

ON A ROLL



Merchandise World gets the sector moving **P12**



CELEBRATING THE BEST
THIS YEAR'S BPMA AWARD WINNERS **P16**



SEAMLESS OPERATION P22
TEXTILES MOVE BEYOND SUPPLY CHAIN STRESS

TAKE THE SUSTAINABILITY PLEDGE P30
THE INDUSTRY GETS BEHIND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Contents

4 News

Need to know information for the industry

8 Ask Clive

The European opportunity

10 Business support

Energy and rates help

11 IWD

The BPMA is celebrating International Women's Day

12 Merchandise World

Getting the industry together for 2023

16 BPMA Awards

Who did the sector vote the best of the best?

22 Apparel and bags

As supply chains stabilise textiles remain hot

29 Peace of mind

Assessing customers' creditworthiness

30 Sustainability pledge

Enlisting industry support

35 Technology

Wireless headphones are making a big noise

36 BPMA news

Update on Association activity

37 What's the story?

Creating brilliant communications

38 Fit for a king

Coronation merchandise guidance

MARCH/APRIL 2023

WELCOME



Welcome to latest issue of *Product Media Magazine* and with 2023 well and truly underway, the industry is bright, bouncing, buzzing after this January's Merchandise World and BPMA

Annual Awards. Read on for show highlights and this year's stellar winners.

Earlier this year, we braced ourselves for deep recession and with the news inflation is peaking, there is more optimism in the marketplace as face to face, events and corporate customers keep the order books topped up. With the need for supply chain traceability and sustainable evidence needed more than ever, visitors to Merchandise World were hunting for compelling products

to tell their customers the right story about effective merchandise.

At the show, the BPMA also launched its StepForward Pledge, a member only initiative to help every business on their road to sustainability. Getting our house in order with our standards, compliance and all aspects of how we buy, sell and operate for 2023, the StepForward Pledge is just one element of the Association's mission to support members. Find out more about the Pledge in this issue on page 30 plus a report on how sustainable sales are impacting profits.

Another important first is the International Women's Day Lunch on 8th March, hosted in London as part of the diversity and inclusion agenda the BPMA is following. Bookings close soon – look out for the advert in this

issue. Part of a much bigger creative industries push to understand more about our landscape, help us attract and retain skilled talent and how the development of our industry relies on its diversity, members of the BPMA will be invited to join a census in March.

This issue is packed with your news and our regular columnists; we love to hear your news and as the only magazine for the promotional products industry, our readers love to hear about the movers and shakers plus look for inspiration through our advertising. If you'd like to send in your news or advertise in future issues including the pre-show edition in September, get in touch with us today via editor@productmediamagazine.co.uk.

Carey Trevill
BPMA CEO

Product Media 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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Merchandise sector almost back to pre-pandemic levels

The UK and Ireland promotional merchandise market has almost completely bounced back following the pandemic as end-user companies returned to spending and caught up with delayed projects.

According to the latest Sourcing City Market Report on the sector, merchandise has now recovered to 97% of pre-Covid levels with a market size of £1.13 billion.

In 2019 this was close to £1.17bn before the industry dropped off a cliff edge and declined by around £430m (37%) during the Covid pandemic.

The past year has seen a recovery of more than £401m to bring the industry once again beyond the billion-pound mark.

David Long (pictured), chairman of Sourcing City and author of the report, said: "It is pleasing to see that the industry continues to prove its resilience and entrepreneurial spirit. The world economy has faced significant challenges in recent years, and to date the industry has responded well. No doubt there are more challenges to face, but this industry is known for moving quickly to respond to market changes, and I remain optimistic that we will come through the coming years strongly."

Despite the additional challenges of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the fuel crisis, and supply chain issues, the promotional merchandise industry remained buoyant through to the end of 2022, he added.

The report, for Sourcing City Purple Club members identified future facing issues for the industry as it looks to rebuild.

There is a severe shortage of workers in the UK job market making it hard for companies to fill vacancies. Stock is in also in short supply from some suppliers as they rebuild stock levels post-Covid.

The report also points to financial and political instability hampering strategic planning, accompanied with constant inflationary increases to basic costs, salary increase pressure and rising interest rates.

Brexit regulation continues to be a thorn in the side of any company that exports or imports.

Given the scale of the decline in business due to the pandemic, the number of distributors and suppliers that went out of business was small, although restructuring was common.

It was estimated that the industry operated at about 60% of 2019 levels during parts of the pandemic, with the worst month (April 2020) being only 22% of the same month in 2019.

However, in 2022 distributor companies increased by 10%, mainly due to experienced staff being released by distributors and striking out on their own.

Understandably, the majority of new distributor companies have a turnover of less than £500k.

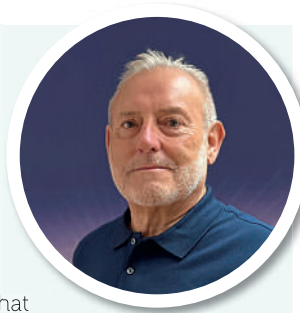
Larger distributors continue to have a significantly disproportionate share of the entire market spend, with just 156 companies representing almost 60% of the entire market spend with a combined turnover of over £660m.

The remaining 40% of the market spend is shared across 2,491 distributor companies.

Numbers of suppliers in the UK & Ireland marketplace has remained relatively constant. As with distributor companies, there are very few known high profile company casualties.

Sourcing City enquiries recovered strongly to approaching 1.5 million in 2022 with a growth of 36.7%. Exhibition giveaways, eco friendly ideas and desk gifts led the way. Travel, event, and activity items also showed strong growth.

The top 25 product groups have remained relatively constant to previous years in 2022, with bags, pens and pencils, mugs, plastic giveaways and sports bottles the top products.



Tech platform aims for more growth in 2023

Promotional product software provider AIM Smarter has gone into the new year celebrating growth and advancements in technology, supply chain connectivity and new tools.

In 2022 AIM Smarter focused on serving distributors' and suppliers' needs by strengthening supplier relationships, updating more supplier products than any previous year, and inviting suppliers to provide real time electronic data feeds.

AIM currently features data from more than 140 suppliers holding in excess of 50,000 unique products with more than 100,000 individual variations to be ordered.

Multiple supplier partner integrations are now live in the US providing real-time passage of data between members using the technology and suppliers' systems; syncing product inventory, orders, and statuses to provide enhanced visibility and reduced manual input.

AIM Smarter COO, Deborah Wilkinson said: "In 2020, we instituted an agile approach, not only across our technology development but across the business as a whole. This approach, embracing collaboration and continuous improvement, has allowed the business to future-proof its tech stack, be deliberately innovative, and scale the business while building a culture of trust and engagement across preferred partners, members, and affiliate communities."

AIM Smarter UK general manager, Rosi Spence pointed to technological advancements in the UK, despite economic turbulence.

"The AIM Tech platform is attracting a spectrum of quality distributors looking for a streamlined online business management suite and we've seen a 10% increase in distributors adopting the AIM Tech Suite for search and order creation from prior year, along with the launch of 2,658 global unique webstores to date with a BETA launch of a new, feature rich ecommerce platform for 2023," she said.

In 2022 the company updated its CRM system, PromoServe, with new software development features, new marketing collateral and business service packages, as well as a newly appointed general manager to support the post-Covid recovery of UK distributors and suppliers.

The company is claiming an industry first with its Merchbook tool – an online interactive catalogue that's fully brandable and drives traffic to individual products on websites.

The company is planning to launch further new functions in 2023.

Wearables and clothing at new promo show

The organisers of The BIG Promotional Trade Show has launched a collocated show focused on print wear and wearables.

Glasgow will host the first edition of The BIG Wearables Trade Show in March alongside The BIG Promotional Trade Show.

The organisers note an increased interest in this sector from both visitors and exhibitors such as XD Connects and Kingly moving into wearables.

Around 60 suppliers of promotional merchandise, wearables and services from the UK, Ireland and Europe are due to exhibit, the organisers claim.

New exhibitors will include Fruit of the Loom, Russell Europe, Result, Regatta, Neutral, NotJust Clothing, Impression Europe and Oldeani.

See the industry events calendar on page? for full dates.

Sustainability is on a plate with Stroodles

A company behind a sustainable pasta drinking straw has launched a fully edible tableware range.

Stroodles' new range includes biscuit spoons, wheat bran plates and bowls, and wafer cups, which are completely biodegradable, vegan, zero waste, and edible.

The business successfully launched pasta drinking straws in 2019, which it claims are better for the environment than plastic and paper variants, and are more robust than the paper equivalents.

The new range includes edible, vegan spoons, made from biscuit that have a one hour use time with cold dishes and 30 minutes with hot dishes.

Stroodles' edible plates and bowls to serve hot and cold food, are made from wheat bran and are designed to be 100% biodegradable, vegan and compostable in 30 days.

Its edible cups are made from wafer, designed to last for at least 40 minutes with hot drinks and be heat-resistant up to 85°C.

There is no transfer of heat and the wafer doesn't change the drink's taste. The cups



are available in 110ml and 220ml volumes and are perfect with hot drinks, as well as cocktails and even desserts. An outer recyclable holder can be customised upon request.

Founder Maxim Gelmann, said that the company was ready to grow the eco-tableware category.

"Stroodles is more than a company, we are a movement dedicated to making real change by impacting the planet in positive, eco-kind ways. We have always taken our commitment to creating solutions to plastic pollution very seriously. Ever since we started off with our signature pasta straw we knew this was just the beginning of our journey," he said.

Kingly socks it to them with latest eco plaudit

Promotional clothing supplier Kingly has received a Socially Responsible Strategic Management Award at a ceremony organised by Bulgaria's Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.



The sock specialist was nominated in the Ecology category, coming first in the contest for its work implementing sustainable projects within the merchandise manufacturing industry.

Kingly has been working on shifting the perspective of textile products for some time, introducing upcycled promotional cotton socks in compostable bags in 2019.

It received the Promotional Gift Award 2020 as upcycled cotton provides significant savings in resources and compostable bags can break down within eight weeks once disposed of.

The upcycled socks and GOTS organic cotton socks were also shortlisted in the Sustainable Product of the Year category for BPMA's Product Awards 2023.

Other products include eco-sustainable knitted sweaters, and customers can calculate the amount of preserved resources with a sustainability calculator and get a certificate from Kingly.

Recently the company launched The Kingly Upcycled Project to retrieve textile offcuts from sock production for new products. In line with its ISO 14001 Environmental Policy, leftover fibers find a new life as stuffing for printed pillowcases and furniture.

Kingly's upcycled socks are supported by BCome's Cradle to Grave sustainability platform which empowers textile and apparel businesses to build responsible supply chains and guarantee transparency.

