

MERCH MAGAZINE

from the
bpma
British
Promotional
Merchandise
Association

JULY/AUGUST 2026



PEOPLE POWERED

*Why the human factor still matters
in promotional merchandise* PAGE 16

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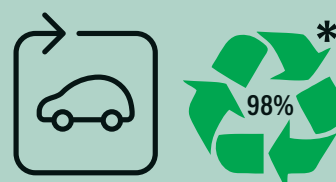
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WELCOME

The recent BPMA Conference (p4) provided a stimulating platform for the merch sector to come together and kick about some of the most important issues affecting it.

AI, sustainability, wellbeing, supplier-distributor relations, and encouraging innovation were some of the topics in the air at the salubrious setting in rural Northamptonshire.

If there is one link to all of these, it is that they are all about people – something that we have taken as a theme for this issue of *Merch Magazine*.

It is often said that this is a social industry. People value their contacts and like meeting them in the flesh. It was one reason why the pandemic had such a flattening effect on it.

Happily, those days are over, and the sector is in rude health – possibly better than previously imagined. BPMA CEO Phil Goodman revealed that new research by its partners put the value of the UK promotional merchandise supply chain at £4.7 billion, supporting 68,000 jobs.

Outside of our sector, that's a fact that few will be aware of, but it highlights the importance of making more noise about what we do. To that end, US trade association, the PPAA is launching a global advertising campaign that will promote the value of merch in the marketing mix, raising its prominence.

It's a move that dovetails nicely with BPMA efforts to do the same in the UK. This month sees the first fruits of partnership with Made

in Britain which sees them herald the value of working with homegrown manufacturers.

This will develop further to promote the creativity of the UK merch sector through this year's BPMA Design Challenge, which has Made in Britain on board for the judging process and an emphasis on what we can make here.

Creativity was a subject that also provided one of the most engaging sessions at this year's conference. The keynote from Fredrik Haren enthused the audience with the message that we can all be creative, and that practical – and profitable – creativity can come from being just a little different from your competitors.

That's a message we can all get behind.



JULY/AUGUST 2026



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Merch Magazine is available to the whole promotional merchandise industry. It is the official magazine of the British Promotional Merchandise Association (BPMA).



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Advertising and Media Pack
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Editorial Services
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Design and Production
ATG Media,
www.atg-media.com
Photography
shutterstock.com,
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THE NEXT LEVEL

This year's BPMA conference was a platform to discuss technology, creativity, people, and the future for merch

The 2026 BPMA Conference mixed things up in more ways than one.

A new venue, the elegant Northamptonshire Fawsley Hall played host, offering a chance for delegates to enjoy stunning views of the rolling countryside.

But they weren't just along for the views. The BPMA team had devised a thought-provoking and interactive day that provided plenty of food for thought, as well as rather nice actual food, and opportunities aplenty for networking and sharing industry insight and scuttlebutt.

Welcoming attendees, BPMA chair Clive Allcott advised them to get the maximum out of a packed day.

BPMA CEO Phil Goodman outlined the Association's achievements over the past 18 months, including a complete rebrand, celebrating 60 years of the BPMA and the merch industry, CPD accreditation for the education programme, new talent recognition awards, a perks scheme BPMA Xtra, consumer and industry research, international outreach, a regional Ambassador programme, and much more.

RAISE THE BAR

The year ahead will see further initiatives, he promised, with a view to raising the status of merchandise as a strategic partner in the marketing mix.

New research has revealed that the

overall contribution of the promotional merchandise supply chain to the UK GDP is higher than previously thought at around £4.7bn. Furthermore, merch supports 68,000 jobs.

"It's based on a global impact study to establish the true value of our industry. It's a phenomenal piece of work that we could not have achieved without the help of our partners, the PPAI," he said.

Goodman highlighted the growing importance of such global alliances as the PPAI, and the EAC, which resulted in the recent International Leaders Summit where a strong BPMA-led UK contingent shared insights and discussed the way ahead for the industry (see p32).



A year of progress



Fawsley Hall hosted

UNDERSTANDING GEN Z

Gen Z are entitled, take too many sick days, have no resilience, and don't know how to dress for work (onesies are not considered too out there apparently).

This was the opinion of an engaged audience for leadership consultant David Haylor who asked delegates to give their thoughts on an apparently much maligned group.

However, according to the military officer turned performance coach, the attitudes of Gen Z are an understandable response to a work environment that is increasingly hostile and where it is not at all obvious what is in it for them.

"They don't know what career paths will be open to them – youth unemployment is 16% – so it's not surprising that they want to grab what they can while they still can. It's not 'entitled', it's rational."

The changes in technology that conference had heard about, combined with the fallout from Covid and an increasingly volatile world economically and politically, means Gen Z is less likely to bet the farm on having the kind of life that previous generations took for granted. Working hard and doing the right thing can look like a trap when nobody can predict what the next three years will look like, let alone the next 10.

"Everything is moving very quickly and our systems have been stressed by these changes. A group of people had to sit in a room for two years during Covid – that will decrease the level of psychological confidence, communication ability, and stability anybody has," said Haylor. "I coach people who are in their fifties and sixties who are still trying to regain their confidence."

The good news is that the skills that businesses and individuals need can be



Help build skills of Gen Z, said Haylor

taught. Forward-thinking companies are investing in training their younger people in the abilities that they have missed out on developing, such as walking into a room and talking to people, or pitching to them.

When combined with an open company culture that welcomes input, the benefits of diversity allow anyone to come up with ideas that deliver growth.

That isn't just theoretical. Haylor told of a 14-year-old FT intern who suggested to the big boss that the brand wasn't doing enough to engage with the next generation. They loved the content, but couldn't afford the subscription.

The result was more proactive engagement with schools and universities to build a pipeline of customers for the future. Because yesterday's member of Gen Z is tomorrow's business leader.



A chance to engage with colleagues

Early fruit of this link will be a global marketing campaign later in the summer.

“We are moving from an industry that puts logos on things to being a strategic marketing partner,” said Goodman.

Following the success of last year’s Dragons’ Den design challenge, Goodman was able to announce that 2026 would see a new version that puts the focus on British manufacturing.

BRITISH MERCH

A partnership with the Made in Britain organisation has seen it introduce a specific category for promotional merchandise, and this closer relationship will see Made in Britain judge the best entries to this year’s award.

“It’s a brilliant way to show end users how innovative this industry is,” he added.

With sessions covering AI, digital product passports, building sustainable supply chains, diversity in the workplace, and managing Gen Z, there was plenty for attendees to get their teeth into. All this, and two distinct forums for suppliers and distributors to help direct the BPMA in its work. There was a lot going on.

AI specialist, Tom Newton outlined how the technology was moving from the realms of



Industry engagement can be fun



Happy delegates



Funky lanyards for 2026



Planet Mark's James Shorey



Allcott - 'Make the most of today'



Catching up with peers



Getting creative with
Fredrik Haren

UNLEASH CREATIVITY

There are no non-creative industries. Even undertakers are looking at innovative ways to move their sector forward, according to creativity explorer, Fredrik Haren.

The keynote speaker at this year's BPMA conference explained what creativity was and how it could be used practically to provide demonstrable competitive advantage.

Giving the example of his own self-published work, *The Idea Book*, Haren showed how looking at things slightly differently could lead to huge benefits for merch businesses.

In a world where business books sell a few thousand copies, Haren came up with idea of a volume that was half business book, and half notebook. The difference is slight but means that companies will buy it on their stationery budgets which are much bigger than those for books. The result is sales of a quarter of a million copies against about 3,000.

