Button Hacks II: Using Photos and Fabric

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As I wrote in my post from 8 May, I love finding ways to expand the crafting possibilities of my button machines. The buttons make great embellishments for many of my projects, and I especially like using them to make Christmas ornaments.



Button machines are engineered for use with light-to medium-weight paper (roughly 16 to 24 lb). Within this range, you have a lot of sources for images for your button making: printed gift wrap, magazine and calendar images, sheet music, comic book pages, rubber stamped images, or your own designs and drawings.



Back when I first began button making, I didn't have a good printer, so I made collages using small images and text cut from magazines and flyers. (Though I now usually print my button designs on a laser or inkjet printer, I still like the look of these collaged versions.)

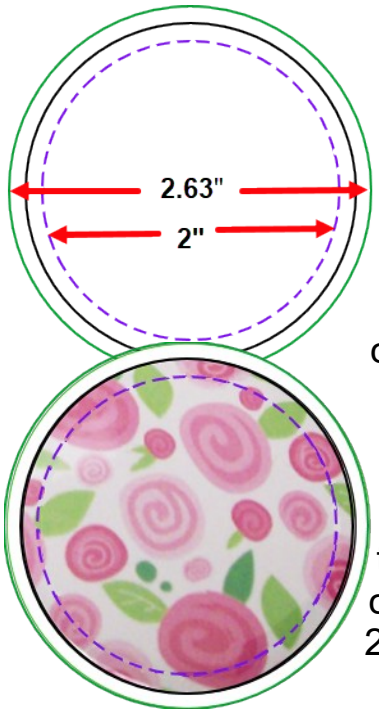


Sooner or later, you may be tempted to expand your button making using scrapbooking paper, printed photos, or greeting cards. These can be pretty, but unfortunately, they are too thick. (Paper that is too thick is one of the most common causes of button failure.) At best, the heavier materials will interfere with the machine's operation and prevent the mylar from wrapping smoothly, giving the edges of your button a jagged, untucked look. The poorly-formed button may even fall apart in your hand.



Worst of all, stiffer materials like these can jam or even permanently damage your machine, especially if you have one of the plastic brands so popular nowadays.

Luckily, there is a simple way to avoid these issues and still use photo paper, Christmas cards, or stiff scrapbooking paper images on your buttons. Once you know the trick, it will even seem an obvious solution. But first, you'll need to know a little button anatomy.



The cut size of the design paper is larger than the finished button, to allow enough paper to wrap and tuck around the outer edge when the button is assembled. (For a 2.25" button, the paper is cut to 2.63" diameter – the green circle on my diagram).

The display area – the portion that shows on the front of the finished button – is just under 2". The additional paper wraps around the edge, and the portion outside the black circle is crimped and tucked beneath the button back, so isn't visible on the finished button.

Thus, everything outside the purple dashed circle needs to be light enough to crimp and fold neatly: 24 lb weight or lighter.



However – and here's the significant part – the 2" centre area does not get crimped, and remains flat. Thus, slightly stiffer material can be used for the front of the button so long as it is cut smaller than 2".

(I use paper punches to cut my centre images to various sizes, depending on the look I want.



These smaller circles are backed with a 2.63" circle circle cut from lighter paper such as gift wrap, magazine pages, or printer paper.





A touch of glue stick holds the centre image in place while the button is pressed.

This method allows you to use your pretty card stock or greeting card images on your buttons, without fear of jamming or damaging your machine, and it works on all brands and styles of button makers.

Note: the measurements I've given are for a 2.25" size button, but you can adapt this same method for other button sizes, so long as the centre image is cut slightly smaller than the nominal size of the finished button.

For the CN Marine button, I cut my design centre to 2”, then placed it on a lighter blue backing. This leaves a narrow contrasting border around the central image.



This kitten in a teacup came from a greeting card, and the lupins from a calendar. Once again, I cut the images to 2” and backed them with comple-mentary printer paper, which is the part that gets crimped when the button is button is pressed in the machine.

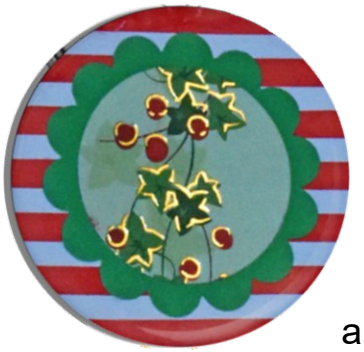


Cutting the image a little smaller – 1.5” or 1.75” – allows you to vary the look of the finished button. The smaller cut size leaves a wider border, so you can make a feature of the background paper. You can also add an accent border by cutting a slightly larger circle of light-weight paper before gluing the whole thing to the back-ground circle, as shown on these penny and holly buttons. On these, I have used gold foil and black paper to border the images.



If you have one, you might try using a scallop circle punch to make the accent border, as I did on these final samples. The grey mottled border on the chickadee button is actually the inside surface of a business envelope, while the striped background on my holly button is made from wrapping paper.





You can use this technique with any button maker, including Badge-a-Minit and those inexpensive plastic machines now on the market. As long as you keep your centre images sufficiently smaller than the design cut size (about 2” for a 2.25” button) and choose lighter weight paper for the background, you can suc-cessfully use heavier stock (from 60lb to 110lb) to make buttons. And with the addition of accent borders, you might just find that they are among your most favourite button creations.