have to meet styling specifications.

## WHO SHOULD PREPARE MY SPECIFICATIONS?

The answer to this question lies in the quality you expect. The manufacturer that you have prepared your bid specifications will submit specifications that call for their method of construction. If a manufacturer that employs questionable construction methods prepares your bid specifications, you have no protection against use of those shoddy methods during actual construction of the garments.

If your bid specs offer you no protection, and your school requires you take the lowest bid meeting specifications, then you have made yourself very vulnerable. By using bid specifications that call for the highest standards, and then by holding all manufacturers to those standards, you are assured of receiving the quality of uniform you demand.

By using the proper bid specifications you will not be a victim of low ball pricing, but rather you are assured of receiving a uniform that meets your specifications. Remember, if the sample submitted does not meet the CONSTRUCTION SPECIFICATIONS you sent out, the bid should be rejected. If you feel that any deviation from the construction specifications exceeds your request, you also have the right to accept any deviation, this decision is totally up to your organization.

## WHAT IS THE PROPER WAY TO EVALUATE A UNIFORM?

Evaluation is the key to receiving the quality of product you desire. Through thorough evaluation you can determine which uniform actually provides the "best buy". The "best buy" cannot be determined by the lowest price, but rather by the lowest price offered by the company that meets the standards of construction you have outlined in your specifications.

To determine which company provides what you want, you must conduct an evaluation. You should conduct your evaluation of quality and construction prior to the opening of the bids. This evaluation should be completed and a report prepared PRIOR to the actual opening of the bids. If you attempt to complete this task after the bids have been opened, your evaluation could be swayed by the dollar signs bouncing around in your head. The sole purpose of the evaluation is to determine quality and make a recommendation based on quality, pricing will be added to your formula at the bid opening.

The first step in the evaluation is the development of an evaluation committee. This group should include people knowledgeable of sewing and garment construction, however, not limited to these people. Anyone involved in the final decision should be involved if possible. You might want to include your home economics teacher, a local tailor, the booster club president, a school administrator, and even a school board member. This group will meet prior to the bid opening (usually about a week earlier), conduct the evaluation and make a recommendation of manufacturer based on construction.

The basis for your evaluation is the construction specifications you sent each company. With seam rippers in hand, you should open the garments submitted by the companies (on the seams please!) and determine exactly how they make their suits. You are not responsible for closing the seams you open, we are submitting these samples to you for evaluation, USE THEM!

With our construction specifications in one hand and the sample uniform in the other, conduct your evaluation and determine the quality of each sample submitted. Even if a company did not provide an "exact" sample (one that meets your styling specifications), the sample submitted must represent their construction techniques and methods. By a thorough evaluation of the samples submitted, you can determine your manufacturer of choice.

After you have completed the actual evaluation, take the time to prepare a written report of your findings. Have each member of your evaluation committee sign the report to indicate their support of the findings. Board members and administrators appreciate having such appraisals committed to paper. Such a presentation will

facilitate their discussion, and it also gives your evaluation more credence. We have different forms that reflect Fruhauf construction techniques that you can use when conducting your evaluation and preparing your presentation.

At the actual bid opening, make your recommendation of manufacturer prior to the opening of the bids. Your recommendation is made on the basis of evaluation of quality, and becomes one element in the overall decision making process.

## FINALIZING THE ORDER

Once you have completed the uniform evaluation, prepared the written summary of the findings of the committee and made your presentation to the governing body, the bids are opened. Now you have all the pieces to

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the puzzle and it is time to make a decision. Your decision must be to award the contract to the company offering the product that meets the standards you have established, at the most competitive price. This decision is totally in the hands of the school and the uniform companies must abide by the decision made by your school.

After you have selected your vendor, you should notify all the bidding vendors of your decision. Samples sent for evaluation need to be returned to the manufacturers as soon as possible. The successful vendor will send a representative to your school to measure your students and finalize the order.

At this time you must give your approval of the sample uniform. The sample uniform will be returned to your selected vendor to be used as the prototype that is the ultimate authority if questions arise about your order. Most often this sample is the "exact" sample that was provided to you early in the process. If you have made styling changes since the sample was produced, the company can provide "dummy" parts (i.e. sleeves, coat fronts, etc.) that show the finished look. These parts should be attached to your sample showing your final design. If the changes were significant, the vendor may supply another sample for your approval. However, this takes up precious time and holds up production of your order, therefore, most schools work with the original sample and any "dummy" parts that are needed.

Your Fruhauf representative will also measure your students at this time. The question that always comes up is "Who should we measure?" We recommend that you measure the current organization that will use the uniforms. If you have a 9th grade through 12th grade group, we would recommend you measure the CURRENT 9th through 12th grade students. If you measure the 8th through 11th grade students (next years 9th through 12th grade), you will have uniforms that fit students in 8th through 11th grade. After your students are measured, your Fruhauf representative will show you the sizes taken so far and you and your Fruhauf representative can then decide on the sizes of the extra uniforms that you are ordering. This method is not written in stone and if you do have that large 8th grade student you would really like to measure, then we will measure them. We don't want you to wind up with "a closet full of suits that are too small to use" anymore than you do.

After you have determined sizes, the financial aspects of the order must be worked out. As mentioned earlier, the order is complete only when accompanied by a purchase order or deposit check. To facilitate things, please have this phase of the process figured out before measuring day. If you say "We'll send that P.O. within a day or two!, it is a sure

bet that we won't see a purchase order within a month, and you will be upset when you are told your delivery will be delayed since the order was not finalized on the day measurements were taken.

Once the representative has accumulated the measurements, approved sample and purchase order and/or deposit check, you can relax and start cleaning out your closets in anticipation of delivery of your new uniforms.

## EPILOGUE

As we mentioned in the beginning of this presentation, the purchase of uniforms will be one of the largest investments you make. It becomes the responsibility of each individual involved to provide their school and community the highest quality product available. Hopefully this booklet has answered many of your questions. We are sure that not all of your questions have been answered however, and we stand ready to assist you in any way possible.

When you are evaluating companies, you must consider service and support offered by the manufacturers. Once your uniforms are delivered the representative's job is only half done. For over ninety years, Fruhauf Uniforms, Inc., has been providing quality products and complete service and support to schools throughout the United States. Today we stand ready to offer you that same support in your project, call on us for that support.