

# DIRECT-TO-FILM PRINTING FOR ADDED FLEXIBILITY

Emily Bovens from Brother explains how direct-to-film printing can be a useful solution and a good supplement to your work portfolio, whether used alone or combined with direct-to-garment, for new opportunities and faster production



Emily Bovens, Graphic Designer at Brother

Direct-to-film (DTF) is a fairly new method of printing. Rather than being applied directly onto the garment, it is printed onto a foil first which is secured with a powder glue and then dried. It can be applied with the help of a heat press to almost any garment in any position.

The first major advantage of printing a motif onto foil is that you can store it for a long time providing that you keep your printed and prepared foil in a dry, dark place. It can then be accessed and used when needed. This creates the opportunity to produce in advance, saving a lot of time since the final application process to the garment happens in a matter of seconds. For motifs that are frequently used, such as a company logo, it can be useful to have a few in stock for quick and easy access.

## RANGE OF OPTIONS

Another big advantage of DTF is that you can print on pretty much all materials, since you first print on a film and then the print only has to be pressed onto the individual fabric. This opens up a lot of possibilities to quickly

*“Another big advantage of DTF is that you can print on pretty much all materials”*

print on the most diverse materials, such as polyester shirts, nylon shorts or even leather bags and thereby personalise these items.

DTF can give smaller shops, that may



Foil removal after pressing the printed sheet onto the garment

not have space for a printer, the opportunity to produce or decorate garments on site. All that is required for the last step are the printed, processed foils and a heat press. As a result, these shops are able to offer their customers individually printed garments.

## COMBINING DTF AND DTG

DTF also has some disadvantages; it is not the solution if you need to print high-resolution photorealistic motifs, really thin

and fine motifs, or gradations. Here, our recommendation is to have a printer which can do both direct-to-garment (DTG) and DTF. The printers of market-leading manufacturers are known for their ability to print very precise photorealistic designs directly on the garment. As you can see, it can be useful to work out when to use DTG and DTF, because both can offer a lot of advantages.

It is also quite easy to work with both methods and, since a lot of DTG printers



Finished result after pressing it onto the garment

can also perform DTF, you can even use the same inks – all you need are the printable foils and the powder glue. Another thing you will need is a driver for your computer to convert into DTF-printable files. However, leading manufacturers often provide these free of charge.

The haptics also play a role when comparing DTG and DTF – the printed motifs in the DTF process feel stiffer and heavier and are not as flexible as with DTG printing. Here you might perhaps consider that larger motifs should be printed with DTG and smaller motifs, where the haptics do not matter the most, print with DTF.

### CHOOSING A DTF PRINTER

When buying a DTF-capable printer it is advisable to stick to leading manufacturers, as often cheaper, imported models lack the CE (European conformity) seal. The CE seal is therefore important, because it shows that a product is tested by the manufacturer and that it meets all EU-wide requirements for safety, health and environmental protection. If the CE seal is missing, the machine cannot be used without safety and quality risks. Often the customer service and support for cheap imported machines is not guaranteed and in the worst case scenario you are alone in dealing with possible issues.

*“You can even use the same inks – all you need are the printable foils and the powder glue”*

With leading manufacturers, customer service and immediate help are a standard of quality, and you always have a contact person you can get in touch with, in case of problems, ensuring that your production never comes to a complete halt for a long time. We must speak also about the environmental aspect, especially when it comes to inks. The inks of well-known manufacturers are water-based and OEKO-Tex certified, which makes them harmless and safe for both humans and the environment. With cheaply-produced inks, this quality may not be guaranteed.

DTF definitely has its advantages and disadvantages, but in general you can say that if you know the strengths and use them for you and your business, it can be a great addition. Especially because it is so easy to implement and combine with DTG printing. Why not try DTF yourself? ■

**Emily Bovens is a Graphic Designer at Brother**



A printed DTF sheet

#### Further information:

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