The company's upcycled socks have earned the 'Advanced Score' on planet care and transparency, and 'High Score' on circularity.

Kingly's GOTS organic cotton socks have achieved BCome 'Honours score' – the highest rank given.

Kingly has capped an impressive awards streak by being named as Finalists in the 'Marketing Campaign of the Year' category at the BPMA Product Awards.

Previously, Kingly's Upcycled Cotton Socks and GOTS Organic Cotton Socks have been shortlisted in the Sustainable Product of the Year category.



Alvastone pushes to the top for Luton charity

The team from promotional clothing supplier Alvastone took a break from production at the beginning of February for a charitable assault on Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

Director Bilal Hussain led a team in its attempt to climb Africa's tallest mountain to raise £100,000 for a local charity that assists children and young adults with disabilities, and their families.

Hussain has been a director of Friends of Bright Eyes (FOBE) for more than 10 years and has family experience of a sibling with a disability.

"It was incredibly hard. The air is so thin that you have to stop after a few steps. It took us ten hours to get to the Uhuru peak,

but it was so worthwhile," he said.

FOBE is looking to raise a total of £200,000 to renovate a property in Luton that will serve as a community centre for the support of children and young people with disabilities and allow the charity to offer more services to its users.

Work is underway at the site and it is hoped that the outdoor areas will be ready by this summer.

The Kilimanjaro climb is the third charity effort by the team, which has previously also undertaken the Three Peaks Challenge to raise money for the centre.

Donations can be made until the end of March at justgiving.com/fundraising/bilal-hussain24.

Merchandise World posts impressive visitor and exhibitor numbers

January's Merchandise World in Coventry had 1,374 visitors, showing an increase of 54% from the 891 at the last event, which was held in April 2022.

The exhibition featured 14 new suppliers and a total of 161 exhibitors, which was up on the 144 exhibitors in April.

Many exhibitors now have a focus on environmentally friendly products, and this was evident from the new products in their ranges.

The move towards sustainable products is clear and ECO World proved a popular stand for discovering new ideas.

According to the organisers, the ratio of visitors per exhibitor was the highest ever at 8.5. Overseas exhibitors represented 18% of the total.

Visitor numbers were greater than expected due to the lower number of people now working in the industry following distributor companies restructuring during the pandemic.

The show also followed the identified trend of 60% of visitors coming on Day 1



and 40% on Day 2.

The show moves to Milton Keynes on 13 September. Read the Merchandise World review on p12.

US promo market now bigger than pre-pandemic

The US promotional sector has completed a post-Covid recovery, according to industry figures from its foremost trade body.

Promotional Products Association International (PPAI) estimates for 2022 put the overall turnover of the US promotional products sector at more than \$25bn (£20.8bn).

The figure represents a growth of more than 13% compared on 2021, and sets a new record turnover for the US and indicates a complete recovery following

the pandemic.

PPAI figures are based on sales volume sought by research company Relevant Insights at the end of 2022.

The figures show that more than half of sales are through companies with annual turnover of less than \$2.5m - more than \$12bn was earned by companies of this size.

The results of the survey reveal that SMEs grew significantly faster in the year 2022 than large companies with turnover up to 30%.



Fluid makes it eight in a row with service plaudits

Fluid Branding has retained the Feefo Platinum Trusted Service Award for the eighth year.

Feefo is an independent seal of excellence, which recognises businesses that consistently deliver a world-class customer experience registered on the platform as verified reviews from customers.

Platinum Trusted Service Awards are presented to businesses that have achieved the Gold standard for three consecutive years.

To receive Gold businesses must have collected at least 50 reviews with a Feefo service rating of between 4.5 and 4.9 during 2022.

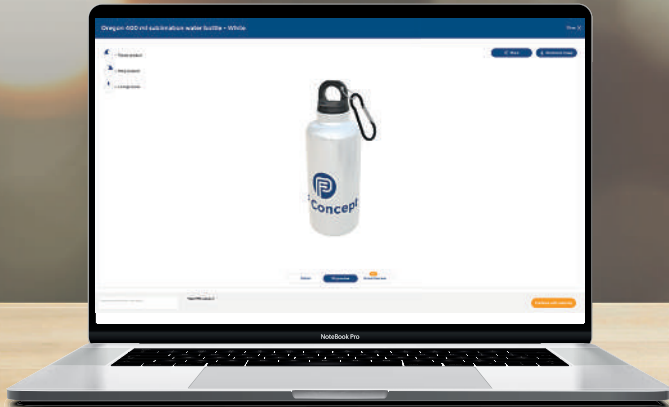
Miles Lovegrove, managing director at Fluid Branding said: "After the last few



years of uncertainty, it's amazing news that we're still keeping our customers happy and are consistently exceeding high expectations. As always, we champion exceptional people with meaningful merchandise, and it's great that our teams have been acknowledged with this award, too."

Tony Wheble, CEO at Feefo, added: "This year has been a difficult one for so many businesses. I'm delighted to recognise thousands of our clients that have overcome various challenges to provide such high levels of customer service and satisfaction."

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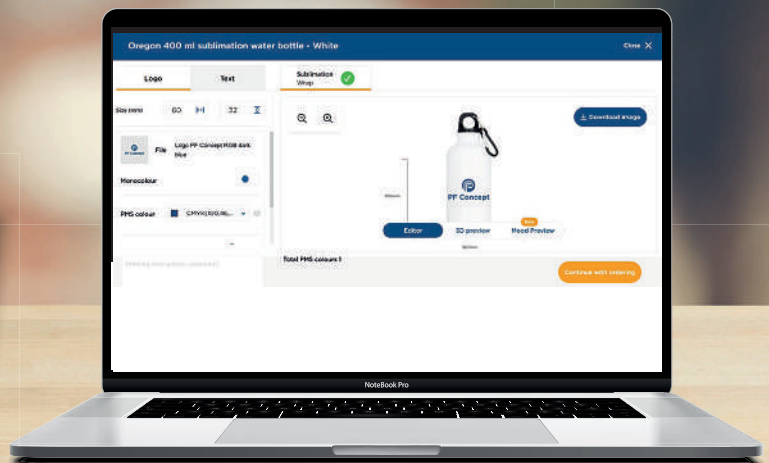


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CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Promotional clothing buyers looking for a one-stop shop for European supply have a range of new options, says **Clive Allcott**



So here we are in 2023 and hopefully some of the challenges of the past years are drifting into the background. Challenges such as Covid which in turn caused immense disruption on supply chains across the world, the war in Ukraine and the hike in energy prices and of course Brexit, which bought its own export trading challenges.

With these concerns many businesses have had to be flexible and agile to find resolutions to problems that were often outside of their control. I look at our business at DTB (Direct Textiles +

Bags) and see the changes that we have implemented to overcome such issues and the solutions we have put in place. One of these has been the setup of our European business DTBEU in Poland where we have been able to supply our UK customers with their European demands.

With so many distributors now fielding a European office to alleviate all the extra duties and VAT issues when supplying a European project, it has been necessary for suppliers to rally to the call and look to support this requirement.

Travelling around the European shows it has become evident that the demand for a 'European solution' has become a prerequisite for many distributors, however this does come with some caveats. The first one being, conformity of branding and the other the range of products.

If we look at the clothing marketplace in isolation, there are some key differences in product brands. The standard lines in the UK are often not available in Europe



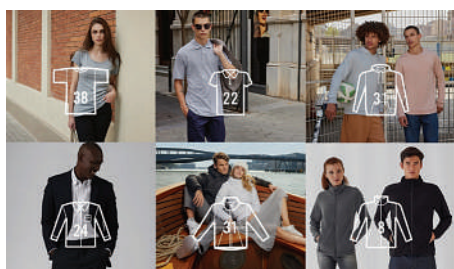
due to shape and size and colour palette. It is important that a clothing range can be offered across all countries.

A second point would be that many distributors are also looking for the conformity of branding across the UK as well as in Europe, which can prove difficult if you are using two separate suppliers who may well be using different inks or thread, hence the expansion of UK suppliers looking to expand into Europe offering a one-stop solution to offer consistency.

Ask your supplier if they have a European solution and 2023 may well be the year you expanded into Europe with confidence.

Happy Selling

Clive the clothing and bag guru. 🇬🇧





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ENERGY SUPPORT

FROM APRIL IS DIALLED DOWN

Government support for high energy bills will continue beyond April but it will be more targeted

The government's new energy scheme for businesses, charities, and the public sector has been confirmed ahead of the current scheme ending in March. Eligible businesses may receive a discount on high energy bills until 31 March 2024.

This will help businesses locked into contracts signed before recent falls in the wholesale price manage their costs and provide reassurance against possible future rises.

The winter Energy Bill Relief Scheme (EBRS) package of support for non-domestic users was worth £18 billion and the government has indicated that such unprecedented support would not be replicated. Latest data shows wholesale gas prices have fallen to levels seen just before Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

With a cap set at £5.5bn, the scheme provides certainty for businesses and reflects how the scale of the challenge has changed since September last year.

WHAT SUPPORT?

From 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, eligible non-domestic customers who have a

contract with a licensed energy supplier will see a unit discount of up to £6.97/MWh automatically applied to their gas bill and a unit discount of up to £19.61/MWh applied to their electricity bill, except for those benefitting from lower energy prices.

For eligible non-domestic customers who have a contract with a licensed energy supplier, the support will be subject to a wholesale price threshold, set with reference to the support provided for domestic consumers, of £107/MWh for gas and £302/MWh for electricity.

This means that businesses experiencing energy costs below this level will not receive support.

Customers do not need to apply for their discount. As with the current scheme, suppliers will automatically apply reductions to the bills of all eligible non-domestic customers.

ENERGY INTENSIVE BUSINESSES

A higher level of support will be provided to businesses in sectors identified as being the most energy and trade intensive – predominately manufacturing industries. This is known as the Energy and Trade Intensive Industries (ETII) scheme and the

government has published a list of eligible sectors.

These firms are often less able to pass cost to their customers due to international competition.

For eligible ETII businesses, the government is announcing:

- These businesses will receive a discount reflecting the difference between a price threshold and the relevant wholesale price.
- The price threshold for the scheme will be £99/MWh for gas and £185/MWh for electricity.
- This discount will only apply to 70% of energy volumes and will be subject to a 'maximum discount' of £40.0/MWh for gas and £89.1/MWh for electricity.

HOW IT WORKS

As with the original scheme, suppliers will automatically apply reductions to the bills of all eligible non-domestic customers.

Eligible ETII customers will have to apply for the higher level of support. Further details on how this will work will be published in due course. If you think your supplier is not applying the discount correctly, you should contact your supplier in the first instance.

