

KICK START YOUR T-SHIRT BUSINESS

**A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO STARTING
A T-SHIRT FACTORY FROM SCRATCH**

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First edition: June 2022

ISBN: 978-93-5659-613-9

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Published by: Self-published by Prasanta Sarkar

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Website: www.onlineclothingstudy.com

Printed by (POD): Mudranik Technologies Pvt. Ltd. Bengaluru

To
My father Adar Chandra Sarkar

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List of Abbreviations

4TOL	4 Thread Overlock
AMC	Annual Maintenance Contract
AQL	Acceptable Quality Level (Limit)
B2B	Business to Business
BOM	Bill of Materials
BPR	Business Project Report
CAD	Computer-aided Design
CAM	Computer-aided Manufacturing
CMT	Cut, Make, Trim
CPL	Cut Panel Laundry
DHU	Defects per Hundred Units
DPR	Daily Production Report
DTG	Direct to Garment (printing method)
DTM	Dyed to Match
EDP	Electronic Data Processing
ELS	Extra Long Staple
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
FIFO	First In, First Out
FOA	Feed off the Arm
FOB	Freight on Board
FPT	Fabric Performance Test
GPT	Garment Performance Test
GRN	Goods Receipt Note
GSM	Grams per Square Metre
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HOD	Head of the Department
HPS	Highest Point of Shoulder
HR	Human Resources
IE	Industrial Engineer
INR	Indian Rupee
IT	Information Technology
JD	Job Description
KPI	Key Performance Indicators

MIS	Management Information System
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NIFT	National Institute of Fashion Technology
NOC	No Objection Certificate
OB	Operation Breakdown (Operation Bulletin)
OCS	Online Clothing Study (Author's Blog)
OT	Over Time
PCD	Planned Cut Date
PLM	Product Lifecycle Management
PMS	Production Management System
PO	Purchase Order
POM	Points of Measurement
PP	Pre-production
PPC	Production Planning and Control
PPM	Pre-production Meeting
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Checker
RFID	Radio-frequency Identification
RFT	Right First Time
RMG	Readymade Garments
SAM	Standard Allowed Minutes
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SMS	Salesman Sample
SNLS	Single Needle Lockstitch
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SQC	Statistical Quality Control
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat
T&A	Time and Action (Calendar)
TOP	Top of Production
UBT	Underbed Trimmer
UOM	Units of Measurement
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USP	Unique Selling Proposition
WIP	Work in Progress

Introduction

It is a common perception that a t-shirt business refers to printing t-shirts and selling them through online and offline channels. Entrepreneurs sell custom printed t-shirts to go with the trend of customers sporting t-shirts having their design. This includes printing a company logo or brand name on the t-shirt. However, a t-shirt business involves much more than only doing custom print orders and selling to individuals or small groups.

From time to time, OCS readers and individuals wishing to start a t-shirt business kept enquiring about this book's release. Although I was a bit delayed in completing this book, now it is finally here for all the start-up enthusiasts. In this chapter, I have covered the following:

- The objective of drafting this book
- Intended readers of this book
- Why this book
- Different ways of starting a t-shirt business

This book will walk you through the preparation stages for starting a t-shirt business. Background knowledge is essential before you step into investing money in the new business for making t-shirts and other apparel items. If you are reading this book today, I am sure you are doing your preparation and gathering knowledge in all possible ways to know how you can start your business.

Whoever contacted me for preparing their t-shirt business plan or a project report for a new start-up, used to ask questions related to the background knowledge of apparel manufacturing processes. They were keen to learn about knitted fabrics and other raw materials, sewing machinery, and equipment requirements for other associated processes. Getting an idea about fabric sourcing destinations and material suppliers was also an area of interest. Additionally, they were looking to understand fabric quality and t-shirt quality. Their main concern areas were making superior quality t-shirts with available resources, managing hires for running the business and their wages, product costing and other key information and references.

1.1 Objectives of drafting this book

The objectives of authoring this book are including but are not limited to the following:

- To help newcomers get the right information for setting up a t-shirt business.
- To build a definitive guide on t-shirt manufacturing business set-up.
- To compile my experiences and knowledge for the benefit of readers.

