



MACHINES PLUS ACADEMY | PRACTICAL PRINTING GUIDE

DTF vs DTG: Which Printing Method Suits Your Business?

A practical guide for businesses choosing garment printing equipment - written to help you understand the trade-offs before you buy.

FREE TO READ. FREE TO DOWNLOAD. NO PAYWALL.

We share practical knowledge because better information leads to better decisions, better operators and better print businesses.

Prepared by Machines Plus

Australian printing equipment, installation, training and support

machinesplus.com.au/academy

Updated October 2026 | Edition 1 | Guide MPA-DTF-001

The short answer

DTG prints ink directly onto the garment. **DTF** prints onto a transfer film that is powdered, cured and then heat pressed onto the garment.

Neither method is automatically better. The right choice depends on your garment mix, artwork, order size, labour, floor space, finishing process and expected production volume.

Machines Plus field note

A lot of businesses ask us which technology is “best”. A better question is: **which process fits the work you actually sell?** A machine that looks faster on a specification sheet can still be the wrong choice if the rest of the production process does not suit your orders.

DTG and DTF at a glance

Consideration	DTG	DTF
How the image reaches the garment	Ink is printed directly onto the garment.	Image is printed onto film, coated with powder, cured, then heat pressed.
Garment flexibility	Especially strong on suitable cotton garments. Other fabrics depend on the printer, ink and process.	Works across a broad mix of cotton, polyester and blends when the garment and process are suitable. Always test unfamiliar materials.
Hand feel	Can feel very soft, especially where ink penetrates the fabric.	Creates a transfer layer on top of the garment. Feel depends on artwork coverage, film, powder and pressing.
Artwork	Excellent for detailed, photographic and full-colour artwork.	Excellent for detailed, full-colour artwork and small logos. Fine isolated detail needs good artwork and process control.
Finishing	May involve pretreatment, printing and curing.	Requires film, powder, curing and heat pressing.
White ink	Common on dark/coloured garments; maintenance is important.	A major part of the process; circulation, maintenance and regular operation matter.

When DTG makes sense

DTG is a strong option when the garment itself is the print surface you want to work with directly, particularly where print quality, soft feel and on-demand production matter.

DTG is worth serious consideration when:

- **Most of your work is on suitable cotton garments.** Premium T-shirts, fashion garments and retail-quality apparel are common DTG applications.
- **You produce photographic or complex artwork.** DTG is well suited to gradients, fine colour detail and artwork with many colours.
- **You run one-offs and short orders.** There are no screens to make, and each garment can carry different artwork.
- **Hand feel matters.** Depending on the garment, ink coverage and process, DTG can produce a very soft result.
- **You want printing and curing to stay close to the garment workflow.** The garment is printed directly rather than creating a separate transfer inventory.
- **You already have a strong DTG customer base.** A proven order mix matters more than chasing a different technology simply because it is popular.

Things DTG still needs

A professional DTG setup may require pretreatment, suitable garments, correct curing, colour management, RIP software, platen choices, white ink maintenance and a controlled print environment. Buying the printer does not remove those requirements.

Where DTG can become inefficient

- Orders made up of many different fabric types or garments that are difficult to load onto a platen.
- Jobs where the transfer can be produced separately and pressed later by another operator or location.
- Production where pretreatment, loading and curing become the main bottlenecks.
- Businesses that need a very broad garment compatibility range and want one transfer process for many product types.

When DTF makes sense

DTF separates image production from the final garment. You print transfers first, then apply them with a heat press. That can make DTF very flexible for mixed garment orders and production planning.

DTF is worth serious consideration when:

- **You print on a wide variety of garments.** DTF can suit many cotton, polyester and blended products, subject to testing and the garment manufacturer's requirements.
- **Your orders mix garment colours and fabric types.** One transfer process can simplify jobs that would otherwise need different garment-specific print approaches.
- **You want to produce transfers ahead of pressing.** This lets printing and garment finishing happen at different times or stations.
- **You sell transfers as a product.** Dedicated DTF production can support businesses supplying transfers to decorators who do their own pressing.
- **You handle many logos and workwear jobs.** DTF can be very practical for chest logos, backs, names and mixed-size decoration.
- **You need a production line that can scale.** Dedicated printers, shakers, dryers and multiple heat presses can be built into a higher-volume workflow.

Machines Plus field note

The printer is only one part of DTF. Film, powder, curing, the heat press, temperature, humidity, maintenance and operator habits all affect the finished transfer. A cheap printer does not automatically mean a cheap production system.

Where DTF can become inefficient

- Poor-quality film, powder or pressing can undo the quality produced by a good printer.
- White ink maintenance cannot be ignored simply because the machine is sold as "easy to use".
- Large solid transfers can feel heavier than a direct print, so artwork design and transfer size matter.
- The process introduces more consumables and finishing stages that need to be controlled consistently.

Questions to answer before you buy

Before comparing machine speeds, ink prices or promotions, answer these questions about your actual work.

1. What are you printing on?

Cotton T-shirts? Polyester sportswear? Workwear? Hoodies? Mixed fabrics? The garment mix can quickly change which process is practical.

2. What do your orders really look like?

One-offs, 10-piece jobs, 100-piece runs or transfer wholesale? Average order size matters more than the biggest job you did once.

3. What does the artwork look like?

Photographs, full-front artwork, small logos, names, numbers, solid blocks or fine text all place different demands on the process.

4. Where will the bottleneck be?

Printing speed is only useful if pretreatment, curing, powdering, pressing, loading and labour can keep up.

5. Who will operate it?

A machine needs daily habits. Training, maintenance discipline and staff availability matter.

6. What space and environment do you have?

Printer footprint is only part of the room. Consider curing, heat presses, consumable storage, ventilation, temperature, humidity and safe material handling.

7. What will you need in 12 months?

Buy for the business you are building, not just the order sitting on your desk today - but do not overspend on capacity you may never use.

Do you have to choose only one?

No. Many established garment decorators use more than one process because their customers do not all buy the same product.

A business might use **DTG** for premium cotton garments and photographic prints, while using **DTF** for workwear, polyester, mixed garment orders, logos or transfer production.

The right answer can also be a hybrid-capable system, or two dedicated technologies working side by side. The important part is understanding what each process is expected to do.

A simple starting point

Mostly suitable cotton + premium direct print feel + photographic artwork? Start by looking closely at DTG.

Mixed garments + broad fabric range + transfer production + flexible pressing? Start by looking closely at DTF.

You regularly need both? Compare the cost and workflow of a hybrid approach against dedicated equipment.

How Machines Plus helps

Machines Plus does not start with a brand or model number. We start with what you want to produce, your expected volume, your existing equipment and where you want the business to go.

- **Equipment selection** - compare suitable DTG and DTF approaches.
- **Installation and setup** - where required for the equipment and package.
- **Operator training** - practical use, maintenance and production routines.
- **Colour and software** - help with RIP workflow and colour where applicable.
- **Consumables** - inks, films, powders, media, garments and maintenance items.
- **Ongoing support** - technical questions, production issues and future upgrades.

Tell us what you want to produce.

We will help you work out what you actually need.
machinesplus.com.au/academy | 1300 167 587

About this guide

This guide was prepared by Machines Plus from practical experience working with professional printing equipment and production environments. It is general information only. Equipment, inks, garments and procedures vary. Always follow the current manufacturer instructions for your specific equipment and test unfamiliar materials before production.

Free knowledge. No paywall. We share practical information openly because we trust our experience, judgement, training and support - not information barriers.