The government will compensate suppliers for the reduction in wholesale gas and electricity unit prices that they are passing on to non-domestic customers.

The discount applied will be in pence per kilowatt hour (p/kWh). The p/kWh government support for comparable contracts will be the same across suppliers, but the absolute level of individual bills will continue to vary across different contracts and tariffs.

The Chancellor has also written to OFGEM, asking for an update in time for the Budget on the progress of its review into the non-domestic market to assess whether further action is needed to secure a well-functioning market.

For more information on the scheme, go to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/energy-bills-discount-scheme>

RATES SUPPORT

Businesses in England will also benefit from support with their business rates bills worth £13.6bn over the next five years, a UK-wide £2.4 billion fuel duty cut, a six-month extension to the alcohol duty freeze and businesses with profits below £250,000 will be protected from the full corporation rate rise, with those making less than £50,000 not facing any corporation tax increase at all.





BPMA EMBRACES *International Women's Day*

This year's IWD event can be a stepping stone to promoting diversity and inclusion within the merchandise sector

International Women's Day has long been celebrated and the promotional products industry joins the supporting messages all over the world each March. This year, the BPMA has launched its International Women's Day Lunch to be held on 8 March in London as part of a series of diversity and inclusion measures for members.

Hosted at 30 Euston Square, the event boasts a networking drinks reception followed by a delicious three-course lunch. Members will hear from keynote speaker, Kathryn Jacob OBE, CEO of Pearl & Dean, on the role women play in making our industries diverse plus insights from our member panel. Driving the conversation, the theme of International Women's Day is #EmbraceEquity, focusing on the idea that the equity we all expect is not a nice-to-have, it's a must-have to ensure we create a fair and equal world.

DIVERSITY IS CRITICAL TO THE INDUSTRY'S FUTURE


This is the first time the BPMA has celebrated the annual event and supported by a panel of female members, the lunch has been shaped to kick start

the diversity and inclusion agenda for members. Addressing a range of challenges from the lack of information about the diversity in our sector through to recruitment and careers in the industry, the panel has set out a series of goals for the coming year.

The International Women's Day event will be followed by an invitation to all members to take part in the All In census on 15 March. This is a creative industries initiative from the Advertising Association aimed at helping understand more about the diversity and social mobility of our sectors.

Book your places today

Tickets and tables are now available via bpma.co.uk/events. The event is only open to BPMA members and tickets on a first come, first served basis. Sponsorship for the event is now open, please contact Tom Robey for more information on tom@bpma.co.uk.

The BPMA panel is made up of members Carrie Stokes, Jules Adam, Claire Hutchinson, Melissa Chevin, and Colette Jeanes. 

What she said

Carrie Stokes, Bio Laboratories

"I really hope that by getting involved with IWD we can start to make some changes within the promo industry that will benefit all, over time. We need to ensure we are helping businesses evolve and become safe and empowering places for all to thrive. We need to be able to attract the next generation to this awesome industry and make sure those in middle age and older still feel seen and supported so we don't lose their years of experience in order to mentor and inspire those coming through the ranks."

Jules Adam, WCM+A

"Not only do we celebrate this day because of the historical footsteps of great women who fought for their rights, it is also a time to forge gender parity and equity within our own industry. The campaign theme this year is #EmbraceEquity, and I cannot think of a better theme for what I hope will be a yearly event. Both men and women are welcome because it is about the rise of women not about the fall of men and everyone should play a role in creating an inclusive world. What better place to start than within our own industry?"

A PERFECT 10

The tenth Merchandise World show saw the industry back up to speed with a vibrant get together in Coventry

The January temperature outside Coventry's CBS Arena may have been on the nippy side, but inside a warm welcome awaited from the promotional merchandise industry.

Those who braved the icy roads to the Midlands on the first day of Merchandise World were able to enjoy a bustling, vibrant show where exhibitors had really pulled the stops out with their stands, and aisles jostled with visitors eager to find out what was new and exciting in the world of merchandise.

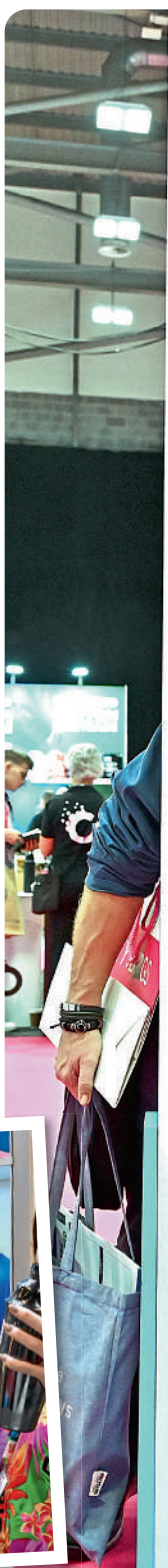
The show was the tenth that has been held since Sourcing City and the BPMA came together to produce an event where the whole of the industry could come together. Having experimented with a few venues, the show has now settled on a start the year event in the traditional central England location, with a secondary, event in Milton Keynes to service the pre-Christmas trade.

Having lost two shows due to Covid over the past years, the enthusiasm to meet was high among distributors and exhibitors in Coventry.

BACK TO BUSINESS

Pre-registrations for the show were around 1,600, and a good number of those streamed through the door on the first morning it seemed, with Sourcing City chairman David Long saying figures were over 700 by lunchtime on the first day.

"It is always nice when months of solid teamwork comes together to deliver a show that really benefits exhibitors and visitors. Without the support we get across the trade none of this would be possible, and we are always grateful," said David Long.



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10th
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Networking | Appointments
show





"It was also very nice to see lots of new faces, I hope the new generation coming through remain as excited by the industry as we are."

The exhibition featured 14 new suppliers to the show and a total of more than 160 exhibitors. Many exhibitors now have a focus on environmentally friendly products, and this was evident from the new products presented from their ranges. The move towards sustainable products is clear and ECO World proved a popular stand for discovering new ideas.

THE BEST YET

Over the two-day show 1,354 quality distributor visitors streamed through the door and the show hall remained busy right up until the show closed at 3pm on Day 2. The show also followed the trend of 60% of visitors coming on Day 1 and 40% on Day 2.

Show organiser, Ella Long said: "From the feedback we have had, our latest show was considered the best one yet. We always aim to push the bar higher, so this was great to hear. Visiting distributors were excited about the new products and suppliers that they had found, and exhibitors felt that both the quality and volume of the visitors was exceptional. There was a lot of optimism in the air and that ensured that everyone left the show with a smile."

Jason O'Connor, director of distributor Total Merchandise summed up the reaction of many at the show.

He said: "It was a pleasure to head to Coventry for Merchandise World last week. We had a great time discovering some brilliant new products and ideas, and it really felt like there was a renewed sense of

purpose in the air. We also enjoyed catching up with some old friends from across the industry, as well as making some new ones. The team is already looking forward to the next edition of the show."

Natasha Ithildin of Fluid Branding said Merchandise World was an opportunity to see new products and discuss insights on upcoming trends.

"Nothing beats getting up close to a new range, such as XD Connect's new Iqoniq clothing collection. It caught my attention straight away - it's just so soft. Also, have you seen their green tracksuit? Beautiful. It's great to see our industry taking strides (no, leaps!)



toward a more sustainable, environmentally-friendly future," she added.

LOOKING AHEAD

There was certainly a feeling of an industry looking ahead to new opportunities at this year's show.

Mandy Hastie, managing director of The Sweet People was in attendance at the show with a new brand for the company, new packaging for partnering brands that want to send out merchandise with confectionery, and a new offering to send product to Europe.





The company has partnered with a fulfilment house in the Netherlands to ease the difficulties that many businesses encounter when trying to send items to the EU post-Brexit. By sending pallets of product to the fulfilment house, products can be sent more easily by British promoters to customers within the EU, she said.

"There has been massive demand for this from distributors, and although initially it will only be for UK distributors, we will open it up to European customers as well," she said.

The Sweet People has also started holding teambuilding events for clients who want to make their own chocolates at the factory, with sales meetings tacked on, she added.

40 YEARS YOUNG

Another company making a splash at the show was Senator Pens which was celebrating its 40th anniversary.

As well as a selection of pens made from recycled materials, the Harlow-based manufacturer was showing how

the humble writing instrument can help businesses stay connected. On show was its Connected range that includes a QR code pen which allows users to link to websites carrying relevant brand or business information, simply by hovering a phone camera over the code.

Senator also has the Challenger which uses an NFC tag which links to online pages related to a brand. The clever cloud solution allows changing content so that a product will always be up-to-date, even after long periods of use.

HIP TO BE SQUARE

Another upcoming anniversary is Rubik's. The brand behind the iconic and fiendishly tough to complete cube, is celebrating its 40th next year, and Preseli was showcasing its latest brand association at Merchandise World. Preseli marketing manager Robert Bruce says that lots of major brand collaborations are likely, so it could be timely to get involved.

SWISS KIT

Another brand with plenty of heritage is Victorinox, best known for the Swiss army knife, but which supplies a whole range of other gift items. These days, the company is as much associated with travel and cutlery as with its pocket knives.

Another useful product is the Swisscard, the credit card sized gift which packs a multitude of tools into it a wallet-sized offering than can be branded.

MOVING ON UP

Clothing company Alvastone was at the show for a brief burst of business before director Billy Hussain and his team headed to Kilimanjaro for a charity ascent of the mountain (see news p4) for the full story.

The team of 12 was kitted out in colourful T-shirts supplied by the Luton-based business.



Award winners on show

Merchandise World was the first opportunity for visitors to see the winning products from the latest BPMA Product Awards in the flesh.

With fourteen categories judged, there were winners across a range of areas from apparel and awards, to technology and writing instruments.

Products were also recognised for innovation, sustainability, and being British-made, and many winners proudly displayed their trophies on their stands.

The full range of product winners can be seen at bpma.co.uk.





COMPLEMENTS OF THE BRAND

Another company promoting a new direction in Coventry was Eat My Logo, which is best known for its range of branded cupcakes, brownies, biscuits and just about any sweetmeat that will get your mouth-watering.

As well as the usual goodies, the company had some surprising new additions to its range.

Director Andy Poar explained that the company was looking to expand into chocolate bars which would complement its existing range.

"It's actually quite straightforward compared to some of the branded products we already offer," he said. "You can't stand still in this industry. We're always looking for something new to offer."

A more tangential turn is the company's expansion into branded beer through a partnership with a brewery. The result is a selection of beers and ciders that can be branded with a relatively low minimum order. It is a complementary product to its existing range, the company said.

MIDDLE EAST SERVICE

With the recent World Cup promoting interest in the Middle East, companies are in search of ways of fulfilling their presence in this growing market. Dubai distributor Jasani was present at the show for the first time to test the market and to offer up its services.

