



Top 5 T-Shirt Secrets You Can't Afford To Ignore

How to make someone's new favorite t-shirt.



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Think about your favorite t-shirt.

It's the one you wear once a week if you can manage to keep it clean. It's the shirt you keep in the top drawer because it's easy to get to. If it's truly one of a kind, you probably gave it "closet status" so that it never gets creases. You love this shirt and there could be multiple reasons why. It could be the way it fits, the softness of the fabric, the color combinations, the cool design or the story it tells. My guess is, if it's earned a spot in your top drawer or closet, it's a combination of all these things.

After working in the t-shirt business for 7 years and seeing thousands of shirts come through our doors, the one question I still find myself asking is: **where would this shirt end up in my closet?**

Would I put it in the bottom drawer? The drawer I have to dig into when it's time to mow the grass, wash the car, or paint the house *shudder* – or would I hang it up and give it closet status?

The good news is, bottom drawer syndrome can be avoided. Over the years I've developed **5 top drawer industry trade secrets** that can help you create someone's new favorite t-shirt.



1. | There is a quality shirt for every budget.

You can breathe a sigh of relief because I'm here to tell you the most expensive t-shirt does NOT always win. Many of our customers bring in their favorite shirts to see if we can find something comparable. More often than not, I'll look at the tag and realize it's a budget-friendly option. There is a quality shirt for every budget. All you need is a guide to help you determine what your t-shirt preference is.

Below is a helpful infographic you can use to determine which style is best for your upcoming project.

SHORT SLEEVE T-SHIRTS



Ordering long sleeves, tank tops, hoodies, crewnecks, or other apparel? Ink can help you decide that too.

inkcustomtees.com

2. | Create a design worth wearing

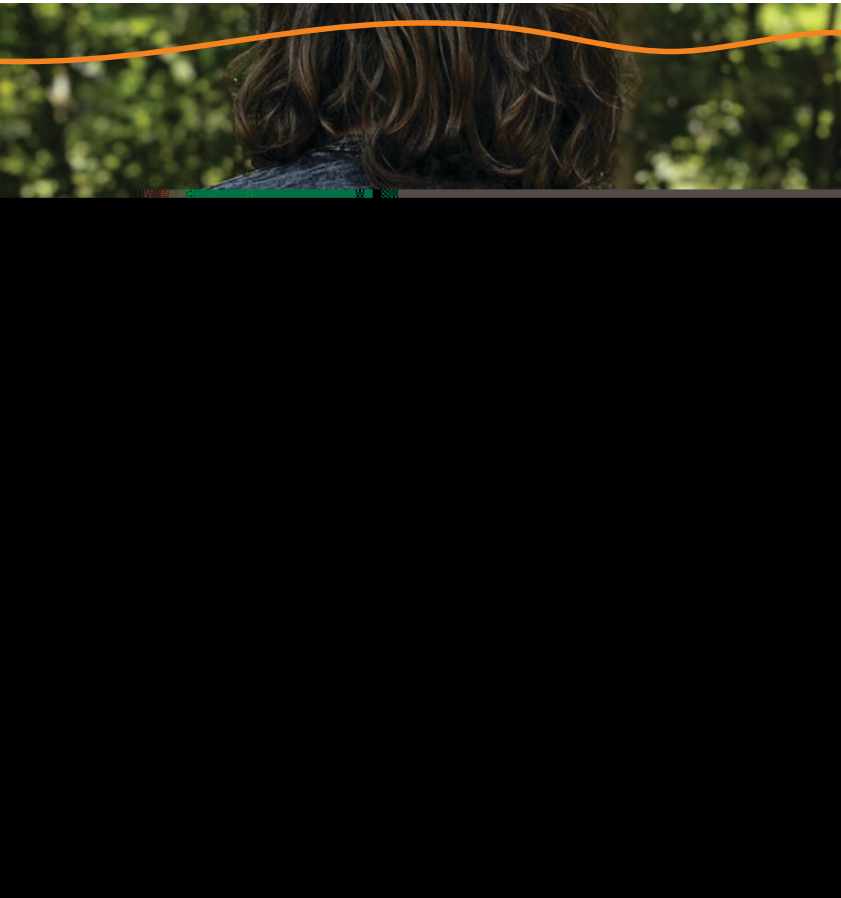
While it may seem obvious, I can't emphasize enough the important role custom, creative artwork plays in the overall success of a shirt. To make sure your design is worth wearing, you need to think about your finished design as two parts: quality and creative.

