

MERCH MAGAZINE

from the

bpma
British
Promotional
Merchandise
Association

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

INSIDE

*Inside the den
The BPMA Comic Relief Design
Challenge delivers*
PAGE 4

*Level up
Is an M&A deal right for your
business?*
PAGE 7

*Time to shine
Promotional merchandise takes a
bow*
PAGE 18

POWER UP

Switch on to promotional products

PAGE 8

MERCHMAGAZINE.CO.UK

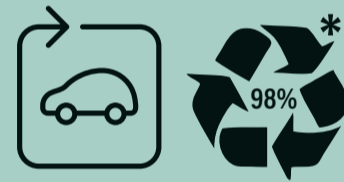
NEW!

BIC® 4 Colours® ECO



The iconic driver of change

It's here! The first ever recycled BIC® 4 Colours® ECO



Made from 98% recycled plastic coming from car parts*

*The percentage is calculated based on total weight of the barrel.

Manufactured and printed in BIC factories

Made using 100% electricity coming from renewable sources

Made from recycled plastic car parts

@bicgraphic BIC GRAPHIC

Think BIC
www.bicgraphic.com

WELCOME

Happy New Year and welcome to a new BPMA publication. *Merch Magazine* aims to help raise awareness of the great stuff in our sector. The products, sure, but also the people who make things happen, the campaigns that use merchandise so effectively, the changing nature of the industry as it wrestles with issues such as sustainability, and the innovation and creativity that serves its clients.

For a sector that's worth more than £1.2 billion, promotional merchandise can sometimes feel a bit anonymous. The way companies use merch has undoubtedly changed in recent years. There are fewer of the big FMCG campaigns that used to be the bread and butter of the sector.

But organisations and brands are still using merchandise because they know that

recipients love it, and that it remains an effective way to communicate. Merch has mushroomed as an internal marketing tool, helping organisations speak to their staff. And it has found new markets in areas such as live events, B2B, charity, the academic sector, influencers, and retail merchandise.

Merchandise is evolving fast, and *Merch Magazine* aims to stay abreast of these changes, highlighting them and explaining them.

For our first issue of 2026 we are looking at the Power of Promotional Products (p8). We don't want to teach granny to suck eggs, but it's sometimes easy to forget what great merchandise campaigns look like and what they can achieve – there are some fantastic examples inside.

One of our interviewees described merchandise as the only piece of advertising that people are happy to receive. That's a power most media would love to have.

The fun element of what the sector does was fully on display at the BPMA Product Awards just before Christmas (p18). As well as being a chance to meet old and new friends, the occasion is a rousing congratulations to the best products in the sector. An interesting observation this year was the high number of winners with a great sustainability story to tell.

It's just one indication of how the sector is changing, and something that we want *Merch Magazine* to be part of. We hope you will join us on the journey.



4 Pitch perfect

Behind the scenes at the BPMA Comic Relief Design Challenge

7 M&A activity

Is it right for you?

8 Power up

The power of promotional products

13 Ask Clive

What's fresh for 2026

15 The network effect

Galpeg's 50th anniversary

17 Merchandise World

Looking ahead to the show

18 Time to shine

The BPMA Product Awards

24 Merch Mindset

Jason O'Connor discusses the changing sector

27 Finance

Beware business failures

31 Technology

The arrival of AI

32 BPMA News

Recognition awards shortlist

34 Stronger together

25 years of Advantage Group

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

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



British Promotional Merchandise Association
 Fetcham Park House, Lower Road,
 Fetcham, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22
 9HD
 All phone enquiries: 01372 371183
www.merchmagazine.co.uk
www.bpma.co.uk

Editorial
editor@merchmagazine.co.uk
Advertising and Media Pack
advertising@merchmagazine.co.uk
Editorial Services
 Stuart Derrick

Design and Production
 ATG Media,
www.atg-media.com
 Photography
[shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com),
[Freepik.com](https://www.freepik.com)

The BPMA has the right to refuse editorial content and advertisements on sight of artwork, particularly where there may be a conflict of interest.

The opinions, beliefs and viewpoints expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the opinions, beliefs and viewpoints of the publication or the editor. The publishers cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage, nor can responsibility be accepted for any claims by advertisers, contributors, or other persons and organisations. No material may be reproduced without the written permission of the publishers.



INSIDE THE DEN

Promotional merchandise was the winner when the BPMA and Comic Relief teamed up for a Dragons' Den style pitch

Promotional merchandise professionals came up trumps in creating innovative new product ideas for the Comic Relief organisation.

The BPMA and Comic Relief challenged members to let their imaginations roam free to devise new merchandise ideas for the much-loved charity.

The Comic Relief Design Challenge asked for a brand-new item of merchandise for Comic Relief that captures its essence and stands as a year-round symbol of its work beyond the traditional Red Nose Day and Sport Relief campaigns.

Designs were encouraged to consider sustainability, inclusivity and accessibility and how best to embody the Comic Relief ethos of humour and heart. The BPMA was hugely impressed by both the quality and quantity of submissions received from members.

After much consideration, eight shortlisted member companies were invited to present their ideas in a 'Dragons' Den' style pitch event in November.

Held at the original Dragons' Den studio in North London, the pitch event offered the eight shortlisted companies the unique

opportunity to step into the iconic set and experience what it's like to pitch under the pressure of the dragons' gaze.

Against the backdrop of the original studio, complete with lighting, cameras, and a full production crew, the day delivered all the intensity and excitement of a real television moment.

Each pitch was assessed by a panel of dragons composed of representatives from Comic Relief and the BPMA Board, showcasing the imagination, expertise and energy that define the promotional merchandise sector.

The judging panel featured Becky Yeoh (Comic Relief), Greg Leaney (Comic Relief), Clive Allcott (DTB) and Melissa Chevin



(Globefish Consulting), who collectively brought a wealth of insight, brand expertise and commercial understanding to the evaluation process.

Shortlisted companies taking to the floor were: Sycal, Juniper, Total Merchandise, Wild Thang, Far 'n' Beyond, Exceptio, Bizz Badge and Brand Addition. Each company delivered an incredible pitch, highlighting creative product design, sustainability credentials and commercial potential.



Team BPMA in the Den

The final four selected for consideration in the final stage of the competition were Brand Addition, Exceptio, Sycal, and Total Merchandise.

Brand Addition was named the winner of the competition for its imaginative interactive Tap Patch that encouraged both donations and engagement with the charity and its good causes.

Feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive, with participants and judges alike praising the creativity, professionalism and shared enthusiasm that filled the studio.

Comic Relief's Greg Leaney, said the experience was "firmly top of the list of slightly mad days at Comic Relief".

"We got to hear from eight businesses, who pitched ideas for new and innovative ways we could be making the most of merch," he said. "Thank you to everyone who took part, and to the British Promotional Merchandise Association (BPMA) for organising, and all your support for Comic Relief this year."

John Howarth from Wild Thang shared: "The energy, creativity, and passion in that room was unreal – every pitch was next-level and such a brilliant reminder of the talent we have in our industry. A huge thank you to everyone who made the day so special – our fellow pitchers, the production crew, and of course the BPMA and Comic Relief teams. Truly, a day to remember."

Sam Wood from Far 'n' Beyond said: "It's such a great opportunity working on something new for Comic Relief and the BPMA, as it highlights the positive impact that Comic Relief has, whilst getting to create a new marketing angle, which is really exciting."

Brand Addition was revealed as the winner at the BPMA 60th Anniversary Celebration featuring the Product Awards, in December, where the industry will come together to celebrate 60 years of the BPMA and recognise the most innovative and exciting promotional products of the year. ●



BA TAPS TO WIN

The judging panel chose Brand Addition's Tap Patches as their winner in the BPMA Comic Relief pitch.

BA explored the lack of engagement that can result when donations are mainly digital. As people increasingly want to show real life support, it came up with wearable symbols of support in the form of NFC enabled Tap Patches.

As well as being fun and collectable, these patches allow people to tap the patch with their phones and make a donation. The designs celebrate activism, inclusion and positivity. The concept could also be extended to encompass limited editions, event specific patches, and introduce collectability and rewards. The same technology could also feature in stickers and keyrings. Tap Patch is bold, fun and makes doing good visible again, BA concluded.

Other shortlisted finalists included Sycal which focused on the growing awareness of neurodiversity as a hook for its idea. With an estimated 15% of the population neurodivergent, there is an opportunity to connect with an underserved group.

Inspired by the way that sensory rooms can help those who may be overwhelmed to relax and reduce anxiety, Sycal came up with a series of fidget pens with sensory mechanisms that allow the user to discreetly calm themselves.

Total Merchandise devised a colouring book with a mission to inspire creativity and fun while educating users on the charities that Comic Relief supports. By colouring in the pages devoted to each charity, the users learn about the charities and can share their designs via social media, linking with them for further engagement.

Exceptio pitched a pair of 'Red Toes Day' branded socks that could be used to create a cuddly brand mascot.