Clients have been asking for such a service, said Shrey Jasani from the company which has 30 years' experience in the region.

"Many companies have an EMEA presence but the struggle with the 'MEA' part of it. That's where we can step in and provide an alternative to shipping pallets of product to the region," he said.

It provides a range of well-known corporate gift brands, including Cross, Tumi, XD Design, and Samsonite. It has also picked up a gold award at the Gulf Sustainability Awards 2022 where its Change Collection won Best CSR Initiative.

MAKE THE PLEDGE

Sustainability remains a watchword for the merchandise sector, hence the BPMA's initiative to enlist the industry to sign up for its Sustainability Pledge.

Merchandise World saw the launch of the StepForward Pledge which aims to help BPMA members take proactive steps to embed sustainability within their products, their operations and in the communities they serve.

By signing up to the Pledge, members declared their commitment to tracking and measuring their sustainability performance each year. This in turn will help enhance the reputation of participating companies, together with raising the profile of the promotional merchandise industry as it addresses climate change and other environmental challenges.

Find more details on p30.

SMART BAGS

JuteBag was one of the companies with products aimed at providing more sustainable options for merchandise buyers. Its Cyclo fabric has inbuilt blockchain technology that proves that fabric comes from recycled sources.

With increasing demand for recycled cotton products, disreputable players can try and pass off cotton that does not meet

recycled standards as the real thing. Cyclo allows its provenance to be approved all the way along the supply chain.

JuteBag also undertakes a similar scheme for RPET bags to ensure that they are from reliable sources.

MORE IN SEPTEMBER

After a bustling show, there will be plenty of leads to chase and customers to service, but Merchandise World will be back again in September when attention shifts to the end of year promotional cycle.

The Milton Keynes show is on 13 September. We'll see you there.



BRIMAN's Treasure Hunt is back

Members of the BRIMAN Group invited visitors to collect a BRIMAN treasure map, visit each BRIMAN member to collect a stamp and claim their treasure at the BPMA stand. Each completed treasure map was also entered in the prize draw to win a £250 Amazon voucher. It was won by Lorraine Bulbeck of TC Group.

BRIMAN members exhibiting at the show were: Adco, ANC Manufacturing, Billbo, Badger Design, Bio Laboratories, Juniper Products, CHX Products, Eat My Logo, First Editions, Foremost Magnets, Orchard Melamine, UK Lanyard Makers, Sow Easy, The Umbrella Company, Sweet People and WCM+A.

With thanks to Sweet People for the delicious treasure, Badger Design and Foremost Magnets for their production support.





A NIGHT TO *remember*

* Award winners celebrated in style at the 2023 BPMA Annual Awards Dinner, hosted at the CBS Arena in Coventry





Laltex - Supplier of the year £2m+



Zippy Promos - best distributor up to £250k

Ideas with Bio Laboratories landing the winning vote for this category.

Next up was **Supplier of the Year £2m+** sponsored by Geiger, with a strong line up of finalists of Laltex Group, XD Connects and WCM+A. Laltex Group scooped the Award and flooded the stage with a very excited team.

The next Awards announced focused on distributors and this year, more turnover categories were recognised.

Distributor of the Year up to £250k, sponsored by Promo Collection, had finalists Zippy Promos, ETC. Branding and AA Promotional Products on the edge of their seats. Zippy Promos landed this first distributor award.

Distributor of the Year £250k-£500k, sponsored by Victorinox, announced contenders Beeline Promotional Products, TSF Branded and Manic Merchandise with Manic Merchandise winning this category.

Sponsored by Preseli, **Distributor of the Year £500k-£1m** finalists were Cyan Group, Navillus and Project Merchandise with Navillus taking the Award home.

Distributor of the Year £1m-£2m - sponsored by PF Concept, hailed finalists One Stop Promotions Ltd, GoPromotional and Bounce Creative Designs. Bounce Creative Design duly jumped on stage to accept their award for this category.

Fresh from the first day of Merchandise World, guests from across the promotional merchandise industry gathered to catch up with friends and colleagues started their evening with a drinks reception. Along with a reminder of the recent BPMA Product Award Winners announced earlier in January, the chance to relax at the end of a busy day was welcomed.

The last dinner was hosted in April 2022, returning after a two-year break following the pandemic and the event this year was back in its normal January slot. The BPMA Awards are presented annually to member suppliers and distributors following a vote placed by each member. In addition, several categories were available for members to enter their marketing campaigns, while the best of British was celebrated with the BRIMAN Award.

INDUSTRY SUPPORT

The dinner is always supported by generous sponsors and event supporters. This year's category sponsors were Geiger, Preseli, DTB, PF Concept, Bic Graphics, Promo Collection, Victorinox and B group. Several members of the Board also presented on the night. WCM+A generously provided the trophies and the BPMA Recognition trophy was by Laser Crystal. Melt in the mouth chocolates at the dinner were supplied by The Sweet People.

Hosting and compering the event, the BPMA's charismatic Chairman Haydn Willetts kicked off the evening with his thanks to all attending to get the evening off to a roaring start.

The first category up was **Supplier of the Year up to £2m**, and the finalists were The USB Group, Bio Laboratories and Desktop



Manic Merchandise - distributor of the year up to £500k



Navillus - distributor of the year up to £1m



Bounce Creative - distributor of the year up to £2m

Allwag Promotions - distributor of the year £2-5m



Bic Graphics, sponsoring the **Distributor of the Year £2-5m category**, were on stage as finalists Allwag Promotions, Premier, and Pellacraft waited to hear who had won. Allwag Promotions received this Award to cheers and applause.

With the final **Distributor of the Year Award over £5m**, sponsored by DTB, contenders Fluid, Total Merchandise and Brand Addition waited nervously for the gold envelope to reveal Fluid as this year's winner.

The Distributor and Supplier Marketing Campaign of the Year Awards were next. Willetts shared the judge's feedback before naming this year's winner and talked of the innovation and inspiration from every entrant to this category.

Judged by an independent marketing judging panel, **The Distributor of the Year Marketing Campaign** finalists were Fluid for their 'Festivals & Events' campaign, Vibrant Colour for its 'Master Your Merch' campaign, and Geiger's 'Geiger Green Live' campaign. Geiger took the award with their 'Geiger Green Live' campaign, impressive work

BUILDING EXCITEMENT

Taking a short pause for dinner, the room was buzzing with excitement for the final awards of the evening which included the long-awaited Product Awards Grand Prix and BPMA Recognition Award.

Geiger won best distributor marketing campaign



Fluid Branding - distributor of the year £5m+

BPMA AWARD WINNERS

Supplier of the Year up to £2m

Winner: Bio Laboratories

Supplier of the Year £2m+, sponsored by Geiger

Winner: Laltex Group

Distributor of the Year up to £250k, sponsored by Promo Collection

Winner: Zippy Promos

Distributor of the Year £250k-£500k, sponsored by Victorinox

Winner: Manic Merchandise

Distributor of the Year £500k-£1m, sponsored by Preseli

Winner: Navillus Print Gifts

Distributor of the Year £1m-£2m, sponsored by PF Concept

Winner: Bounce Creative Design

Distributor of the Year £2m-£5m, sponsored by Bic Graphic

Winner: Allwag Promotions

Distributor of the Year £5m+, sponsored by DTB

Winner: Fluid Branding

Distributor Marketing Campaign of the Year

Winner: Geiger - Geiger Green Live Campaign

Supplier Marketing Campaign of the Year

Winner: WCM+A - Sustainable British Manufacturing Campaign

BRIMAN Award

Winner: Premier Print & Promotions

BPMA Recognition Award

Andrew Hill



WCM+A won the supplier marketing award



BRIMAN award winners Premier Print & Promotions

with long-term strategy in mind. Judges also awarded Vibrant Colour's entry Highly Commended.

The **Supplier Marketing Campaign of the Year** saw finalists WCM+A for their 'Sustainable British Manufacturing' campaign, The Outdoors Company with their 'Take A Stand, Source Responsibly' campaign, and Kingly's 'Inspirational Stories' campaign. The winner of this category was WCM+A's 'Sustainable British Manufacturing' campaign for its excellent work during 2022, driving exceptional results, new clients, and revenues. Kingly also received Highly Commended from our judging panel.

The **BRIMAN Award** was a further opportunity for distributors to show off the best of British. Judged by BRIMAN members looking for distributor members who had promoted British made and finished promotional products, Premier Print & Promotions walked away with this Brit-centric accolade.

The **Product Awards Grand Prix** was also awarded at the dinner. A new addition to the Product Awards line up; the Grand Prix was awarded at the final judging panel and selected from all Platinum Product Award winners. Juniper Product's Wellness Journal was voted Grand Prix winner by the panel and a delighted team received the award to a huge round of applause.

A NEW TRADITION

Last award of the evening was the **BPMA Recognition Award**. The BPMA Board decided to start a new tradition this year, recognising outstanding contributors to our industry. The person selected for this year's BPMA Recognition Award was Andrew Hill who has for many years gone above and beyond, making sure the reputation and position of the industry is upheld.

The evening concluded with conversation, music, dancing and fun and while PM was sure there were few sore heads for day two of Merchandise World, this fantastic event marked the return to business as usual for 2023.



Juniper won the Product Awards Grand Prix

Andrew Hill was the first winner of the new BPMA Recognition Award



The BPMA would like to thank everyone who attended and supported this event. More images of the event will be available at bpma.co.uk/annualawards #bpmaawards.

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Introducing the BIC® Super Clip range of products.

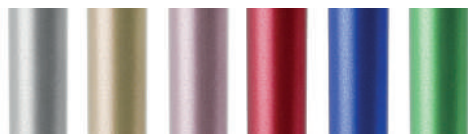
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We call it "Super" and we are not exaggerating.

Maybe you wonder why we call it "Super". Or maybe you already know it. But just in case, let us explain: first of all because of its modern style; also because of its big printing area on the clip; and it's made in Europe with 100% renewable energy and all manufactured and printed in BIC factories for a low impact carbon footprint. Isn't it Super?

GLACÉ



SOFT



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Imagine the BIC® Super Clip, but even more Super.

Imagine. Ready? Great: imagine the famous BIC® Super Clip made from natural raw materials like wood flour, castor oil and talc powder*. Just imagine, a BIC® Super Clip that contributes to a more sustainable future. Now stop imagining it: you have it here.

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Seamless operators

Bags and apparel remain merchandise winners despite supply chain hiccups

Promotional clothing and bags are two of the most popular choices for end users. Not only are they valued by recipients, but they represent large and mobile media that can take a brand name or message out into the market place. They also tend to be long-lasting meaning that the cost per impression is a good value investment.

