Screen Printing, DTF and DTG Compared for Los Angeles Shirt Orders

Choosing a shirt decoration method is less about picking the newest option and more about matching the process to the garment, artwork and order size. Screen printing, direct to film and direct to garment can all produce strong results, but each one handles color, fabric and setup differently. For anyone comparing DTF transfers Los Angeles for a local order, the useful question is not which method wins overall. It is which method fits the job in front of you.

Start with the order itself

Before comparing equipment or finishes, define a few basics. What fabric are the shirts made from? How many colors are in the artwork? Is the design a small chest logo or a wide, detailed image? How many shirts are needed, and do sizes range from small to extra large? These answers narrow the field quickly.

A simple one-color logo on a large run often suits a traditional method. A full-color illustration with gradients and fine shading may point toward a digital process. Mixed fabric orders and short runs can shift the decision again. It also helps to decide how the shirts will be used. Uniforms that need a consistent look across repeat orders have different needs from event shirts, gifts or small batch merchandise.

One local option is Custom Shirt Printing. For details such as order minimums,FileType artwork requirements and turnaround, it is worth confirming with whichever business is chosen before committing to a method.

View the location on Google Maps

Screen printing: steady and efficient for the right run

Screen printing pushes ink through a mesh screen onto the fabric. Each color usually needs its own screen, and the screens are placed in registration so the layers line up. That setup is one reason this method becomes more practical as quantity rises. Once the screens are ready, repeated prints can move quickly and produce a consistent finish.

This approach is a good fit when artwork has limited colors, bold shapes and clear edges. Team uniforms, work shirts, event tees and simple branded apparel often fall into that category. Solid areas tend to look crisp, and certain inks can sit well on cotton. If a design uses shading, photographs or many blended colors, the need to separate colors can make the process less convenient.

Fabric matters too. Cotton and cotton blends are common candidates, while some synthetic or performance fabrics may need special inks or a different approach. Dark garments can require an underbase, which adds another layer and another point to manage. Screen printing is also less flexible when every shirt has a different name, number or design, because the setup is built around repetition.

DTF: flexible transfer printing for varied garments

Direct to film printing starts by printing artwork onto transfer film, then applying a printing powder and curing it. The finished transfer is placed on the garment and bonded with a heat press. That separation between printing and pressing is what makes the method useful in many small and mixed orders.

DTF suits full-color artwork, detailed images and short runs. It can be used across different garment types, including cotton and many blends, which makes it handy when an order includes varied fabrics or sizes. A gang sheet layout can place several designs on one film sheet, helping with small batches that would be awkward for screen setup. Because the image is printed digitally, fine detail and gradients are easier to preserve than with color separation.

The finish is different from a traditional print. DTF transfers usually sit as a distinct layer on top of the fabric, with a slightly raised feel. That is not a flaw, but it is something to consider for large designs or garments meant to feel soft. Pressing needs care, since heat, pressure and peel timing affect the bond. Poor adhesion, lifting edges or a shiny patch can point to a problem with the transfer, the garment or the press settings.

DTG: direct printing with a soft hand feel

Direct to garment printing applies ink straight onto the shirt with specialized inkjet printing equipment. Light garments are usually simpler to print because the ink sits on a pale base. Dark garments often need pretreatment solution to help the white ink bond and keep the colors clear. After printing, the garment is cured so the ink sets properly.

DTG is often chosen for detailed artwork, photographs and designs with subtle color changes. Since there are no screens to build, it can handle one-off prints and variable designs with less setup. The printed area usually feels softer than a transfer, which can matter for large chest prints or shirts intended for regular wear.

Cotton garments are the strongest match for this method. Blends can work, but results depend on the fabric content and how the surface accepts ink. On dark shirts, white ink layers can feel heavier and may need careful curing. DTG is less ideal for very large solid blocks on tight budgets or for garments that will face heavy abrasion, where a transfer or screen print may be more suitable.

Comparing the practical trade-offs

Think of the three methods as different ways of solving the same design problem. Screen printing is built for repeatable runs with simpler color counts. DTF is built for flexibility, full-color artwork and mixed garments. DTG is built for direct digital printing with a softer finish, especially on cotton.

Artwork is often the deciding factor. Bold logos with one or two colors are straightforward in screen printing. Detailed color work is easier in DTF or DTG. Print resolution matters for small text, thin lines and gradients, so request a clear source file rather than relying on a low-quality image. If the design includes tiny lettering, check how it reads at actual print size before approving the layout.

Garment choice can be just as important. A heavy cotton tee, a lightweight fashion shirt and a polyester sports top do not respond in the same way. DTF can adapt across more fabric types, while DTG generally favors cotton. Screen printing can work well on many fabrics, but ink choice and underbases may change the hand feel and appearance.

Order structure also matters. A single design across many shirts can justify screen setup. Several designs across a few shirts may suit a transfer sheet. Names, numbers or personalized details are easier with a digital method. Repeat orders need consistency, so keeping artwork files, placement notes and garment details organized helps avoid small differences between batches.

Questions worth asking before you choose

A short conversation at the start can prevent a disappointing result. Ask how the proposed method handles the exact fabric and color of garment being printed. Ask whether the artwork needs adjustments for the process, especially if it contains fine lines, transparent effects or dark-to-light gradients. Confirm the print size and placement on the garment, since a design that looks good on a screen can feel too large or too small on fabric.

It is also sensible to ask about proofing and what happens if a print has a flaw. Details such as minimum quantities, setup requirements, file formats and turnaround times should be confirmed with whichever business is selected. Those practical terms can affect the choice as much as the visual finish.

A simple way to narrow the decision

For a large run of simple, bold artwork, screen printing is often the first option to compare. For short runs, mixed garments and colorful artwork with fine detail, DTF transfers are easy to justify. For cotton shirts where a softer printed area matters and the artwork is detailed, DTG is

worth considering. If the order includes several of those needs at once, compare samples and process details rather than relying on a general reputation for one method.

Custom Shirt Printing is at 11150 Glenoaks Blvd, Pacoima, CA 91331, USA. The phone number is (323) 406-0702.