See you at Merchandise World

The UK's only promotional
merchandise exhibition

**Come and see us
at Stand M4**

Wednesday 21.01.2026

Thursday 22.01.2026

CBS Arena, Coventry

**Merchandise
WORLD**

Merchandise World is jointly owned by British
Promotional Merchandise Association (BPMA)
and Sourcing City.

bpma
British
Promotional
Merchandise
Association

LEVEL UP

Is M&A the right strategy for your merchandise business? Geiger's approach claims to help businesses unlock their potential

For many branded merchandise distributors, there comes a natural point where the next stage of growth requires new capabilities, broader reach, or simply a change in pace. Whether the goal is global expansion or a thoughtful transition into retirement, mergers and acquisitions can shape the future of a business.

GROWTH AND PEACE OF MIND

After 50 years in business, Frank Murphy at BTC Group felt the company needed a global footprint to take the next step, while Geiger sought a strong European base.

What mattered most was not just scale but trust. "Selling your lifetime business is a massive challenge. We were unbelievably lucky to find a company nearly 150 years old and still run by the same family. It was the best business decision we ever made," says Murphy.

Joining a global organisation allowed BTC Group to focus on what it does best – sales – while benefiting from Geiger's experience, infrastructure, and international reach.

"Organic growth was becoming more challenging each year," he says. "Being part of Geiger has given us the resources to grow and innovate while safeguarding the team and legacy we have built over decades."



Frank Murphy (middle) says a deal with Geiger boosted BTC

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

In late 2022, the directors and shareholders of Firebrand Promotions faced a situation familiar to many mid-sized distributors: they were ready to grow, but their resources could only take them so far.

"Following a strategic business review, the decision was taken to find a business partner with far greater resources and bandwidth," says director Andrew Bourne.

The goal was clear: to secure the company's future and accelerate growth that simply was not possible as an independent distributor.

Alignment mattered most. "Both organisations shared a commitment to first-class service, ethical operations, supporting staff, and a vision for leading the industry toward more sustainable merchandise solutions," he adds.

After professional and straightforward negotiations, Firebrand was successfully acquired by Geiger in the summer of 2023.

PEOPLE FIRST

Many acquisitions focus primarily on scale or market consolidation, but Geiger's philosophy is different. As a family-run organisation with deep roots and long-term vision, its M&A strategy focuses on continuity, culture, and care.

The emphasis is on building on what already makes each distributor successful. Teams are supported, client relationships preserved, and founders can be confident their life's work will continue to thrive. For family-held distributors, this approach resonates strongly. Owners want reassurance that their employees and customers will remain in good hands.

Geiger wants to continue building with both organic and inorganic growth. It is always open to conversations with industry peers who are either looking to hand over their business into trusted hands or are excited about taking the next step together and operating side by side. Being a family-owned business remains a key part of the offering,



Firebrand's Andrew Bourne (middle) sought a business partner

and that matters to the partners who join.

Geiger operates differently from private equity firms or other investors. The focus is on medium- and long-term strategies that serve the best interests of all members of the Geiger family.

HELPING DISTRIBUTORS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Scaling as a small or mid-sized distributor is increasingly challenging. Clients expect global fulfilment, advanced technology, sustainability expertise, and rapid turnarounds.

Joining a larger, established organisation can be transformative. By partnering with Geiger through acquisition, distributors gain:

- Global infrastructure to support multinational accounts
- Financial and operational resources to accelerate growth
- Advanced technology, from e-commerce platforms to logistics
- Sustainability expertise
- A broader client base and expanded service offering
- Reduced operational burden, allowing teams to focus on sales and creativity

IS M&A RIGHT FOR YOU?

Whether planning for retirement, reaching the limits of organic growth, or looking to take the business to the next level, a thoughtfully chosen M&A partner can unlock opportunities that would be difficult to reach alone.

Mergers done right are not about giving up your business. They are about giving it the future it deserves. With the right M&A partner, your company and your people can continue to thrive.

In cases of succession planning, it is especially important to maintain contact with the previous owner to ensure a smooth and reassuring transition for their customers.

If you are interested in discussing the future of your business, we would be happy to hear from you in confidence. Please contact Vicky Kinasz, president of Geiger International on vkinasz@geiger.com. ●

POWER UP

Promotional merchandise can turbocharge marketing campaigns... if it's used creatively

Whether it's a gift, a prize, an award, a commemorative item, or a little something to recognise a great job, everyone loves to be the recipient of a great product.

Merchandise, swag, freebies... whatever you call it, has always been a powerful way of getting someone's attention in an environment where there are so many calls on us.

We've all heard the stats about the huge number of messages that bombard us every day. Whatever the actual number or the media channel used it is getting harder to achieve cut through with the consumer.

That's why merchandise has always been a promotional mainstay, dragging eyeballs to places that other media don't reach.

MARKETING WITH A SMILE

According to Mike Oxley, CEO of Prominate, merchandise finds a place in marketing due to its tangible nature.

"It's the only piece of advertising that makes people feel happy to receive it. Generally advertising is viewed in a negative way to the extent that people now block it. But they are generally delighted to receive merchandise."

As well as being happy to receive it, Oxley says that merchandise is kept and used constantly resulting in repeated views of a brand or message.

Innovative approaches pay off, as Prominate found when it developed a fun and useful sandshaker for Tui. The branded vibrating

platform is installed at resorts to shake the sand from delighted kids after a day on the beach.

"When it's well targeted and hitting the fans of a brand, merchandise is incredible. The power of what we do as an industry is massively underestimated."

CUTTING THROUGH

James Biggin, managing director of Steel City Marketing says that with increasing digital noise, it's no wonder people are switching off from online marketing. By contrast, promotional merchandise stands out by slowing things down.

"Give someone a good notebook or a water bottle they genuinely like, and suddenly your brand becomes part of their day. It's on the desk during meetings, in the car, at the gym. You're not interrupting them, you're helping them. That's rare in marketing."

Steel City client Parseq wanted to stop its thousand employees using throwaway cups, so invested in 2,000 branded stainless steel travel mugs. What started as a practical decision became part of the company culture.

As well as boosting green credentials as part of its ISO14001 accreditation, the mugs became a recruitment tool too. Employees would take the high-quality mugs everywhere, providing a small but meaningful signal to the outside world that Parseq looked after its people.

CHANGING FACE OF MERCH

But merchandise changes. Once, a powerful ally of FMCG campaigns, merchandise is increasingly rare in supermarket aisles where Andrex puppies and PG Tips Monkeys once reigned supreme.

The industry still thrives but merchandise has found new homes – supporting brands in different sectors and different ways, such as academia, onboarding kits, supplier outreach, motivation and incentive programmes, retail marketing, and live event activation.





LET'S MAKE MERCHANDISE MEMORABLE

Promotional merchandise adds a powerful dimension to the marketing toolkit, but the sector needs to up its game, says Fiona Proudler

First, the sobering news. Promotional merchandise has a bad name. Landfill, many would say. The good news is, as an industry, we can reinvent.

The days when gifts with purchase filled the supermarket shelves and every event was supported by a huge array of giveaways have gone. Meanwhile, consumer behaviours and tastes have shifted. The rise of sustainability has put an extra lens on what we produce.

Some brands are getting it right using merchandise to connect with audiences. When Primark worked with Greggs to launch Christmas jumpers, the sales figures were off the charts. The subsequent range development, such as the 'Baked in Gold' jewellery range and 'Top Trumps' last Christmas, spoke volumes about how the right brand merchandise will be loved by customers.

What's their secret sauce? People love the product – but they also love the brand – its humour, its playfulness, its common touch. It's not promotional merchandise – it's brand merchandise.

It's in stark contrast to too common approach of 'take product, apply logo'.

There is no insight to the audience and no celebration of the brand. Great merchandise has to start with an understanding of who the end user is. Merchandise then has to have utility, build an emotional connection with the brand and be something they want to show off in the real world.

Not every brand has the connection with customers that Irn Bru or Tunnock's has (we're lucky to work on both of those iconic brands). But all brands can apply the same level of creativity to their merchandise that they do to other areas of their marketing rather than leaving it to the last minute or delegating it to the most junior member. If they don't, somebody upstream is going to eat their lunch. Other agencies may not be as clued up on compliance, or sustainability and responsible sourcing, but they understand the brand and the audience and they are credible in delivering 'moments of magic'.

To fight back, we have to show that we are not a cost – but rather that our merchandise can create impact and return. The role that merchandise has in extending the relationship with the consumer is crucial. It is a privilege to be able to produce something that gets taken into their world and makes somebody a proud flag bearer for your brand.

Consider how Adidas essentially 'owned' UK cities this summer because of its collaboration with Oasis. And Taylor Swift's Eras tour made the swapping of friendship bands part of the communal experience. The merchandise was about belonging – and associating yourself to the brand, or should I say the band.

That's what brilliant merchandise can do, and it's amazing when you get it right.

• **Fiona Proudler is managing director, Orb Group**



A LOVELY DAY FOR SOME GUINNESS MERCHANDISE



Guinness is one of the UK's top selling beer brands but consumption is highly seasonal and often associated with occasions such as the Six Nations tournament, Christmas and St Patrick's Day.