However, textiles have had a rough time during the past couple of years. Like merchandise of all descriptions, they have been beset by supply chain disruption.

Billy Hussain, director of bespoke clothing specialist Alvastone, says that issues with the clothing supply chain are still unwinding after two years of pandemic stress when shipping costs went through the roof and simply obtaining stock was a problem.

"The supply chain has been awful for a while and to a certain extent it remains very difficult. I'd say it has stabilised rather than got better."

For customers, this means that lead times can still be lengthy and costs have increased.

"On the manufacturing side, it is taking longer because manufacturers are not producing as much as they used to. Minimum orders have also got higher," he says.

For Alvastone, the company has built in contingency by holding more fabric than it used to in the past. Historically it would buy fabric in when it was required, but now it looks to have stock to ensure orders flow more seamlessly.

Hannah Brewer, commercial sales and marketing executive at Outdoor and Cycle Concepts (O&CC) says supply chain delivery issues appear to have been very much resolved for UK and Euro-based companies, however, there do seem still to be issues from further afield.

"Prices have seen an increase due to a number of issues including resourcing, conflict, and more sustainable

production," she says. "This is something we have seen across all industries and garments are not exempt."

Brewer says that because O&CC's group sales team forms part of a much wider business, it has access to hundreds of brands.

"We have the ability to offer the best product from our range to match the needs of the end user. This not only provides a great opportunity to get what the customer wants but also helps sustainability as the user is not having to replace or reorder items as often," she says.

The company has noticed more and more requests for branded clothing as promotional merchandise.



New fast clothing service launched

A new service that enables promoters, festivals and bands to get quality promotional clothing printed in 24 hours was launched at Merchandise World in Coventry.

Samedayprintwear.com has been set up as a sister website by the experienced team that has been running samedaybags.com for the last 10 years.

The eco-friendly screen printers have expanded their headquarters in Monmouthshire, from which they have been turning around last-minute orders for promotional bags for exhibitions, conferences and events and are now offering T-shirts, hoodies and other clothing with delivery within 24 hours when required.

Director Helen Green said: "There is a huge demand for fast turnaround clothing merchandise. Our new service will help festivals, who often have to change line-ups at the last minute. Tour and event sponsors

can be given longer to decide on backing an event as their logos can still appear on promotional clothing.

"It will also help bands and promoters who half-way through a tour suddenly find they have a hit on their hands and demand for merchandise soars. Being able to order more without compromising quality is a real advantage."

Helen and her husband Melvin started out in promotional festive clothing before specialising in bags 10 years ago. They have always screen-printed T-shirts and clothing as a side offering to the bags but are now launching a sister website dedicated to the clothing range.

It will have the same

environmental standards and quick turnaround and be produced from the same base in Raglan where the business is recruiting more screen printers, office staff, sales staff and designers over the first quarter of 2023 as the business expands.

They will be offering the EarthPositive range of shirts which are organic, ethical and climate neutral.

EarthPositive shirts are made in manufacturing facilities powered by green renewable energy, reducing their carbon footprint by 90%.

Samedayprintwear.com uses vegan, water-based inks and glues so every part of the product can be environmentally sound.

The EarthPositive collection also comes in 46 different colours and various styles and fits.



"Companies and organisations are looking more and more to invest in quality goods that will not only meet their sustainability criteria but stand the test of time," she adds. "With branded goods, customers not only align themselves with leading outdoor brands, but to find products that the recipient will be proud to use or wear."

Quality also aligns with another desirable must have for today's buyers – sustainability.

Stormtech director of sales Kyle Annable says that where it was once viewed as a luxury that could not be afforded, perceptions are changing fast.

"The reality is that this is an extremely personal and important topic for a lot of people and especially young people," he says.

Companies realise that overhauling their supply chain doesn't happen overnight but that making a genuine commitment to a more sustainable model can start quickly by developing a realistic and impactful strategy to achieve goals.

Stormtech's journey to sustainability includes using more recycled materials, and while it will take time before all fabric is from recycled materials, there are simple and effective changes it has made in the interim.

It has stopped the use of harmful PFCs in waterproofing. It also uses poly bags from recycled materials and cardboard also comes from recycled sources.

The company, which launched its Polygiene Stay Fresh technology range to UK distributors recently, emphasises buying quality to cut down on textile landfill.

Rachel Salisbury, divisional head at Bags HQ also notes that in the last few years the demand for sustainable bags has been increasing, with customers wanting alternative options that have been made with recycled materials and eco-friendly recyclable credentials.

"We have gradually been investing in more



eco stock and now have a large range of products made from a range of materials, such as RPET, recycled paper, recycled card, recycled cotton, organic cotton and more. This allows our customers to offer a great choice of items to those who would prefer an environmentally friendly promotional bag or notebook."

For 2023, Bags HQ has added GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) certified bags in to the range, with different sizes and weights available. GOTS is the worldwide leading textile processing standard for organic fibres, including ecological and social criteria, and all bags with this certification have a tab stitched into the side to back up its credentials.

GRS (Global Recycled Standard) bags are also new for 2023. GRS is a voluntary product standard for tracking and verifying the content of recycled materials in a final product. The standard applies to the full supply chain and



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CANVAS BAGS
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DRAWSTRINGS
BACKPACKS
EXHIBITION BAGS
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"Companies and organisations are looking to invest in quality goods that will meet sustainability criteria and stand the test of time."

addresses environmental principles, chemical content and much more. All bags in this collection are made from 50% recycled cotton and have a tab stitched into the side to show their certification.

The company has also teamed up with Three Peaks GBR to bring a new option for customers. Three Peaks aligns with Bags HQ's environmental values, as it partners with ocean charities to reduce plastic pollution.

"It's a great choice to provide an eco-friendly, brandable and premium option for those businesses that want a different type of bag for travelling, outdoor sports and much more," says Salisbury. All Three Peaks GBR bags are made using RPET material, a soft yet hard wearing, high quality and water-resistant material.

Despite the disruption of supply chains, time sensitivity will also be an issue for certain projects. Meeting those needs has become a USP of Samedaybags.

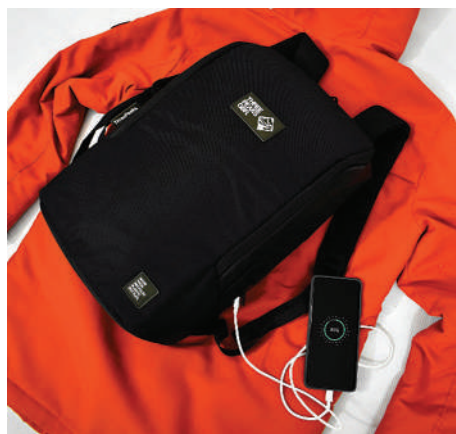
Director Melvin Green, explains that offering a quick turnaround means that company holds a lot of stock which means

it has not been greatly affected by supply chain issues.

"Our sustainably sourced bags mostly come from Asia and we order well in advance so that we can always offer choice to customers," he says. "There are occasions when we may not have a particular bag in a particular colour and then we work with customers to find an alternative bag or solution. The fact that the nature of our product is time sensitive definitely makes the conversation easier with our customers, as they're often looking to order as a matter of urgency. Having stock and choice available allows us to offer an immediate solution."

He adds: "With costs rising we are finding customers want bags to work harder for them and last longer. We would encourage people to opt for a durable bag and have an eye-catching design as it encourages the user to make the most use of the bag."

The business is now taking its quick turnaround model into apparel with the launch of Samedayprintwear.com with the aim of printing clothing within 24 hours (see box p23).



BPMA AWARD WINNERS IN FOCUS: BAGS AND APPAREL

The apparel category for the BPMA Product Awards is always a hotly contested one; the apparel sector has come on leaps and bounds in recent years with major players in the market. Innovative production techniques and sustainable offerings have impressed the industry together with the traditional and loved staples which form the foundation of many orders.

VERSATILE WINNERS

This year's BPMA Product of the Year categories for apparel and bags didn't disappoint. In the apparel category, the Silver Apparel Product of the Year was bagged by PromoCollection's Full Size Sublimation Bucket Hat. A fun and versatile product with fully customisable print, this was a popular choice for festival branding and outdoor sports.

Like many entrants to this category, the next category winners were represented by robust and stylish jackets. The Hiker Jacket from United Brands of Scandinavia was a perfect example of a high-quality shell jacket with all the superb functions we expect from this supplier who took the Gold Apparel Product of the Year.

The Hiker Jacket also features zipper pullers in contrasting colour and it is possible to add zip pullers in other colours matching the company logo. With great sustainable touches such as



its compostable polybag, judges praised the function and form of this promotional staple.

The Platinum Product of the Year was hands down the Rab Downpour Eco Waterproof Promotional Jacket from The Outdoors Company (main picture). With a key component the ability to brand, this high-spec jacket boasted a sustainable menu of features to impress. Built from recycled 2.5-layer Pertex Revolve fabric with a fluorocarbon-free DWR treatment, the Rab Downpour Eco Jacket is Rab's first ever mono-polymer waterproof jacket.

RECYCLING IN ACTION

The Bag & Folder categories also presented some fantastic product ranges, finishes and options. Judges for the Product Awards awarded a 'Highly Commended' for Oldeani's Shield RPET Laptop Bag; made of recycled bottles for a durable and attractive finish.

The Silver Bag & Folder Product of the Year came from multiple award winners, Juniper with its Como recycled PET folder and binder range. These high-quality folders and binders are made from recycled material; cover material, and inner pockets are COMO RPET made from recycled plastic bottles. The linings are made from RPET polyester (again recycled). Recycled board is then used and the padding switched from PVC foam to an organic cellulose cloth. The writing pads are also made from recycled paper.

IT'S IN THE BAG

Samedaybags.com scooped the Gold Bag & Folder Product of the Year with their Salvage Recycled Shopper Tote Bag, which takes waste to inspirational style. This soft feel tote bag is made from 100% recycled materials featuring a T gusset and twill effect to the fabric face.

The Platinum Bag & Folder Product of the Year winner came from another multiple winner, JuteBag with the Ninga Recycled RPET Recron GreenGold Tote Bag. This trailblazing bag was loved by the judging panel who applauded the credentials of this latest star from JuteBag. The Ninga Recycled PET Recron GreenGold Tote Bag is made from 100% recycled plastic water bottles. A stylish, robust and eco-friendly shopper, each bag is embedded with tracer technology for forward and backward traceability, providing full product transparency.

The Ninga has an extensive list of eco-credentials that sets it apart from standard RPET bags. Plastic bottles are shredded, transformed into yarn and woven into beautiful and versatile tote bags.

