



## Solutions for a Sustainable Supply Chain



### Promotional Products

Apparel and textile items, gift baskets, food and beverage, drinkware, totes, swag

### What's in this Factsheet?

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### Top Tips for more Sustainable Promotional Products

1. Less is more: buy fewer, higher-quality items that reflect your values.
2. Reusable, practical items such as umbrellas, outdoor gear and t-shirts are kept longer on average than other items.
3. Be creative with the design. Branding your promo products thoughtfully can make a huge difference to how the product is used.
4. Leverage promo items to create sustainable behavior change by choosing reusable / zero waste items made from sustainable materials.
5. Reach out to local, indigenous and minority owned companies to see if their products can be branded, to create meaningful campaigns with a great story.

### The Problem: Impacts of Promotional Products

- **Resource Consumption.** The global promo products industry is valued at over \$20 billion and continues to grow. Promo items are often bought in high volumes and tend to be low cost and low-quality from unsustainable manufacturing practices.
- **Limited Transparency.** Typical swag items frequently have untraceable supply chains, with little to no assurances against unethical labor practice and very limited options for sustainable materials.
- **Excessive Waste.** On average, most promotional products are discarded within a year. Many poor-quality promo products are difficult to reuse or recycle and hence, end up being landfilled.

#### Did you know?

*58% of Canadian consumers have a more favorable opinion of the advertiser if the product they received was Eco-friendly. 51% if the product was made responsibly.*

### Before you Buy:

- Consider the need for your purchase and whether there may be an alternative to fulfill this need. Could you opt for a digital gift, an experience or gift card instead?
- Check current inventory / surplus and consider if you've used current products to the end of their useful life.
- Right-size your order to the minimum amount necessary.

### Lifecycle Approach:

Always think about how you can reduce impacts across a product's whole lifecycle, ask yourself:

- How was this product made?
- How will this product be used?
- How will this product be disposed?

## Criteria for Sustainable Apparel and Textiles

Clothing accounts for 1/3rd of all promotional products, and the apparel industry is one of the most resource intensive, unethical, and polluting industries in the world. Brandable sustainable textiles have become more accessible in recent years. In particular, there are great options available for t-shirts, hoodies, baseball caps, blankets and tote bags. Look for the following features for more sustainable choices:

- **Organic & Natural Materials.** Look for apparel made from organic cotton, hemp and rayon (TENCEL) that are dyed with natural, non-toxic colorants. Avoid conventional cotton, which contributes to harmful farming procedures and is often linked to forced labour practices.
- **rPET and PFC-Free.** Look for materials with 60% or more recycled content (rPET). For outerwear and waterproof items, look for PFC-free items. PFC, or Perfluorinated carbon, is used in durable water repellent (DWR) and has been linked to environmental and health issues.
- **Ethical and Fair Labour Practices.** See if vendors have their own Supplier Code of Conduct and/or are aligned with standards such as: International Labour Organization, Fair Labour Organization, Sedex, BCSI, Fair Trade Certified, PPAI Code of Conduct, or QC Alliance.
- **Environmentally friendly decoration:** Unlike with hard goods, apparel items are commonly sold blank and decorated third party. Ask to decorate locally or with a union printer and look for options for water-based inks, patches & embroidery with recycled or organic threads.
- **Opportunities to re-use.** Look for ways to reuse or update apparel before buying new. For example, avoid branding product with dates so they can be used for multiple events, or use patches and stickers to update apparel items for events. Look for companies with textile recycle programs for selling upcycled products.

## Criteria for Sustainable Food & Beverage

Food and beverage items make for fantastic promotional products and effective sustainable alternatives to throw-away swag at events, tradeshows or as gifts. Some considerations include:

- **Buy local.** Opt for gift baskets or food products which are either grown or assembled locally.
- **Minimal Packaging.** Look for food items with recyclable, compostable or minimal packaging. Provide instructions for how to recycle or facilitate recycling packaging where possible.
- **Check for eco-labels.** Look out for the eco-labels listed in the table below. For food and beverage, Fair Trade, Certified Organic and Rainforest Alliance are commonplace.
- **Shelf-life.** Consider non-perishable products with a long-shelf life to prevent food waste.