There is a predictability to how many people address problems. You only have to come up with a slightly different approach to stand out in your marketplace, said Haren, extolling the virtues of curiosity in helping to create difference.

theory to a set of tools that could genuinely bring benefits for merch companies.

He advised delegates to get hands on with AI and see it as something that could make an iterative difference to businesses rather than a tool that needed to be perfected before launching it.

"Don't spend six months on it," he said.

With buyers looking for ever more information on the sustainability credentials of promotional merchandise, several speakers offered invaluable signposting on how to make such demands beneficial rather than simply onerous.

Bureau Veritas' Rebecca Turner gave delegates a rapid overview of digital



Ideas start here



Planning for the future

passports (DPP), which are designed to simplify the sharing of product data across the supply chain.

Her colleague, Joshua Stamps, updated conference on the EU Deforestation Regulation, which aims to ensure that a set of products traded and consumed in the EU – including wood, rubber, palm oil, soy, beef, coffee, and cacao – do not contribute to deforestation and forest degradation.

Meanwhile, James Shorey of BPMA partner, Planet Mark delved deeper into building a sustainable supply chain.

There was also a strong focus on staff development across the day with Chloe Wallace of One Source HR addressing the issue of diversity in the workplace, and Menospace's Haley White speaking on the creation of menopause inclusivity.

With David Haylor covering the always contentious topic of managing Gen Z, there was more than enough content for delegates to enact when they took it back to their businesses.

A delighted Phil Goodman wrapped up the event by saying it was the conference he hoped to deliver for members. One that represented the sector faithfully and provided an overview of all that was good in merch.



A packed agenda awaited delegates



'Tell us more'



AI you can use



Digital product passports explained



BPMA CEO Phil Goodman – 'Moving the industry on'

WHAT THEY SAID

GARETH PACKER, EXCEPTIO

"An amazing day yesterday at the British Promotional Merchandise Association (BPMA) conference. Some great speakers and Fredrik Haren was fantastic, finishing off the event speaking about creativity."

MATT PLUCKROSE, JUTE BAG

"I loved the event this week. It was professionally run, informative and had a very good mix of speakers that gave real insight into some key trends in our

industry and most importantly what will change in the way we work over the coming years."

LIZ NEWTON, SOURCING CITY

"A fantastic day at the 2026 BPMA Conference, joining BPMA members from distributor companies, supplier companies, and service providers from across the promotional merchandise industry. The conference delivered a great agenda that encouraged open discussions around the

opportunities, challenges, and innovations to help shape the future of our industry."

SARAH HOWARTH, WILD THANG

"We have invested in time ensuring we get to these events to learn, and we've done more of that in the last two years. And the learning we've take away has really helped elevate our business. As much as it feels difficult to pull away from the day-to-day operations, it is crucial if you want to drive forward the business."

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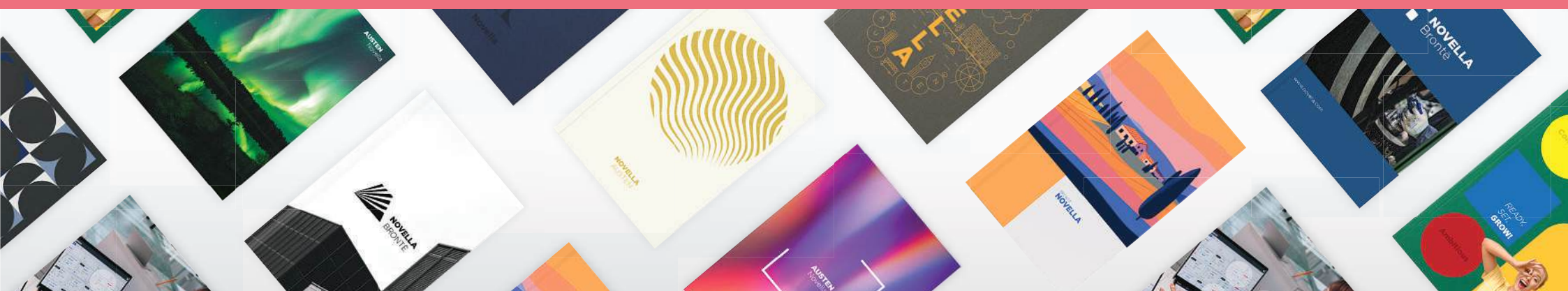
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GET THE NEW LOOK

Branded clothing is starting to look less corporate and more fashionable, says Clive Allcott

Promotional clothing no longer means thin T-shirts, oversized logos, and garments that end up at the back of a wardrobe. Promotional apparel now takes its inspiration from retail fashion, with quality, comfort, and style leading the way.

BIGGER AND BETTER

One of the biggest trends this year is the rise of heavyweight T-shirts and relaxed fit garments. Companies are choosing premium fabrics and modern cuts that people want to wear, both at work and in their everyday lives.

Oversized T-shirts, boxy fits, and heavyweight hoodies are becoming the go to choice for branded merchandise and staff uniforms.

SOFTER COLOURS

Bright promotional colours are making way for more sophisticated shades. Vintage inspired tones such as washed black, sage green, stone, sand, and dusty blue are proving popular as brands look to create a more premium look.

Garment dyed finishes are also gaining traction, giving clothing a lived in, fashionable appearance.

Branding is becoming more subtle with small embroidered logos, woven labels, and discreet branding that feels more like fashion brand than a marketing giveaway. It's apparel that people choose to wear, not just receive.

SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE STAGE

Sustainability is now an expectation. Organic cotton, recycled materials,

ethical sourcing, and longer lasting garments are key considerations.

Quality is increasingly valued over quantity, with businesses investing in fewer but better products.

LIFESTYLE APPAREL

The line between workwear and casual fashion continues to blur with quarter zips, lightweight jackets, gilets, and premium crew neck T-shirts becoming popular alternatives to traditional corporate clothing. They combine a modern look while maintaining a professional appearance.

Caps and beanies remain strong performers, but styles are evolving. Five-panel caps, vintage-wash baseball caps, corduroy finishes, and premium embroidered headwear are helping brands create merchandise with genuine retail appeal.

The bottom line is that clients are signalling a new era where promotional clothing looks and feels more like retail fashion than corporate merchandise.

Happy selling
Clive the bag and clothing Guru.



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MADE IN UK

“WE WANT TO CONTINUE THE LEGACY...”

Impression Europe directors Josh, Robby and Matt Stephenson explain to Jason O'Connor how business is a family affair



JASON O'CONNOR:

Any successful entrepreneur can say “my kids are going to take over” but how well that goes will vary – the kids aren’t necessarily going to have the same hunger as the parents. So, I think what you guys have done is tremendous.

ROBBY STEPHENSON:

We all had to work elsewhere before we came to Impression. We weren’t just brought into the company. Malcolm and Adrian [Stephenson, who founded the business in 2004] would say, “go out and get your experience elsewhere”.

Plus, we were only given a job if there was one available. We all came in from the bottom, making the tea and being treated like everyone else. We even call Adrian and Malcolm by their first names – we’ve stuck with that outside of work, which is probably a bit bad...

At first, it was about gaining the respect of everyone here, which was hard to do as it was a case of “the sons are coming in” and we were a lot younger than everyone else. It took quite a long time.

JOSH STEPHENSON:

But between the three of us now, we’ve been here over 30 years.