The brand wanted to make it more of a consideration in the peak beer drinking summer so introduced a disruptive activation platform, Lovely Day for a Guinness.

Its agency RPM, developed a comms platform based around impactful illustrations and bright imagery, for playful summer messaging that reframed Guinness. However, to build a more disruptive summer association, it needed something more.

This came in the shape of Lovely Drops, a multi-channel, digital-first promotional platform that 'dropped' exclusive Guinness promotional merchandise, such as limited-edition T-Shirts, and experiences throughout the summer. Guinness had already worked with artist Kathi Burke to create playful illustrations that reimagined a pint of Guinness in a summery context, and the partnership

continued into collaborating on Lovely Drops merchandise. Her distinctive style helped bring a burst of seasonal fun to the campaign in a way that felt both fresh and true to the brand.

Collaborative merchandise helps bring the Guinness brand to life in a fresh and culturally relevant way. It blends the stout's rich heritage and strong visual identity with the creativity and design expertise of its partners.

These collaborations celebrate shared values, craftsmanship, and cultural moments – allowing Guinness to connect with audiences in a more meaningful and authentic way. In this case, the summer-themed partnerships helped the brand show up at the right time, in the right context.

Guinness also wanted the prizes to feel uniquely 'Guinness' and culturally meaningful. By focusing on playful collaborative merchandise, customised innovations like Nitrosurge products, and exclusive experiences, it could offer rewards that money can't quite replicate. This approach also allowed it to tailor prizes to the summer season and adapt them across different channels and retailers, rather than defaulting to a more generic cash incentive.

As a result, Guinness shifted consumer perceptions and linked Guinness with summer drinking occasions by becoming the No.1 beer of summer 2024, as well as achieving more than 40,000 entries on the Lovely Drops promotional platform.



Paul Goldsmith, managing director of Event Merchandising says merchandise is an increasingly important part of the marketing story providing fan commemoration, a gifting opportunity and marketing and promotional muscle.

The company has worked for such high-profile events as the Eurovision Song Contest, the Rugby World Cup, and UEFA Champions League.

A recent project developed merch for the live experience of the BBC's hit game show *The Traitors*, including a death match card game and a gift version of the show's iconic chalkboard used to indicate who they think are the traitors within their group.

"Now more than ever, the younger audience are very much aware of merch and the power of merch, and that always features in some of our clients, like YouTubers and influencers. They're not afraid to shout about merch, to talk about it," he says.

FAN POWER

The world of merchandise has expanded and the boundaries blurred. Areas such as clothing have become huge sectors for merch, with the lines between workwear and fan merchandise becoming less distinct.

Ten years ago, who would have thought that consumers would be prepared to buy clothing plastered with a brand's logo? Not as a sponsor of a sports team or event, but simply to show support and brand love?

At its best, merchandise creates powerful, real world items that enhance the customers understanding of the brand – and build their love for it, says Fiona Proudler, managing director, Orb Group

"Merchandise should provide a moment to extend the relationship that the audience has with the brand – whether it be a product or service," she says. "When you create the right product, your audience will keep it and use it over and over meaning your brand will stay visible and be front of mind for so much longer than most other media."



A SLEEPER HIT

Rail brand, Caledonian Sleeper (CSL) approached Orb to create its first ever online range to sell to CSL guests and train lovers everywhere.

It designed and built a Shopify webstore, working closely with CSL to deliver a marketing plan for launch both online and onboard trains.

The launch was a huge success and, since then, Orb added a number of items to the range including a new Christmas collection.

It's just one example of how merchandise can still deliver marketing power – if it is employed with creativity and passion. ■



A WICKED REACTION

When Robinsons and Universal Pictures came together to mark the release of *Wicked*, the team at Clone created a spellbinding influencer box that turned a simple unboxing into pure theatre. The influencer campaign formed part of a £200,000 launch. Clone developed an unforgettable experience to capture the magic of limited-edition Robinsons flavours that linked to the movie launch. With just one week for design and production, Clone's influencer box broke from tradition. Instead of a standard lift-top opening, two doors parted in the middle to dramatically reveal bottles of Glinda's 'Outstandiful Berry' and Elphaba's

'Amazafying Citrus Twist'.

Each bottle contained drinkable glitter that brought a bewitching shimmer to every sip, bringing the 'Release the Magic' message to life, while a built-in audio player delivered the *Wicked* film's theme tune

The pack, featuring custom messaging and artwork from the film was delivered to select influencers and Universal team members, creating a social media buzz three weeks before the film's release. Every aspect was designed to inspire sharing with influencers capturing the musical reveal moment in dramatic unboxing videos.

MAKE THE MOST OF MERCHANDISE

You don't need a huge strategy to get merchandise right – just a bit of thought, says **James Biggin**, managing director, Steel City Marketing

1. Pick things people want

Useful items get kept. Kept items get seen.

2. Don't skimp on quality

If it feels good, it reflects well on your brand. If it feels cheap...

3. Let merchandise support your marketing

It can bridge everything – online campaigns, events, onboarding, follow-ups. A physical reminder that keeps your brand front of mind.

4. Match the item to the moment

Different audiences value different products. When you get that fit right, the impact is huge.

MATERIAL DIFFERENCE

13

Al

Aluminium



New
MS8

Prodir is a brand of Pagani Pens SA.

Prodir LTD
T +44 1782 47 60 90

www.prodir.com
open.prodir.com

prodir®

THE NEW LOOK FOR 2026

Regulation will force a rethink on promotional clothing, says Clive Allcott

In 2026, the era of the flimsy giveaway T-shirt is fading, replaced by pieces that look and feel like they belong on the streets, in the gym, or even in the office. The forces driving this shift are bigger than fashion – they're rooted in sustainability legislation, consumer expectations, and an evolving tech landscape.

MANDATED SUSTAINABILITY

Due to the European Union's Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), sustainability is becoming a design requirement. ESPR aims to make it the norm for garments to last longer, be repairable, and recyclable.

This soon to be mandatory move towards digital product passports means every T-shirt, hoodie, and jacket may soon come with scannable proof of its origins.

Expect the phrase 'promotional wear with real integrity' to become common place,

with recycled tees, organic cotton hoodies, biodegradable fibres, water-less dyes and sustainability graduating from nice to have to a non-negotiable demand from customers.

FABRIC INNOVATION

Temperature regulating fabrics, breathable performance blends, UV protection, wearable technology and modular construction are pushing promotional clothing into the performance wear category.

Where customers once settled for the least expensive option, they're now investing in future tech pieces that people will want to keep. Changes in the supply chain also mean a requirement for shorter production runs, on-demand digital printing, and less overstock waste.

The smartest promotional item will not be the one with the biggest logo but the one with the best fabric and branding story. It's all about the sizzle, not just the sausage.

STORYTELLING

People no longer want to be walking advertisers. They want clothing that fits their lifestyle, feels high quality, and tells a meaningful story. Promotional apparel is responding with better cuts, richer textures, and bolder aesthetics where exciting print techniques are redefining what a promo tee can be. At the same time, inclusive sizing and unisex fits see the industry embrace a more fluid and body-diverse consumer identity.

Today's branded clothing is less about brand logos and more about subtle branding along with wearable identity.

DESIGNED FOR EVERYDAY USE

No longer limited to give aways or conference handouts, promotional garments are being created with everyday versatility and use in mind. A hybrid jacket that can transition from the office to outdoors, modern outerwear that feels genuinely premium, and subtle branding that enhances rather than overwhelms.

ESPR is directing us towards longevity, not just a good design. ■



KERAMIKOS and THERMALMATE
The Promotional Drinkware Specialist

Bring your brand to life with the ColourCoat range. Precise Pantone matching for the exterior of your drinkware. All sprayed and decorated in the UK!



See the full selection on our website.

WWW.KERAMIKOS.CO.UK

Super Clip Super Space, Super Branding



Big on space. Built for standout branding

With its oversized clip and reliable twist mechanism, this pen is designed to make your brand stand out. Large print areas give you the flexibility to create a promotional tool that truly represents your business.

MIX & MATCH

360° Printing

Reliable twist mechanism

Writing length 1.8 km



Learn more



Made in Europe



Manufactured and printed in BIC factories



100% electricity coming from renewable sources



@bicgraphic



BIC GRAPHIC

Think BIC
www.bicgraphic.com



Galpeg celebrates five decades of growth, expertise and shared success

Fifty years is a significant moment for any organisation, and for Galpeg it highlights a story built on trust, industry knowledge and a commitment to helping distributors build thriving businesses. That steady momentum has shaped Galpeg from the very beginning.

Founded in 1975 by Gerry Green, Galpeg first made its mark creating premium promotions for major brands such as Mobil, Andrex and Dulux. Galpeg earned a reputation for innovation long before the sector looked anything like it does today. When Gerry's son Paul joined in the mid-80s, he recognised that while premium promotions were lucrative, they lacked ongoing client continuity. Having discovered the potential of promotional gifts during his business degree placement, he saw an opportunity to build a broader, more sustainable customer base.

