



# Can DTF Printing Be Good for Your Business?

For wide-format print service providers seeking creative growth, direct-to-film technology may be the next logical step.



DTF printing allows for apparel customization and personalization in just four easy steps with no “weeding” required. | Credit: Roland DGA

High-production DTF printers like Roland DG’s TY-300 produces athletic wear with vibrant graphics and a “soft-hand” feel. | Credit: Roland DGA



By Kelli Ramirez, Industry Author

**W**ide-format print service providers (PSPs) are constantly exploring new markets and adapting printing technologies to meet evolving customer needs. Direct-to-film (DTF) printing for textile decoration is one technology that continues to grow and improve — but is it a good fit for a traditional display graphics business? Instead of simply crunching the numbers, we turned to the experts: OEMs and DTF print shops. In this article, they share their tips for curious minds.

## Market Opportunity

More than just an add-on, DTF printing can be a strong amplifier for existing business by providing a great upsell opportunity. For PSPs seeking an established wide-format printer and ink system that complements existing display graphics production — and who want to expand creative and revenue opportunities beyond traditional signage — DTF printing is a strong option.

DTF printing is widely used to decorate apparel (especially T-shirts), which account for the majority of the DTF printing business. According to a 2025 global study by BBN Times, fashion and apparel represent the largest segment at approximately 45% of market share, followed by promotional products at 25%, sports and athletics at 15%, and specialty applications comprising the remaining 15%.<sup>1</sup>

It’s highly effective for synthetic blends, performance wear, and items requiring vibrant, durable prints, making it a great solution for on-demand and personalized items such as team jerseys, installation crew uniforms, accessories, home decor, and promotional products. DTF can also be used on leather, denim, polyester, and spandex. Since it adheres at a lower temperature, it’s also suitable for nylon or textiles that previously would melt under heat.

So, how can PSPs identify the need to add DTF printing in their shops? Start by researching current customers’ orders.

“Monitor for incoming small batch or one-off orders, full-color artwork on non-cotton substrates, or fast turnaround personalization orders,” says Paul G. Morales, product manager, Professional Imaging at Epson America. “Analyzing order trends, especially from walk-in traffic or e-commerce channels, can help determine if and when DTF printing would be a good fit.”

Go for the upsell when customers need signs and graphics for an event. For example, the organizers of a local race may also need T-shirts, tote bags, race bibs, windbreakers, and more.

“Offering DTF printing can help you retain customers by expanding your services and preventing them from seeking apparel decoration

elsewhere,” says Scott Donovan, commercial manager at DuPont Artistri Digital Inks.

## Workflow and Practical Advice

The essentials include a DTF printer, necessary consumables, powder shaker, and heat press unit. A controlled production environment is key to achieving consistent results.

Defining production goals (e.g., what you want to produce and how many) helps clarify the synergies and redundancies between existing product offerings and new DTF printing capabilities.

“You can quickly specify the DTF printer width and the other required hardware components,” says Josh Hope, director of marketing at Mimaki USA. “This can also help identify the means, methods, and costs to achieve your intended goal.”

Compatible RIP software capable of nesting and color management tools are also necessary, though they may already be part of a PSP’s workflow.

For PSPs integrating a wide-format DTF printer (as opposed to a desktop version), ensure sufficient space is available. All necessary service points to the device should be easily accessible to allow practical operation.

“Careful planning around space, staffing, and training, paired with the right equipment, workflow setup, and quality control practices, will ensure consistent, high-value output,” Morales says. Selecting reputable brands that offer warranty coverage and on-site service repair if issues arise is advised.



The SureColor G6070 is Epson’s first dedicated wide-format direct-to-film printer. | Credit: Epson America

The environment around a DTF printer and adjacent devices is another key consideration. “One concern is the control of transfer powder, as stray powder can contaminate output being printed on nearby machines,” says Mike Davis, application specialist at Roland DGA. “For example, powder from a shaker can land on a banner being produced on a nearby wide-format printer.”

Some users prefer a separate room for DTF printing. “Our printers are located in our basement, which ends up being really good for it because it’s more humid than being above ground, and we don’t have many windows or doors, so it’s a fairly controlled environment,” says Tim Pipp, owner of DTF New England, Keene, New Hampshire.

Maintaining a consistent environment is critical for optimal output. “We have found that keeping the area around the printer at 68-72 degrees Fahrenheit with 60% humidity really helps maintain the colors and consistency,” says Hailey Dinsmore, owner of Jaded Creations, Indianapolis.



Powderless DTF printing in action. | Credit: DuPont Artistri Digital Inks

There is also a window in the DTF workflow where the transfer is freshly printed and remains relatively wet. In this window, sufficient shaker powder must be applied to the design before the powder adhesive and design can be transferred onto the undecorated item. If the transfer dries before the powder application and subsequent heat press occurs, or if it isn't properly applied, the process must be restarted.

"With each new technology, there is a learning curve," Hope says. "Fortunately, DTF printing is a simple but powerful process that does not require a significant amount of time to master."

Staffing depends on production levels and forecasted volume. One operator can manage multiple printers with an efficient setup. As with all digital technologies, staff should be trained in daily maintenance routines, including printhead cleaning, capping station care, color consistency practices, such as printing quality control sample files, and workflow efficiency, such as batching jobs and nesting artwork.

"Training isn't complicated, but it's important to dial in color management, film handling, and curing times to avoid costly mistakes early on," says Davis Slagle, vice president of BeeGraphix in Fredericktown, Pennsylvania — a PRINTING United Alliance member.