RS: We were all brought in for different roles, so we’ve learnt the company in different ways. And then in 2021, there was an opportunity for us to purchase the company from them. They each still hold a small share and they’ll always be paid for the work they did to get the company to the position they did, like they did with their parents. But because we now have a financial stake in the company, it’s given us that hunger and we are determined to make it work.

JOC: *I think a lot of kids might enter a company and ruin the good work that’s been done because they’ve suddenly got power and have the wrong idea about the direction of travel. Whereas you’ve obviously added a lot and respected what’s come before you.*

MATT STEPHENSON:

Our parents, especially Malcolm and Adrian, are good at keeping everything grounded. We were all brought up with good morals and good values. We grew up respecting how much they put into the company.

We want to make them proud and continue the legacy. I think they’ve set a great example and given us the tools to keep that going.

JOC: *Impression started as an agent for a European stock wholesaler. The UK operation is above and beyond what other people in your situation may do. Going forward, where’s your ceiling?*

JS: As high as it can go. We want to be one of those suppliers that people can’t afford to not use. It’s not so much that we want to be the biggest, but we want to be the best. One of our USPs is our service, which is something that Adrian and Malcolm drilled into us.

JOC: *I think with AI coming in, service might dip because businesses will think it can replace staff. But with what we do, customers still need the human touch – they want that trust and relationship.*

MS: We’re a firm believer in building relationships with customers. I don’t think that’s ever going to change, even with the introduction of AI.

JS: This is a very relationship-driven industry. We can talk about AI but you’re still going to need staff to deliver that personal touch – just maybe not as many as five years ago.

JOC: *I think you need to look at all aspects of the operation and see what you can automate.*

MS: When we’re interviewing new staff, we say we’re a company that embraces traditional values and morals, while also looking forward to the future. I think that’s important to balance.

JOC: *What are your plans for the next few years?*

MS: We made the decision about seven years ago to bring all our tech in-house. Technology moves so quickly and if you don’t keep up, you’ll be left behind.

JS: We also really want to grow the UK markets. We'd love to get into the European markets – hopefully this will become easier with some of the systems we're building. We've talked about America potentially one day as well. But for now, grow as much as we can in the UK and Ireland.

JOC: As a business person, you have to have your eye set on your end goal, right? Josh, tell us about being a BPMA ambassador.

JS: I was partnered with Dan Hill at Zagwear as a southern ambassador. We found that you see the same faces at events – but for the longevity of the industry, it's the next generation that are going to take it forward. So, we came up with an event that would bring together legacy leaders and future leaders.

The idea of the event was that a legacy leader, such as yourself, would bring a future leader – someone you believe will do big things – and they'd all be in the same room. Dan and I both class ourselves as legacy but we're also still young, and we realised we want to bridge that gap. We had about 50 people turn up at the first event in London in May, and it was really successful. We'd love to take the idea around the country.

JOC: I think it's phenomenal. I still consider myself young, but I'm not. But I certainly don't consider myself legacy because there are people that have been doing this a lot longer than me. Until recently, I don't think there's been a huge amount of fresh blood in this industry.

JS: But they're in these companies somewhere: it's just finding them. If we can put on events like this once or twice a year and start to connect people, that's how you'll get new ideas.

JOC: How do you see the industry changing in the next couple of years?

RS: We are seeing more and more companies investing in technology, automation and their online presence. Having that personal touch is also still so important. I can't see this changing yet.

JS: Our best sellers will still be the best sellers. Our Braiswick A5 notebook has been our best seller for the last five, six years. That's not changing. But we have seen a small shift towards premium products.

MS: End-users are more conscious about the products they're putting their logo on now. That's why we're investing in bringing good quality brands into our range.

JOC: We have a huge number of customers and I think the lower-end stuff will always be there, but we've never had so much exposure to the higher-end products as we do now. They weren't for our business model originally, but they are now. What's your advice for someone new to the industry?

MS: Be bold and don't be afraid to be a bit different. Shake things up and just go for it.

JS: Speak to people in the industry and learn as much as you can. Build those relationships.

JOC: People buy people, no?

MS: That's exactly it. People buy from people, and even more so in this industry. I'd definitely say don't be afraid to ask questions. We're still young. We like to speak to people and ask company leaders like yourself for their advice.

RS: Exactly like Josh and Matt have said, learn from the larger companies, see what they are doing and put your own twist on it.

Jason O'Connor is managing director of Total Merchandise. Josh, Robby and Matt Stephenson are directors of Impression Europe

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CREATING CONNECTIONS

Merch suppliers are helping global brands communicate their values and strengthen culture, says Pierre Yu

From my position in Hong Kong, working with distributors and brands across multiple continents, one of the most significant changes I have witnessed is that promotional products are no longer just about products.

They are increasingly about people, culture and purpose.

For many years, success in sourcing was largely measured by manufacturing efficiency, cost and delivery. These factors remain important, but today they are no longer enough. Global brands are asking different questions, driven by changing customer expectations, workforce dynamics and corporate values.

What is particularly interesting is how those priorities vary across different regions of the world.

GLOBAL VIEWS

In the UK and Europe, conversations increasingly centre around sustainability, compliance and transparency. Buyers want to understand where products are made, what materials are used and how supply chains are managed. Promotional

merchandise is often viewed as an extension of a company's environmental and social commitments.

In the United States, we see a different emphasis. Technology companies, fintech firms and fast-growing businesses are using merchandise to strengthen company culture, support employee onboarding and build communities around their brands. For many clients, the objective is not simply to distribute products but to create meaningful experiences that help people feel connected to an organisation.

In the Middle East, demand is often shaped by hospitality, relationship-building and premium brand experiences. Presentation, quality and attention to detail are critical, particularly for programmes linked to major events, tourism initiatives and corporate gifting.

CULTURAL DIMENSION

While the priorities differ, there is a common theme running through all these markets. Brands increasingly want merchandise that reflects who they are and what they stand for.

For suppliers in China, this represents an important evolution. Success is no longer determined solely by manufacturing capability. It increasingly depends on understanding the culture behind the order and the purpose behind the product.

The same factory may produce merchandise for a sustainability-focused European campaign, an employee engagement programme for a Silicon Valley software company, and a premium gifting project in Dubai. The products may be different, but more importantly, the stories behind them are different.

This is changing the role of suppliers. We are becoming partners in helping brands communicate values, strengthen culture and create meaningful connections with people.

Global markets will continue to face uncertainty, but one trend is clear. As promotional products become more closely aligned with culture and purpose, understanding people will become just as important as understanding production.

From China, that may be the most important change of all.

Pierre Yu is product manager at Xoopar ■





STILL PEOPLE POWERED

Are people still your best asset? You'd better believe it

We live in an age where AI and associated technologies threaten to disintermediate all of us in the name of efficiency.

Yet, at the same time, the human face of the promotional merchandise sector is desired as much as ever. Witness the people who flock to industry gatherings,

trade shows and conferences. If Covid taught us anything, it was that splendid isolation is overrated.

Although it is claimed that orders can be made seamlessly through sparkly new API systems, many still like the reassurance that a real person provides – someone who is available should anything go wrong.

Because, of course, things don't always run as smoothly as we'd hope for. Merch supply chains are dynamic and complex things. When an order breaks down or stalls for any one of a multitude of reasons, it's often an individual hero at the supplier or distributor who manages to bypass the glitch, making the difference between mission success and failure.

THE SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPION

For Abbey Clark, becoming Pro-Ad's sustainability champion last year was less a departure from her day-to-day work than a natural extension of it.