Make sure the artwork itself is quality. T-shirt designs are like tattoos. Everyone has an idea, but only a tattoo artist knows how to bring the idea to life in a way that is meaningful, skillful and permanent. You wouldn't hire a graphic designer to design a tattoo or vice versa. Likewise, it's better to hire a graphic artist or illustrator that has experience designing t-shirts. You're much more likely to have a finished product that can compete with the big brands.

Communicate your idea creatively. The best t-shirt design doesn't just look good – it means something. Whether you're an idea machine or don't have a creative bone in your body, what you DO have is a story. Find a statement that resonates with the

heart of your brand and ask the artist to incorporate it into the design. If you're working with the right artist, they will know how to bring your story or vision statement to life creatively.

Lastly, don't waste your time working with an artist that doesn't have experience with screen-printing design. If they aren't using Adobe Illustrator or Photoshop, you'll have to pay your screen-printer more to re-create their artwork in a way that's compatible with t-shirts.



3. | Know where you can save money

One of the best ways to know if you're working with the right screen printer is if they give you advice on where to save money. There are industry trade secrets that some companies like to keep to themselves. A good partner won't.

The easiest way to trim up a t-shirt budget without having to sacrifice quality is to adjust the amount of print locations and print colors. I often ask our customers, if you go into any major fashion retailer, are you buying a shirt because of all the ink colors? Most likely not. In fact, most brands are trending towards simplicity in design and minimalism in color. There's exceptions to the rule, but for the most part your customers won't care how many colors of ink are on the shirts.

Similarly, unless you know your customers are avid about having a front and back print, you can eliminate the back print and save a ton of money. Shirts are printed flat, which means only one side of the shirt is printed at a time. If you have a front, back and a sleeve, the job will take 3 times as long to print. It may not be worth the extra cost to only print on the front.

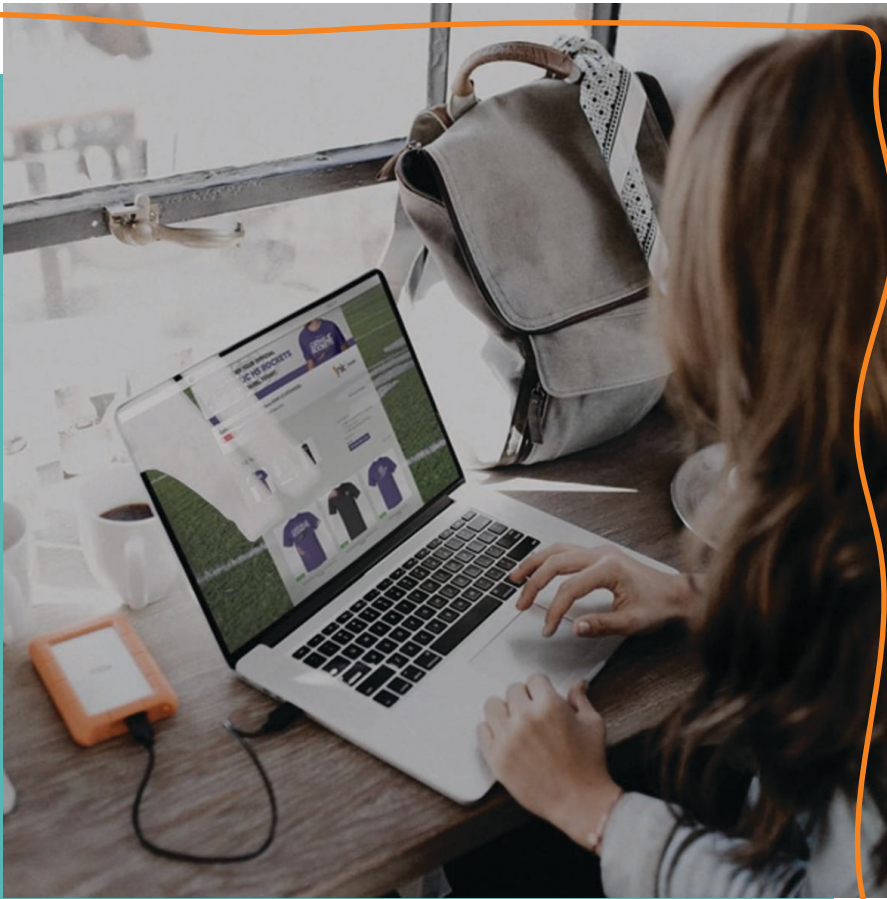
Lastly, you shouldn't pay extra to run short sleeves, long sleeves, and sweatshirts together. If you order the exact same design on 75 short sleeve, 50 long sleeve, and 25 sweatshirts, your printer should price you at 150 total shirts. If not, you aren't getting the best service.