## Criteria for Other Sustainable Gifts & Giveaways

Promotional gifts & giveaways include speaker gifts, holiday gifting, event swag and branded merchandise. Traditionally, we tend to think of low cost, mass produced hardgoods which aren't built to last. Increasingly there is a trend towards consuming less and people are finding more sustainable approaches to swag. Look for the following features for more sustainable choices:

- **Sustainable Materials.** Look for products made from natural or recycled materials. For drinkware, look for items made of stainless steel or BPA-free plastic to ensure they are safe for drinking purposes.
- **Social Value.** Look for products with giveback schemes or that support organizations and non-profits in-line with TRU's values (i.e. B-Corp certification or 1% for the planet).
- **Local & Creative Alternatives.** Shop locally and look out for unconventional swag options that tell a great story.
- **Digital Gifts & Experiences.** Opt for non-physical gifts such as gift cards, experiential gifts (tickets to plays, concerts, games), and charitable contributions wherever is possible.
- **Reuse where possible.** Leverage swag across multiple campaigns to reduce waste.
- **Encourage Sustainable Behavior.** Think about products that encourage sustainable behavior change, like zero waste items such as grocery totes, coffee tumblers, food wraps etc.
- **Watch out for greenwashing!** Many products that claim to be 'eco' have minimal recycled or natural material content, look for certifications or products with over 60% rPET content. Likewise, many 'eco' products are not recyclable, make sure you check.

### Don't Forget about Packaging!



*Most promotional hard goods come wrapped in plastic by default. Try asking for eco-friendly packaging where possible.*





*TIP: If you operate a soft-plastic recycling scheme, recycle any plastic packaging before distributing, or providing a soft-plastics bin at your event.*

## Eco-labels & Certifications

A lot of promotional gifts & items don't have an eco-label to signify their sustainability, but here are a few to look for. For a complete listing of relevant eco-labels, refer to the Ecolabel Index at:

<http://www.ecolabelindex.com>.

The Logo	Description
	<p><b><u>Forest Stewardship Council</u></b></p> <p>Guarantees that the wood, paper and packaging products you purchase come from responsibly managed forests and verified recycled sources. Look out for FSC certification on stationary and wooden tech and swag products.</p>
	<p><b><u>Fair Trade</u></b></p> <p>Ensures that producers receive a fair wage and work in a safe environment by setting international Fairtrade standards and supporting Fairtrade producers. Within promotional products, look out for Fair Trade certification in Food and Beverage items. There are now some Fair Trade textile options available for basic apparel items.</p>

The Logo	Description
	<p><b><u><a href="#">ECOLOGO Certification Program</a></u></b></p> <p>Certifies environmental leaders in numerous product and service categories and represents a Type 1 ecolabel under the internationally recognized ISO 14024 requirements. ECOLOGO Certifications are voluntary, multi-attribute, life cycle-based environmental certifications that indicate a product has undergone rigorous scientific testing and exhaustive auditing to prove its compliance with stringent, third-party environmental standards.</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="#">Global Organic Textile Standard</a></u></b></p> <p>GOTS certified is an increasingly common organic textiles standard that ensures compliance from harvesting of the raw materials, environmentally and socially responsible manufacturing to labelling.</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="#">Organic Certification</a></u> and <u><a href="#">Rainforest Alliance</a></u></b></p> <p>Most organic certifications require products to be made of at least 95% organically produced ingredients. Rainforest Alliance Certified products must meet strict environmental, social and economic standards, focusing on protecting forests, the climate &amp; human rights. Look for a reputable organic certification or Rainforest alliance certification for food and beverages items.</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="#">Oeko-Tex – Standard 100</a></u></b></p> <p>An independent textile testing institute for conventional textiles which ensures products do not contain allergenic dyes or colouring agents, are tested for pesticides and chlorinated phenols, and have been tested for heavy metals and formaldehyde.</p>
	<p><b><u><a href="#">QC Alliance</a></u></b></p> <p>Quality Certification Alliance (QCA) is an independent, not-for-profit accreditation working specifically within the promotional products industry. They focus on quality, product safety &amp; social compliance. Certified members are required to undergo site audits and have a factory compliance and product quality framework in place. You're more likely to see this at a supplier level, rather than individual products.</p>