

How to Get the Best Results from Custom Shirt Printing

Getting the Most Out of Your Custom Shirt Printing Project

I have been involved in custom shirt printing for over a decade, and if there is one thing I have learned, it is that the difference between a so-so order and a truly great one comes down to preparation. Whether you are ordering for a small team event or a larger run for your brand, the decisions you make early on determine the quality of the final product. In this article, I will walk through the practical steps that help ensure your custom shirt printing project turns out exactly as you imagined.

Choosing the Right Garment

The shirt itself is the foundation of everything. I have seen people spend hours on a perfect design, only to print it on a low-quality blank that fades after a few washes. The fabric weight, weave, and color all affect how the ink sits and how the shirt wears. For most everyday use, a 100% cotton tee with a mid-weight fabric (around 5.3 ounces) gives a good balance of comfort and durability. Cotton absorbs ink well and holds color for years if cared for properly.

If you need a more athletic fit or plan to use the shirt for active work, a cotton-polyester blend can be a smart choice. The polyester helps the shirt resist wrinkles and shrink less, but it also changes how the ink behaves. Some inks bond differently to polyester, so always ask the print shop what they recommend for that blend. In my experience, a good printer will walk you through the options without pushing you toward the most expensive choice.

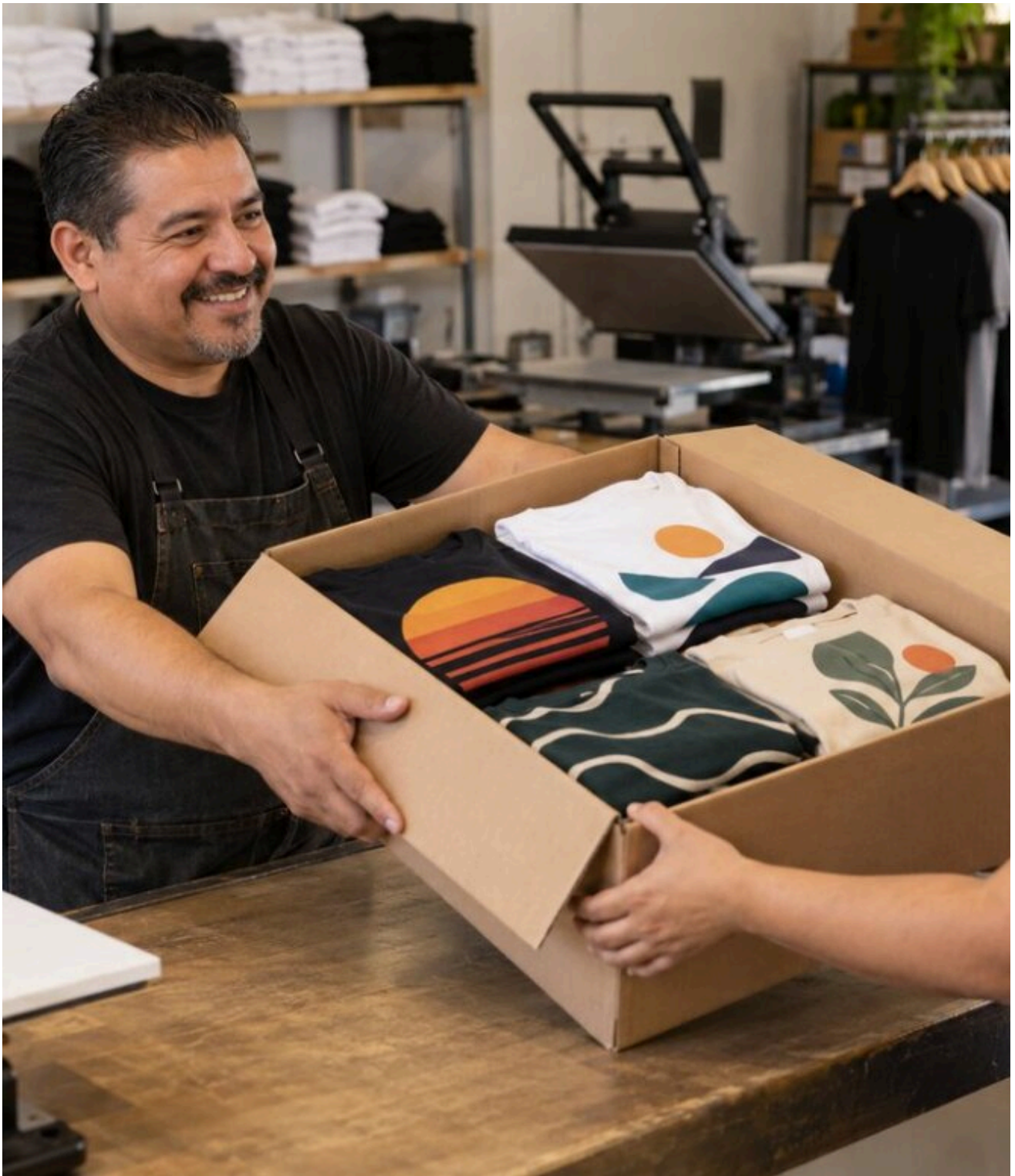
Understanding Print Methods

Not all custom shirt printing is the same. The method you choose affects cost, durability, and the look of the final print. Here are the three most common methods I see used in Los Angeles shops:

- Screen printing: This is the workhorse of the industry. It produces vibrant, long-lasting prints and is cost-effective for orders of a dozen or more. The ink sits on top of the fabric, giving a slight texture. It works best on cotton or blends with a high cotton content.
- DTF transfers: Direct-to-film printing has become popular for smaller orders or designs with many colors. The print feels like a sticker at first but bonds well with heat. It can be applied to both cotton and polyester, which makes it versatile.