Abbey has a long-standing interest in environmental issues and in helping the people around her understand how sustainability can be made practical, relevant and achievable. Her previous experience creating content and communications around recycling, environmental awareness and community engagement made her a natural fit for the role.

The Northumbrian company is deeply committed to sustainability, a commitment which has seen Pro-Ad being awarded Ecovadis Platinum status. That recognition underlines the company's continued focus on responsible practice, both internally and in the way it supports clients.

Abbey's role is centred on keeping those values visible across the business, helping colleagues stay informed, engaged and confident when discussing sustainability with clients.

"Sustainability is most effective when it becomes part of the everyday decision-making process rather than a standalone initiative," she says. "My role is about helping to make sustainability practical and accessible. Small improvements, consistently applied, can make a really meaningful difference over time."

Pro-Ad commercial director, Loren Nardini says: "Abbey is helping us to ensure the value of sustainability is embedded right across the business.

"Everyone can contribute to that and Abbey's role in supporting colleagues, keeping a close eye on emerging sustainability topics and

requirements and conveying those values to our customers, is pivotal to our growth."

He adds: "Clients are increasingly looking for partners who can combine creativity and service with responsible sourcing and a credible understanding of sustainability."





SAVED BY THE MERCH

The saviour of the day is the person who knows, from years of contact building and networking, a reliable alternative source to complete an order against a brutally punishing timeline.

Our sector is full of such people – 68,000 throughout the promotional merchandise supply chain according to research revealed at the BPMA conference.

Our industry is just that, industrial, and has therefore invested heavily in advanced manufacturing and branding kit, it is a specialist sector serving demanding end-users. There is still a need for oversight by skilled and experienced personnel, often with years of practical knowledge on tap. Technology allied to a human hand on the tiller remains important.

RELATIONSHIP BUSINESS

It is often said that merchandise is a people industry and that 'people buy people'.

This remains true. Products are largely similar between companies so differentiation comes through in other areas, such as sustainability credentials and service. It is in the latter area that the human factor comes into play most crucially.

It's an area we are exploring in this issue, in all of its many forms.

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

Behind every successful piece of merch there is a group of people making it happen every step of the way

In the world of promotional products, it's easy to focus on the surface: the logo, the colour match, the precision of the print. These tangible outcomes matter and clients depend on them.

Every promotional product is part of a larger story. It might support a brand launch, strengthen a customer relationship, or represent a company at a key event.

And beneath every branded item lies something less visible: the team, the culture, and the mission.

At the heart of Tancia's production facility is a team of skilled individuals whose expertise turns ideas into physical form. Whether it's a technician calibrating machinery, a designer refining artwork, or a production manager ensuring deadlines are met, every role contributes to the final product.

In trade printing, where repeat orders and long-term partnerships are common, experienced teams understand client expectations instinctively. That knowledge becomes competitive advantage.

With more than 30 years of industry experience and an extensive UK-held product range spanning drinkware, bags,



writing instruments, and tech accessories, Tancia is built on a strong and positive culture that drives alignment across the business. From the print floor to customer service, every team member shares the same commitment to quality and reliability,

ensuring a smoother, more consistent experience for every customer.

The sense of purpose is reinforced through meaningful ethical sourcing and sustainability initiatives, from holding FSC certification (C009251) and offering GRS-certified products to committing to responsible production practices, including carbon-neutral manufacturing through the Chili Concept brand.

This commitment extends beyond operations into active community and charitable involvement, ensuring impact is both environmental and social.



You can't programme human capital into a computer but you can develop it, which is why education programmes and apprenticeships matter. Progressive companies are doing more of this (see p18).

Innovation is a related issue – an indefinable quality that can be like bottling lightning. Merch companies can be incredibly creative given the chance, as the BPMA's Design Challenge has proved (watch out for news on the latest Made in Britain link up). In this issue, Preseli explains how it tries to foster a

culture of innovation and not simply leave it to chance (see p23).

The broader culture of companies is important too, not just for recruiting staff, who increasingly seek out employment in organisations whose values align with their own. Clients also scrutinise what their business partners stand for, and it can make all the difference to procurement decisions.

All of which is to say, that people still matter, perhaps more so at the moment than ever.

INVEST IN TALENT FOR GROWTH

Whether it's through apprenticeships, the BPMA education programme, or a combination of both, merch companies are growing their talent pool



IF Solutions apprentices past and present: Tom, Amber, Meg and Max

Telford-based merchandise specialist IF Solutions has been in business for 30 years and is looking forward to growth with a focus on bringing new blood into the industry.

The past year has seen it grow the headcount from 13 to 19 employees, with an apprenticeship approach to the fore.

Sales manager, Jake Howard says the company works with Worcester College to develop the skills of its apprentices, emphasising hands-on learning and continuous improvement. This has contributed to 60% growth in the past year.

"We've had apprentices in the past and they've proved to be valuable team members, with some of them still working here," he says.

IF currently has two apprentices, Meg and Max, on the team, and Howard says they have both found their own distinctive niche within the business.

On joining the company they were immersed in all aspects of the merch business, shadowing other team members to get an overall view of what IF Solutions does. As

TRAIN TO SUCCEED

The BPMA Education Programme offers an online professional development programme tailored to the promotional merchandise sector, created and written by industry experts, open to BPMA members only.

Courses are CPD accredited with the Association for Accredited Learning.

BPMA courses include six months access to

the online platform, mandatory and elective modules, a final exam, and the opportunity to visit a factory for a tour.

There are currently 2 levels available:

- Trained in Promotional Merchandise (TPM)
- Certified in Promotional Merchandise (CPM)

There are four course intakes each year providing flexible study options.

it became apparent where their individual skills and interests lie, they have moved into specific departments where they can focus on further development.

"We can assess where we feel that they would be best in the business, and the individuals can self-assess what they could potentially achieve here and where they want to be," says Howard.

For Meg, this means working within the sales administration role, where her methodical, and analytical approach makes her perfect for the role.

Max showed an early interest on the proactive side of selling and has slotted successfully into a role developing his sales skills.

According to Howard, IF's approach to growing its own talent dovetails neatly with the dynamic nature of the business. While the company values experience in its hires, he is aware that the nature of the business continues to change.

"We don't know what this business will be like in a few years' time, so we want people that can grow and develop as we do. There is the possibility that when you hire people with



Navillus's Millie and Yssabela

existing skills, they can be a bit set in their ways and bring that to the business.”

IF Solutions has always developed from early days when it focused mainly on lanyards and badges. Its range has now expanded to include a wider range of items such as socks and playing cards.

Bespoke merchandise is a growing part of the business and a more profitable area, says Howard. The company has carved something of a niche in music, creating bespoke items for bands such as Oasis.

“Our MD, Adrian has nurtured relationships with certain clients that deal with music clientele. They are probably our most difficult clients, because their demands are crazy. It’s always incredibly short lead times, incredibly bespoke stuff, but in truth, that’s where the money is for both our distributors and for us. So, we have almost become specialists in ‘special’.”

Howard emphasises the importance of IF’s people in creating business opportunities.

Aimie Banks,
Biblio

WORTH THE CHALLENGE

Max Hindley, 22, joined IF Solutions as an apprentice in July last year. Alongside his apprenticeship, he has undertaken the BPMA’s TPM qualification

“I’m still quite new to the business and the industry as a whole. I joined as an administrator apprentice but have developed into more of a sales role which is being on the phones with clients and pricing up the enquiries. I have really enjoyed my first 10 months.