One final myth: don't be fooled by companies that say they'll "save your screens". This should NOT be a way to save money. If someone charges you screen fees, but saves your screens, you're much worse for it in the end. The best companies will save your separations digitally so they can make you fresh, new screens when you place a re-order.



4. | Build up the hype

Building up the hype for your shirts is just as important as selling them. You've probably seen this with big companies like Disney, Apple and Nike. They build up the hype for movies, computers, phones, the most innovative running shoes, etc., long before they're released. That's because there is a real science behind anticipation and how it's linked to happiness. When we anticipate something good, our brain releases the chemical dopamine causing us to think positively about a product we



might receive in the future. Once this happens, we've created a positive bond with this product and are far more likely to buy it once it's released.

An easy way to build up anticipation is to get people involved on social media. Let people be a part of your t-shirt designing process by posting different design options on Facebook or Instagram. Ask your audience to vote, like or comment on their favorite design. Offer a giveaway in exchange for feedback on which design they like most. Our favorite companies tend to be the ones we feel most connected to.

Social media is a great place to build this bridge while maintaining the hype. If you're feeling proactive, you can take this a step further and setup a pre-order store with a company that collects orders and payments on the front end.

5. | Know what it takes to get in the top drawer

Now that I've walked through finding a budget friendly shirt, hiring an artist, knowing where you can save money and building up the hype on social media, I want to come back to the original question: what makes a t-shirt top drawer quality?

First off, do you like wearing it? Be honest and ask yourself if it's comfortable enough to wear 3-4 times a month. If you only wear it at the event, your customers are doing the same. They may not wear it again until the house needs re-painting.

Secondly, does it appeal to your demographic? Think about your customers. Are they kids, women, or men? Ask them why they like their favorite t-shirts.

Third, does your shirt mean something? I touched on this briefly when we talked about art design but it's worth restating. The most memorable shirts are the ones that tell stories, make us laugh and connect with strangers on the street. They're the shirts that can evoke something deeper in us and make us think. Your shirt should mean something. If it's authentic your customers will wear it.

Fourth, make sure your shirts are retail quality. At Ink we define retail quality as:

QUALITY OF THE SHIRT + PRINT QUALITY X DESIGN IDEA (DESIGN CONCEPT)

Lastly, remember consistency is key. Consistency builds trust and reliability. I have my own favorite retail brands, but they didn't become my favorite overnight. The reliable quality of their clothes and customer service is what keeps me coming back each year. Consistency takes time, so don't be discouraged if you don't see change overnight. Keep offering top drawer t-shirts and your customers will come back to you!



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Caleb Harris

Creative & Marketing Director

Caleb joined Ink in 2012 after running his own clothing brand. He uses his 10+ years of experience in design, screen-printing, and marketing to help brands have more successful merchandise.



We help brands, groups, and events offer retail quality t-shirts that people want to wear by providing expert guidance, custom artwork, and quality prints.

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