

# Digital versus Screen Printing

## What's the difference between Screen printing and Digital printing?

Screen and digital printing are two of the most popular methods of printing and your choice will depend on what it is you want to print, the material you want to print on and the quantity you desire. In brief, if you wanted 100 individually personalised prints, the digital print would suit your needs. Alternatively, if you needed a higher quantity of prints that didn't have to be personalised, then screen printing may be your best option.

Both methods have differing finishes too – if you're looking for a more authentic, retro or softer look, you may be more interested in screen printing, however, if you're looking for a more modern, fresh and crisp finish then digital printing is something to consider. This is just one of the things you have to consider when trying to work out the best printing method for you; we list the main benefits and drawbacks of each method below.

## What is screen printing?

The screen printing process includes the use of a stencil (aka the screen), and using this, layers of ink are applied to the printing surface, one at a time. For each new colour, a different screen is used.

## What is digital printing?

This process is much newer and involves the use of complex computing. The image on the screen is analysed and then converted into a format which can then be printed directly onto the surface required.

## What is screen printing used for?

Screen printing is very versatile, and the technique can be used to print on many different types of material such as textiles, plastic and latex. The surface you're printing on does not need to be printed under pressure, so it's commonly used for products such as balloons, clothing and wallpaper.

## What is digital printing used for?

Digital printing is typically used for direct mail and coupons or a print which requires a more modern, crisp finish. This method is a lot more detailed in comparison to the screen printing process.

Digital printing can be used for near enough anything and makes it very easy to personalise, and it's a quicker alternative to screen printing.

## Price comparison

Depending on the quantity of prints you require, you might be better off using one of the methods over the other. For example, if you're after a small number of copies, then screen printing probably isn't the best way to go as the initial setup can be expensive. However, the more prints you need, the cheaper this process will work out in the long run as once the screen printing machine has been calibrated, there's no need to do it again. This setup is often charged as a one-off fee – the origination fee.

Digital, on the other hand, works out a lot cheaper for smaller quantities as you don't have to pay the origination fee.

The price per print can also depend on the number of colours you want to use. Black and white digital printing is cheaper, but there's no difference if you decide you want one colour or one hundred. An additional screen is required for each new colour with screen printing which means any additional colours will cost you.

## Age of screen printing process

Screen printing's original roots go back to Egyptian times with stencilling and then later in China (900 A.D.) when they first forced ink through silk fabric to create images. It was then that ancient artists first stretched silk fabric across a frame and poured hot beeswax into it. Although, it wasn't until the 1880's that screen printing took off as a commercial process for decorating fabric.

## Age of digital printing process

The digital printing process was introduced relatively recently with the first digital printing presses being introduced in the early 1990's. Digital printing processes have evolved a lot in the meantime to the point where batches of digital prints can be published in a matter of seconds.

## Quality comparison

Where a screen printing gives a more vibrant finish (especially when printing onto a darker surface), digital distribution is better suited to detailed work due to the layers of ink being thinner which assures the final print will turn out more precise.

# Key Differences in Screen and Digital Printing

## The benefits of screen printing

- Cost effective for large batches
- Versatile design placement – artwork can easily be moved and printed at a different angle or position.
- The more you order, the cheaper the cost per unit – although the initial setup fee can be expensive, the more copies you need, the cheaper it works out. Once your artwork has been setup, you don't need to pay the fee again which is ideal if your design rarely changes.
- Although you can't necessarily personalise prints using this method, we can print off badges which we can then run through a digital printer to personalise prints.

## The drawbacks of screen printing

- Not very cost effective when printing in multiple colours
- Large upfront investment required
- One design per batch
- Colours can bleed into one another (although you could argue this as a positive if that's the look you're going for)

## The benefits of digital printing

- Fast – could be the best option if you're running to a tight schedule
- Cost effective – if you only need a few prints, it's probably the best solution.
- Greater flexibility – Allows frequent changes if needed. Perfect for personalised mail
- Sharp, crisp finish

## The drawbacks of screen printing

- Colour matching errors – the colour might appear slightly different on the screen compared to when printed.
- Cracking in the folds – the ink isn't absorbed fully into the paper so cracks can sometimes appear.
- More expensive when a higher quantity of prints is required.

# Conclusion

So there you have it. Hopefully, our guide has given you a better idea of the processes involved and finished you can achieve with screen printing and digital printing. If you'd like to speak to one of our printing pro's, or if you would like a quote on our digital printing services, feel free to get in touch using the quick enquiry form to the right.

If you'd like to talk about a potential direct mail or direct marketing idea you have, get in touch with us. We'd be more than happy to share our insight and help you on your way.