Award Winning Eco Folders

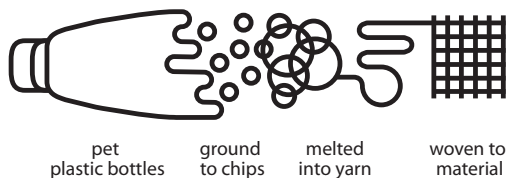


Full range of black A5 & A4 folders in stock.
Branded by deboss or colour digital print in 1-2 weeks.

Deboss sample
on Black Como



The base of the Como & Porto material is rPET, made by recycling old plastic bottles that would normally go to landfill, to then form a new soft, tactile, and flexible material.



Eco Credentials

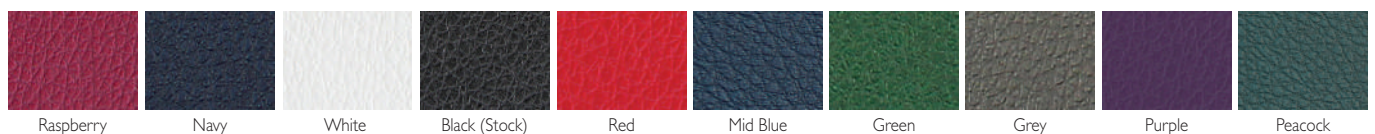
- 80% rPET – made from recycled plastic bottles
- 16% non-woven cellulose
- 4% PU
- rPET polyester lined
- Recycled board
- Organic cellulose cloth padding
- REACH Compliant
- Vegan friendly



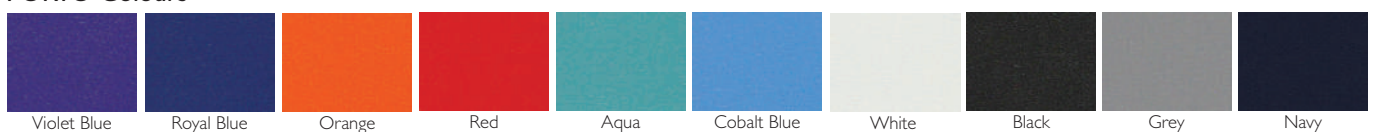
Full range of colour A5 & A4 folders available MTO, branded by deboss or colour digital, within 3 weeks.



COMO Colours



PORTO Colours



GUARANTEED PEACE OF MIND

With the start of the new financial year looming, it makes sense to step up assessment of how to deal with customers says **Mike Collins**



The New Year is always full of promise to alter ourselves, our lifestyles, our environment but how often do we promise to alter the way we look at our business? We're a couple of months in now, so have we made those changes we promised to ourselves that we would?

Running a successful business can be a drain on your time. Often the clamour to service clients and fulfil orders takes over the opportunity to really consider your business's fortunes, including analysing your exposure and your risk.

We all know that 2023 is going to be an ongoing challenge with cash flow so now is the time to study or scrutinise your customers' payment habits.

Is there a particular customer who has taken longer than usual to pay?

If so, make a note on your accounts system to flag them up as a concern. Then make them your priority when you're conducting your credit control, contact them first. The quicker you action a concern, the speedier you are going to get paid.

Is there a particular customer who has consistently ordered, or tried to order, more goods than your suggested credit limit should allow?

Now is the time to conduct some credit and diligence checks on that customer. Make sure that they are worthy of the extended credit limit that you have already granted to them.

If you're a BPMA member that has fully activated your membership benefit Account Assyst package, you can consistently check whether the customer should be receiving a larger credit value. If they are worthy of

an increase, then consider extending their credit limit. Your customer will appreciate the vote of confidence and may even provide further orders and profit.

If you have not yet activated your BPMA benefit package, then simply contact Ian Jenkinson on 07860 197476 to discuss your needs. Sometimes we can help in a few short seconds.

Not a BPMA Member? No worries – talk to us anyway. We are supporters of the promotional goods industry and so will always have a solution to help... which might even include an advisory to join the BPMA if this is beneficial for you cost-wise in obtaining a relationship with us. We're just here to provide best advice and guidance.

Should your customer not be worthy of an increased credit limit, then what actions are you taking to protect yourself on future orders?

This is where a Personal Guarantee can help. A Personal Guarantee provides a little bit more protection and security against a credit risk and allows a further avenue of pursuit should the customer's business go through a tricky financial time in the future.

The new and improved Account Assyst package will help you easily secure Personal Guarantees. This we believe is an additional feature that we will become essential during the next 12 months.

The new financial year beginning on 6 April is a time, just like any other new year, for fresh starts and new beginnings, so let's begin by putting best practices into our businesses for a stronger position.

Mike Collins is managing director of Direct Route/Account Assyst



Local Support Contact Details

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

London and South

David Barker
dbarker@directroute.co.uk
07766 545871

Midlands and East Anglia

Ken Brown
kbrown@directroute.co.uk
07795 214426

Wales and North West

Ian Jenkinson
ijenkinson@directroute.co.uk
07860 197476

North East, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Mike Collins
mike@accountassyst.com
07866 427363



Getting our house in ORDER

The BPMA has launched the StepForward Pledge as a way for members to demonstrate to merchandise users that they appreciate the importance of a sustainable approach

Leading with a compelling narrative, the BPMA's StepForward Pledge sets out the importance of the plan for every member business to aim for high standards for the products they sell, the people who work for them and the planet we live in. This straightforward and compelling approach has the industry sitting up and paying attention.

The BPMA has set the Pledge up as a voluntary route to help members on their path to sustainable best practice.

BPMA Board Director, Melissa Chevin who has been working closely with the team at the BPMA to devise and launch this initiative, explained why it is important.

"This is aimed at changing the way we work and the work we make. A very simple expression to describe the way we need to approach the huge task for member companies," she said. "It's important to the future health of our industry that we get our house in order; our customers expect it from us. Open to every member of the BPMA, this voluntary process helps you assess where you are, where you need to get to and support on the journey so no matter what stage you're at, we can help you improve your position as a business."

WHAT DROVE THE BPMA TO CREATE A PLEDGE?

In the face of mounting pressure to combat climate change, businesses and

consumers are paying greater attention to their impact on the environment. Our end user customers are pretty savvy and whether they are a micro-SME or a large corporate, most are looking for the solutions presented to have a supply chain we can trace and products whose impact on the planet is properly understood.

In a session ran earlier in January, BPMA President and owner of Allwag, Angela Wagstaff was interviewed about the customer awareness and demands she is experiencing. Detailing her types of customer and the different approaches they may expect, she noted her customers, big or small, all need to hear that her team understands exactly what they are selling and are able to evidence the production and manufacture story.

Tested in a recent client meeting as to whether she knew the backstory of a specific product with a strong sustainable material specification, she said: "We're having great meetings with clients and we need to be prepared to answer all and every question. Doing the homework is critical and we need to be able to provide a clear pedigree for every product."

DEMAND FOR THE RIGHT INFORMATION IS HIGH

Those invited to register their interest in the Pledge this January, told the BPMA

more about the demand and reliance on sustainable sales within their organisations. With 61% of members stating that the demand for evidence of sustainable best practice was high, only 7% stated they weren't asked for this information. Some 62% of those respondents said they had a sustainable programme or policy in place and while 32% said they didn't have any current policies, they were keen to implement a sustainable best practice. One member visiting Merchandise World was registering interest in the Pledge after losing a significant contract due to the lack of sustainable policies and product evidence.

Revenue generated from sustainable sales was also growing exponentially across the industry as end users migrated their requests from a 'nice to have' to a 'must have' aspect of their orders. While not every sale was attributable to a pure sustainable sale, more than 70% of respondents stated up to 50% of their order books were linked to a sustainable product. With 32% of suppliers now stating the majority of their income (75-100%) is in sustainable goods, *PM* expects the reporting in sales to all be based on a sustainable supply chain within the next two years.

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN THE PLEDGE?

Members signing up to the Pledge



are subject to an online assessment and need to provide a sustainable policy to qualify. Armed with resources and support to help complete a series of continuous improvement goals, the Pledge is based on Environmental, Social and Governance targets (or ESG) crucial for both business growth and establishing long-term benefits. The Pledge has been supporting members in managing the risks and opportunities of ESG, embedding sustainability within their products, operations and in the communities in which they serve.

The StepForward Pledge is a sector-specific guiding set of principles that encourages members to take steps in embedding sustainability within their products, services and in the communities in which they operate.


Signatories are asked to declare their commitment to measuring, tracking and improving their sustainability performance against a set of criteria each year between now and 2030.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND OUT MORE?

Only open to BPMA members, the Association is hosting a series of webinars in March and April to cover each step to complete the Pledge, what members need to provide and why. Registration for these sessions is via bpma.co.uk/events and listeners can choose from several dates. More detail is also available via bpma.co.uk/stepforward-pledge

Webinar dates are:

- 12:30pm 22nd March 2023
- 09:30am 12th April 2023

In addition, anyone interested in the Pledge can also register their interest and while this is only open to members, the BPMA is inviting the industry to find out more by getting in touch. *PM* readers can register their interest via bit.ly/StepForwardPM 



The Pledge explained

Why are we launching the Pledge?

Businesses and consumers are paying ever greater attention to their environmental impact.

Environmental, Social and Governance (or ESG) efforts are crucial in delivering tangible, long-term benefits and business growth. To support our members in managing the risks and opportunities of ESG and embedding sustainability within their products, operations and in the communities in which they serve, we are launching the BPMA StepForward Pledge.

Benefits of the StepForward Pledge

- Join a network of pioneering businesses taking steps towards improving the sustainability performance of their business and the wider industry
- Enhance your reputation among customers, staff and local community
- Demonstrate to customers and value chain partners that your business is committed to playing a distinct role in supporting the transition to net zero
- Help raise the profile and relevance of the promotional merchandise industry as one that takes tackling climate change and environmental issues seriously

How to become a supporter and find out more

Whether you are just starting your journey, or you have been working on your sustainability for a while, you can pledge your support.