INNOVATION BUILT IN

Paul developed a promotional camera business over 12 years, with Galpeg representing Kodak in the promotional market and even broke new ground internationally, becoming one of the first promotional suppliers to enter Russia and the first to develop branded phone cards with campaigns for global giants such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's.

Galpeg continued to grow, although the premium promotions side of the business came to a natural end in the early 90s and the business continued to prosper until the financial crisis of 2008 when it faced a new, major challenge of survival.

"That crisis resulted in a significant loss of business which was almost impossible to replace," Paul said. "The only solution was to

identify a new business opportunity within the promotional products field."

Out of that challenging moment came a bold, industry-changing idea: the Galpeg Associate Programme.

SUPPORT TO THRIVE

The vision was simple but revolutionary: empower ambitious sales professionals and smaller distributors to compete with the largest players by giving them world-class back-office support. Today it is known as the Galpeg Network.

"My modus operandi from the start was to give smaller distributors or even people who never considered working for themselves the opportunity to do so, and to compete head-on with the larger distributors. This has been achieved by many of the network members, and the outcome has given me so much pleasure," he said.

Across five decades, Paul has witnessed major shifts: technology accelerating turnaround times, margins tightening, traditional roles blurring and increasing consolidation through mergers and acquisitions. Yet through it all, Paul remains dedicated to championing and supporting new and growing businesses.

MORE TO COME

He reflects on the organisation's anniversary with gratitude, for the members, the team, and for the industry that has shaped him.

But what excites him is what lies ahead.

"We want to continue welcoming new members, helping them grow, helping them achieve their goals. That's what drives us," he says. ●

WHAT GALPEG MEMBERS SAY

"Nearly sixteen years in, and it's been a blast. Joining Galpeg has been the best decision I've made for my business. The structure, the buying power, the industry insight – it's all been phenomenal. It's given me the confidence and capability to win major corporate clients."

Wesley Dabbs, Aurora Promotional Merchandise

"Galpeg feels like a family. Paul is one of the most ethical, honourable people I've ever met, and the team is endlessly supportive."

Richard Andrews, Promotional Works

"I would never have started my own merchandise company without them – their support gave me the confidence to take the leap. The partnership has only strengthened over time."

Russ Platt, Blue Fish Promotional Merchandise

"From the very first call with Paul, I knew this was the right model. The professionalism and depth of expertise in the network is invaluable. It was without doubt the best decision I made in launching Evergreen Branding."

Trevor Howard, Evergreen Branding

"Being part of Galpeg gave us the working-life balance we'd always wanted. The support is exceptional – it makes us look great to clients and helps us serve them even better."

Andy Sheridan, Coast Branded Merchandise Solutions

"If you're bringing in business for someone else, why not do it for yourself? Galpeg gives you everything you need to run your own company. But what truly matters is trust – and you feel that from the first meeting."

Stanley Gibson, Better Branding UK

"From day one, Paul and the team were exceptionally supportive, offering stability, trust, and a collaborative environment when I needed it most. Their professionalism and understanding made the transition smooth, and I've valued working with such a dedicated team."

Linda Graham, LKG Merchandise

"There's a genuine spirit of collaboration within the network, and together we benefit from stronger group spending power, better pricing and exceptional supplier relationships."

Danny Heenan, Ashro Promotions

Merchandise WORLD

UNMISSABLE
EVENT!

Weds 21st & Thurs 22nd January 2026
at CBS Arena, Coventry, CV6 6GE

Don't miss out on our unique event!

16

Days

01

Hours

10

Minutes

30

Seconds

VISIT THE UK'S LARGEST NATIONAL TRADE SHOW

- 180+ UK & International suppliers
- Discover 2026's hottest new products first
- Find out about Exclusive show offers
- Support your National Show
- Free entry to professional distributors



Register today at merchadiseworld.co.uk

To find out more please call us today



01252 224191

or email  info@merchadiseworld.co.uk

DOWN TO BUSINESS

If it's January, it's time to hotfoot it to Merchandise World for the industry's biggest and best show



The business trend of the year is AI, but there will always be a place for face-to-face interaction. And in the promotional merchandise sector that place is Merchandise World.

The traditional kickstart to the year will happen on 21-22 January in Coventry, perfectly timed to allow visitors and exhibitors to blow off the post-holiday cobwebs and get right down to planning for the year ahead.

More than 180 exhibitors will be at the event representing manufacturers and wholesalers from the UK and European Union presenting new product ranges, environmental products, and their best-selling lines. With UK collective market spend on merchandise at more than £1.2 billion, Merchandise World is the place where distributors and suppliers come together to do business.

ESTABLISHED AND NEW PLAYERS

Some of the biggest names in the sector will be represented at the show, such as PF Concept, Bic, Screenworks, The Sweet People, Gafpros, XD Connects, and Goldstar.

In addition, there is a selection of new suppliers this year, including: AS Colour, Atlantis Headwear, Aykiz, Jack & Jones, Teejays (apparel); Adsystem, Very Displays (display); Advantage Worldwide (logistics); Asquith (labelling); Chilly's (drinkware); Easygifts, Macma (wholesalers); Gorenler (textiles); Promo Water (drinks); Soake (umbrellas); Vonmahlen, Xoopar (tech accessories), and The Wristband Company.

Visitors can see and feel the latest products, discuss branding techniques, and hear about the trends that will shape the year ahead.

Some of the top trends that will face

merchandise users in 2026 include sustainability, premiumisation of products, retail equivalence, personalisation and customisation, and logistical delivery.

These are all fairly crunchy subjects that deserve to be interrogated in a bit more depth than a quick internet search, or even an email will allow. Merchandise World allows visitors to go into real detail by delivering the experts who are able to show real products and talk through options for merchandise campaigns.

AWARDS TIME

There is also time for recognition. The first night of Merchandise World will see the BPMA Awards Gala Dinner held at the CBS Arena and playing host to around 500 members of the trade. The Awards are the most prestigious in the sector recognising the suppliers and distributors who are held in highest esteem by their peers.

Voted for by BPMA members, the Awards are a genuine benchmark of the companies who are rated as the best business partners.

In addition, there will be awards for the best marketing campaigns of the year, and new recognition awards to shine a light on the talent in the industry.

We look forward to seeing you there. ●

The Essentials

Where – CBS Arena, Judds Lane, Coventry CV6 6GE

When – 21-22 January 2026. Show opens from 8.00 and closes 17.00 on Day 1, and 15.30 on Day 2. A free breakfast is served on both days from 8.00-10.00.

Why – The start of each year is the main time when everyone involved with sales in professional distributor companies wish to meet suppliers to discover the new and best-selling promotional products for the new selling year.

How – visitors can register at merchadiseworld.co.uk. There is a free station transfer shuttle bus to and from Coventry station every 30 minutes between 08.00-17.30 on Day 1 and 08.00-15.30 on Day 2. Free airport transfers from Birmingham International are available by prior arrangement.

Car parking at the Arena is free with promo code MW2025. Pre-book in advance at CBSarenaparking.co.uk or register on the day.

TIME TO SHINE

The 2025 BPMA Product Awards showcased the best in the sector and celebrated 60 years of the industry's Association



With more than 25,000 promotional merchandise products fighting for attention in the sector, the winners of the BPMA's prestigious Product Awards really have something to be proud of.

Introducing the third edition of the Awards, at a glittering ceremony in London's The Brewery, BPMA membership director Tom Robey, said that gaining recognition from expert judges in the sector was a moment to shout about.

"The awards have really stepped up a gear with more retail standards products and better decoration methods than ever. If you made it to the shortlist this year then it is a great achievement," he said.

60 NOT OUT

As well as recognising and rewarding the best products in the sector, the event was also a celebration of 60 years of the BPMA.

"It is a remarkable milestone of 60 years of the BPMA – six decades of education, innovation and memorable communication in an industry the continues to inspire," said BPMA chair, Clive Allcott.

Formed in 1965 with a mission to grow and unite a community of merchandise professionals, while raising standards in the industry, the BPMA's mission is as strong today as it was in the founding of the Association, he told a packed room of merchandise professionals.

"The unwavering support of members has helped make the BPMA what it is. We look forward to a future that is bright whether that is fostering innovation or championing sustainability," he said. "Let's raise a glass to 60 incredible years and an incredible future that lies ahead."

Wrapping up 2025 ahead of the Awards, BPMA CEO Phil Goodman thanked the executive team for their efforts in his first full year in post.

"I was recently in the US with Clive where our US equivalent, the PPAI, has a team of 60 to deliver exactly the same service as we do. It takes the same effort with our team of six," he said.

A YEAR OF CHANGE

Goodman hailed the progression the team has helped deliver. This included the BPMA's regional ambassadors who in 2026 will be charged with spreading the BPMA's message throughout the UK and helping recruit new members.

Looking back on 2025, he said: "It's been a really big year for the BPMA. When we rebranded this year we chose three words: Inspire, Innovate, and Impact, and a really good example of that was the Comic Relief Design Challenge."

