

# What's hot in the branded merchandise, apparel, and gifting market?

The field of branded merchandise, apparel, and gifting is experiencing robust growth as brands intensify their efforts to capture attention and loyalty in an increasingly competitive market landscape.



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The enduring appeal and impactful nature of meticulously branded uniforms or corporate gifts play a significant role in forging connections with customers, enhancing recall and familiarity, fostering loyalty, and ultimately shaping purchasing behaviour.

Barron, a branded merchandise reseller/distributor, shares some insights on some of the key trends in the branded merchandise and apparel market, and the important considerations to look at:

- **Casual and comfortable styles:** corporate uniforms are increasingly leaning towards more casual and comfortable uniform styles, moving away from traditional, formal attire and fabrics.

Many companies have been incorporating 'athleisure' elements into their branded clothing to promote a comfortable and relaxed work environment, yet a professional image. Recognising the importance of diversity and inclusivity, there is also a growing trend towards offering a wider range of styles, cuts and sizes in corporate uniforms to ensure that all staff members are comfortable.

- **Customisation:** Customised uniforms and clothing styles with impactful, quality branding elements are key, and today there are many branding options to incorporate logos, colours, campaign elements and unique designs – from embroidery, to engraving to debossing to game-changing sublimation.

While the corporate mainstays of black, white, grey and navy remain popular, the introduction of sublimation printing brings modern and vibrant colour palettes and patterns into clothing designs. Colours are in as brands look to go bold yet sophisticated, infusing personality and individuality into any uniform while being tasteful and professional.

Personalisation has been a growing trend, but it's now going next level with full customisation - from choosing colours and materials to adding unique designs and embellishments, through to the packaging and delivery - customers crave products that reflect their individuality.

The caveat of course is that while clients are looking for bespoke options and styling, they still need the assurance that any uniform or apparel programme will be available from suppliers for at least a few years for consistency.

- **Sustainable materials:** Sustainability and ESG remain top of mind for most brands, hence eco-friendly, recyclable and OEKO-Tex certified fabrics are gaining a lot more traction. (The OEKO-Tex standards enable everyone to make responsible purchasing decisions and protect natural resources).

On the gifting side, there is a big focus on the sustainability of materials used in production - think bamboo, seeded papers and a shift away from plastic and so on. Ethical sourcing, safety accreditation and labour practices of manufacturers are also under greater scrutiny. For most brands, they're looking for branded products that reflect their commitment to societal and environmental initiatives.



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- **Functionality:** Functionality and ‘comfort’ finishes are in when it comes to fabrics, notably SPF50 finishes for sun protection for employees who spend much of their time outdoors – think hospitality, safari, construction, sport and so on; moisture-wicking finishes remain a mainstay for better comfort and breathability and 4-way stretch fabrics are another in-demand item for ease of movement and comfort.

Besides apparel that’s intended for the workplace, garments that can be worn at work and then after hours and on the weekend are all the rage. Light-weight knitwear, hoodies, fleece and functional features and comfort are the top sellers here.

- **Tech integration in gifting:** Without a doubt, tech is the number-one category for corporate gifting. Branded merchandise with technological features, such as smart accessories or items with integrated tech elements like USB chargers, Bluetooth connectivity, power banks and storage, wireless headphones and so on are topping the shopping lists.
- **Personalisation:** personalised corporate gifts are gaining popularity with companies customising gifts with the recipient’s name or a personal touch to make the gesture more meaningful and memorable.

In getting to grips with the massive diversity and range of products and trends in the market, work with an experienced merchandise reseller in aligning your promotional strategy to business and marketing objectives.

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