A couple of people in the office had done the TPM before me and I wanted to challenge myself. It has supported my role massively as it helped me gain knowledge about the industry. When I did the exam, I was around six months into working at IF Solutions, so it helped me gain an understanding of products and what I am providing.

The most challenging part was the actual

test itself, I’ve never been the best at exams, and this was no different. I do enjoy challenging myself though and I thought that this was worth it. I also was never the best at revising so that may explain my struggle with exams, I made sure that I did revise for this though.

Doing the practice tests and going over the PDFs multiple times helped me with the exams. Work colleagues helped me by asking me questions from the modules which was a massive help as some of the questions we were practising came up on the exam.”



“With our bespoke products, we are selling something different. It’s the strength of the graphics department that has really delivered business for us. I can’t tell you the number of times that a brief has asked for one thing, and we’ve shown them what else we can do and they’ve ended up buying multiple products.”

When it comes to apprentices, Howard is an enthusiastic supporter but stresses the need to properly support them.

“We want people that want to improve, so once you’ve got them in, you have to give them the support to do it. You brought them in for a reason, so have to help them to get better.”

AIMIE BANKS, BIBLIO PRODUCTS

“I’ve been working in the promotional industry since 2003. I joined with a degree in Business & Marketing, but most of what I’ve learned has come from hands-on experience. In a small company, you get involved in everything – especially back then, when there wasn’t really a clear training path, so you learned as you went, and sometimes from mistakes.

Over the years, I’ve worked across different areas of the business, building a well-rounded understanding, but the TPM and CPM courses have helped fill in gaps. The TPM refreshed the basics that can be lost in the busy week, and the CPM has given me new ideas and guidance that I can use to improve the business.

Finding time for the course can be tough but if you set aside an hour a week it will make a difference. Grab a notebook, turn off distractions, and ask your team to cover you so you can focus. It’s a small investment in your own development and definitely worth it.”

CATE JONES, NAVILLUS PRINT GIFTS

“My colleague Millie and I have both been with Navillus in Greenwich for just over a year. We decided to pursue the TPM qualification to build a solid foundation in the industry, and it has certainly delivered on that goal.

Our colleague Yssabela, who has been with Navillus for over two years, completed the course with us this year. Despite her experience, she found the course extremely useful and well worth the study.

We found the modules both interesting and informative, and we are grateful to Navillus for being so supportive throughout the process. We highly recommend this course to anyone in the industry who has not yet completed it.

Having enjoyed the programme so much, we are now looking forward to continuing our professional education by studying for the CPM in the future.”



Cate Jones, Navillus

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PEOPLE FIRST

Castelli Milano 1938 is investing heavily in work culture to drive success

When it comes to responsible business practices, the focus often lands externally. But for a certified B Corp like Castelli Milano 1938, the benchmark of success starts within.

Scoring an impressive 25.0 in the B Impact Assessment 'Workers' category, the brand is looking to rewrite the employee playbook.

Castelli's commitment to B Corp governance embeds stakeholder voice directly into corporate strategy. Through active feedback channels, surveys, and a dedicated feedback form, the company ensures that employee insights drive change.

Rather than top-down mandates, this creates a system where employees can influence decision-making, providing a blueprint that aligns the company's progress with a commitment to People, Planet, and Prosperity.

MINDFULNESS ON THE CARDS

As well as creating a mindful environment within the company, Castelli has expanded the approach to a Mindfulness Collection called Grow.

This includes a ritual journal and mindfulness cards which are designed to help organisations move from a purely perks environment towards a culture of permanent care.

In an era of digital fatigue, mental clarity is a premium commodity, and Grow has been designed to help facilitate this development, encouraging reflection.

Created by a psychotherapist, the products are also produced with a care for ecological concerns, including ink and paper choice, resulting in a product that feels like a gift, works like therapy, and looks like piece of art.



Castelli Milano 1938 staff giving back with a litter pick

Continuous evolution means the business is dedicated to constantly refining, and building upon its benchmarks year-over-year.

SERVICE DESIGNED FOR BALANCE

Empowerment extends to trusting staff to design schedules around their lives. This can mean adjusting hours for stress-free school runs or utilising a hybrid model that allows applicable office teams to work remotely for up to 60% of their week.

This balanced approach ensures reliable customer cover while fostering a workplace culture built on genuine quality of life.

360° WELLBEING

Practical perks links to B Corp commitments and sustainability goals, helping to drive a reduction in carbon emissions by encouraging conscious commuting. There is on-site parking and EV charging at discounted employee rates, plus a Cycle to Work scheme.

Castelli's health strategy blends daily workplace comforts with robust professional support. The office environment is enhanced by a barista coffee machine, artisan teas, and seasonal soups.

Beyond the office, mental and physical health is safeguarded by an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). A 24/7, 365-day confidential helpline grants staff and their families access to qualified counsellors, CBT, and financial guidance.

PURPOSE, UPSKILLING, AND RECOGNITION

Through its Kallidus Training Academy, Castelli has increased its professional development from 10 courses in 2023 to 24 this year, ranging from workplace awareness to neurodiversity at work.

Castelli also offers employees one to three paid volunteer days annually to support charitable and community projects close to their hearts. Individual milestones are also celebrated – every employee receives a birthday gift.

This employee-centric approach is paying off. The 2026 employee satisfaction survey found 80% of respondents rated the company's work schedule as 'Excellent' or 'Good.' With plans to integrate the global PerkBox platform next, Castelli continues to redefine what a modern, compassionate employer looks like.





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INNOVATION ON A ROLL

Preseli's latest promotional idea is the result of a culture focused on product development

Merch supplier Preseli's latest innovative product is proving an amazing conversation starter for distributors who need something new to show to their clients.

Custom wrapped toilet rolls may seem like a strange choice as a promotional product but distributors have responded positively to the light-hearted invention.

The UK-made promo loo roll is the result of a collaboration with Serious Tissues, an ethical manufacturer of toilet rolls made from 100% UK recycled post-consumer wastepaper, resulting in a much lower carbon footprint than its bamboo competitors.

"When the team at Preseli approached us about launching their dual-branded Serious Toilet Rolls at our Geiger Live Premier Collection event, we immediately loved the idea," says Lauren Carslake, senior marketing executive Geiger.

"The Geiger-branded Serious toilet rolls became one of the unexpected highlights of the event. They were vibrant, memorable, and sparked fantastic engagement with our customers. One attendee even commented that they left with the thought of placing branded toilet rolls in their welcome boxes."

Ryan Askew, managing director, Premier Print & Promotions says the product produced a similar reaction at its TAPex event.

GREAT REACTION

"We launched Serious promo loo roll recently at TAPex and the reaction was fantastic. It's 100% post-consumer waste, British made by a social enterprise, supports the homeless, low cost, great impact. There's nothing crap about this product."

Preseli has garnered accolades and industry awards with an impressive track record of innovation over recent years.

Marketing manager Robert Bruce credits a number of factors, not least a more considered approach to innovation.

"Preseli is a small team, and we have



nurtured a culture in which ideas are encouraged and explored. We are quite happy to research long-term projects without losing sight of the vital day-to-day stuff that keep our orders flowing," he says. "I come from a product development background and have timetabled it into our sales and marketing calendar. We believe that having new products, new images and new marketing support are crucial."

Preseli's UK sales manager Russ Coleman says that while being a dependable supplier is crucial in an industry built on a multitude of smaller orders, sales teams thrive on having something new to talk about.