Although in this book I have focused on t-shirt manufacturing, one can get the guideline for setting up a manufacturing plant for any kind of apparel product. In the last ten years, I have received numerous queries regarding starting a t-shirt manufacturing set-up (factory). This has made me feel the need for a definitive guide on t-shirt manufacturing. Till now, I have prepared more than ten project reports on t-shirt manufacturing plant set-up for newcomers. A sample project report for t-shirt business set-up is shown in Chapter 10.

Other than the project reports, I have also answered hundreds of questions on apparel business set-up and apparel manufacturing processes. I would say, though there is free access to knowledge available on the internet, there are missing pieces. One is a definitive guide for t-shirt manufacturing business set-up. A guide that can inspire the newcomers and show them the steps to start this business from scratch would be helpful to them.

The company I first joined was primarily a t-shirt manufacturer and exporter. I had spent two and half years in the plant that was manufacturing t-shirts for domestic brands and international brands (mostly for German buyers). I have been involved in the activities from the business project report preparation stage to machinery purchasing and finally factory set-up. Thus, having overseen every process in and out, I am quite aware of the entire business process. My responsibilities were not limited to the production floor, and I oversaw product development and sampling activities as well for t-shirt orders. I visited multiple t-shirt printing units, t-shirt embroidery units, and garment dyeing and washing plants to execute the t-shirt orders.

Later, I joined a management consulting firm based in Gurgaon, India. During my tenure there, I learned process improvement, quality

management, and lean manufacturing for apparel manufacturers. These led to an in-depth understanding of the techniques to improve the profitability of an apparel manufacturing business. While overseeing quality improvement projects with exporters, I understood that the chronic issues most garment factories face are making quality garments and reducing expenses in quality control.

Further, as I did process improvement and product improvement, I learned where the potential for improvement and cost-saving are hidden. This gave me an insight into how garment factories can increase their bottom line without hiring expensive consultants. I realized the importance of systems for running a factory. Though these are not part of this book, I would like to share my experience in the garment manufacturing sector.

In my current job, I have access to garment manufacturing factories. These include manufacturers of t-shirts and knitwear products.

The sole purpose of sharing my experience is to ensure you that I have added value to this book. The things you would need to know and the knowledge you are looking for will be covered in this book. If you aim to know how to set up a t-shirt business from scratch, I am sure that I will not disappoint you with the content of this book.

I was frequently asked questions related to the t-shirt business for starting a business and running the business in a better way. A couple of questions could be answered in short, but for most, I needed to spend a couple of hours.

Due to time constraints, I would be compelled to avoid answering certain questions which made me feel disheartened. Even for answering a short question, I would need to spend time and shift my mind for one or two minutes. I realized that the solution could be to compile a book that covers all information that one may need to start and manage a t-shirt manufacturing business. Hence, the result is this book.

I see a burning desire in a distinct number of individuals to start a clothing business. While they were exploring setting up a t-shirt business (specific item) on the Internet, they occasionally landed on my blog, and they read the related articles on my blog (and other blogs). Unable to think up a guideline on how they can start their business – they dropped an e-mail to me seeking suggestions, guidance, and more resource links.

Here I have shown seven of the emails that I received from the different parts of the world.

--- Email - 1 ---

Good evening, Prasanta,

My name is Flavio, and I am looking to start my clothing brand which would include everyday wear like T-shirts, Sweaters, sweatpants, etc. I am 22 and a recent college graduate in NJ. I have always been a highly motivated individual with a passion for having my own business.

For the past couple of months, I have been creating a logo and a brand for my business. I have been testing my logo on certain articles of clothing to see some designs that I would like. I realized that I cannot just print and put a logo on regular blank T-Shirts from other companies like Gildan, Hanes, etc. and expect to be something out of that. I have been looking to see the process of how to manufacture my clothing and apply my tags on the clothes so they can represent me.

I came across your article, "Step by Step Guide to T-Shirt manufacturing for Business" and am interested in such a process. If you can provide me with and guide me to the right steps on how to start off by manufacturing my own articles of clothing, I would appreciate it.