Pledge Framework

Signing on to the Pledge means committing your business to working towards improving your sustainability performance in three key ESG pillars:

PRODUCTS

- Procure and supply an increasingly greater percentage of recycled and/or sustainably sourced products
- Ensure an increasing number of products are packaged in materials that can be sustainably sourced and easily recycled
- Make sustainability claims easily verifiable so that consumers can trust the marketing messages they are presented with

PLANET

- Increasingly procure renewable energy tariffs for business premises
- Choose delivery partners that take steps to improve fuel efficiency
- Reduce harmful emissions whilst travelling
- Use resources efficiently and transition towards a circular economy
- Measure and reduce emissions from supply chains
- Meet or exceed the Greening Government Commitments by reducing climate impacts
- Report on sustainability performance in a transparent manner

PEOPLE

- Train employees to incorporate sustainability into their day-to-day thinking
- Focus on employee wellbeing
- Support our local community
- Pay employees a national minimum wage and provide flexible working conditions

You also agree to track your performance in each of these areas every year (from now until 2030). To be eligible to sign the Pledge, organisations must either have a published sustainability statement or make plans to publish one, the latter, with guidance notes provided by the BPMA. We are requesting a sustainability plan because it is an important tool to help you improve your operations, reduce costs, stay focused on your goals, and avoid misleading customers with greenwashing. We'll be there to help guide and advise every member who wants to sign up.

Next Steps

We are now gathering interest from our members in the Pledge as we prepare resources to be released later this year.

- Step 1. Register your interest in supporting the BPMA StepForward Pledge
- Step 2. Receive a link to sign on to the Pledge (through the BPMA member website)
- Step 3. Complete an online assessment form
- Step 4. Receive a BPMA endorsed StepForward Pledge logo
- Step 5. Access a complimentary sustainability toolkit for your business

Connecting Brands With People



Preseli has been a supplier of popular products to the promotional industry for 30 years. We have built our reputation on great service & time-proven reliability.

We pride ourselves in being experts in areas like Keyrings & Lanyards and are delighted to be offering a growing range of other products including our 'New for 2023' exclusive range of Eco friendly lanyards and stationery. Perfect for conferences and events.

To find out more visit www.preseli.biz where you will also find our training guides and unbranded brochures ready for your customers.

- Eco Friendly Conference Supplies
- Large range of sustainable Lanyards
- Keyrings and Metal items
- Business and Leisure gifts
- Umbrellas
- Ties and Scarves
- Extensive UK stocks for quick turnaround

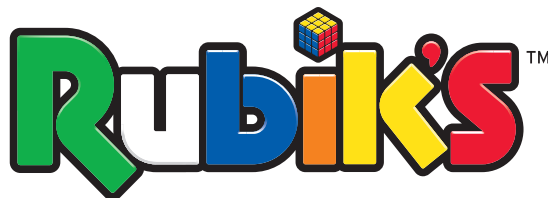


Connect with us

On the web: preseli.biz

By phone: 01352 730 006

By email: sales@preseli.biz



Rubik's Iconic cube is a promotional item that communicates messages using uniquely interactive 3D media.

Rubik's has a new home in the UK.

For all enquiries please contact Preseli on
01352 730 006
or email:
rubiks@preseli.biz



Unique Brand items

From desk accessories to Bluetooth speakers we offer the full spectrum of Rubik's promotional range.



UK Held stock

Ready to customise on one side with high quality UK printed labels.



Classic items

From the iconic cube through to classic promotional items like keyrings.

LOOKING FOR ALTERNATIVES

A plastic ban to be introduced in England is forcing companies to be more innovative

The government has confirmed that single-use items like plastic cutlery, plates and polystyrene trays will be banned in England to protect the environment.

A timeline is not yet clear on the measure which could cut the 1.1 billion single-use plates and more than four billion pieces of plastic cutlery used in England every year.

Only about 10% of items are recycled and plastic waste can remain in landfill for many years polluting soil and water.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is to publish the results of a long consultation on the issue.

Minister Therese Coffey has said she will ban a range of single-use plastic items mainly relating to takeaway food and drink. Single-use plastic straws, stirrers and plastic stemmed cotton buds were banned in England in 2020.

Scotland brought in its own legislation last year covering items including plates,

cups, cutlery and balloon sticks. Laws for a similar ban in Wales were approved in December and will come into force later in this year.

This latest measure does not, however, cover items found in supermarkets or shops. The government said it would address those by other means.

Maxim Gelmann, founder of Stroodles, which has created an innovative range of edible tableware, welcomed the legislation which he said would complement the education around the topic of plastic alternatives that suppliers have

been feeding into the market.

"An idea can always be as amazingly innovative but unless it offers huge cost savings adoption will always take ages especially with huge companies," he said. "However, with legislation in place this always poses the best reason to accelerate adoption as suddenly the idea has the natural sign-off by compliance, shareholders and wider company."

Although sustainable products command a premium, Gelmann said the cost had to set against positive marketing and PR spin off, plus lower costs for waste disposal and cleaning. Companies can also charge for a more sustainable product, making them a revenue centre, he claims.

"With a paper cup you can't charge that out to the customer as no one would pay, however with a Stroodles cup you could pass on the full cost to the consumer and even make a premium."

Merchandise company, B-Loony, innovated in advance of legislation introducing its cardboard Balloongrip holder as an alternative to plastic balloon sticks which were in line to be banned.

Kris Baker, marketing manager, B-Loony said the company was already investigating alternative materials when initial discussions arose around the potential Single Use Plastics ban.

"We actively encouraged all our customers to switch as we saw that the continued use of plastic sticks would fuel negative perceptions of balloons with them also being mistaken for plastic, although they're natural rubber," said Baker.

Due to Brexit, EU directives on single use plastics were not transposed to UK law and the home nations each took their own approach, which has muddled the water on legislation, said Baker. 





StepForward PLEDGE

Our industry is embracing sustainability, changing the way we work and the work we make.

To represent the steps our members are taking on this journey, we are launching the **StepForward Pledge** in 2023. No matter where you are on your sustainability journey, register your interest in the **StepForward Pledge** today. Be one of the first to step forward and support the Pledge.

Visit bpma.co.uk/StepForward-Pledge to register your interest and find out more about what's involved. We are hosting webinars in February, March and April to explain why the Pledge is important to your business and answer your questions. The **StepForward Pledge** is a member only initiative. If you would like to find out more about becoming a member and signing up to the **StepForward Pledge**, get in touch today via membership@bpma.co.uk.



VOLUME SELLER



Managing ambient noise is the latest feature for headsets, says **Matt Pluckrose**

Wireless headphones and earbuds are fast becoming one of the top selling promotional technology products. They make the perfect promotional campaign gift, loyalty reward or incentive, event giveaway, or staff motivational incentive.

They appeal to all age groups and have become an essential business tool as many companies continue with video meetings rather than face to face.

Noise-cancelling headphones were originally developed for pilots to help deal with noise and improve comfort during long haul flights. The first consumer versions were designed for regular passengers on these flights and were a luxury gadget.

Prices are now dropping rapidly and many manufacturers include this technology in all their product ranges not just the top end models. This has opened up a clear opportunity for our market as more models become available and demand increases for use in a variety of situations such as video meetings.

Two current technologies are leading the way and both improve the headphone user's experience in different ways.

Environmental Noise Cancellation (ENC)

ENC earphones are engineered to cancel or suppress all ambient background noise while protecting or enhancing the subject's voice.

ENC is enabled during calls and neutralises the environmental noise by generating an 'opposite' sound. The headphones know what signals to output to cancel the environment noise by recording them with an integrated microphone and processing them before creating the cancelling output.

Your voice can then be heard more clearly by people participating in the call, because the background noise suppression enhances the overall quality of the call.

The user of the headphone or earbuds will not directly notice the difference. This technology is generally less expensive to produce and is becoming popular in many lower cost options.



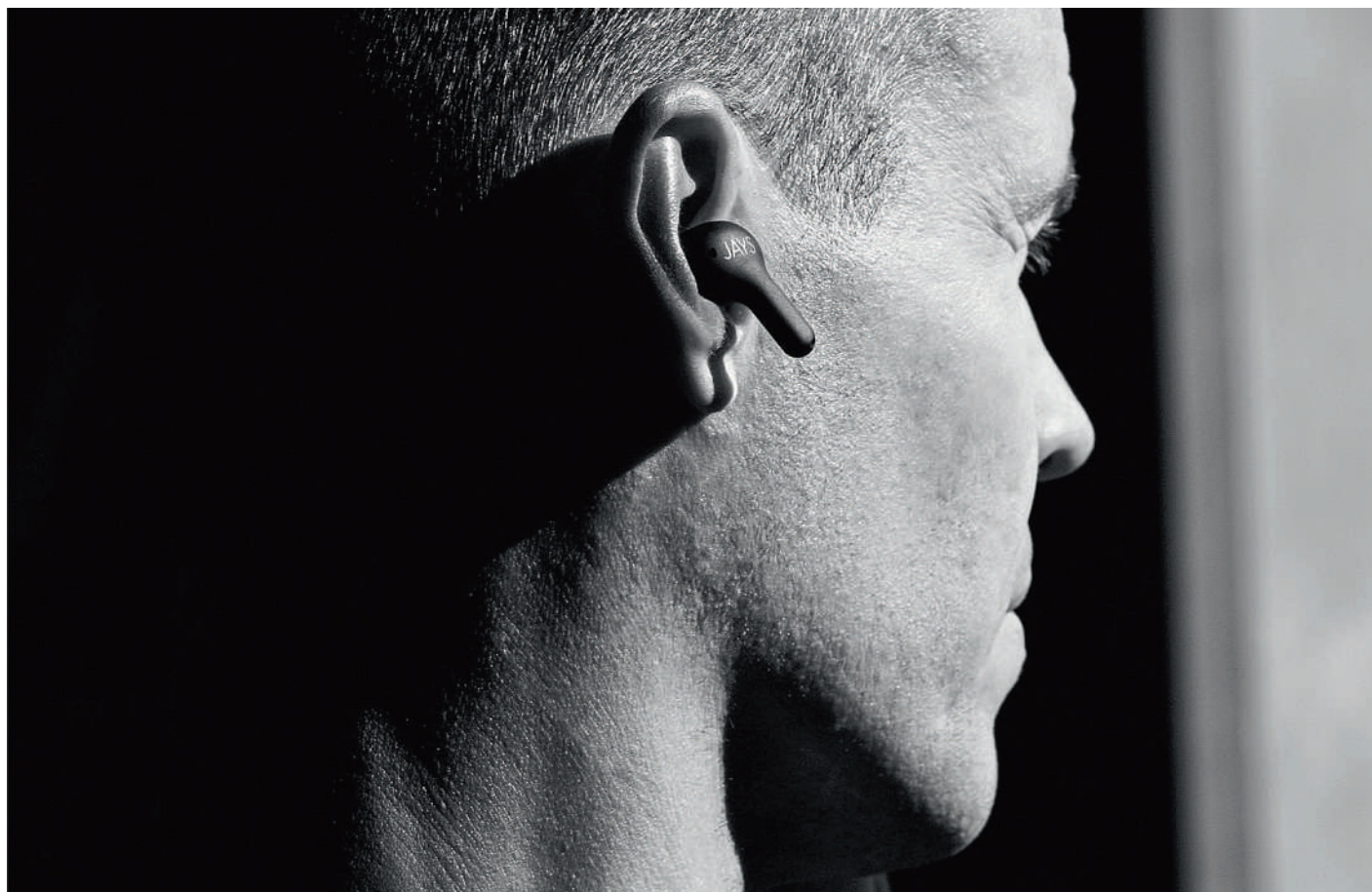
Active Noise Cancellation (ANC)

ANC works in a similar manner to ENC although it only affects the output sound from the headphone's speakers instead of the microphones. The benefit of ANC is that it dampens disturbing ambient noise via anti-noise or white noise.