## Customer Expectations

Setting customer expectations about DTF printing may also come into play, particularly for those accustomed to

purchasing screen-printed garments. For example, they may expect to pay more for additional colors, which is not the case when utilizing digital technology. Color matching is always a concern, and some DTF print shops address this by offering a swatch sheet that customers can use to match the shop's color profile sheet.

"I often tell people that everybody's printer is calibrated differently, so color matching is super important," Pipp says. By providing a swatch sheet in advance, his customers can match almost exactly the color they're looking for.

Customers also ask about durability and how DTF printing compares to screen printing or vinyl. Some expect it to feel heavy, but they're surprised at how soft and flexible it is. "The challenge is helping people understand that while it looks sharp and vibrant, it doesn't always have the same texture or finish as a traditional screen print," Slagle says. "Once they see and feel the finished product, the questions usually go away."

DTF printing's ability to deliver jobs quickly is another strong asset. Slagle recalled a rush job for a local football playoff run: "We were able to turn around over 500 individual orders in less than 24 hours. That wouldn't have been possible with screen printing."

Similarly, Dinsmore mentions her company's work for a local animal rescue, where they were able to offer fulfillment-style production for them. "They were not putting out money and waiting for their items to sell; instead, those funds are better used helping animals," she says.

As previously mentioned, custom apparel, small batch orders, and branded merchandise are ideal entry points. Evaluate your production requirements. Entry-level devices may produce only five 12x12" prints per hour, whereas many high-production units can output 100 or more prints of the same size in one hour. "It's best to invest in a device that will be able to handle increasing demand as your business grows," Davis says.

## Profitability and Return on Investment

The cost of entry will vary depending on printer model and width, printing

capability, powder shaker unit, heat press unit, films, and inks. Entry-level equipment often ranges from \$5,000 to \$10,000, while professional, mid-to high-volume systems range from \$15,000 to \$30,000. The potential revenue is strong, especially for on-demand fulfillment, personalized merchandise, and repeat business from e-commerce and retail clients.

With DTF, PSPs can be more flexible in pricing since there are no setup costs or minimums. "Price based on the value, not just the transfer. For small runs and personalized jobs, you're offering speed and flexibility that other decoration methods can't match," Slagle says. "DTF printing is perfect for repeat business such as teams, schools, and businesses that need reorders, because there's no minimum." By keeping consumables on hand, PSPs can run a quick reorder in minutes.

Pipp echoes that sentiment: "Repeat orders are really nice with DTF printing because we can get pretty close to matching a screen print color, and the customer doesn't have to order a minimum quantity."

Others use a different pricing structure. Dinsmore explains that Jade Creations' pricing follows an à la carte structure with a price per-square-inch rate for the print. Customers then select a shirt for an additional cost, and a press charge is added. Personalization adds a small charge to cover digital setup time. A reward system encourages repeat business by offering discounts on future orders.

Promoting the advantages of DTF printing, such as low minimums, easy personalization, and fast turnaround is crucial. Research pricing and costs to determine a suitable pricing structure for specific offerings. PSPs with high-production DTF systems that are being well utilized can net sales exceeding \$1,000 per day. "A 24" roll takes eight hours to print and can generate up to \$3,000 in a gang-sheet scenario," Donovan notes. "With material costs around \$500 for film, ink, and powder, the margins are compelling."

"No more minimums with DTF printing means a single shirt can be as profitable as a large run," Hope says. "Small businesses can say 'yes' to niche designs and limited editions. It also reduces labor costs as smaller teams

can manage larger workloads, freeing staff for other tasks and boosting your bottom line."

## OEM Takeaways

Automation, integration, and streamlining operations topped the list for our participating OEM representatives.

Automated transfer systems for high-volume DTF printing and transfer production are getting attention, with some high-end units processing up to 500 garments per hour. "Multi-platen heat presses are part of this advancement," Davis says. According to Morales, barcode-driven workflows and RIP automation are streamlining production by reducing manual steps and increasing throughput.

"Regarding integration with digital workflows, DTF technology seamlessly integrates with digital design software, enabling rapid prototyping, on-demand printing, and mass customization, streamlining the production process," Hope says.

Hybrid solutions, currently available in smaller printer models, are also gaining attention. "Hybrid printers, potentially combining powder and liquid adhesive capabilities, are on the horizon, offering flexibility in production," Donovan says. Hybrid systems that combine DTF printing with DTG printing are further expanding creative possibilities and offering greater flexibility to meet diverse customer needs.

## Final Thoughts

DTF technology is a versatile, easy-to-use, and eco-friendly solution for a wide range of substrates. It offers faster turnaround times and increased production flexibility without high-minimum order quantities, while complementing a PSP's existing business.

While doing your due diligence, remember these vital steps:

- Research thoroughly to understand potential applications and any issues that might affect adding DTF printing to your operation.

- Identify a clear market or customer need before investing, and be prepared for a learning curve. Stay up to date with emerging technologies.

- Prioritize disciplined maintenance, training, and a scalable production strategy. Invest early in workflow design and quality control to ensure repeatable results and long-term customer satisfaction. ■

<sup>1</sup> Hall, Daniel. "DTF Printing Market Analysis and Business Intelligence," Sept. 13, 2025. [bbntimes.com/technology/DTF-printing-market-analysis-and-business-intelligence](https://bbntimes.com/technology/DTF-printing-market-analysis-and-business-intelligence)

Kelli Ramirez, principal at Kelli Ramirez Communications, is a marketing professional specializing in developing communications campaigns for businesses in the display graphics industry. An industry veteran, she has written a variety of materials for leading hardware, software, and consumables vendors and trade publications in this dynamic market.

Mastering DTF printing doesn't take long, but the results are powerful. | Credit: Mimaki USA





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