Comic Relief was chosen because of the importance of merchandise in helping build its brand through the iconic red nose.



A diamond anniversary



What a cracker



Apparel Platinum for Stormtech

“They understand our world and would not be where they are without that piece of merchandise,” he said.

Revealing that he was slightly nervous ahead of the challenge about how well the industry would respond to it, he admitted that he was blown away by the responses.

It is hoped that the BPMA can repeat the challenge next year, perhaps with another sponsor, as it proved an excellent platform for showcasing industry creativity.

“It made me realise what a professional industry we are. I was really proud to represent it,” added Allcott who helped judge the final presentation.

Brand Addition was announced as the winner the Challenge, but in reality, everyone who got involved was a winner, said Goodman.

Before the industry hailed its own award winners, Goodman mentioned that the BPMA itself has been shortlisted for an award by the Trade Association Forum in its



New look trophies for 2025



Kingly won Apparel Gold

Best Association Transformation category. The results will be announced in February – fingers crossed.

PRODUCT WINNERS

This year saw a good spread of the top awards rather than domination by particular companies. With Silver, Gold and Platinum awards available in most categories, there were a number of double Platinum winners recognised.

Bagco did the double in the Bag & Folder Product of the Year, and the Stationery Product of the Year.

A popular winner was First Editions which picked up the heavily contested Drinkware award for its groundbreaking Foamo reusable coffee cup. The cup, which was developed by the Midlands manufacturer and uses plant-based materials including recycled cooking oil in production, has been hailed



Chairman Clive helmed proceedings



Award winning awards from WCM&A

as a breakthrough product in the sector. It was little surprise then when it went on to be named the UK Made Product of the Year.

Cornwall manufacturer CHX also made the trip to the podium twice for two Platinums with its Walletmate Collection winning Health, Travel & Leisure Product of the Year, as well as the Sustainable Product of the Year.

Last, but not least, Dutch wholesaler Toppoint did the double with its recycled plastic Xoopar Aura white noise speaker. This piece of kit was chosen as Technology Product of the Year and Innovation of the Year.

SWEET SUCCESS

Other Platinum winners were Stormtech (Apparel), WCM&A (Award & Exhibition), Hainenko (Writing Instrument), and The Sweet People. The latter swept the board in the Food & Drink Product of the Year category picking up Platinum, Gold and

BPMA Education Programme

**January 2026
intake now open**

Join hundreds of promotional merchandise professionals and gain a CPD accredited qualification through the BPMA's Education Programme

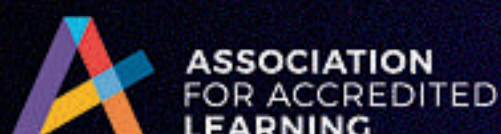
Two levels available:

- Trained in Promotional Merchandise
- Certified in Promotional Merchandise



Enrolment includes 6 month access to the online platform, mandatory and elective modules, a final exam and factory visit opportunities.

**To enrol and for more information,
simply email education@bpma.co.uk**



bpma
British
Promotional
Merchandise
Association



Brand Addition triumphed in the Comic Relief Design Challenge



Apparel winners Neutral

Silver for its edible products.

As always, BPMA sponsors were generous in their backing and demonstrated that the awards are widely regarded as the highest accolade for promotional products in the UK.

The BPMA thanks this year's sponsors, who were Nadel, Pro-Ad, the Big Promotional Trade Show, American Solutions for Business, Purple Promotional Clothing, Wild Thang, Ross Promo, Sourcing City, and Merch Express.

Judged by a cross section of industry colleagues, the awards had nine categories and three additional special awards.

All Platinum award winners were also put forward for the Grand Prix which will be revealed at the BPMA Awards on 21 January at Merchandise World.



CHX's Walletmate was lauded



First Editions went double Platinum



All the trophies for The Sweet People



Bagco came up trumps



Celebrate with a smile

BIG SHOWS VENUES IDEAS

incorporating the **Promotional, Wearables & New Products Trade Shows**

- Business Gifts • Promotional Merchandise • Wearables • Printwear • Sustainable Products
- Headwear • Systems and more... nothing beats the power of meeting face to face!



PROUD TO BE A
bpma
Member



BIC graphic
HEADLINE SPONSOR Your Brand Ambassador

REGISTER NOW!
thebigpromotionaltradeshow.co.uk



4 MARCH 2026

DUBLIN

Crowne Plaza
Blanchardstown



11 MARCH 2026

GLASGOW

Glasgow Crowne
Plaza Hotel



15 APRIL 2026

HEATHROW

Marriott
London Heathrow



22 APRIL 2026

MANCHESTER

Manchester United FC
Old Trafford

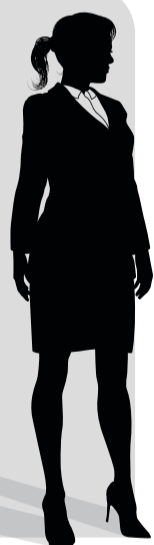
INTERESTED IN EXHIBITING..?

Showcase your products at the pre-eminent regional exhibitions for the promotional merchandise & printwear industry.

For further information contact us any time:

E enquiries@thebpts.co.uk

T (+44) 0333 77 22 312



Loving it Live!

Nothing compares to real life and live events, so we are delighted to announce the BIG shows are back: register now and get engaged!

Now incorporating and co-locating **The BIG Wearables Trade Show** as well. **The BIG Promotional Trade Shows** are the promotional merchandise and wearables events to get to: nothing beats the power of meeting face to face!

Experience the future of merch

- ... MORE THAN **60** KEY SUPPLIERS & BRANDS
- ... SEE ALL THE LATEST PRODUCTS
- ... COLLECT SAMPLES, CATALOGUES, & IDEAS
- ... REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED ALL DAY

- ... CONVENIENT LOCATIONS
- ... FREE TO ATTEND
- ... FREE PARKING

THE BIG
promotional
wearables
new products
TRADE SHOW

PROMOTIONAL MERCHANDISE WEARABLES BUSINESS GIFTS PRINTWEAR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS HEADWEAR SYSTEMS & MORE

**PROMOTIONAL
SHOWCASE**

SUPPORTED BY



SPONSORED BY

The BIG Promotional Trade Show exhibitions are closed trade events. Only bona fide distributors and resellers of business gifts, promotional merchandise and printwear may attend. Suppliers, manufacturers and their affiliates and all service providers must exhibit to be able to attend.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

Categories

● Apparel Product of the Year

Platinum – RX-2 Vertex Stormshell, Stormtech

Gold – Elite Premium Classic Crew, Kingly

Silver – Fairtrade organic quarter zip sweatshirt, Neutral

● Award & Exhibition Product of the Year

Platinum – faceted real wood awards, WCM&A

Gold – Lan-Key RPET keyring, Preseli

Silver – recycled acrylic clutch pin badges, WCM&A

● Bag & Folder Product of the Year

Platinum – Wye recycled backpack, Bagco

Gold – pop-up tech and gadget case, Oldeani

Silver – Coastal Threads Repreve dual carry sling bag, Goldstar Europe

● Drinkware Product of the Year

Platinum – Foamo reusable cup, First Editions

Gold – Chili Concept Calypso double walled drinking glass, Tancia

Silver – Agua Iconic glass bottle, Agua

● Food & Drink Product of the Year

Platinum – eco vegan treat pack – custom sweet cubes, The Sweet People

Gold – maxi advent calendar – Jelly Bean Factory, The Sweet People

Silver – eco window slab box – milk chocolate, The Sweet People

● Health, Travel & Leisure Product of the Year

Platinum – Walletmate collection, CHX Products

Gold – Catherine II eco bear, Regal Toys

Silver – bamboo ice scraper, WCM&A

● Stationery Product of the Year

Platinum – Maxton sugarcane notebook, Bagco

Gold – 2026 Castelli Appeel 'Ortisei' A5 Daily and Quarto weekly diary collection, Castelli Milano 1938

Silver – Castelli Shiro 100% recycled medium ruled notebook, Castelli Milano 1938

● Technology Product of the Year

Platinum – recycled plastic Xoopar Aura white noise speaker, Toppoint UK

Gold – GAN 25W universal travel adapter, Oldeani

Silver – branded tile, Calverley



Award sponsors make it happen



Classy entertainment

● Writing Instrument Product of the Year

Platinum – Baron Extra recycled 'Tour of Italy' collection, Hainenko

Gold – Seashell ball pen, Pencom

Silver – Media Clic Ecolutions Plus, BIC Graphic Europe

● Innovative Product of the Year

Platinum – recycled plastic Xoopar Aura white noise speaker, Toppoint UK

Gold – Chili Concept Calypso double walled drinking glass, Tancia

Silver – Walletmate collection, CHX Products

● Sustainable Product of the Year

Platinum – Walletmate collection, CHX Products

● UK Made Product of the Year

Platinum – Foamo reusable cup, First Editions

Gold – eco vegan treat pack – custom sweet cubes, The Sweet People

Silver – mobile phone stand key fob, Juniper



He's Christmas ready



If the hat fits...