I would like to know the process of having shirts and sweaters that have my own private tag on them. I really look forward to hearing from you and I thank you for taking your time to look at this email.

Thank you / Flavio

--- Email - 2 ---

Dear Sir,

Hope you are doing well.

I am a student of OCS.

I want to start a t-shirt business and want to make one small factory with two lines.

This is my first step and mail to you to help me achieve this. Please suggest what would be the minimum square feet requirement in a building to establish a t-shirt factory with two lines only. Also, will it be profitable if I start with two lines only as I need to invest?

Thanks

Sekhar (Name changed)

--- Email - 3 ---

Dear Prasanta Sir,

I have been reading your articles and posts for over a week and I find them extremely helpful and informative. I am honestly glad that I came across Online Clothing Study. With the amount of knowledge that I have gained from just reading your posts and articles, it wouldn't have been practically possible for me to get it anywhere else. Consequently, writing a book on the topic of T-shirt manufacturing is going to be immensely helpful to those who are planning to set up a manufacturing unit or start a clothing brand.

I haven't received any formal education in clothing, Fashion, Textile or Manufacturing. On the contrary, I have a master's degree in Entrepreneurship from London. Though I have a family business of trading readymade garments which has motivated me to start a clothing brand. However, it gets really daunting for me to think about how I am going to do it.

As your work clearly shows that you have extensive knowledge about the clothing industry, I would also suggest you write a book on how to start a clothing brand for those who want to start their own line of products but do not have a professional or formal education from the university like that of Textile engineers or Fashion designers. I am content with the qualification and the level of education I have received but then I also regret or wish (to be more precise) to at least have acquired the fundamental knowledge about Fashion designing and understanding textile and what not. However, I know that I can't be an expert at everything. That is why they aptly say, "Jack of all trades but master of none".

Sir, I would humbly request you to write such a book that will consist of all the major topics right from the basics of what fibre and yarn are to designing of styles and things to consider while Fabric sourcing to the Manufacturing process and all the way till apparel merchandising and selling. In my opinion, if you create such a book, it would be immensely helpful for people just like me. Also, I am at a stage of my project, where finding a good CMT Manufacturer who follows all the SOP is difficult as all of them ask me to put a very high MOQ. At this point, since I am only starting off, I can't chuck in a huge amount of capital as an investment and don't want to find myself tied up in too much inventory.

Can you please suggest to me a handful of manufacturers for woven and knitted garments who could agree to produce 0-25 pieces per style? Since I am planning to launch 8-10 styles in T-shirts and 5-7 styles in Shirts do you think that it is enough in your opinion? I would highly appreciate your suggestion and views if you can guide me on how to balance all that.

I hope that you will take my concerns and suggestions into consideration. I truly hope that you will also help me so that I can smoothly launch my clothing line. Thank you in anticipation of your best cooperation.

Kindest Regards,
Mohammad Amir
Allahabad, India

--- Email-4 ---

Good day Prasanta,

My name is Sammy. I trust you are keeping well amidst the current global madness.

Firstly, I want to thank you for the awesome website 'online clothing study'. I am starting my own t-shirt brand, and because it will be my first business, I'm researching extensively. Your articles have been very helpful.

I'm hoping you can advise me on something. I want to use 100% Pima/Supima cotton for my t-shirts. I'm wanting to produce a pure quality t-shirt. Would you suggest I use a single jersey or interlock? 180gsm?

I live in South Africa and it's impossible to find Pima cotton here, so I'm having to import. I will be manufacturing the t-shirts locally though as I'd like to develop a local lady's CMT.

I appreciate any help you can offer.

Warmest regards,
Sammy

--- Email-5 ---

Good day, sir.

I am by name Aaron from Nigeria. Thank you for the good thing you are doing on your website. I am an aspiring entrepreneur. Writing a business plan for starting a clothing line. Please suggest what type of machine I need for making t-shirts using cotton or polyester fabric?

