# Plastisol screen printing in Los Angeles: how the process works

Screen printing is a way of pushing ink through an open image area onto a surface. With plastisol ink, the printed design sits on top of the fabric rather than soaking into it. That makes the process a common choice for shirts, hoodies, totes, and other items where bold color and a durable finish matter. For someone comparing plastisol screen printing Los Angeles options, the useful question is not just who can print, but what happens between the approved artwork and the finished item.

The basic idea is simple. A fine mesh is stretched tight across a frame. Parts of the mesh are blocked off, and parts are left open. Ink is placed on the screen, then a squeegee pulls it across. Where the mesh is open, ink passes through and lands on the garment. Where the mesh is blocked, nothing passes. Each color usually needs its own screen, so a multi-color design is built up one layer at a time.

## Preparing the artwork

The process starts with artwork that has been set up for print. A full-color photograph, for example, usually needs to be separated into solid color layers. A logo with two flat colors may be straightforward. A design with gradients, fine shading, or tiny text can need more careful handling. The aim is to turn the image into shapes that can be printed as clear layers.

Placement is also settled early. A front chest print, a back print, and a sleeve print each have different limits. The size of the image affects how comfortable the finished garment feels and how clean the edges look. A dense design with large solid areas can feel heavier than a small, open one. Thin lines can disappear if they are too fine for the mesh or the fabric texture.

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Garment choice changes the outcome too. Cotton, blends, and performance fabrics react differently to ink. A smooth surface makes detail easier. A textured knit can interrupt fine lines. Dark garments often need an underbase, a layer printed first to give the colors above it a brighter base. Light garments may need fewer layers, which can keep the print softer.

## Building the screen

The next stage is making the screens. A screen mesh is selected based on the design. A coarser mesh lets more ink pass and suits heavier deposits or glitter-style effects. A finer mesh gives smoother detail but passes less ink. The right balance depends on the artwork, the ink, and the fabric.

The mesh is coated with a light-sensitive layer called emulsion coating. Once dry, the screen is exposed to light through a film or other positive image of the design. The light hardens the areas that should block ink. The image areas stay softer and are washed away, leaving openings in the stencil. This is called screen exposure, and it has a big effect on print quality. Too little exposure can leave a weak stencil that breaks down during the run. Too much exposure can make fine detail hard to wash out.

After the stencil is ready, the screen is fitted to a press. The garment is positioned on a platen below it. Registration marks and guides help keep the image in the same place on every piece. Good setup is a quiet part of the process, but it prevents many visible problems later.

## How the ink is printed

Plastisol ink is thick and creamy at room temperature. It does not dry in the screen the way some water-based inks do. That gives printers more working time during a print run, which helps with consistency. The ink is laid across the top of the screen, then pulled forward with a squeegee. The squeegee angle, pressure, and speed all affect how much ink passes through the mesh.

Too little pressure can leave a thin or broken print. Too much pressure can force ink under the stencil and blur the edge. A steady stroke matters more than force. The goal is an even layer with clean edges, not a heavy blob sitting on the fabric.

When a design has several colors, the garment moves from screen to screen. Each layer must line up with the one before it. This is color registration. Slight movement can happen if the garment shifts, if the screen is loose, or if the artwork was not separated cleanly. On a well-set run, edges meet neatly and small gaps stay open. On a poor run, colors overlap where they should not or leave unwanted slivers.

One-color printing is the simplest form of the process. It uses one screen and one ink layer. It is often chosen for text, simple marks, and event items. Multi-color work takes longer because each screen has to be aligned and checked. That extra setup is not wasted effort, it is what keeps repeated pieces looking alike.

## What curing changes

After printing, the ink still needs heat. Plastisol does not become durable just because it looks dry. It must reach the right curing temperature so the resin particles fuse into a solid film. This is often done with a conveyor dryer or a heat press, depending on the setup and the item.

Under-cured ink may feel tacky, crack after washing, or wash out. Overheating can affect the garment, change the hand feel, or alter some colors. Heat needs to reach the ink layer, not just

the surface of the print. Thick deposits take longer to cure than thin ones. Dark inks and heavy underbases can also behave differently from lighter layers.

This is why temperature and time are treated as a pair. A printer checks that the ink reaches the intended heat for long enough. Test prints and wash checks can reveal problems before a large batch is completed. Once a setting is settled, consistency becomes the priority.

## Where in-house work fits

Some shops keep the whole process under one roof, from artwork preparation to curing. Choosing in-house plastisol screen printing can make it easier to ask clear questions about screens, ink layers, placement, and finishing. It can also make changes simpler while a job is still in progress, because the artwork, press, and drying stage are connected.

That does not mean every job should use the same approach. A single-color design on a light shirt has different needs from a broad back print on a dark hoodie. A shop may recommend fewer colors, a smaller image, or a different garment to improve the result. These choices are practical, not cosmetic. They affect how the print looks, how it feels, and how well it holds up.

For readers comparing local options in Pacoima and the wider Los Angeles area, it helps to ask how a design will be prepared and what the final print will involve. A clear answer should explain the number of screens, whether an underbase is needed, how colors will line up, and how the ink will be cured. If timing matters, confirm the turnaround directly with the business chosen, since schedules can vary. The same applies to minimum quantities, artwork requirements, and whether a proof is available.

In-house plastisol screen printing is not a magic shortcut. It is a controlled sequence of decisions: make the stencil, move the ink, align the colors, then cure the print. When each part is handled with care, the result is a graphic that looks crisp and stays part of the garment through normal wear. When one part is rushed, the signs usually show up as rough edges, mismatched colors, cracking, or a print that feels too stiff.

One local option is Custom Shirt Printing. For exact details, contact Custom Shirt Printing at 11150 Glenoaks Blvd, Pacoima, CA 91331, USA, phone (323) 406-0702.