"The launch of our Closed Loop Lanyard Recycling in 2025 is a fantastic story, and one that has raised Preseli's profile as a supplier that looks to the future," he says. "However, we have never had such an immediate response to a product as we have with the launch of the custom wrapped toilet rolls."

MERCH CUT THROUGH

Serious Tissues' sustainable and ethical values have great cut through at a time when sustainable procurement is a great priority for clients, but it's the ability to just make customers laugh when they see their first sample that has made this such a powerful way to interact, adds Coleman.

"I have heard every pun, every bottom reference and can see we have set our distributors minds whirring as they see the potential of the product."

Possible uses already identified include onboarding kits, student accommodation packs, the hospitality sector, and even as a gifting option.

Preseli MD, Dave Wilson says: "This project has been a classic example of how an idea has been encouraged, researched and developed using the skills of the whole Preseli team. ■



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THE HUMAN TOUCH

Tech companies are not just reshaping our lives. They are bringing fresh opportunities for promotional merchandise

The promotional merchandise industry has always been about creating connections between brands and people. Increasingly, however, some of the most innovative users of branded merchandise are not traditional consumer brands at all – they are technology companies.

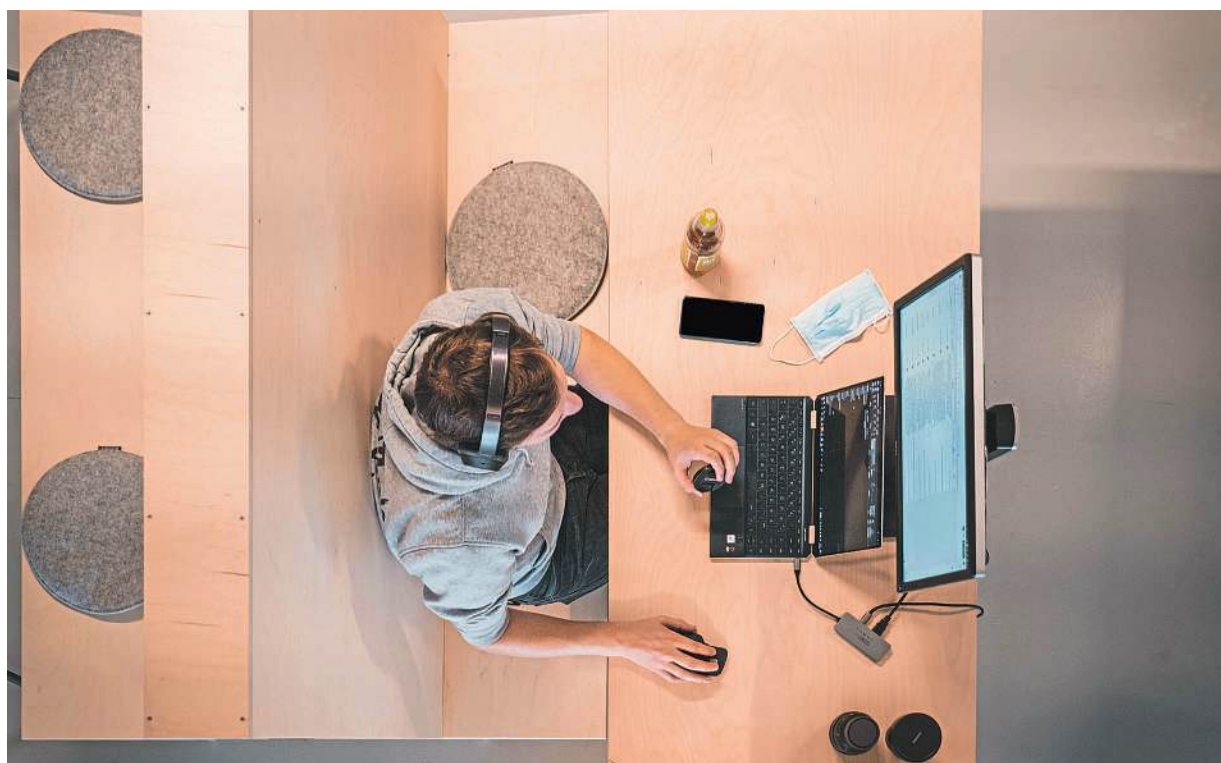
According to the latest UK & Ireland Promotional Merchandise Industry Market Report, the sector was worth £1.334 billion in 2025, while the North American market has grown to almost \$28 billion. Behind those numbers is a significant shift in how organisations view merchandise and the role it plays in people, culture and purpose.

DIGITAL FIRST

Over the past decade, software companies, fintech businesses and, more recently, AI-driven organisations have transformed the way they engage with employees, customers and communities. Many operate with distributed teams, digital-first customer relationships and highly competitive recruitment markets. As a result, creating a sense of belonging has become a strategic priority.

This is where promotional merchandise has found a new purpose.

For many technology businesses, branded merchandise is no longer simply a marketing giveaway. It is an extension of company culture. Welcome packs help new employees feel part of the organisation from day one. Recognition programmes celebrate achievement and reinforce company values. Community merchandise turns customers



into advocates and strengthens engagement beyond the screen.

WELCOMING CULTURE

Technology is also changing the products themselves. QR-enabled packaging, NFC technology and personalised digital experiences are allowing physical merchandise to connect recipients with content, communities and causes. A branded product can now provide access to onboarding resources, learning platforms, event experiences or sustainability information with a simple tap or scan.

Perhaps most importantly, the growth of AI and software businesses demonstrates that even in an increasingly digital world, human connection remains essential. The more

digital our interactions become, the more valuable physical touchpoints can be.

For distributors, this creates a significant opportunity. Technology companies are among the fastest-growing sectors of the economy, yet many are still discovering how branded merchandise can support recruitment, retention, culture and community-building objectives.

The future of promotional merchandise is not simply about putting logos on products. It is about helping organisations create meaningful connections between people, culture and purpose. In many cases, the companies leading that transformation are the very businesses driving the next wave of technological innovation.

Alan Doyle is account director at Xoopar



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BADGE OF HONOUR



Environmentalism King Charles recently received a Blue Peter Green Badge in recognition of his advocacy for the planet

Cornwall-based merchandise manufacturer CHX Products has been designing and manufacturing sustainable merchandise for more than 30 years.

The company has a planet positive approach with sustainability at the heart of its process. It uses post-consumer waste plastic sourced from discarded fridge interiors in its production and powers its factory with solar electricity.

Circular manufacturing ensures that any offcuts are fed back into production resulting in zero plastic waste.

In addition, CHX has developed a range of biodegradable products that are durable in use but have enhanced end of life disposal options.

PLASTIC WITH CARE

A biopolymer range is created using waste from sugar cane and maize that absorb CO₂ in the atmosphere while growing. There is even a range of plastic products made from recovered marine plastic which can be traced from its collection point to a finished product.

It's no wonder then that CHX manufactures the Green Badge awarded by BBC TV programme Blue Peter for environmentalism.

One of the most recent recipients of the Green Blue Peter Badge was King Charles III, who was presented with it during a visit to The King's Foundation's Pierburg Education Centre and Kauffman Education Garden, as part of the Foundation's 35th anniversary celebrations.



While the standard Blue Peter Badge is awarded for appearing on the show, the Green Badge requires demonstrated commitment to environmental causes. His Majesty's receipt of the badge recognised decades of advocacy for sustainable land use, food production, and environmental stewardship.

