

Screen Printer's Overhead Checklist

The 12 costs most shops forget when pricing jobs.

Know your real number before you quote.

Why this matters: Most screen printers only account for ink and shirts when quoting a job. But your real cost per print includes dozens of hidden expenses. Miss just a few and you're losing money on every order — even the ones that feel profitable.

✓ The 12 Overhead Costs Most Shops Miss

Use this checklist to audit your pricing. Check each box you're currently accounting for. Any unchecked box is money leaking from your margins.

1. 🏢 Facility Cost Per Print Hour

Your rent or mortgage doesn't stop when the press isn't running. Divide your monthly facility cost by your actual production hours — not calendar hours.

Formula: Monthly rent ÷ Monthly production hours = Facility cost/hour

Example: \$2,000/mo ÷ 160 hrs = \$12.50/hr you need to recover

2. ⚡ Utilities (Electric, Gas, Water)

Flash dryers, conveyor dryers, exposure units, compressors, washout booths — they all draw power. Most shops underestimate utility costs by 40-60%.

Tip: Check your electric bill in summer vs. winter. The difference is largely your production equipment.

3. 🧴 Screen Chemistry & Reclaiming

Emulsion, degreaser, reclaimers, haze remover, screen wash — these consumables add up fast. A single screen reclaim cycle costs \$1.50-\$3.00 when you factor in all chemicals.

4. 🖨️ Screen Replacement & Mesh

Screens don't last forever. Mesh tears, frames warp, tension drops. Budget for replacing 10-15% of your screen inventory annually.

5. 🛠️ Equipment Maintenance & Repair

Press maintenance, dryer belt replacement, compressor servicing, squeegee sharpening. If you're not budgeting for breakdowns, you're pretending they won't happen.

Rule of thumb: Set aside 3-5% of equipment value annually for maintenance.

6. 📦 Packaging & Shipping Supplies

Poly bags, tissue paper, boxes, tape, labels, shipping materials. Even if the customer picks up, you're spending time and materials on packaging.

7. 🚚 Delivery & Freight Costs

Gas, vehicle maintenance, delivery time, and blank garment shipping. Getting shirts TO your shop and finished orders TO the customer both cost money.

8. 🖨️ Software & Subscriptions

Art programs (Adobe), shop management (Printavo), accounting (QuickBooks), separations software — these monthly fees need to be spread across your jobs.

9. 📅 Administrative Time

Quoting, invoicing, ordering blanks, answering emails, proofing art, chasing approvals. If you spend 30% of your day NOT printing, that time still needs to be covered by your print pricing.

This is the big one. Most shop owners drastically undercount admin time. Track it for one week — you'll be surprised.

10. 🎨 Art & Pre-Press Time

Film output, screen exposure, registration setup, test prints, color matching. Even "print-ready" art needs prep work. Quote it or eat it.

11. 🛡️ Insurance & Licenses

General liability, workers' comp, business license, equipment insurance. These are real costs that need to live in your per-job pricing.

12. 🗑️ Waste & Misprints

Misprints happen. Shirts get stained in storage. Ink dries in the screen. Budget 2-5% waste factor on materials.

Don't forget: Test prints and setup shirts are waste too. A 6-color job might burn 3-4 shirts just getting dialed in.

Stop Guessing. Start Knowing.

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