



The ongoing debate

This month industry veteran William Shorter tries to answer whether printers should be screen printing or printing direct to garment.



Should I be screen printing or printing direct to garment? This seems to be the question that many people are asking themselves.

Both large and small businesses are diversifying to meet the consumers needs and desires for personalisation by investing in both technologies.

When you look at print magazines at the news and advertisements, it is clear that DTG printing for personalisation is growing and brands such as Levi's have jumped on the band wagon to offer direct to garment printing as a way to personalise your denim during pop up shops and also as a way to market the brand differently.

However, they've also done this previously with screen printing at their flagship shops, so personalisation has been around for a while. However, DTG is allowing for that more personalised print with a quick turnaround, this why it is capturing the headlines for small run printing and personalisation.

If you visited Printwear & Promotion LIVE! 2018, FESPA 2017 or any of the printed textile focused exhibitions over the last five years, you will have noticed a significant increase in the presence of DTG marketing and new players into the market and advancements in the garment pretreating process. We've also seen magazine headlines relating to purchases

of DTG equipment at some of the largest printers and even some moving completely away from screen printing as their businesses diversified to shorter run lengths and personalisation.

Is it a threat?

Considering all of these advancements in digital printing technology, surely DTG is a threat to screen printing?

I agree that many start up textile decorators may no longer look to screen printing as their viable start up printing process, but then again many of these previously started out as vinyl transfer printers and then moved onto screen printing for fulfilling orders for long run lengths. Personally, I perceive a bigger threat to the vinyl market rather than screen printing. I have even met printers that went down the DTG route initially and have since abandoned DTG to set up a screen printing business as this is where they can make their money on long run lengths.

However, don't get me wrong, I do expect DTG to continue to grow in the coming years, but I do not see it as

threat to long run length screen printing. In fact, I see it as a partner to screen printing, with the hybrid (screen printing carousel or oval with an addition of a digital printing head) technology that was first shown in 2012 at FESPA Eurasia becoming the norm and opening greater opportunities to garment printers in the future.

As technology sits today, there is no better printing process than screen printing for giving you high throughput, durable print and a colour range (pantone colours are possible) that is vivid and bright, exactly what the brands of today still want. Whereas DTG printing can be quick when creating small areas of personalisation and even quicker when multi heads are used to print personalised areas e.g. names, quotes and small pictures, to meet the desires of individuality for consumers.

From my perspective, if you are looking to invest in printing for the future, then look at hybrid printing to offer personalisation and great prints that will continue to keep brands and the consumer happy for the future.

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