



5 Ideas for Effectively Growing and Scaling Your DTG Printing Business

The custom-printed t-shirt industry **is booming.**

It seems like everybody wants a custom t-shirt and they want it quickly. In fact, the custom t-shirt industry in the U.S. is forecast to reach a **value of 3.1 billion dollars by 2025.**

One of the big changes in the industry is that while more orders are being placed, there's now an increase in orders for smaller amounts or fewer units. So, instead of one customer ordering 200 of the same t-shirt design, you have 20 customers ordering 10 different t-shirt designs each. DTG (direct-to-garment) print shops are uniquely positioned to take advantage of these growing opportunities in short-run t-shirt printing.



Unlike traditional screen printing, which can often require front-end costs and time associated with setup, DTG printers require minimal setup so you can print short runs quickly. You simply load your artwork and a print ready t-shirt into the printer and press a button. It's a fast, efficient process for short-run t-shirt printing that can potentially help increase profit margins.

DTG offers other advantages as well. You can print a full color range and even photo quality raster images. It provides on-demand print capability. And you can easily print fully customizable artwork with no added steps. Plus, you only need a small amount of space to set up a DTG printer, so you can easily work from your garage or a spare room in your home.

In this eBrief, we'll share effective ways small to medium DTG print shops can expand and scale their businesses to help make the most of the growing opportunities in short-run t-shirt printing and show how easy it can be to run a successful DTG printing business.





Idea #1

Add More Printers

One of the easiest ways to grow your business is to simply add more DTG printers. Obviously, the more DTG printers you have, the more t-shirts you can print. But you need to have the right type of DTG printer to make the most of your investment and print t-shirts as quickly as possible.

One of the most important aspects to consider when choosing a DTG printer is throughput. Throughput is often confused with speed.

Speed is potential volume. Throughput is actual volume measured in sellable t-shirts. For example: You may own a sports car that goes 160 mph, but if you have to stop at every intersection for a red light, your “throughput” when driving is the same as any other car.

The same is true with a DTG printer. If you have a lot of red lights in your production due to breakdowns or downtime for maintenance, for example, your throughput will be greatly reduced, regardless of speed. So, the question to ask isn’t “What is the printer’s top speed,” but rather “How many sellable t-shirts can the printer produce over a certain period of time?”



Here are three things to look for in a DTG printer that can affect throughput:

1. Fast, Easy Garment Loading

One of the things that can slow down production and reduce throughput is how long it takes to load a t-shirt into the printer. Traditional platen hoops can be a struggle to use. So, look for a DTG printer that offers a quick-load grip pad to reduce the time it takes to load garments.

2. Maintaining Quality at High Speed

Some printers can produce high quality prints when time is not a factor, but quality degrades quickly as the speed increases. Prints that are low quality can result in increased waste costs, and additional print time to redo the print. Printers that feature highlight white print modes where color and white ink are applied simultaneously, along with multiple ink droplet sizes, can deliver both the quality and speed needed.

3. Automatic Cleaning and Minimal User Maintenance

Downtime due to cleaning and maintenance can dramatically impact your throughput. Choosing a printer that offers automatic cleaning, background white ink circulation, and minimal user interventions for maintenance can be the way to go. The less time you spend on cleaning and maintaining the printer, the more time you can spend printing t-shirts. This can help boost cost-effectiveness and profitability by not only increasing printer uptime but by also helping to reduce the overall maintenance expense.



Idea #2

Upgrade Your Support Equipment

Another way to scale and grow your business so you can print more is to invest in support equipment for pre-treating and curing t-shirts that can help increase production.

If you're pre-treating by hand using a sprayer, consider upgrading to an automated pre-treater. There are two types of pre-treaters to choose from. One is an open pre-treater, which decreases the amount of labor it takes to pre-treat t-shirts and allows for fast loading and unloading of garments. One caveat: due to potential overspray, it is recommended that you place open pre-treaters in a different area than the printers.

The second type of pre-treater is an enclosed pre-treater. This type of pre-treater provides a much cleaner environment because it eliminates overspray into the room. As a result, enclosed pre-treaters can be placed in the same area as the printer equipment, which

can increase efficiency and throughput.

The other type of equipment used in DTG printing is a heat press. Again, there are two types to choose from: flatbed and conveyor dryer. If you're using a flatbed press, consider upgrading to a conveyor dryer which can increase productivity and cost-effectiveness by enabling continuous curing for long production runs. As its name implies, a conveyor dryer features a conveyor belt that carries printed t-shirts through a forced-air heating chamber to cure them.

Flatbed heat presses can only press one shirt at a time, but a conveyor dryer can cure multiple shirts in an ongoing process. These dryers allow the operator to continuously feed the conveyor dryer with printed t-shirts, so the curing process is never halted. Conveyor dryers are also ideal for use in "pods," which we will discuss next.



Idea #3

Create Printing “Pods”

One simple way to potentially increase your production and scale your printing operation efficiently is to use printing pods. This can increase throughput allowing you to produce hundreds of shirts per hour.

