

TEXTILE + DESIGN LAB

Case study number: 07/2011

Project Title: Digitally printed artwork for fashion

TDL Partner: Stolen Girlfriends Club

Contact: Carina Koehler

Website: www.stolengirlfriendsclub.com

Project Period: June 2011

Partner Profile: Stolen Girlfriends Club (SGC) is an edgy niche New Zealand fashion brand, marketed with refreshing counter-culture appeal. It was founded in 2005 by Dan Gosling, Luke Harwood and Marc Moore, a New Zealand based trio with no formal design training who, nevertheless, set out to make the clothes they couldn't find in the market. The company has grown to distribute nationwide and internationally, and is diversifying its range through new production technologies.

Strong shapes, different fabrics and unique styling feature strongly in Stolen Girlfriends Club's range. Prints play a very important role as unique tee shirt prints were the brand's signature identity. As the company expands its profile overseas and develops larger collections, yardage print is an increasingly important statement.

Carina Koehler of SGC's production team was responsible for co-ordinating the new printed fabric developments with the Textile and Design Lab.

Project background: Stolen Girlfriends Club staff heard about the TDL via an AUT staff member. The company is design and innovation oriented and it was felt that the TDL's technology and expertise would compliment the company's vision and ambitions.

Project Description: To develop and test a range of digitally printed strike-offs, which would be converted into prototype garments.

Project Methodology: The primary aim was to produce the initial strike-offs in a short time frame that would enable SGC to go straight into off-shore print production once the designs had been approved. The SGC art director and Carina met with TDL manager Peter Heslop to discuss the artwork, colour scheme, base fabrics, yields and fabric dimensions. Peter advised on the processes associated with digital printing and emphasised the need to colour match to specific base cloths. The SGC staff were taken through the lab so that each process could be explained in detail.

Stolen Girlfriends Club were impressed by the strike-offs produced at the TDL. This was their first experience of digital printing and their staff were interested to see the differences between digital and screen printing. Carina commented that most of the prints the TDL developed turned out well and they gave us a good idea of how their designs would look when they progressed to sampling. The quick turn around allowed SGC staff to make some minor changes to the artwork, which was then reprinted before being despatched to their off-shore printer.

Feedback: 'We got so much positive feedback since we started to develop our own yardage prints and we will definitely continue working with digitally printed fabrics', commented Carina. 'We would definitely work with the TDL again! It's great to get constructive suggestions and feedback from professionals. Our expertise is in the designing of the artworks but we don't know too

much about the printing process itself in terms of what works and what doesn't. That's when we really need the TDL staff's expertise to advise us on what printing technique will work best and what criteria we must consider when designing yardage prints in order to get the best results', she added.

Whilst the vast majority of SGC's designs printed well using the TDL's digital printer, one in particular failed to reach the company's expectations. The design consisted of very fine white lines on a navy blue background. The digital system does not allow for light colours to be printed onto dark pre dyed fabrics, hence the navy background had to be printed onto an undyed substrate. The nature of this design was not best suited to digital printing for two reasons: firstly, printing large areas of fabric with solid colour can result in 'banding', a series of horizontal lines across the piece, which mirror the path taken by the print heads as they traverse across the piece. Secondly, the fineness of the white lines, whilst visible on the screen, were barely visible after printing due to the inherent 'bleed' of the dye as it was applied to the material, which caused the thickness of the lines to significantly reduce. With a few design adjustments these issues were resolved in readiness for off-shore production. Through this developmental process, SGC were able to gain a better understanding about the limitations of the digital printing process.

Outcome: The TDL's ability to offer such quick turn around times saved SGC several weeks during the strike-off process. The TDL printed strike-offs were suitable for the overseas factory to reference and colour match enabling SGC to take the designs straight into sample length printing.

Insights: SGC staff were appreciative of being able to discuss and see the digital printing process first hand at the lab. The visit has also prompted SGC to consider working with the lab for the development of knitwear as well as digital printed fabrics.

Conclusion: Digital textile printing technology was identified by the TDL as having the potential to create value for the NZ fashion industry by supporting the development of more original textile print designs and supporting greater efficiency for sampling and refining design development. The Lonely Hearts Label case study is an excellent example of this process in action.

Images:



Image courtesy of Stolen Girlfriends Club