WHAT THEY SAID

"We're proud to share that The Sweet People has achieved outstanding success at the BPMA Product Awards 2025, including multiple category wins and a top industry honour. This recognition celebrates our commitment to UK-made, sustainable confectionery and the exceptional work of our team, from design and development through to production and packing."

The Sweet People
"What a fantastic event celebrating 60 years of the BPMA. We're delighted to have won the Health, Travel & Leisure Product of the Year Award. Here's to continued collaboration and innovation!"

CHX
"We are absolutely overwhelmed to have won the Writing Instrument of the Year award at the 60th BPMA Anniversary. It is an incredible honour to receive this recognition for our Baron Extra Recycled Tour of Italy collection. A huge thank you to the entire Hainenko team and to our Italian partners Stilolinea for their dedication and hard work in making this achievement possible."

H Laubis, Hainenko



“WHAT WE CAN DELIVER NOW IS UNBELIEVABLE..”

Keramikos managing director, Godfrey O'Donnell tells Jason O'Connor of his merch journey from YTS placement to business acquisitions

JA: So, Godfrey, where did it all start?

GD: I started with Action when I was 16. I thought I'd last about three weeks, but 40 years later I'm still in the same industry, dealing with many of the same customers. It's been an interesting journey. I've seen the industry evolve and become far more professional.

During the 16 years at Action, we had a factory in the UK as well as sister companies in France, Italy, Spain and Germany. Eventually, production was condensed into one European factory. After that, I moved to Supreme. I only left Action because once manufacturing left the UK, we lost control of our lead times and that was difficult.

JA: So Supreme seemed like a better offer at the time?

GD: To be honest, Supreme's biggest customer was Action. Supreme was manufacturing all of Action's acrylic coasters, keyrings and rulers. We'd buy the blanks from them and sell them into the trade because Action had such a huge customer base.

The owner of Supreme then was Russell Vaughn, who I was good friends with. I saw him at a show once and he joked, "When are you going to work for me?"

When Action decided to close its UK factory, it was a really difficult time. I worked closely with Phil Roberts, whose dad Trevor owned

Action, so it felt like a big family.

Once Trevor made the decision to move production to France, we'd have ended up just selling products made abroad, and it didn't feel like the right move for me. I joined Supreme while Phil went to Fanela.

JA: How long were you at Supreme?

GD: Around eight or nine years. We grew the business and it was tremendous. We expanded manufacturing, sold across Europe and into the US, and I even went to South Korea to sign contracts for the Brite Mat mouse mat. They were brilliant times.

At Action we'd largely import from the Far East, whereas at Supreme we had full control of production. That was superb.

JA: Were you there for the merger?

GD: Yes. Russell and I spoke to the key people and believed the manufacturing side at SPS (Supreme Plastics) had huge potential. I remember being at a show in Germany when Russell said, "I think we need more opportunity to expand the range." That's what eventually led to Product Source and Supreme becoming one company.

The idea, the vision – everything behind it – was spot on, but the execution wasn't. There were serious teething problems.

JA: I think those early problems were severe. But out of that we eventually got

PF, and everything that used to be SPS is now running smoothly.

GD: To be fair, even after a few years there were still difficulties. I thought it would take another year to 18 months before it returned to its former level. They got things back on an even keel after Russell and I left, and PF have since taken it to another level with manufacturing.

JA: So, you left and went to Keramikos, did you know Mark beforehand?

GD: I'd known Mark (Lee – Keramikos MD) for years – we were good friends. When I left SPS, I spoke to Mark, who was planning to move Keramikos from Matlock into a new, much larger site to grow the business. Luckily for me he said, "Come and join us." It was one of those fortunate moments – and that was 17 years ago.

Of course, the timing wasn't great because four or five months later the recession hit, right after Mark had invested seven figures.

JA: With 40 years of experience, you've probably seen more change than most in this industry.

GD: Definitely. I remember back in my Supreme days when Total Merchandise, then an internet-only company with no sales reps, placed an order for 10,000 Brite mats. I couldn't believe it – no one had come to see samples. It was probably a £15,000 order,

placed online without a single question. It was a sign of things to come and now it's normal.

JA: The internet has taken the world by storm. We can't live without it now. I'm curious what percentage of the industry is made up of internet sellers.

GD: It'll be a huge percentage. There are still brilliant small companies run by 'old-timers' like myself, but many of them are retiring and I'm not sure new ones are coming in. It's very different from 40 years ago. Some people look at the market now and think, "There are too many people doing it – I don't want to get involved."

There are still major players servicing corporate accounts and programmes who do excellent work.

For us, we're doing metal bottles, Pantone-matching lids, bases and bottles. Some of these projects take two months. But society today wants everything online and delivered almost instantly.

JA: That's Amazon's influence, isn't it? A real shift in buying habits.

GD: Back at Action, lead times were always three to four weeks – whether it was 50 umbrellas or 100 pens.

I remember going to America in the 1990s and we spoke to suppliers and they talked about seven to ten-day delivery times. All of us from Britain and Ireland were in shock. When we came back, we changed our mentality. Lead times shortened and technology helped enormously. What we can deliver now is unbelievable.

JA: As the market has exploded with new ideas and technology, how have you adapted?

GD: Our core has always been ceramics and drinkware. But several years ago, Mark and I saw huge potential in sports bottles. We came across Thermalmate in the UK and acquired them.

That opened a lot of doors – and took us back to manufacturing. We had all the tools in the UK and could produce 80,000 bottles without a problem.

When Listawood went under, we acquired its stock and assets, which allowed us to set up the plant here to do Pantone-matched mugs and bottles. We can't stand still – we'll keep expanding our drinkware offer.

JA: How much do you think the drinkware market will grow?

GD: I think the UK and European market could double in size over the next five years. Drinkware is like a fashion accessory. My 12-year-old daughter has three or four different bottles for different occasions.

We'll keep expanding the range and adding finishes like laser engraving. We've got exciting things in the pipeline for next year.

JA: What do you think has kept you in the industry for so long?

GD: Honestly, when I started at 16, I thought I'd be there two or three weeks. In my third week, because I was on a YTS earning £25 a week, I said I was leaving to work on a building site.

The next day I got a phone call: "Mr Roberts wants to see you." Trevor asked why I was leaving, and when I told him it was for better money, he asked if I liked my job. I said yes. He told me I wasn't leaving and put me on £75 a week.

And I've stayed in the industry ever since. I've loved every minute. It is the one industry that once you are in, it is very difficult to come out. I have never regretted staying. ●

• Jason O'Connor is managing director of Total Merchandise

CERTIFIED RESPONSIBILITY™

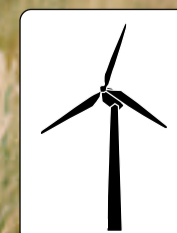
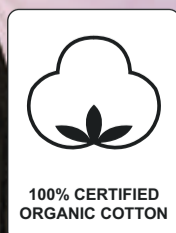
Neutral® has over 20 years of commitment to 100% responsible clothing and accessories, whether for promotional merchandise or uniform. We are dedicated to healthy soil on our planet, thriving farmers in the fields and safe workers in the factory.

We are certified with top standards, such as Fairtrade, EU Ecolabel, SA8000, and Oeko-Tex – securing organic cotton, fair pay, renewable energy, safe working conditions, non-toxic dyes – and much more.

See more at neutral.com



Neutral®
Certified Responsibility™



License no. DK/016/049

License no. 19007



BEWARE THE *AFTERSHOCK*

Unexpected consequences can come from business failures that are not directly linked to you, says Mike Collins

National Timber Group Limited, the UK's largest independent timber supplier recently fell into administration.

Experience tells us the likelihood is there will be a 'pre-pack' sale, where the assets and goodwill will be bought by a new 'phoenix' company but this won't stop the ripples of insolvency spreading far and wide. Timber supplies will be stopped, new suppliers will charge a premium for replacements and projects will be delayed, to name but a few.

I hear you ask: "But I'm not in construction, so how will this insolvency affect me?"

PAIN SPREADS

Ripples from insolvencies travel much further than just the immediate subcontractors and suppliers. Sadly, some suppliers not in that industry may also face insolvency now their meal ticket has gone and so may be forced to pass this pain down their own supply chain.

For example, Subcontractor 1 Limited is forced to write off its £30,000 National Timber debt.

It now doesn't have the money to pay its marketing agency its monthly retainer.

In turn, the marketing agency can't pay its copywriter company, which was retained externally to create a PR piece for another project.

Because the copywriter company hasn't been paid by the marketing agency, it cannot then pay its monthly outsourced HR company bill... and so on and so on.

LIMIT YOUR RISK

What can we do to avoid the ripple effect of this debt pain?

1. Try not to earn only big ticket items.

Tempting as it is to chase the Golden Goose, recent events show no business is too big to close. Use the big ticket invoices to re-invest in processes and practices to aid in developing your business further to secure more frequent residual clients and take the burden of having big clients.

