PRODUCTION

Production & Product Strategy

DTF, fulfillment and choosing the right products — how the work gets made, and what you should be making it on.

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2026 Edition

Three decisions shape a shop's production floor: which decoration methods you own, how orders flow through them, and which blanks you put in front of customers. This guide covers all three, with the operational detail that separates a busy shop from a scalable one.

01 **Why DTF transfers are so popular** — Method

02 **A DTF-powered online store playbook** — Fulfillment

03 **Why offer high-end childrenswear and school merch** — Products

The through-line

Clean data, then batched orders, then minimal touchpoints. Every recommendation below is a version of that same sentence.

SECTION 01 · METHOD

Why DTF Transfers Are So Popular

Direct-to-film (DTF) transfers are digitally printed transfers that offer vibrant, multi-color designs and apply to a wide variety of substrates. The design is printed onto PET film with a DTF printer, then applied to a product — a hat, tote, T-shirt or jersey — using adhesive powder and heat.

> **“My daughter and I consistently play tug of war with the design when we’re showing customers. It doesn’t split, crack, or peel.”**
>
> **Mark Heise** | Yellow Springer Tees and Promotions

The Benefits

Durability

Prints hold up on polyester, cotton, blends and tri-blends through wash and stretch tests.

Fewer print-head clogs

DTF inks are similar to DTG inks but runnier, which tends to mean fewer clogs.

Easier maintenance

Larger systems give you room to clean, and many use OEM print heads, so replacement parts are easier to find.

More product offerings

Works on cotton, 100% polyester and blends, plus textured items, bottles, hats and bags.

No pretreatment

Unlike DTG, garments do not need pretreating — one step out of the process.

Extensive color options

Works on light and dark garments and supports vibrant, multicolor designs not available on traditional heat transfers.

How It Works

- ✓ Create and prepare the artwork using RIP software with DTF capability and the ICC profile from your ink manufacturer
- ✓ Print the image onto PET film with a DTF printer
- ✓ Add adhesive powder over the transfer, by hand or with a machine
- ✓ Apply heat — the top platen hovers over the powder and transfer rather than clamping fully
- ✓ Remove the transfer, often using a cold-peel process once the film has cooled

Does Your Business Need DTF?

For a high-volume screen-printing shop, small drop-in orders of 10–12 prints are not always feasible — but you do not want to turn customers away. DTF offers a simple solution for those one-off jobs without hurting your bottom line. It is also economical for e-commerce sellers running special-edition goods, since you can test designs without committing to a large quantity.

If bringing DTF in-house is not feasible yet, you can order pre-printed transfers from a supplier. That cuts down on training and production time and is a simpler way to gauge whether the service is worth offering.

Real-World Results

12	36	Any
shirts an hour, typical DTG production	shirts an hour with DTF, front and back	number of colors, with no effect on the price

For team sports, name-drop and nesting features let Heise generate names and numbers and lay them out efficiently, saving significant time on jobs that once required feeding names in one at a time.

SECTION 02 · FULFILLMENT

A DTF-Powered Online Store Playbook

If you use direct-to-film to grow online sales, a clear operational roadmap helps: make your online stores easy to duplicate, keep order data clean, and build a fulfillment program that scales with volume. The points below come from an industry panel of decorators who run high volumes of online stores.

Quick Takeaways

- ✓ **DTF unlocks complex workflows, especially for short runs and on-demand stores, when your setup and order flow are disciplined**
- ✓ **Store templates and cloning are a growth advantage when launching many similar stores**
- ✓ **Clean product and artwork naming conventions reduce human decisions and production touchpoints as you scale**
- ✓ **Customer experience is your margin — remove friction in ordering, artwork intake and reordering**

Why DTF and Online Stores Pair Well

DTF supports profitable small runs and print-on-demand without forcing traditional bulk orders that leave you with excess inventory. That fits the online-store model, which usually involves smaller order sizes, more frequent output, more SKUs and variety, and a constant need for accurate product data and reliable fulfillment — exactly the mix for spiritwear, promo and corporate merch.