Thank you, sir

Aaron

--- Email-6 ---

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your quick reply. Regarding the t-shirt/polo t-shirt manufacturing, I am mostly looking for ways to estimate the capacity of our workshop. For this, I try to figure out how long it would take to sew one such garment. As a newcomer to the garment industry, I lack the experience to do this kind of estimation. On your website, I checked the breakdown of operation and the SAM/SMV for the sewing process but as we will start as a very small workshop, we probably have much lower productivity. So far, we plan to start with only 5 people. We would develop two to three standard patterns and then produce these styles. I thought of one staff in the warehouse and cutting room, three staff on the sewing floor and one manager for pattern making, sampling, QC etc. I calculate with 22 working days a month and 8-hour per day.

If we assume three people on the sewing floor this equals to 528 hours/month of sewing time. We would use second-hand industrial machines and work with a staff that has medium qualifications. I don't know yet how to structure the work (still studying the operation breakdown), thinking of maybe applying the single-piece flow method. So currently I try to estimate a (conservative) number of pcs. (t-shirt or polo t-shirt) that could be produced per month?

If you would have any literature regarding this capacity planning or reference values from your own experience, I would be very thankful!
Thank you,
Suman (Name changed)

--- Email-7 ---

Hi Prasanta,

I read the articles and your replies on Fabric/T-shirt manufacturing. I am an IT professional, but I want to start my own T-shirt manufacturing business.

Will you please guide me? How to take this up and what will be the starting steps.

I contacted a few retailers here in the local market of Indore, but they are not agreeing to buy as they said put your t-shirts and if they get to sell then get the amount back.

I am not having a heavy amount of money to invest about 50 thousand. Please suggest and share guidance.

Thank you,
Vikas (Name changed)

What do you feel after reading these emails from passionate individuals who dream to know about t-shirt manufacturing and start their entrepreneurial journey in making t-shirts?

I would say- inspiring! These emails inspired me to write this book. And you are reading it now.

1.2 Intended readers of this book

This book is for all who are seeking information on the t-shirt manufacturing business and are interested in setting up a garment manufacturing unit.

Information is required to understand the apparel business, production environment, materials, and the whole apparel supply chain. Most of the necessary information is available in a scattered way on the Internet. For a newcomer, it is a daunting task to understand which

subjects one needs to learn to accomplish the business set-up goal and run the t-shirt business in a challenging environment. Secondly, it is difficult for them to know the name of the right sources (website names) for the necessary and accurate information to learn apparel business processes. Thus, it is best to refer to a book that covers all the necessary information, guidelines, and steps for setting up a t-shirt manufacturing business. I will cover these in the thirteen different chapters compiled in this book.

Everyone might not get enough time for reading books in between hectic schedules. For one with a well-established business, reading a business set-up book would not be the right choice, but they should utilize time and money in productive work. One who has adequate funds for hiring a team and running the business by his/ her team would not need to read this book. On hiring the right team with the required knowledge, the team will do the business set-up. They will prepare your business plan, identify the right location for your factory, and select the right mix of machinery and equipment. They will bring buyers and take care of business development and run the business. Even hiring a team in the new field is not an easy task – for this, you can avail the services of a job consulting firm. You can use your money to materialize your dream. There is another group of businesspersons, who have more money than the first group. They can skip the process of hiring a team and setting up a new factory. They can buy an existing garment manufacturing company (factory) wherein all the existing managers, staff, and workers can be utilized for running the factory.

An individual who is currently doing a 9 to 5 service job but wants to start a t-shirt business will try to understand the business and prepare extensively before hiring any consultant or an expert for a business set-up. He/ she will be spending time reading related books and articles and surfing the Internet to get free services for business needs.

I can only share the ideas and knowledge that I have learned and observed in the last ten years for making t-shirts. You need to do the challenging work to fulfil your dream of setting up a garment business and growing the business every year. You need to be organized and committed to your plans. Develop a long-term goal and break it into short-term plans. You could also take suggestions and get a mentor for controlling your business.