This anti-sound is produced from the surrounding sound, which is captured by microphones in the headphones and earbuds. Then the sound is analysed and twisted, so the person using the headphones or earbuds hears less ambient noise. This way it isn't necessary to turn up the volume in a noisy environment, which is better for your hearing.

Both of these technologies are now standard in many leading brands such as Apple, Samsung, and Bose. It is becoming more affordable than premium brands and perfect for promotional marketing.

Matt Pluckrose is managing director of Desktop Ideas 



The BPMA is focused on bringing members together to share learnings and experiences

WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE INDUSTRY

Like many industry sectors, there are working groups led by their trade associations who concentrate on key areas of best practice, trends, research and compliance to help the businesses they look after achieve and succeed more. The BPMA Board has brought together industry leading figures to help plan the next steps on the path to promotional merchandise betterment.

Concentrating on an agenda which covers sustainability, research, compliance and standards through to their growing Award programmes to recognise excellence, BPMA Chair Haydn Willetts has charged the teams with a scope to cover both short- and long-term outcomes. Together with a group looking at diversity and inclusion, the agenda

is driving a mix of events, advice and leading research to help its members position their businesses and grow the industry overall.


Delivering more

The sustainability group has already launched the StepForward Pledge, the BPMA's sustainable standards programme for members and with more planned to support members over the coming year, look out for more information on this. Research is also underway on several work streams considering buyer behaviour, economic impact and insight generating studies to arm distributors with key sales messages linked to the proven effectiveness of merchandise in the mix.

Compliance and standards are never far

from anyone's agenda and with a sharp focus on supply chain value and evidence, more is coming to members to inform and educate across a range of topics with more resources being provided on critical 'must know' areas. In addition the diversity and inclusion group is hosting its first International Women's Day Lunch on 8 March this year followed by a nationwide creative industry census in 15th March.

Bringing in key thought leaders alongside the Board from Senator, Fluid, Prominate, WCM+A, BH1 Promotions, PF Concept, Navillus, XD Connect, Desktop Ideas; these are ones to watch as they build a better future for the BPMA and the industry.

Visit bpma.co.uk for more information on events and news. Questions? Contact enquiries@bpma.co.uk 

INDUSTRY CALENDAR

8 March

BPMA International Women's Day lunch, London

8 March

The Big Promotional Trade Show, Glasgow

15 March

Haptica Live, Bonn, Germany

22 March

The Big Promotional Trade Show, Dublin

18 April

The Big Promotional Trade Show, Manchester

27 April

The Big Promotional Trade Show, London

13 September

Merchandise World, Milton Keynes

2024

9-11 January

PSI, Dusseldorf, Germany

24-25 January

Merchandise World, Coventry

Once upon a time...



WHAT'S THE STORY?

When it comes to building brilliant communications, it is business critical to create a brand narrative that cuts through

We all invest a lot of time, money and energy in promoting our businesses to new and current customers. Whether it's through calls, emails, social, newsletters, or advertising, every point of contact is your opportunity to tell a great story and be the reason why your company is the first one to ask when the need arises.

Most of us don't have access to a crack team of marketing specialists to hone our communications but a few simple checks on your next round of newsletters or social messages could be the difference that drives reaction and action.

BE ENGAGING AND STAND OUT

Ultimately, you want to engage your audience with a clear and interesting stand out reason. Whether it is an industry communication between suppliers and distributors or from distributors to end users, give them a great reason to open that latest email.

One distributor told *PM* they had received more than 400 emails from suppliers in a 48-hour period, filled with compelling promotions and offers. Realistically, they won't all be read so make your headline count. Sounds simple but unless there is a clear call to action, it's possible your content might be missed.

GET EMOTIONAL

Don't be afraid to put your heart on your sleeve – if your mission and values matter to you in the way you conduct

business, say so – it's critical if this drives the outcomes too. We respond to positive values and we prefer to do business with people who care. Defining the values that matter to you and help convince a potential customer it matters to them too may need some work to ensure a clear message is conveyed; the impact can be instant and put you and your team front of mind.

Not every communication has to be about a product either. Tell your customer a story about progress, innovation... anything that delivers impact and triggers the idea is worthwhile especially for end users.

It's also important to remember for end users, you're the expert. Whether they are a regular customer or a potential one, they will have a lot less knowledge than you of what is possible when it comes to products and what they could order. Providing new knowledge that could match their values, particularly when it comes to delivering on the sustainable agenda, could land the next order for you.

BE MEMORABLE

By standing out and for the right reasons, means you will stand out and be different from the rest. It's tempting to say your standout memorable point of difference is service or even price but stop and consider first what truly makes you different. The unique points of difference you promote mean you are more likely to be remembered, and re-told, and provides an answer to every buyer about why they chose you.

CONSIDER YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

Traditionally, we look at a classic features, benefits and experience of products to promote ourselves. To appeal to our customers, we need to take into account their conscious and subconscious wants, fears and needs. What are the rational drivers for purchase? Is there a hidden need? Could there be an emotional driver of the purchase? Is there a risk of switching to your business or product range? What happens if they do nothing as a result of seeing or interacting with your business?

When we are communicating with customers, we're doing several things; we're building the 'brand' message with them about your company or we're activating a 'sell now' message. The memorable triggers which help influence sales over the long term, priming them emotionally to prefer your business can and should be a part of the communication mix so when you're ready to push a targeted sales message, it's more likely to hit home.

PM's advice on great communications is keep your marketing communications clear, represent your company brilliantly and tell a compelling story about why doing business with you is an excellent idea.

This article is based on a BPMA webinar which took place in January 2023 on Brilliant Communications. Members have access to brand building worksheets and other resources via bpma.co.uk 

MERCHANDISE FIT FOR A KING

King Charles III's Coronation will present merchandise with an opportunity to celebrate and commemorate

Coronation guidelines were finally released this February as the nation prepares for King Charles III and The Queen Consort's Coronation on 6 May 2023. PM has been busy reviewing the Coronation plans which will allow the promotional merchandise industry to produce a wide variety of goods.

The great news is merchandise is featured heavily in the guidance and fantastic assets have been made available for UK companies to use.

Use of the logo for merchandise

The logo has been released to be used free of charge and will not require approval via the Lord Chamberlain's Office which is good news for the industry. The Coronation logo suite of assets have been confirmed and are available for use for all activities associated with the Coronation including community and national events, publications, retail, and merchandising.

PM has covered some key points from the guidance below and encourages the industry planning to use the Coronation emblems to carefully review and read all the guidance. In the guidance, there are specific merchandise examples which provide the visual guide the industry should aspire to.

Guidelines and artwork

Detailed guidance and downloadable assets can be found at royal.uk/coronation-emblem.

Who can use it?

It's important to know who the Coronation emblem can be used by. It is intended for use by charities, companies and individuals for celebrations to mark His Majesty The King's Coronation in 2023. This does include commercial use, merchandise and advertising but we've advised the emblem should not be redrawn or re-constituted.

If you have questions on its use, the industry can receive a swift response

from the Lord Chamberlain's Office in writing to Buckingham Palace London SW1A 1AA or you can email them at royalwarrants@royal.uk.

Aren't the rules usually very strict?

Under normal circumstances, the use of the Royal Arms and other Royal Devices for commercial purposes is

Souvenirs and branded merchandise: what are the things you can and can't do or say?

Souvenirs, subject to the limitations in the guidance are defined as "articles of a permanent kind" specifically designed to mark the Coronation and identified with the occasion by the incorporation of a phrase such as:

- The Coronation of King Charles III and The Queen Consort – 2023
- The Coronation of King Charles III – 6th May 2023
- The Coronation 2023

This also applies to souvenirs produced using regional language variations.


To qualify for the privileges in the guidance, such souvenirs must be:

- a. In good taste.
- b. Free from any form of advertisement.
- c. Carry no implication of Royal Custom or Approval.

Containers or Receptacles of Merchandise

PM has also learned that as a special exception, containers or receptacles of merchandise will, for this Coronation only, qualify as souvenirs provided that:

- a. They are permanent in nature - i.e. metalware, ceramic or other semi-indestructible material and specially made for the occasion.
- b. They comply with the requirements of Paragraph 3 in the Guidance notes. With particular regard to Paragraph 3 (b), the name of the manufacturer and details of the contents may appear only on the underside or interior of the container or on the stopper.
- c. The Royal Symbols that may be used on containers or receptacles are limited to photographs of The King, The Queen Consort and the Coronation Emblem.

Important note for the industry: the use of the Royal Arms and the Royal Cyphers are specifically forbidden on containers and packaging. Holders of the Royal Warrant of Appointment may use the Royal Arms only in accordance with the Lord Chamberlain's Rules. 



prohibited unless the permission of the Member of the Royal Family concerned has been obtained. The King and The Queen Consort have approved the rules governing the commercial use of Royal Photographs and Official Insignia may be temporarily relaxed to allow their use on souvenirs marking the Coronation.

The guidance carefully explains how manufacturers may use official Royal Devices and detailed guidance has been published on the use of the Coronation Emblem and PM recommends a thorough review before you start.



bpma

british promotional
merchandise association

#EmbraceEquity

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY LUNCH

8th March 2023

30 Euston Square, London

Join us for an exclusive member only event to celebrate the women in the promotional merchandise industry, hosted at 30 Euston Square, London. Hear from keynote Kathryn Jacob OBE, CEO Pearl & Dean on diversity and talent in the workplace and why it matters. Members can enjoy a networking drinks reception and sumptuous three course lunch, which will be concluded with a lively member panel.

Tickets and tables available now via bpma.co.uk/events.

Sponsorship packages: please contact Tom Robey on **01372 371 183**. This is a members only event and every member is welcome.





**PRODUCTS AND IDEAS.
CAMPAIGNS AND CONCEPTS.
FOR MARKETEERS, BUYERS,
AGENCIES AND DISTRIBUTORS.**

- // 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- // Exhibitors from all product areas
- // International examples
of best practice
- // Lecture programme
- // Exhibition of the award winners:
Promotional Gift Award

Admission is free of charge.

Register at:

www.haptica.live

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