

What are the different types of apparel printing?

There are several different ways to print custom apparel. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. This guide will provide a brief overview of each method so that you can make more informed decisions.



Screen Printing

Also known as silk screening, this method involves stretching a mesh screen over a frame and creating a negative on the screen. Then ink is rolled over the screen and onto the garment. Each added color will require repeating the process.

Advantages

- ▶ Oldest and most well-known type of apparel printing
- ▶ Considered to be the highest quality printing by many professionals
- ▶ Stands up to many washes
- ▶ Compatible with most types of fabric
- ▶ Fast and efficient for printing large quantities of one design
- ▶ Affordable for printing large quantities of one design

Disadvantages

- ▶ Inefficient for printing small quantities of different designs
- ▶ Expensive for printing smaller quantities
- ▶ Equipment takes up a lot of space
- ▶ Costs more time and money to add more colors
- ▶ Requires years of experience to do well



Direct-to-Garment Printing (DTG)

In DTG printing, ink is applied directly onto the garment through the use of nozzles on a print head. Several colors can be printed at once.

Advantages

- ▶ Fast and efficient for printing small quantities of different designs
- ▶ Affordable for printing small quantities
- ▶ Doesn't take much time or money to add more colors
- ▶ Simpler to learn
- ▶ Equipment takes up less space
- ▶ Technology quickly improving to mimic screen printing quality

Disadvantages

- ▶ More costly to print large quantities
- ▶ More time-consuming to print large quantities
- ▶ Less compatible with non-cotton fabrics
- ▶ Stands up to fewer washes
- ▶ Equipment can be very costly



Dye Sublimation

Sublimation printing essentially dyes the fabric itself. The design is first printed onto a special paper. Under heat, the ink turns into gas and bonds with the fabric.

Advantages

- ▶ Most efficient way to print the entire garment
- ▶ Stands up to many washes
- ▶ Doesn't take much time or money to add more colors
- ▶ Soft and breathable results
- ▶ No drying time required
- ▶ Affordable for printing small quantities

Disadvantages

- ▶ More time-consuming to print large quantities
- ▶ More costly to print large quantities
- ▶ Less compatible with non-polyester fabrics
- ▶ Bigger negative impacts on the environment
- ▶ Difficult to print light colors on dark fabrics



Heat Press

In heat press printing, a design is first printed onto transfer paper. When heat is applied, the design transfers onto the garment.

Advantages

- ▶ Fast and efficient for printing small quantities of different designs
- ▶ Affordable for printing small quantities of different designs
- ▶ Compact, affordable equipment
- ▶ Simpler to learn
- ▶ Doesn't take much time or money to add more colors
- ▶ Less negative impacts on the environment

Disadvantages

- ▶ More costly to print large quantities
- ▶ More time-consuming to print large quantities
- ▶ Stands up to fewer washes
- ▶ Difficult to print light colors on dark fabrics
- ▶ Less compatible with heat-sensitive fabrics



Heat Transfer Vinyl

This type of heat transfer printing requires cutting a piece of vinyl to the desired pattern. Heat is then applied, which allows the vinyl to adhere directly onto the garment.

Advantages

- ▶ Affordable for printing small quantities of different designs
- ▶ Allows easy application of metallics and glitter
- ▶ Stands up to many washes if applied properly
- ▶ Compact, affordable equipment
- ▶ Simpler to learn
- ▶ Can apply artwork to any part of garment

Disadvantages

- ▶ More costly to print large quantities
- ▶ More time-consuming to print large quantities
- ▶ Less compatible with heat-sensitive fabrics
- ▶ Less suitable for printing large areas
- ▶ Reduces garment flexibility



Plastisol Transfer

Plastisol transfers begin with a design screen printed onto transfer paper. When the plastisol ink on the paper is partially cured, it is placed on the garment and heat is applied to transfer the ink onto the garment.

Advantages

- ▶ Considered to be high quality printing by many professionals
- ▶ Fast and efficient for experimenting with different designs
- ▶ Affordable for printing small quantities of different designs
- ▶ Doesn't take as much time or money as screen printing to add colors
- ▶ Can apply artwork to any part of garment
- ▶ Transfers can be stored or mailed to clients

Disadvantages

- ▶ More costly to print large quantities
- ▶ More time-consuming to print large quantities
- ▶ Can crack after washes if not applied properly
- ▶ Can take several trial runs to get settings right
- ▶ Less compatible with heat-sensitive fabrics

