



British Promotional  
Merchandise Association Ltd

## SOURCING MERCHANDISE

Merchandise is a fundamental part of many promotional campaigns. The campaign can stand or fall not only on the quality of the merchandise, but also the working practices, standards and professionalism of the supplier.

A quality brand should only be supported by quality merchandise; to use inferior products would debase the brand. However, the quality of service is of equal importance – no matter how innovative the product, if it's delivered the day after the campaign breaks – it's too late! If the colour is not quite right – it's actually wrong! And if the merchandise is faulty – it's a disaster!

If the colour, size, delivery and cost are all fine, but it later emerges that your natty gadget was manufactured in unethical or environmentally hazardous conditions – it can be a catastrophe!

Many major brands have lost face and credibility by not looking beyond the product to satisfy themselves that the company producing that product, and indeed their suppliers, are honest, decent and trustworthy as well as being capable of supplying the merchandise in question.

Think creatively – don't be satisfied with another 'me too' product. For a campaign to succeed it needs to generate interest but you don't have to re-create the wheel. A standard product can be presented in a fresh way – a mug that changes colour to reveal a logo is much more exciting than a standard vessel.

### SIZE MATTERS!

Choose a supplier who is used to dealing in the quantities that you demand. If it's a larger order than they are used to, they might struggle. If the order is too small, it might not rate significantly on the importance scale.

For large orders, production samples are a must. Mock-ups leave too much room for error. And don't forget to allow time for everyone involved to approve the sample. If it's a licensed product, this can be protracted.

Preparing a full brief for the supplier is one of the fundamental steps in sourcing merchandise. Although they are crucial factors, the brief needs to go beyond price, size and colour. Consider also:

- Safety & Legislation

For example, if the object is for use by children then there are safety implications. If the merchandise is to be used outside the UK, then the regulations and legislation of relevant countries must be understood and adhered to.



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- **Timing**

Lead times need to be clearly stated. A production schedule, allowing for the production and signing off of production samples, should be agreed in writing.

- **Delivery**

Having agreed delivery dates, delivery address(es) need to be clearly stated. There can be considerable variances in costs between a one-drop delivery and a multi-address requirement.

- **Packaging**

Details of packaging, packing, cartons and pallets are important facts. Your delivery point may not be capable of accepting pallets.

The brief complete, other important factors are:

- **Finances**

If you don't already have an account with the supplier, discuss with your own finance dept. who should carry out the necessary credit checks. Also, make sure you get a quote for the job as estimates are not binding.

- **Ethical and Environmental practices**

Be prepared to ask some searching questions of your supplier. Brand images can be easily damaged by stories of unethical working practices or environmental hazards. For a large project, a personal visit to the factory or an appraisal by an independent agency is vital when using new suppliers. Before you get that far, you can ask the manufacturer for a reference from a notable satisfied customer – and then check it out!

- **Communications**

All communications should be made and confirmed in writing. Print and file all emails and faxes. Confirm all telephone conversations in writing, so nothing is left to chance.

- **Terms and conditions**

Agree who's terms and conditions you are working to and don't assume it's yours. If it's your suppliers, obtain and studiously read them. It's tedious work, but it is essential that they are understood and agreed.

(NOTE: all BPMA members must supply trade references and a suitable financial history before they can join. During their membership, they must adhere to a strict code of conduct ensuring that their practices are legal, decent and honest.)