

Published based on [What is the Process Known as Screen Printing?](#)

What is the Process Known as Screen Printing?

Silk screen printing process is an laborious task that dates back as far as the Song Dynasty in Mainland china (960-1279 AD). It is called silkscreening because in the 1960's printers used silk as the 'mesh' which the ink came through before being transferred onto the material. Silk screen printing has retained the name even though polyester is now primarily used instead of silk as the mesh screen. It is also known as screen printing or serigraphy.

First, a frame of wood or aluminum is constructed, to which the mesh is attached. The stencil is made of a material that the ink cannot seep through, and is the negative, or opposite, of what will show on the material the ink will be transposed to, paper, cloth, or some other material or promotional items. The mesh is either made of man-made materials such as polyester, nylon, or steel. Next, the stencil is placed on top of the mesh. The screen is now placed on the cloth or paper, also called the substrate.

Next the ink is put on the bottom of the negative part of the mesh and transposed to the substrate. This is achieved by running a fill bar, also known as a floodbar, across the screen starting from the bottom, and moving the bar gently to the top. Now the operator will move the fill bar in the opposite direction, using a slightly different technique.

This process can be used on branded t/shirts and also other garments and substrates. The screen is raised to avoid contact with the item to be printed, and with some pressure the fill bar is pulled back across the template forcing the ink into areas missed upon the first pass.

The last process performed in the frame is done by use of a squeegee. This rubber blade is moved across the template, forcing the ink in a uniformed fashion, into the substrate.

This makes sure that the ink being printed onto the substrate is the same thickness as the mesh and/or stencil. As the squeegee moves across the frame the mesh pulls away from the substrate. If everything has been done properly, this 'snap off' leaves the ink on the promotional items or substrate in the design of the stencil. For multi-colored prints, the darker colors are used first, and the lighter colors, applied in the same fashion, are silkscreened on top of the darker colors.

The 'Flat-bed' (probably the most popular and the one just explained), the 'cylinder', and the 'rotary' are the three types of screenprinting presses being used today. The screen used for the stencil can be cleaned and re-used with the same stencil. If the stencil is no longer used, there is a more exhaustive process used to clean the screen.

Although silkscreening is used primarily for clothing, there are many other materials and promotional items that can be employed, such as personalised pens, balloons, and more recently, in the technical field, to lay down conductors and resistors. There are literally thousands of materials that can be silk screen printed.

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