2. Limit your risk through sensible invoicing

Analyse your invoices. Can you break an invoice down into parts and invoice smaller but on a more regular basis. A non-payment of a smaller invoice by a customer is an indicator of bad things to come and also limits your risk as you've only raised smaller bills.

3. Be aware of your exposure at all times

Good credit control is all about being vigilant and organised. Regularly monitor your credit limits and analyse the payment days of your customers. If you find a customer exceeding both, take action to reduce that exposure before it's too late.

We all know that some business is all smoke and mirrors and recent events show that some of that may be true. The key for businesses who deal in credit is to reverse that mirror, look closely at yourself and your practices and ask is there anything you can do better to avoid the ripples of debt pain lapping at the door?

Rest assured, we're at hand to help you find answers to any credit management challenge.

Just call your promotional goods liaison Ian Jenkinson on 07860 197476 or email ijenkinson@directroute.co.uk to discuss the many ways in which Direct Route Account Assyst can protect your business cash flow. ●



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

East Anglia, Midlands, North West and Wales

Ian Jenkinson
ijenkinson@directroute.co.uk
07860 197476

North East, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Mike Collins
mike@accountassyst.com
07866 427363





// ADVERTISING FOR **REAL**

MARCH 18, 2026
WCCB BONN

Truly effective, verifiably sustainable and tangibly credible: Haptic advertising is all of this. HAPTICA® live shows the impressive potential of promotional products and merchandising.

PRODUCTS & IDEAS

More than 100 brands, specialists and newcomers with thousands of articles

CAMPAIGNS & CONCEPTS

Best Practice Show

KNOWLEDGE & FACTS

Lecture programme

For marketers, buyers, HR specialists, agencies and distributors.



**ADMISSION
IS FREE OF CHARGE.**

Register at:
www.haptica.live

HAPTICA®

THE EXPERIENCE OF HAPTIC ADVERTISING



TRUSTED DATA. STRONGER MARGINS. SMARTER GROWTH.



Why should you join PAGE Group? The benefits speak for themselves



Many of us are familiar with the inevitable question of “what’s new?” from customers, before they buy the exact same mug as last year.

It happens. But if you don’t have a new collection of merchandise to show off, you risk losing that customer – they expect you to be able to provide something on demand.

PAGE Group helps by providing a new collection which will include all your trusted favourites as well as new products, all competitively priced and sourced from trusted, approved suppliers. Details are supplied on a platform available to all members, providing data and images instantly.

WHY JOIN OUR CATALOGUE GROUP?

1. It’s a sales tool that works for you
Our professionally produced annual catalogue introduces a wide range of merchandise in hard copy and electronic formats. No more hours spent searching or piecing together supplier information on individual portals, just a ready-to-go resource that enhances your business and saves time.

2. Products selected by members, for members

Unlike other catalogue groups, our products are selected based on merit, rather than the supplier’s ability to pay for space, so you can trust that only the best products are available at the best price.

3. Buying power that protects your margins
As part of an exclusive buying group, you gain access to negotiated pricing normally reserved for high-volume buyers. The outcome is simple: stronger margins, and a better bottom line.

4. Accurate data you can trust
Say goodbye to outdated information or calling suppliers to confirm details. Our online data shows guaranteed pricing and information. You’ll always have the latest details at your fingertips, helping you quote with speed and accuracy, and avoid costly mistakes.

5. ...and much, much more
There are many other considerations and reasons to join PAGE. We would be more than happy to elaborate given the opportunity.

THE RESULT?

Less admin. Better pricing. Faster responses. More sales.

With PAGE you don’t just join a group, you unlock a growth platform designed specifically for our members.

MEMBERSHIP IS LIMITED

To maintain quality and exclusivity, we offer limited membership spaces. This ensures our members receive the full benefits of collective buying power and real-time data without overcrowding the market.

Join us today and transform the way you sell, source, and succeed.

● To find out more about joining the PAGE Group, go to promotionalcatalogue.co.uk, email info@pagepartnership.co.uk, or call 01926 888 856 ●



It all adds up

- The PAGE catalogue in numbers:
- 1,700+ product SKUs in the latest catalogue
- 40% are new products
- 50% promote a sustainable message
- 25% are made in the UK or Europe
- 20% are offered with a standard five-day lead-time including carriage

bpma

**ANNUAL
AWARDS
DINNER
2026**

Bookings now open

Wednesday 21st January 2026
CBS Arena, Coventry

Don't miss the promotional
merchandise industry's most
anticipated event of the year.
To book email events@bpma.co.uk

Thank you to our sponsors

impression
europe

Preseli

xd connects
Changing the way we give

VICTORINOX

Geiger
brandpiration.

BIC graphic

PF Concept



A NEW WAVE IN MERCH

Artificial intelligence is redefining the future of branded tech as smarter, more sustainable, and built for engagement, says Alan Doyle

Artificial intelligence is set to drive the biggest shift in promotional technology for 2026. For UK buyers, it means a new wave of intelligent, connected products that deliver both usefulness and standout brand value.

Expect to see AI-powered smart pens that transcribe and summarise notes, adaptive products (such as lamps) with voice assistants that learn user preferences, promote and respond to 'brand tags' and smart wearables that track wellbeing while offering personalised feedback.

These products go beyond novelty – they're functional tools that keep brands front of mind every day. This will be the next generation of tech that forward-thinking brands are looking to use. Of course, tech items that support everyday use will continue to be very popular. There is still a market for powerbanks, cables, mice, speakers, earbuds, and other tech mainstays.

TECH A PORTER

Wearables and wellness tech are moving

from fitness niches into premium corporate gifting: smart rings, hybrid smartwatches and designer smart glasses combine health tracking with high perceived value, making them ideal for client retention and executive gifting. Partnerships between tech firms and fashion houses will make wearables both desirable and brandable.

ECO EXPECTATIONS

Sustainability will be non-negotiable. Buyers will prioritise repairable, modular electronics, recycled materials and transparent supply chains. Certifications and clear lifecycle data will influence purchasing decisions as much as price. Consumers' eco-expectations and regulatory pressures will push suppliers to document carbon and material claims.

LET'S GET PHYGITAL

Practical smart tech – branded power banks with ultrafast charging for all devices, NFC-enabled contactless promo cards, wallets, even charge cables, Bluetooth trackers and compact AR/VR demo kits – will remain

staples because they provide immediate utility and digital touchpoints for campaigns. Combining physical products with QR or NFC links will create 'phygital' journeys that capture data and extend engagement.

SMARTER OPERATIONS

Behind the scenes, AI is transforming how the promotional market operates. Machine learning is enabling smarter forecasting, personalised product/media interfacing video and visual brand specific recommendations, and even automated artwork generation.

Buyers will see fast, AI curated, data-led suggestions for promotional ranges replacing generalist paper catalogues. Buyers will demand the latest items as soon as they launch.

BLAME BEZOS

This will improve speed, responsiveness, relevance, ROI and make promotional products more relevant for a more sophisticated consumer who is used to the instant 'Amazon' model of choice, speed and AI-driven intelligent responsiveness.

SUSTAINABILITY FIRST

Sustainability will continue to evolve especially given now that all promotional products considered for most campaigns will have a sustainable prime suggestion.

AI-driven production and logistics are reducing waste, improving traceability through blockchain technology with built in tracers that allow the consumer to track and view the product lifespan from raw material to finished state. This will continue to grow as brands want visibility.

Coupled and supporting such on-demand manufacturing will align perfectly with ESG targets and end-user marketing and corporate expectations.

FUTURE FACING

In 2026, the best tech promotional products won't just display a logo – they'll interact with the user to provide brand experience on a new level.

For forward-thinking buyers, AI offers an opportunity to merge promotional creativity, technology and responsibility in ways never dreamed of 15 years ago.

The brands that embrace intelligent promotional products early will set the pace for innovation, customer engagement and this is where we all need to be looking into 2026. ●

Alan Doyle is account director of Xoopar

PEOPLE POWER

Two new BPMA awards shine the spotlight on the individuals who excel in merchandise

People make an organisation, and recognition is one of the most important ways of showing staff how much they matter.

The BPMA is shining a light on those who make a difference through two great new awards that recognise people who are in the early years of their career, and those who have made a difference over the long term.

The shortlist for both the BPMA Emerging Talent and BPMA Recognition Awards have been released and will be announced at the BPMA Annual Awards Dinner on 21 January.

THE EMERGING TALENT AWARD

Celebrating industry professionals who have been in the industry for up to three years, the following individuals have been shortlisted for the final round of judging.



Char O'Donnell, account manager, Zagwear
Since joining the company in April 2024, she has impressed with her instinctive ability to

switch hats, seamlessly transitioning from high-level sales pitches to day-to-day client delivery.

Boss Daniel Hill said: "Char has become one of our most trusted team members, consistently exceeding expectations and setting the tone for a new generation of leadership in our business."



Jack Clark, sales coordinator, Sycal
The "lynchpin" of the company's order process, Jack ensures every customer order is handled seamlessly, staying ahead of potential delays or issues, and keeping communication flowing.

