



Our Brother DTG printers prove to offer the perfect solution for serving the small to large run, high-color demands of the contract/fashion/retail online store niche.

BROTHER DTG TESTIMONIAL

DTG printers offer the perfect solution

When Mark Bilentnikoff, First Amendment Tees Co. / Contract DTG, Erie, Pa., decided after 25 years in manufacturing that he needed a career change, he decided decorating T-shirts was what he wanted to do. And after a lot of research, he knew that using digital direct-to-garment printers was the best way to do it.

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“I was tired of corporate life and every three and half years, getting laid off. I woke up one day, and said ‘I’m going to make T-shirts,’” he remembers. In his research, he discovered that DTG was the ideal decorating method for any company that wanted to offer fashion or retail shirts online.

“I liked the one-off aspect,” he shares. **“A T-shirt could be anything. You could add as many colors, prints and locations as you wanted.”**

“Coming from a background of lean manufacturing, I realized that printing on demand was a way to control inventory instead of printing 48 pieces and hoping all 48 would sell. It provided a way to buy minimal stock and only print it once it was sold.”

“We started out with DTG and nothing else in June 2010. We eventually added screen printing to handle higher-volume jobs, but we’re still using our five GTXpro B machines for about 75% of our orders, because of the fulfillment. That’s not to say we don’t do a lot of bulk DTG orders. We probably do thousands of 100-piece orders a year, and we’ve done DTG jobs of up to 6,000 pieces,” he explains.

Even though screen printing might seem to make sense for a 6,000-piece job, **when the client wants a photo-realistic picture, DTG is the better choice.** “This particular order was for a company that sold photographic film. They did not want a halftone picture,” he notes.

“It was a photo of a woman with a really fine veil over her face. It was very ornate with a detailed hat and jewelry. Screen printing could not capture the realistic look of it. Sometimes the customer just prefers the DTG feel over screen printing. We try to push some of the larger orders over to screen, but they request DTG all the time.”

Especially in the fulfillment and fashion niche, DTG is popular, because the demand is for small runs with a lot of colors. Clients prefer not to tie up a bunch of money in volume.

Bilentnikoff has been impressed with the GTXpro B's ability to handle a range of different fabric blends.

Bilentnikoff has been impressed with the GTXpro B's ability to handle a range of different fabric blends. “We have been seeing so many new polyesters, cotton/polyester, and cotton/polyester/rayon, but with software Brother has, it's easy to dial in a product. With the pretreatment machine, we print a grid and using that are able to create the perfect recipe for each blend of T-shirt,” he says.

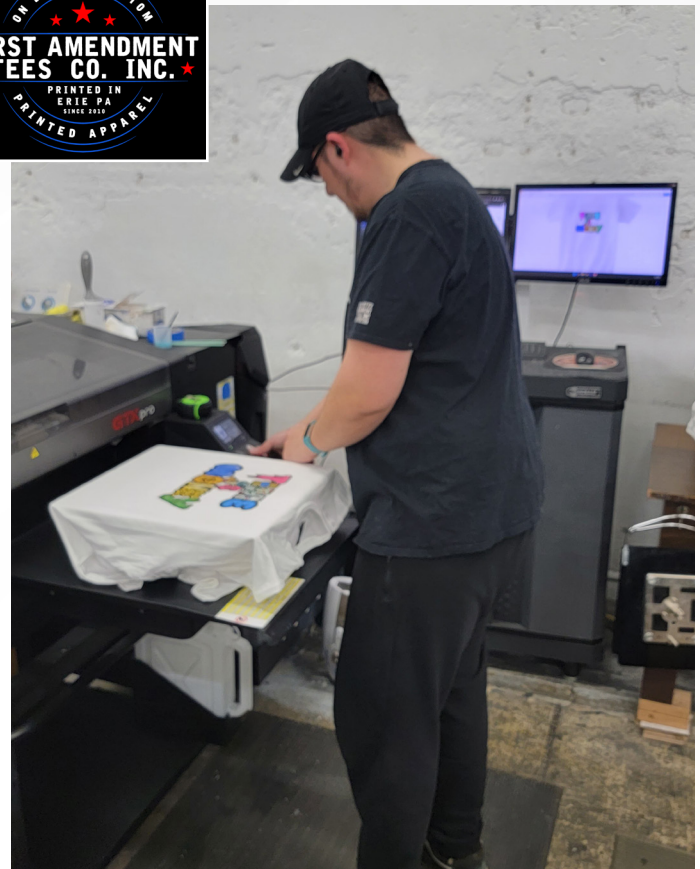
The higher cost of a DTG printed shirt vs. a screen printed one is not a barrier for brands that can charge higher prices because of their marketing and reputation.

“Retail T-shirts are selling anywhere from \$25 to \$90 a shirt. I have one customer who sells hoodies for almost \$200 a piece. They are very good quality, and they are printed on the sleeves,

the hood and a back print, so the client is adding on a lot of decoration, and he gets the money for them.”

A great way to drive up the cost of sweats is to encourage multiple locations, notes the owner. Making a shirt unique with over-the-top decorating justifies the price to the end consumer. “We have one customer who wants prints on a minimum of four places. Often he wants front chest and back, on the sleeve, on the hood, and on the cuff of the sleeve,” he says.

Other nontraditional places clients want prints are on the back nape of the neck, the shirt's bottom corner, the shirt's bottom back corner and on the collar right under the chin. “With the DTG machine, we don't have to limit where we print,” says the decorator. “Sometimes we have to create a jig to hold the garment properly, but we charge more depending on the hassle.”



Bilentnikoff keeps customer satisfaction high by printing samples for clients before the job is run. For a job of 100 pieces or more, the sample is free and for smaller orders there is a charge. The minimum order for contract printing is 11 pieces.

“We have a very low occurrence of customers complaining about shirts,” he says. “Oftentimes they will say ‘Holy Cow, this is better than I expected.’”

The entrepreneur started his business by creating his own website, <https://www.fat-tee.com/>, which originally featured preprinted designs, mostly humorous. But as time went on, he branched out into offering online T-shirt stores for others.

Today, his clients range from designers to brands, TikTokers, YouTubers, and other social media celebrities who amass a big following and want to monetize it by offering merchandise. In this niche, orders range from 20 to 200 of a single design. It is common to get orders of 10 designs/50 pieces of each. He offers the full range of services from designing to printing, selling and fulfilling. That

includes custom labeling when requested. “Then we soon started Contract DTG, www.contract-dtg.com/, to be able to service the wholesale community.”



The owner feels the keys to his success have been in always trying new things and having the right equipment. “We pride ourselves on the fact we are always experimenting with our Brother machines and the inks, including the pretreatment process. **We have a lot less issues with the pretreating than some other people do. Our goods are usually a little bit more consumer ready.”**

“And we have found that the performance of the Brother machines is amazing. They are fast, durable, and the prints have great wash fastness. We’ve seen a big difference between Brother DTG and other equipment we have used.”

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— MARK BILENTNIKOFF