- Embroidery: Not technically printing, but many shops offer it alongside printing. Embroidery adds a premium feel and is great for hats, polos, and jackets. It holds up well to repeated washing.

Each method has trade-offs. Screen printing requires setup fees, so it is not ideal for a single shirt. DTF transfers have a slightly shorter lifespan than screen printing if not applied correctly. Embroidery can be too heavy for lightweight tees. The best approach is to match the method to your order size and how you plan to use the shirts.



Designing for Print

A design that looks perfect on a computer screen may not translate well to fabric. I always tell people to keep a few principles in mind. First, think about the size of the print area. A typical adult t-shirt has a printable area of about 12 by 16 inches on the back and 10 by 12 on the front. If your design is too large, it may wrap around the sides or feel overwhelming. Too small and it looks like an afterthought.

Color also matters. Screen printing charges by the number of colors, so limiting your palette to two or three colors can save money and still look bold. If you need a photo-realistic image or many shades, DTF transfers or full-color screen printing with halftones may be better. For text, make sure it is large enough to read from a few feet away. A good rule is that any text under 1 inch tall will be hard to read on a shirt.

File preparation is another area where mistakes happen. Most shops accept vector files like Adobe Illustrator (.ai) or EPS for screen printing, and high-resolution PNG or PDF for DTF. Avoid using low-resolution JPEGs pulled from a website. They pixelate when enlarged and the print will look blurry. If you are not sure about your file, ask the shop for help. Many offer free design assistance, which can save a lot of frustration later.

Working with a Print Shop

A good print shop is a partner, not just a vendor. When you reach out, be clear about your timeline and quantity. Rush orders are possible but usually cost extra and can limit your options. For example, if you need shirts in three days, the shop may only have certain blanks in stock and may not be able to order your preferred brand.

I also recommend asking for a proof before production. A proof is a digital mockup showing how the design will look on the shirt. It is not the same as a sample. A sample is a physical shirt printed with your design. If you are ordering a large quantity, investing in a sample is worth the cost. It lets you check the color, placement, and feel before committing to the full run.

One phrase I hear often from shop owners is that communication is the key to a smooth order. If you have a specific vision, share it. If you are open to suggestions, say so. The best results come when both sides understand the goal. For example, a customer once came to me with a design that had very thin lines. I explained that those lines would likely break during screen printing and recommended thickening them. The final print looked much better, and the customer was happy they asked.

Quality Control and Aftercare

Once you receive your shirts, inspect a few before distributing them. Look for misaligned prints, ink smudges, or color inconsistencies. If you find a defect, report it to the shop quickly. Most reputable shops will replace defective items if you contact them within a reasonable time.



How you care for the shirts also affects their lifespan. Turn them inside out before washing, use cold water, and avoid bleach. Tumble dry on low or hang them to dry. Heat is the enemy of printed designs, especially on DTF transfers. If you follow these steps, a screen-printed shirt can easily last for years without significant fading.

For businesses ordering custom shirts for employees or giveaways, consider ordering a few extras. A typical print run may have a 5-10% overage to account for mistakes, but having a few spares ensures you can replace a damaged shirt later without reordering a full set. It is a small cost that saves time and hassle.

Why Local Production Matters

There is a growing trend toward using online print-on-demand services that ship from warehouses across the country. While convenient, these services often have less control over print quality and turnaround time. Working with a local print shop, especially one that does in-house production, gives you direct communication and faster turnaround. You can see the equipment, meet the team, and get real-time updates on your order.

That local touch is something I value. When I work with a shop like [customtsprinting custom shirt printing](#), I know the people handling my order are in the same building. If something goes wrong, they can fix it the same day. The personal relationship also means they remember your preferences and can suggest improvements based on past orders. That kind of service is hard to replicate with a remote supplier.

Another advantage of local production is the ability to handle last-minute changes. If you need to add a few shirts to an existing order, a local shop can often accommodate that without starting a new production run. This flexibility is especially useful for events, team uniforms, or promotional giveaways where timing is tight.

Planning for Different Use Cases

Custom shirt printing serves many purposes, and each use case has its own requirements. For a one-time event like a family reunion or a charity run, cost and speed are often the main concerns. A basic screen print on a mid-weight cotton tee is usually the best option. For a business that wants to build brand recognition, investing in a higher-quality blank and a more durable print method can make the shirt a long-term advertisement.

I once helped a local restaurant order staff shirts. They wanted something that looked professional but also held up to daily kitchen use. We chose a poly-cotton blend with screen printing in two colors. The shirts lasted through hundreds of washes and still looked presentable after a year. That kind of result comes from matching the print method to the environment.



For artists and small brands, DTF transfers are a great way to test designs without committing to large minimums. You can order a few shirts at a time, gauge customer response, and then

scale up to screen printing once a design proves popular. That approach reduces financial risk and lets you iterate quickly.

Final Thoughts

Custom shirt printing is a craft that blends art and logistics. The best results come when you invest time in the prep work: choose the right garment, understand your print options, design with fabric in mind, and communicate clearly with the shop. Whether you are ordering a dozen shirts for a team or a thousand for a brand, these principles hold true.

If you are in the Los Angeles area, consider visiting a local shop to see the process firsthand. Many offer free design help and will walk you through their equipment. It is a chance to learn and to build a relationship that makes future orders easier. I have found that taking that extra step always pays off in the quality of the final product. For a reliable experience, customtsprinting custom shirt printing offers the kind of hands-on service that makes a real difference in the finished shirts. Whether you need screen printing, DTF transfers, or embroidery, working with a team that cares about the details will ensure your shirts look great and last long.

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