DTG printing pods group multiple DTG printers around a conveyor dryer that all operate at the same time. A single operator runs the printers then takes the printed t-shirts and places them on the conveyor dryer to cure. Because the printers and dryer are in close proximity, one operator can run several printers simultaneously. This can not

only increase production, but also reduce labor costs by allowing one operator to do the work of several.

Pods also allow you to easily adjust to the volume you need to print. To ramp up production, you simply add an additional printer to your existing pod. One operator can typically handle multiple printers at a time. After that, you can simply create another pod. The result? With the proper setup, you can achieve customized printing at production levels and potentially minimal cost increases.



Idea #4

Improve Workflow Through Automation

Manual workflows can be time-consuming and labor intensive, which can slow down production and affect profitability. Automating your workflow by adding an automated intake system with a barcode reader can help you scale up your production and increase your profit margin by allowing seamless integration between online ordering and printing. This can dramatically reduce the labor and time it takes to print.

Here's how it works. A customer goes to your website where you have online ordering. The customer either chooses an existing design or submits one of their own and selects what color shirt they want. Once they click submit, a print file is generated based on the design and color that were chosen. The print file passes through the workflow process which determines how the garment is going

to be printed. At the same time, barcode labels containing the printing information are generated and can be attached to a job ticket or work order.

The barcode labels can then be attached to t-shirts after the pre-treating process and passed on to the printer operator. The operator simply scans the barcode, loads the t-shirt into the printer and hits the "print" button. Then this process is repeated until all the t-shirts in the order are printed. The operator doesn't need to know what the orders are, what's going on with the software or how to set up jobs in the software because it's all automated. This can result in a more efficient workflow that helps you scale up so you can print garments quickly and lower payroll expenses due to less labor required for more potential profitability.

Idea #5

Go Beyond T-Shirts

T-shirts are a dominant garment in DTG, but they're just the beginning of what you can print with some DTG printers. You can also scale up your business by expanding your product lines to offer other types of custom-printed garments and accessories.

For starters you can custom print on any cotton (natural fiber) or 50/50 cotton/polyester blend with a flat surface. Some DTG printers are available with specialty platens that straighten out non-flat surfaces, such as hats and shoes, so you can print on them, too. Finally, with DTG film transfer printing, you can create photo quality prints to transfer onto a wide variety of fabrics, including 100% polyester garments and performance athletic wear.

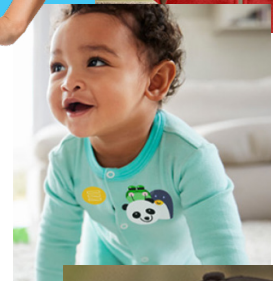
You simply print the design onto film, apply hot melt powder, then transfer the design onto the garment or item you're personalizing.

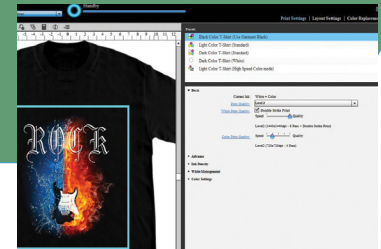
Just some of the sellable items you can create include:

- Canvas Shoes
- Ties
- Bandanas
- Baby Items
- Caps
- Tote Bags
- Pant Legs and Sleeves

And that's just the beginning. All you need to expand your product line is a little imagination and the sky's the limit.

If you're a small to medium DTG print shop, these ideas can help you effectively expand and scale up your operations so you can increase productivity, take on more business and potentially improve your profitability.

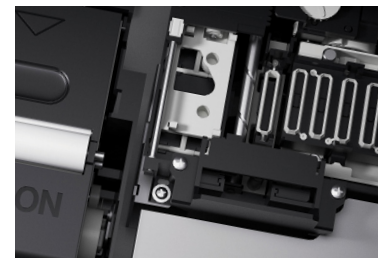




Epson Garment Creator software provides an easy-to-use workflow with tools for layout and text, color management, ink control, cost estimation and more.

As experts in DTG printing, Epson can help you achieve these goals. Our SureColor F-Series DTG printers offer a number of features that make them ideal for scaling and growing your business including:

- Minimal setup, so they're ideal for short-run printing.
- High throughput by:
 1. Reducing the time it takes to load garments by using a quick-load grip pad instead of traditional platen hoops, and
 2. Printing both high-quality white and color inks simultaneously, dramatically reducing overall print times.
- Automated cleaning which simplifies maintenance and helps to reduce maintenance costs.
- Minimal maintenance intervention by the operator allowing printers to run continuously with minimal interruption for cleaning.
- Compatible with automated workflow systems.
- And they're available with specialty platens, compatible with DTG film printing so you can expand your custom printing capabilities to include products other than t-shirts.



An integrated self-cleaning system featuring a fabric wiper and an in-line cleaning system slashes maintenance, operational costs and downtime.



A quick-load grip pad platen, instead of a traditional hoop platen, greatly reduces the time it takes to load garments for improved productivity.

Want to learn more? Visit Epson.com/DTG.



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