

HOW UP-TO-DATE IS YOUR HEAT PRESS?

Ulrike André takes a closer look at the most sought after features in these units

If you've been heat printing for any length of time, you already know how much time and money you can save with this alternative to screen-printing or embroidery. You also know how easy it is to print just one item and still make a great profit. You've used your heat press to make samples for customers in order to secure a big sale, or to decorate hard to screen-print items such as nylon jackets, beach chairs or umbrellas.

Yes, you know that your heat press is a valuable piece of equipment and you're not quite sure how you lived without one for so long. But, now that you own a heat press, isn't there something about that press that you would like to change, or improve upon? Let's start with a little research into some of the features most people consider important in a heat press.

WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

At first glance, most heat presses appear to be relatively simple pieces of equipment. In general there are basically two main types from which to choose, a swinger type or a clamshell type. With the swinger type, the top platen of the press is designed to swing to the left or the right. Clamshell models, as the name suggests, open on an upward angle. The drawback to using a clamshell model is that sometimes your work surface below the platen can become hot, and people have been known to burn their knuckles while arranging graphics on garments underneath the hot upper platen.

The swing away model was invented to prevent this from happening. A few years ago, Stahls Hotronix introduced a

third style of press, the industry's first draw-type heat press. The draw press allows the user to pull the lower platen towards oneself and then push it back in for printing. This design innovation was recognised as a space-saving idea, since one of the drawbacks (no pun intended) of owning a swinger-style press is that you need more counter space.

Each style has its aficionados and as they say, you can get used to pretty much anything. But if you are using your heat press to print more than 15 shirts on a daily basis, you will soon discover that there is a wide range of design differences that can truly affect your productivity and enhance the user experience.

ACCURACY IN TIME, TEMPERATURE AND PRESSURE

In a survey of users, one of the most important features in a heat press is the ability to set the time and temperature automatically. Older heat presses that don't feature digital time and temperature controls not only offer less accuracy, but it is also cumbersome when you have to repeatedly manually reset the 'buzz' timer. Some presses don't even have timers if you can imagine that! All Stahls Hotronix heat presses feature digitally controlled time and temperature gauges and are known to be the most accurate and reliable in the world. In addition, some models feature the ability to identify the pressure setting at which the press is working. Time, temperature and pressure are the three variables that need to be under control in order to have successful heat printing results. The more advanced your press is at determining and controlling these variables, the more confident you can be when heat printing any type of garment or fabric.

So let's say that you are completely happy with the style of your press and also with the way that you can control the time, temperature and pressure, the three most

The Stahls Hotronix Fusion press is easy to use



The Hotronix Hover press from Stahls



The Fusion's features include a swing-away mode

important variables of heat printing. What else are you missing in your heat printing experience? Let's move on to what might be considered by some to be 'luxury' features—automatic opening and the ability to programme your press to remember the time and temperature requirements of your most often applied graphics.

LUXURY FEATURES

If your press has an 'auto-open' feature, you will be much less likely to burn or ruin garments because you weren't there to open the press after the end of the printing cycle. There are several Hotronix models that open automatically – the main advantage of this feature is that you can be preparing the next garment while another garment is printing. Production time is made more efficient and you can produce more shirts per hour. It is also just plain fun to see the press open on its own. Make sure to be on the lookout for easy exchangeable lower platens: this can be a huge aggravation in itself if one must have an assortment of tools handy just to change one heat platen for one another.

IMPORTANT FOR DIRECT-TO-GARMENT PRINTERS

In addition to automatic opening and the ability to programme settings, yet another 'luxury' feature is found in the Hotronix Hover Press. It is the only heat press available for curing direct-to-garment inks. If you own a direct-to-garment printer, this feature is something you should know about. The upper platen is designed to hover over the garment to ensure brighter colours and a stronger bond between ink and the garment. With this breakthrough technology, you never have to worry about direct-to-garment ink residue on your platen. It also has two modes, one for contact and the second for pressure. You can combine three settings of hover, pressure or a combination of both. If you don't use direct-to-garment technology, you can still use the hover press to apply just about any type of heat printing graphic.

THE NEXT LEVEL OF HEAT PRINTING

With all these improvements in heat printing technology, you may be starting to look at your ten-year-old press in a different light. Is it time to update your heat press? If you aren't convinced yet, perhaps the very latest in heat printing innovations from Stahls Hotronix, the Hotronix Fusion, will change your mind.

The new Stahls Hotronix Fusion is designed to make heat printing as goof-proof and easy as possible. This first-of-

kind machine can be used as a swing-away or a draw press. The press is designed to provide 360 degree access to the bottom platen, making it easier than ever before to slip on T-shirts, sweat shirts, and jackets. You no longer need a pad or pillow for bulky items or apparel with zippers or pockets. Just slide the item quickly and easily over the bottom platen. You can even turn the garment around while it is still on the press, for the fastest way ever to print both sides of the shirt.

Another unique 'luxury' feature on the Fusion is touch-screen technology. On its display you can digitally set the time, temperature, and pressure with your fingertip. It has dual time settings for two-step applications, pre-set programs, and an energy-saving four-hour sleep mode. The

press will even 'talk' to you taking you through each step of the programming if you so desire, and can be programmed in eight languages.

Whether your business is completely dependent on heat printing or if you only do a small percentage of heat printing, you may find that having a press with the most modern features will save you time, money and aggravation. ■

Ulrike André is International Marketing Manager at Stahls International

Further information:

Stahls International, St Clair Shores, Michigan, USA
tel: +1 586 772 6161
email: ulrikeandre@StahlsInternational.com
web: www.StahlsInternational.com



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