Different individuals have various levels of urgency for establishing the t-shirt manufacturing business. For someone, it takes a

longer time for making decisions while others are fast in decision making and starting the work. You need to note that – do not wait till all the information is gathered – there is no end to learning things you need to know for starting and running a business. Do not think that you need to learn all the things before you start a business. Start acting right now for setting up your business and start working on your project when you have the minimum required knowledge. When you step into your project, you will learn many things as you progress.

Once you have the first set-up ready, you can gradually scale up your manufacturing business. After a year or two, you will have a team built to work and assist you to achieve the business goals. You can also diversify your business and product range. You could compete with the existing players in the same segment or build up your business in a unique t-shirt niche. There are many opportunities open once you complete setting up your first t-shirt manufacturing business.

1.3 Why this book?

I have broad exposure to the process of making thousands of t-shirts when I was working in the garment manufacturing factory. I have visited more than fifty garment factories where I carried out improvement projects for international quality t-shirts and exported them to western countries.

I have experienced the real-life problems a t-shirt factory faces in the internal processes, and challenges in dealing with buyers and vendors. I have dealt with different fabrics, and various value-added processes like t-shirt printing, t-shirt embroidery, t-shirt washing, and t-shirt dyeing. Apart from these, I also set up a t-shirt factory where we started our work by making kid's and teens' t-shirts for brands like United Colours of Benetton.

When you are becoming an entrepreneur, you need to consider the industrial production perspective. Simply buying a couple of sewing machines and stitching t-shirts is not the real garment business set-up. I have worked in the industrial engineering background and have also written a book on industrial engineering subject for apparel manufacturing. You can refer to that book for more information.

This guidebook will show you step by step process for setting up your dream business. You will learn all the preparation steps and

information needed before you do invest in the business. You will get to know some of the FAQs on t-shirt business setup and their answers.

In this book, you will get guides and suggestions on running your t-shirt business in a better way after the business setup.

1.4 Different formats of t-shirt business

Starting a t-shirt business has different interpretations by different individuals. In the entire t-shirt supply chain, from the t-shirt designing stage to selling the t-shirt to the end consumers, in whichever stage you do business is a t-shirt business.

You can start manufacturing t-shirts for a domestic brand or international buyers. This implies that you set up a t-shirt making factory by purchasing all required machines and equipment, hiring staff and workers (sewing operators and other workers), purchasing raw materials and finally manufacture ready-to-wear t-shirts. Here, you make t-shirts for other brands.

You can also start your label of t-shirts and sell them to retailers and/or on e-commerce platforms. In this case, you will own a brand (or label) and make t-shirts for your brand. You can set up a production factory for this or you can outsource t-shirts for your designs.

You can choose to purchase ready-made t-shirts and resell them through online stores or in a brick-and-mortar store. In this kind of business, you are not manufacturing any t-shirts as the ready-made t-shirts are bought from wholesalers or t-shirt manufacturers. Thus, you do not need to set up a factory.

You can do custom printing of t-shirts based on the orders as and when placed. It is required to keep ready stock of blank t-shirts. This is for those who would like to run a business without a team or with a minimum number of people. You can also open an e-commerce website for selling custom printed t-shirts. For this business, buy blank t-shirts in various base colours, then take orders for individual t-shirts from your website, print the custom design (as per order) and finally deliver it to the customer.

You can become a trader, or you can become a wholesaler for t-shirts. In this business, a trader/wholesaler buys t-shirts from manufacturers and distributes t-shirts to retailers in different regions.

Coming to the investment requirement and machinery types, you can make standard quality t-shirts using only three types of sewing

machines, and one steam press. T-shirt manufacturing set-up requires low investment in machinery and factory set-up as compared to manufacturing other apparel items.

Warning and terms of use of this book

This book is written to guide those who want to start a t-shirt manufacturing business. Whether you make your own label, you work for international brands or domestic retailers - that does not matter.

In case your main goal is setting up your t-shirt brand, getting growth in sales, and brand building, this book will not fulfil that. This book would not cover subjects related to building a t-shirt brand and getting more customers. There are many books available on how to get business and marketing strategies for t-shirts and apparel products.

However, I am sure that up to manufacturing t-shirts you can utilize my knowledge from this book. It covers business development strategies from a t-shirt manufacturing business perspective.