In-house vs. outsourced

Buying DTF equipment means committing to maintenance, consistency and the process behind it. A hybrid approach is normal — even shops that print in-house outsource certain volumes when it is smarter for throughput and margin. Maintenance cadence, color consistency and file flow can become bottlenecks quickly, and when outsourcing, inspect transfers early so you have time to resolve issues.

A Repeatable Store Engine

Start with templates

Identify the customer type, then use seasonal catalog rotations, prebuilt mockups and a consistent intake flow.

Fast, not generic

Templates and cloning are ideal when store types repeat — speed without a copy-paste feel.

Standardize the buy

Consistent product info, sizing guidance, artwork presentation and fulfillment expectations teach customers how to buy from you.

The Fulfillment Playbook

The pattern is the same across shops: clean data, then batched orders, then minimal touchpoints.

Clean inputs, fast output

Build products correctly and standardize file-naming for artwork and colors before orders arrive.

Group by production flow

Batch by decoration type, dates and product type to minimize handling and decision-making.

Plan DTF around capacity

Keep garments and transfers separate until needed, consider a store setup fee to cover transfer costs, and remember capacity is usually limited by staff rather than equipment.

Simplify artwork

Quality-check at the individual file level and offer behind-the-scenes art cleanup so orders keep moving.

A Practical Workflow

STAGE	WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE
Store setup	Choose a template by customer type, prebuild seasonal catalogs, use a repeatable intake checklist
QA product & art data	Standardize naming, define DTF-friendly print rules, set what is auto-approved vs. reviewed
Order intake	Publish sizing and product details, set clear delivery expectations, simplify reordering
Production batching	Group by decoration type, due date and product type to keep jobs moving
Inventory strategy	Stock versatile blanks and stock transfers intentionally; inspect outsourced transfers early
Fulfillment	**Standardize pick/pack rules and track turnaround by store category to spot bottlenecks**

SECTION 03 · PRODUCTS

Why Offer High-End Childrenswear and School Merchandise

A memorable custom order depends on print quality, fulfillment and the quality of the products you print on. You can usually step things up by offering higher-end blanks — and one market that shops overlook is childrenswear. From daycares to school events, these customers often are not aware upgrades exist, so you benefit by presenting the options. It is a win-win: you sell your best work on a product that lasts longer.

A Change in Demand

Demand for better-made apparel has grown, with durability, quality and ethical practices now qualifiers for some customers. When choosing blanks, consider:

Fabric construction

Softer blends and retail-inspired silhouettes.

Alternative fabrics

Recycled materials and hemp.

Manufacturing transparency

Many brands now publish details about their facilities.

Opening New Doors

Schools and childrenswear customers are typically offered budget options and may not realize a higher-end option exists. Industry experts have repeatedly flagged these as overlooked, opportunity-rich niches. Customers to target include:

- ✓ **Schools — especially elementary and middle schools; higher-end products last longer, and students are more excited to wear them, strengthening school spirit**

- ✓ **Preschools** — nicer branded goods double as advertising when parents outfit their kids around town, driving recognition and signups
- ✓ **Afterschool programs** — fresh merchandise every school year makes for reliable repeat business

Combine for Bigger Impact

Merch bundles

Pair a higher-end hoodie with a retail-inspired tee, plus low-cost add-ons like bottles, bags and stickers.

Swag for parents

Offering adult sizes opens a whole additional line of high-end apparel.

Online stores

Seasonal spiritwear, fundraiser or year-round storefronts let customers sell 24/7 while keeping your orders organized.

WORTH KNOWING

The timing extends beyond the school year: summer camps, retreats, sponsored events and fundraisers are all natural fits. Premium goods let you charge a premium price, and your customer can charge more for their end product.

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