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How To with Heat Presses

Beyond transfers, take a look at what processes can be achieved with a heat press

BY SARA KAHANE

With consumers becoming savvier and demanding more creatively-decorated apparel, the standard screen print just isn't turning heads anymore. In this kind of environment, how can screen printing businesses increase creativity and offerings to customers without investing in large amounts of equipment and software during these challenging economic times? One answer is simple—the heat press.

The heat press has been around for years and not too much has changed in terms of its dynamics. But a whole new world of opportunity has opened up to its various uses.

The heat press has been used to apply heat transfers—and heat transfers alone—to T-Shirts, hats and other garments for years. But with tremendous advancements in printing technology spanning the past

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10 to 15 years, people have found new uses for the age-old heat press. With the advent of digital direct-to-garment printing, heat presses have become essential components of the curing process. Because of tumultuous economic times and consumer demand for unique multi-media applications, screen print professionals are finding creative uses for the equipment they currently have.

Curing Discharge Prints

To mix the colored discharge ink, first add a non-corrosive water-based pigment into the discharge base. Then add approximately 6 percent of ZFS (Zinc Formaldehyde Sulfate) into the discharge base thoroughly. For a less intense discharge look, add a smaller percentage of the powdered agent into the base. Place the garment on the platen and print the water-based discharge ink. (All graphics courtesy Insta Graphic Systems with special thanks to Ed Branigan, International Coatings, for screen-printing demos.)

1



2



Let the garment sit for three to five seconds and then place it under a flash unit for approximately 12 seconds to remove any excess moisture. Increase or decrease the amount of time under the flash unit depending on how intense and even you

want the color distributed across the graphic. The longer the garment sits under the heat, the more color will show up in the graphic. (This garment was left under for 12 seconds to allow for color variation.)



3



Move the garment onto a heat press and place a Teflon sheet over the design. Set the machine to 350°, 40 lbs, 12-14 seconds (settings may need to be adjusted depending on the heat press) and engage the heat press. The level of discharge can be controlled in this process by adjusting the dwell time—the longer the dwell, the greater the discharge effect.



Once the cycle is complete, peel the Teflon sheet off of the finished garment.



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Alternative Heat-Press Uses

To succeed in today's environment, professionals in this industry need to be creative and their products must stand out in a sea of ordinary. Consumers are looking to spend their dollars on items that are original and unique; items they feel reflect their own individuality. More and more screen print shops are turning to heat presses because they are finding that using a heat press in

conjunction with screen printing gives their products an edge over the competition.

In certain cases, using a heat press can also cut down production time. In some screen-printing processes, a heat press can replace the use of a tunnel dryer to cure inks. Where a tunnel dryer can take three minutes for a single garment to pass, that same garment can sit under a heat press for 15

to 20 seconds and achieve the same results.

To provide an idea of just how effective a heat press can be in expanding screen-printing capabilities, review the three examples of its alternative uses below.

To begin, it is of utmost importance to invest in a quality heat press. A good heat press provides even and consistent heat and pressure across the entire platen. Heat

and pressure are key elements to a successful application of any kind.

Heat presses can help cut production time while affording ingenuity and originality in design work—far beyond what standard screen-printing methods offer. In the processes described, no two prints will ever come out exactly the same; each will be unique.

So, to boost your business, creativity and offerings to customers without much investment, check out your heat press resources.

(Note: We recommend performing your own testing on all of these methods to make sure you dial in the correct settings for your specific inks, machinery and desired results.)

Creating Textured Platens

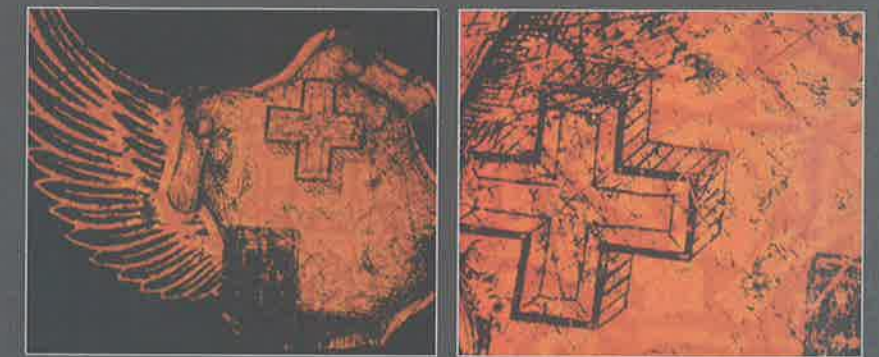
Textured platen processes – To most screen-printers, the thought of using a textured platen is completely counter-intuitive. Standard procedure requires making sure the platen is completely flat prior to printing. However, times have changed, and standard is not going to stand out and be noticed. A textured platen allows printers to create completely unique and original prints. By using a textured platen, the printer is letting go of some control over the process—so every print will come out a little differently. Each one will be one-of-a-kind.

Cover the platen with platen peel for protection. Spray the platen peel with adhesive and place a piece of crinkled transfer paper on top.



Cover the crinkled paper with platen peel. Tear off excess peel.

Textured Discharge Prints



Create a textured platen. Repeat steps one through seven of the aforementioned discharge process. To create the above print, we used a dischargeable colored ink during Step 1. The combination of the textured platen, dischargeable ink and the heat press create gorgeous halftones and color variations that will be unique to each print.

Textured PVC-Free Based Flock/Foil Combos

Create a textured platen. Build a thick stencil on the screen in order to achieve a thick deposit of ink on the garment. Once printed, send the garment down a tunnel



dryer to cure the ink. Typical curing temp is 320° for 90 seconds but settings may vary. For this exercise, we used a PVC-free special effects plastisol-based ink.

Once inks are fully cured, place the garment onto a heat press to apply the foil. Set the heat press for 350°,



15 lbs, two seconds. Lay a sheet of foil over the design and engage the heat press. Peel off the foil when the cycle is complete.



Next, apply the flock. Reset the heat press for 350°, 40 lbs, 12 to 16 seconds, and lay a sheet of flock over the graphic. Engage the heat press; if the flock did not lay down heavy enough, once the cycle is complete, go back for another full cycle.

Once the desired look is achieved, complete the process by running the garment through the tunnel dryer again to ensure the flock and foil are fully bonded to the ink.