

THE COMPANION PAPER · FREE PDF

The Brand Stack

How TWELVE went from a blank name to a live waitlist in seven days. A build breakdown for people who ship.

This paper is the engineering companion to the Build Note *I Started a Scrubs Brand in One Week* at michaelgaff.com/journal/scrubs-in-one-week. The note told the story. This one shows the wiring.

Everything here is architecture and method. There are no keys, no tokens, no supplier names, no private endpoints, and no customer data. The point is to show how the pieces fit, so you can build your own version faster than I built mine.

Built by one human and one AI partner. No agency, no staff.

SECTION ONE

The thesis, and why it shapes the whole stack

Most scrubs are woven. Stiff, hot, and cheap feeling. The wedge for TWELVE is knit: the stretch and breathability of athletic wear, in a category that has not bothered. That single idea is the moat, and it decides every technical choice downstream.

When the thesis is a feel, the job of the stack is to get a real garment onto a real body as fast as possible, while spending almost nothing until demand is proven. So the build optimizes for two things: speed to a live storefront, and speed to a physical sample. Everything else waits.

The discipline note

One copy rule sits above the stack: never borrow another brand's fabric language. Describe what your own garment does. It keeps the brand honest and keeps the legal surface clean.

SECTION TWO

Naming and the trademark knockout

The name came from a knockout search, not a focus group. A working name got replaced by TWELVE, drawn from the twelve hour shift and from the tagline. Before falling for it, a trademark knockout checked that the lane was clear in the right classes. Only then was the domain registered.

The standing rule: no garment labels get printed until an attorney clears the mark properly. You can build the entire brand while clearance runs in the background. You just do not commit anything to fabric early. The knockout is a fast, cheap filter. The attorney clearance is the real gate.

SECTION THREE

The single file site and how it deploys

The storefront is a static site. One self contained build, no framework runtime, no database to babysit. It deploys to Cloudflare Pages, which means the site is served from a global edge with no server for me to patch and nothing to keep awake.

Why static

A static site is the fastest thing to stand up and the cheapest thing to run. For a brand in week one, the storefront does not need a backend. It needs to load instantly, capture email, and let a visitor describe what they want. A static build does all three and costs nothing while the waitlist is small.

The deploy loop

Edits happen locally. A push triggers a build, and Cloudflare Pages publishes the new version to the edge in seconds. Rolling back is just redeploying a known good version. There is no fragile release ritual, which matters when you are shipping changes daily during a launch week.

SECTION FOUR

Custom domain wiring and email capture

The custom domain is attached to the Pages project and verified, so the brand lives on its own address with HTTPS handled automatically. DNS points the apex and the www host at the Pages deployment.

Email capture

A small form posts an email address to a lightweight subscribe endpoint, which writes the contact to a real mailing list. The first signup was confirmed on my own phone, which is the cheapest possible end to end test: fill the form as a stranger would, then watch the record land. If that loop works once, it works for everyone.

The capture is deliberately minimal. One field, one request, one list. No account system, no passwords, nothing to breach. The list is the asset, so the list is the only thing the site needs to protect.

SECTION FIVE

The waitlist and the custom order configurator

The waitlist is not a vanity counter. It is the demand signal that decides what gets made. Alongside it sits a custom order configurator, live before a single garment exists, because the fastest way to learn what people want is to let them tell you before you have made anything.

What the configurator captures

Visitors describe the piece they would actually buy: the cut, the color, the details that matter to someone who wears it for twelve hours. Each submission is a small, structured piece of market research that arrives for free, while the brand is still just a website.

This inverts the usual order. Most brands guess, manufacture, and then hope. Here the guess is replaced by a stream of stated preferences, gathered before any money is spent on inventory.

SECTION SIX

The supplier chain and the white label model

The unglamorous part is what actually lowers the risk of a clothing brand: suppliers and samples. The chain has two pieces.

A domestic white label partner

The first is a United States white label partner with no minimums, brand labels, and dropship under my own name. Keeping it domestic quietly erases the import duty problem that kills most overseas dropship scrubs plans. No customs, no large upfront orders, no warehouse of guesses.

A knit fabric source

The second is a supplier who actually carries the knit fabric the whole thesis depends on. Without the right knit there is no brand, so this source is the part of the chain that gets verified by hand, through real samples, not a spec sheet.

SECTION SEVEN

How preorder demand drives every spend

The money rule is simple. Not a dollar goes to inventory until a hero piece earns it. The receipts so far are deliberately small: a domain, a sample order that came to about ninety four dollars, a logo, and some hours.

The sequence

First, preorder drops run against confirmed demand from the waitlist and the configurator. Only once a piece proves itself does a small batch get placed at a fulfillment house. That is the opposite of the usual mistake, which is buying five hundred units of a guess and then trying to sell your way out of it.

Samples are the one thing worth paying for early, because no spec sheet substitutes for a twelve hour wear test and five washes. When the samples arrive, TWELVE stops being a website and starts being a product.

SECTION EIGHT

Failure modes, reversibility, and the rule about labels

Week one of a brand is a stack of fast, reversible decisions: name, look, niche, suppliers, plus the outreach that gets real samples moving. Almost every choice in the list above can be undone cheaply, which is exactly why they can be made fast.

What is reversible

A domain can be parked. A logo can be revised. A supplier conversation can end. A site can be redeployed in seconds. None of these commit the brand to anything permanent, so none of them deserve weeks of deliberation.

What is not

Printing labels on fabric is the one step that is hard to take back, so it is the one gated behind real trademark clearance. The whole system is built so the irreversible steps wait for proof, while the reversible ones move at the speed of decisions.

Drop 001 lands this fall. The waitlist is open at twelvescrubs.com. More build breakdowns at michaelgaff.com/journal.