With a background in retail management and a sharp eye as a graphic designer, he brings an impressive blend of skills to the Bedford business.



Jack Coulson, apprentice sustainability and administration coordinator, Premier Print & Promotions

Following work experience at Premier, Jack joined the company as an apprentice and has flourished, representing it at industry events and taking part in visits to suppliers to learn more about the sector.

"Without exception, everyone that has had contact with Jack has given overwhelming feedback on his professionalism, enthusiasm and confidence," says Premier managing director, Ryan Askew.



Kerry Sunderland, key account manager, PromoTrade

Since coming into the industry, Kerry's dedication to her role has meant that she consistently delivers impressive results. She has become a well-known, liked and respected member of the promotional merchandise community and the face of PromoTrade attending shows and exhibitions.



Valentina Zucca, administrator, Juniper Trading

Following more than 20 years working in the property sector, Valentina sought out

a complete change and has thrown herself into the world of promotional merchandise.

Her thirst for knowledge and eagerness to learn helped her pass the TPM exam with 100%, and she is predicted to be a big part of Juniper Trading for years to come.

THE RECOGNITION AWARD

Honouring those who have served the promotional merchandise sector for more than 10 years, the following individuals have been shortlisted.



Amber Whalley, divisional head, Pencom (Laltex Group)

Initially joining Laltex as a sales executive, in 2010 Amber transferred to the newly formed Pencom division. She took charge of Pencom in 2022 and is now the face of the business which has gone from a standing start to become one of the largest pen companies in the industry.

Neil Horner of Laltex, says: "She leads a team of seven with kindness and enthusiasm, and sets the tone across the business with amazing hard work."



James Leach, director, Impress Ipswich

Having joined the family business in 2007, James has become its figurehead in recent years. Over the past three years it has gone from strength to strength, promoting sustainable products while retaining a common-sense approach to advising customers. This year Impress won a coveted PAGE distributor of the year award.



Kara Wyatt, head of sales, Total Merchandise

Described by colleagues as an icon in the industry, Kara's professionalism, knowledge and dedication inform every interaction with clients, work mates, and industry peers. Known by everyone, she's a walking encyclopaedia of products, processes and suppliers.

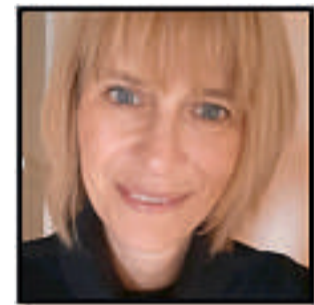
Her boss, Jason O'Connor says: "In the last 18 months since I have had full ownership of TM, I can honestly say that Kara has been absolutely invaluable, assisting in making many, many things possible on our journey. Quite simply she gets it."



Lawrence Angelow, director, Advantage Group

Lawrence has been around the industry for more than 40 years, with 25 of them at the head of the Advantage. One of the most important buying groups in the industry, Advantage aims to be fair to both suppliers and members, and Lawrence sets the tone.

"Lawrence is just an all-round great guy," says Alex Daniels of Solo Midocean. "He invites non-members to his group and has created a group for members to help each other and always has a friendly approach."



Natalie Eichmann, managing director, Gilt Edged Promotions

Having worked with Gilt Edged since 2000, Natalie has an exceptional grasp of the promotional merchandise landscape. She juggles a high-pressure workload, handling sales, in-house production, or onboarding new team members with equal aplomb.

Known as GE's go-to expert, she is calm under pressure and always willing to share what she knows. ■

BPMA AMBASSADORS TO BOOST THE SECTOR

The new regional BPMA Ambassador Programme will empower members to lead, connect, and inspire

The start of the year brings The BPMA Ambassador Programme which is designed to elevate the voices of engaged members who are passionate about advancing BPMA's mission and bringing our industry together.

As a membership organisation, the BPMA welcomes the involvement of those who make up the industry to help determine the future of the industry.

By building stronger relationships in six UK

regions, the BPMA aims to improve visibility and awareness of the Association as part of its ongoing development strategy.

Ambassadors will represent the North, South, Midlands, and Northern Ireland & Scotland.

Ambassadors take on several key responsibilities that shape the member experience. They promote BPMA events and resources across their networks and regions, encourage engagement among current and prospective members, and participate in both virtual and in-person gatherings.

Many will also contribute content, such

as articles, spotlights, or social media posts that highlight industry insights and achievements.

Clive Allcott, BPMA Chair, said: "The Regional Ambassador Programme captures the collaboration we're striving for across BPMA's expanding network. It facilitates meaningful communication across all levels of business, bringing the industry together with a common objective – 'positioning promotional merchandise as the industry of choice for innovation, creativity and professionalism'."

Merch Magazine will be introducing the BPMA Ambassadors in upcoming issues.

STRONGER TOGETHER

The Advantage Group marked 25 years with celebration, awards, and heartfelt tributes

The Advantage Buying Group celebrated its 25th anniversary in unforgettable style at a members' day, product showcase, and gala awards dinner.

Founded by Lawrence Angelow and Martin Herman, Advantage Group emerged from a vision to create a better, more collaborative platform for promotional distributors.

At its core, Advantage was built to provide members with tools, support, and visibility beyond what they could achieve individually, while nurturing a network grounded in trust, reliability, and friendship.

Martin said: "Over 25 years, the industry has changed dramatically, yet the principles that underpin Advantage remain the same – collaboration, innovation, and genuine care for our members. We've always sought to provide value, guidance, and opportunities for growth. That mission continues to guide us into the future."



CONNECT AND CELEBRATE

The anniversary celebrations began with a Members' Meeting, where attendees were welcomed with goody bags.

BPMA CEO Phil Goodman delivered a State of the Nation overview of the industry which set the stage for the Sustainable Genius Bar, where specialist suppliers First Editions, POD, and JuteBag challenged assumptions about sustainable branded merchandise.

Following lunch, the Advantage Product Showcase featured 50 suppliers presenting their latest products and innovations.

ADVANTAGE AWARDS

That evening's Advantage Dinner and Awards included a surprise for Advantage co-founder Lawrence Angelow, as he received a 'This Is Your Life'-style tribute from Gill



Thorpe of The Sourcing Team and Debbie Willsmer from Willsmer Wagg.

This concluded with Debbie and Gill taking a selfie with Lawrence – and when he turned around, everyone in the room was wearing a mask of his face, a touching reminder of the impact he has had on the industry.

LOOKING AHEAD

Reflecting on the future, Lawrence said: "Advantage has always been about growth, innovation, and community. As we look forward to the next 25 years, we will continue to evolve digitally, expand opportunities for our members, and provide the support and guidance that have always been our foundation."

For more information, visit group-advantage.co.uk.

MEMBERS' TRIBUTES

"When we were awarded a client contract that required a catalogue, Lawrence was my first port of call. We joined the group 23 years ago and have loved every moment."

Gill Thorpe, The Sourcing Team

"We joined the Advantage Group in 2008 and soon discovered a group willing to help and support each other. We've had some fabulous overseas trips, memorable catalogue launches, and I feel privileged to continue as a member."

Kerry Adcock, Pinfold Promotions

"Running anything for 25 years takes hard work and dedication but doing it well takes something special."

Ben Whibley, Manic Merchandise

"Being part of this group makes you feel part of something special. Massive congratulations on 25 wonderful years."

Jo Shippen, Hatters Promotions

THE ADVANTAGE 25TH ANNIVERSARY AWARDS

50 Years in the Industry: Celebrating Galpeg's half-century

Founder Members Award: Debbie Willsmer (Willsmer Wagg) and Philip Moulds (Pressplus Limited)

Best Member Website: Merchandise Branding. Nominated – Blue Fish Promo and Nicara Branded Merchandise

Most Wanted Award: Stay Sourced, in recognition of consistent top rankings

Account Manager of the Year: Annouchka Birch, Goldstar Europe.

Runner-up – Claire Etoe, Preseli

Customer Service Team of the Year: Laltex Promo

Unsung Hero: Tom Verow, Mojo Promotions

Supplier Innovation of the Year: Midocean Brands (for express service on 30kg+ orders). Highly commended – Foamo, First Editions

Circular Initiative Award: Pink Sheep for commitment to sustainability

Group Supplier of the Year: Laltex Promo. Highly commended – WCMA. Commended – Castelli, Juniper, Keramikos

Group Member of the Year: Winner – Mojo Promotions. Highly commended – Impamark. Commended – ASP, Stay Sourced



PSI

**A world of choices –
yours to explore, yours
to choose the best.**

7-9 JAN 2026
Exhibition Centre Düsseldorf



The European leading trade show for promotional products, incentives and merchandising

psi-messe.com

Built by



In the business of building businesses

bpma xtra

The all new Members Perks Platform

Enjoy wide-ranging savings on shopping, travel, holidays, entertainment, tech and more – exclusively for BPMA members

**Scan the QR to find out more
and start saving**



bpma
British
Promotional
Merchandise
Association