A second Green Badge was sealed in a time capsule during the same visit.

GREEN VALUES

The Green Blue Peter Badge is awarded for genuine environmental achievement. It is one of the top Blue Peter Badges and is not presented lightly. CHX has supplied Blue Peter badges exclusively for over a decade.

Every badge in the Blue Peter range is produced at the company's solar-powered

facility in Bodmin, Cornwall, using recycled plastic. The combination of renewable energy, recycled materials, and UK-based manufacturing means the badge presented to the King is, itself, a product of the sustainable principles it represents.

Andy Knight, managing director, CHX Products, said: "The Green Badge recognises environmental achievement. The fact that it is made here in Cornwall, from recycled plastic, powered by solar energy, feels like more than a coincidence. It is a reflection of values we have built our business on, and we are proud to play a small part in a moment like this."

CHX makes around 100,000 Blue Peter badges a year. The show has a range of badges for its viewers representing achievement in areas such as music, sport and books. ■



DUEL IN THE SUN

The big hitters of merch braved the heat for the BPMA 2026 Golf Day

The heat was on at this year's BPMA Golf Day as temperatures soared past 31°C on the fairways of the Nottinghamshire Golf & Country Club.

However, the assembled teams kept their cool to enjoy a great day's competition, networking and sportsmanship.

MORNING SCRAMBLE

The day teed off with the 9-hole scramble, and it was Team Jutebag that stitched together a winning performance in the shorter format.

Team PF Concepts followed closely behind, securing Runner Up honours after a solid start to the day.



AFTERNOON SHOWDOWN

As the sun continued to blaze, the 4-Ball Betterball afternoon session brought out even more hotly contested action. Team DTB – consisting of Mike White, Kustom Kit; Stuart Sheppard, BDA; Lloyd Simpson, LSI, and Clive Allcott, DTB – delivered under pressure to take the win

The Merchandise Lab weren't far behind, finishing as Runners Up after a strong showing across the course.

INDIVIDUAL GLORY

Taking top honours, Lloyd Simpson clinched the Individual Champion title with a round to remember, despite Runner Up Aiden Brown pushing him all the way.

SPECIAL PRIZES

A series of additional awards were made to those with a particular set of skills.

Longest Drive was a monster hit from James Allcott, who absolutely drove it home.

Nearest the Pin rewarded sharp shooting from Elliot Sampson, Lloyd Simpson, James Brown, and Matt Pluckrose, who all showed pinpoint precision when it mattered most.

Matt Lawrence, Scott Brimmell, Aiden Brown, Dan Rogers, Nick Roberts, Simon Coy, Josh Stephenson and James Allcott managed to beat the on-site pro.

Despite the heat, spirits stayed high, swings stayed smooth for the most part, and the day was a real hole-in-one for everyone involved. Thanks to all who took part in a most enjoyable day. Watch out for the date and venue for next year's competition.



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Please contact a member of our local support team for advice on any matter related to debt and credit management.

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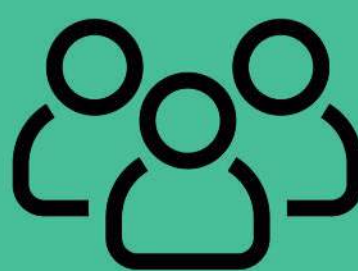
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PREPARE TO SUCCEED

Rising sustainability expectations in merch mean it makes sense to bring in support for accreditation submissions, says Steve Bland



Customers, clients, and supply chain partners increasingly expect businesses to prove they are acting responsibly, not just say they are. That means showing clear evidence of environmental action, ethical sourcing, and responsible business practices. For many companies, Ecovadis has become the benchmark for doing exactly that.

Ecovadis is one of the world's most recognised sustainability ratings platforms, with 50,000 global companies rated each year. Businesses are assessed across key areas including environment, labour and human rights, ethics, and sustainable procurement.

A strong Ecovadis score can help win new business, strengthen customer relationships, and demonstrate leadership in sustainability. But achieving a good score is becoming significantly harder as the thresholds keep rising.

RAISING THE BAR

Take Platinum status – Ecovadis' highest medal, awarded to the top 1% of assessed companies. In 2021, a score of 72 was enough to achieve Platinum. Today, companies need a minimum score of 86 – a 14-point increase in just four years.

Gold has risen from 67 in 2021 to 79 now. Furthermore, in 2024, a change was made so that only the top 15% of companies received Silver (previously 25%) and top 35% for bronze (previously 50%). Standing still means falling behind. Even if your score stays the same, your medal could drop because the benchmark has moved.

MERCH CHALLENGE

For promotional merchandise businesses, this creates an extra challenge, with complex supply chains, multiple suppliers, and products sourced from different countries. That means more sustainability risks to manage, and more evidence required during an Ecovadis assessment.

Questions around supplier standards, packaging, carbon emissions, and product traceability can all make the process more demanding.

That is why preparation matters. Accredited Ecovadis consulting partners, Ecoverify, can help by providing tailored and comprehensive support. The ultimate value is being able to demonstrate a company's commitment to a transparent supply chain and to continuously improving its sustainability performance.

Ecovadis Rating Thresholds



TIME WELL SPENT

A strong Ecovadis submission is not built in a week. It requires clear policies, measurable actions, documented procedures, staff training, and evidence that sustainability is embedded into the business. It can feel overwhelming – especially for busy businesses already managing day-to-day operations.

This is where specialist support can make a difference.

Ecoverify helps many promotional merchandise companies navigate the entire Ecovadis process – from understanding requirements to building policies, gathering evidence, and improving scores.

It has supported more than 30 companies in the merch sector, including Kingly, which recently achieved a second Ecovadis Platinum, placing it in the top 1% globally.

Kingly CEO Rob Armour said: "Ecoverify has played a key role in strengthening our sustainability framework and guiding us through a complex but critical process with clarity and precision. Their hands-on approach and expertise have made a real difference in how we operate and position ourselves for the future."

SUSTAINABLE IMPROVEMENT

That reflects what many businesses are experiencing: Ecovadis is becoming more demanding, but the commercial value of a strong score is increasing too.

Customers are asking tougher questions. Procurement teams are setting stricter requirements. Sustainability credentials are becoming a deciding factor in tenders and supplier selection. The standard is rising and will only continue to do so.

The good news is that with the right support, preparation, and strategy, businesses can keep pace.

If your goal is to improve your Ecovadis score, protect your current medal, or work toward Gold or Platinum, now is the time to act.

Get in touch with steve@ecoverify.co.uk to talk about how the company can help.

Steve Bland is managing director of Ecoverify





FORWARD TOGETHER

Merch leaders from the UK, Europe and US came together to scope out the opportunities and challenges facing the sector

The PPAI EAC-partnered International Leadership Summit (ILS) in Brussels brought together global industry leaders from branded merchandise to examine the forces reshaping the sector.

From geopolitics and supply chain shifts to sustainability, technology, and the future of brand engagement, senior figures gathered to explore how the merch industry is evolving and how it must adapt to remain a strategic marketing channel.

GLOBAL PRESSURES

Ongoing geopolitical tensions – particularly between the US, China, and the EU – are

creating a volatile backdrop for global sourcing. While the US-China relationship remains in a fragile truce, trade tensions persist and are unlikely to ease before November's US midterm elections.

Meanwhile, Europe's trade deficit with China now exceeds \$360 billion, fuelling protectionist instincts across Europe and raising the risk of further tariffs and trade conflict.

At the same time, global supply chains face new vulnerabilities. Strategic shipping routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and Malacca Strait are increasingly politicised, adding cost and uncertainty, and reinforcing the need for diversified sourcing strategies.

CHINA'S TRANSFORMATION

China remains the dominant global manufacturer of merch, but it is changing too. Demographic pressures, including an ageing population, are accelerating a shift toward automation and high-value manufacturing. This could lead to the emergence of 'dark factories' powered by robots as China seeks to maintain competitive despite labour shortages.

For buyers, this could mean Chinese suppliers are more flexible, lowering minimum order quantities and offering competitive pricing to retain business. At the same time, the 'China +1' strategy continues to gain traction, with production gradually expanding into Vietnam, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. However, China retains control over design and supply chain orchestration.

SUSTAINABILITY IS CORE

One of the most powerful themes from the ILS was sustainability's transition from compliance requirement to commercial driver. With 88% of marketers now viewing sustainability as critical to customer preferences, budgets are shifting toward more responsible and higher-quality merchandise.

Encouragingly, research sponsored by industry bodies, including the BPMA, shows branded merchandise has a lower-than-expected carbon footprint, outperforming



many traditional advertising channels in cost-per-impression efficiency. However, challenges remain, with data collection fragmented, while buyers demand clearer, more digestible sustainability insights.

The regulatory landscape is also tightening. New EU legislation will require third-party verification of sustainability claims.

BRANDING POWER

A standout discussion focused on the erosion of brand differentiation in the age of AI-driven marketing. As digital advertising becomes increasingly homogenised, brands are struggling to create emotional connections.

Merchandise is set to step in as a powerful differentiator. Physical, tangible, and often experiential, merch connects with consumers in ways digital channels cannot. Research shared at the summit shows merch can nearly double Net Promoter Scores, reinforcing both loyalty and revenue growth.

The key takeaway was that to be successful



merch must be authentic, culturally relevant, and designed with purpose, moving beyond generic giveaways toward products with real emotional and functional value.

A \$465BN INDUSTRY

Data unveiled at the summit reinforced the scale and importance of the branded merchandise sector. The industry contributes an estimated \$465bn to global GDP, supports 11.5 million jobs, and generates \$136bn in tax revenues.

Although merch is a major component of the global advertising ecosystem, it remains under-recognised by many marketers. Leaders stressed the need for stronger industry messaging and proof points to secure merch's place in strategic marketing budgets.

INDUSTRY IDENTITY

A recurring message was the urgency of greater collaboration across global associations. The industry is aligning around a more modern identity – shifting from 'promotional products' to 'merch' – to better resonate with younger audiences and reposition the sector as creative, strategic, and culturally relevant.

Unified messaging, shared research, and collaborative campaigns will be critical to elevating the industry's credibility and impact on the global stage.

TECHNOLOGY AND PERSONALISATION

Technology is rapidly transforming the sector with mass customisation and print-on-demand enabling personalised products at scale. Meanwhile, APIs and data standards are beginning to unlock seamless integration across fragmented supply chains.

However, progress depends on improving data quality and connectivity, particularly among smaller players. At the same time, AI offers major efficiency gains but must be implemented thoughtfully to balance performance with environmental impact.

LOOKING AHEAD

The ILS underscored a clear shift in mindset: from transactional, volume-driven merchandising to strategic, data-informed, and purpose-led brand engagement.

Success in the coming years will hinge on:

- Building resilient, diversified supply chains
- Harnessing sustainability as a competitive advantage
- Leveraging technology without losing human connection
- Elevating merch as a core media channel, not an afterthought

As the industry continues to unify and evolve, one message stood out: merch is no longer just a product – it's a powerful platform for storytelling, connection, and growth.

BPMA LAUNCHES GENDER PAY GAP ACTION

As of April 2025, the UK's gender pay gap across all employees was 12.8% (Office for National Statistics). This means that, on average, women were paid an eighth less than men.

Inspired by its International Women's Day 2025 event, the BPMA launched a Gender Pay Gap Committee with the shared ambition of addressing the pay gap in our sector. Leaders and founders from across the industry volunteered their time and expertise, and together we have developed the BPMA's Gender Pay Gap Commitment.

This new initiative sets out ten actions that organisations should be taking to drive progress towards pay equality, along with further guidance on how to undertake these actions.

These include areas such as creating an action plan to address the issue, equal access to training and career development, tackling workplace culture and bias, and

supporting all employees appropriately.

By signing up, your organisation commits to advancing gender pay equality within your business and across our industry.

Organisations that reward all employees fairly are more likely to attract the best workers, reduce staff absence and turnover, and thereby increase overall productivity. Whilst also enhancing their reputation and reducing the risk of costly equal pay tribunals.



Sarah Sayed, founder of BX Merchandise and a member of the BPMA Gender Pay Gap Committee, said her company is proud to have

signed up to the pledge to contribute to a more diverse, inclusive, and representative future for the sector.

"As a women and minority-owned business, creating a fair and transparent workplace is something I feel really strongly about, and closing the gender pay gap is a big part of that," she said. "Whilst the promotional merchandise industry has traditionally been seen as male dominated, it's great to see the conversation moving forward, and it's especially encouraging to see the BPMA championing this and raising awareness across the industry."

The BPMA would like to extend its thanks to those that have already taken part and supported this important initiative:

- UK Lanyard Makers
- Identity Merchandise
- Juniper Trading
- Impamark
- USB2U
- Promotrade
- Best Badges
- BX Merchandise

Visit bpma.co.uk to sign up and make your commitment.



REGAL LAUNCH FOR ENCORE

Suppliers and distributors gathered for the unveiling of the 2026 business in a box catalogue

The Encore catalogue had a successful launch recently at historic Rushton Hall in Northamptonshire.

Now in its 16th year Encore's event consisted of a great mix of distributors of all sizes, with support from 43 companies taking space in the Orangery for a tabletop exhibition.

New supplier and distributor members were both well represented at the launch where 100 guests gathered to meet suppliers and see this year's catalogue.

Encore's experienced team produces its high-end catalogue annually and is supported by online product sourcing platform Sourcing Machine. Its 'Business in a Box' proposition offers websites, searchable flip books and product data making it an easy choice for distributors throughout the UK and Ireland. As well as its annual launch event in the

Midlands, it also exhibits at Merchandise World in January.

Encore project manager, Diane Jaggard said the hard work of getting the day organised had paid off and that it remained a popular and well supported event for the merch industry.

"It's the day most people get to see their new catalogue which is always exciting. Business relationships are begun and forged between suppliers and distributors in a relaxed, informal atmosphere when there is plenty of time to chat about products and service."

Visitors were treated to Encore's 'legendary' goody bags. Jaggard thanked the 20 suppliers donating product for these well received bags, and said they had excelled themselves.

She added: "We have printed more catalogues this year than last showing Encore's popularity to distributors for a cost-effective



catalogue package with an amazing group of 60 suppliers."

The event also offered recognition to distributors and suppliers with the award for Distributor of the Year going to Ross Promotional. Metro Merchandise and Gilt Edged Promotions were named runners up, with Formkraft in third place.

Supplier of the Year went to the Laltex Group. Runner up was Keramikos/Thermalmate, with PromoTrade and Strive Badge sharing third place.

The event was supported by the BPMA, which was represented by membership director Tom Robey. Forty distributor members attended and enjoyed a buffet lunch, as well as being treated to an appearance from Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, courtesy of the Up an' at 'Em history group. Prince Albert also served as a great MC on the day. ■





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