How to pick branded merchandise that works for your next event

Start with the audience and the occasion

Choosing branded merchandise for a business event can feel like a guessing game. There are endless options, and each supplier promises something different. But the most effective giveaways come from a clear starting point: understanding who will receive them and what the event is actually about. A tradeshow in Birmingham demands a different kind of item than a company off-site or a client dinner. The person walking past a stand at a conference has different needs and expectations from someone sitting through a day of internal training. Before you look at colours, logos, or budgets, take time to define the setting and the people involved. That one step will shape every decision that follows.

For example, a product aimed at commuters might work well at a city-centre exhibition, while a practical desk item suits a corporate seminar. The audience's job roles, daily habits, and even the time of year matter. A summer garden party calls for something different from a winter networking evening. Once you have a clear picture of who you are giving to and why they are there, you can move to the next stage with confidence.

Define the purpose of the giveaway

Not all branded merchandise serves the same goal. Some items are meant to start a conversation at the event itself. Others are designed to stay with the recipient for weeks or months afterwards, keeping your brand in view. A few items serve both purposes. Understanding what you want the merchandise to achieve will help you narrow the list of possibilities. If the main aim is to draw people to your stand, choose something visible and easy to hand over, such as a tote bag or a colourful piece of drinkware. If the goal is long-term brand recall, pick something people use regularly at their desk or on the go, like a pen, a notebook, or a reusable bottle. When the item aligns with the purpose, the investment is more likely to pay off.

This is also the point where you can think about the message your merchandise sends. A well-made item suggests care and quality. A flimsy one can do the opposite, no matter how clever the design. The branded merchandise you choose reflects your organisation, whether you intend it to or not. So match the quality level to the occasion and the relationship you have with the recipient. A high-value client might appreciate something more substantial than a standard giveaway, while a large public event may call for a cost-effective item that still looks and feels decent.



How to pick branded merchandise that works for your next event

Choose items people actually want to use

The most common mistake in event merchandise is ordering something that looks good in a catalogue but ends up in the bin or at the back of a drawer. To avoid that, think about everyday utility. Items that solve a small problem or fit into a regular routine are the ones that get kept. Drinkware is a strong example because most people use a cup or bottle daily. A branded travel mug or a stainless steel water bottle is something a recipient can reach for every morning. Clothing also works well when it is comfortable and cut in a way people would wear outside of work. A soft cotton t-shirt or a well-fitted polo shirt can become a favourite piece, carrying your logo around for months.

Bags are another category that tends to hold up well. A simple canvas tote or a compact backpack sees frequent use, especially among commuters and travellers. Pens remain a classic for a reason: they are small, practical, and always needed. The trick is to choose a pen that writes smoothly and feels substantial in the hand, not the cheapest disposable model. Similarly, notebooks and journals are popular when they have decent paper and a sturdy cover. The more someone likes using the item, the longer your brand stays in their environment.

When you work with a supplier such as Bulk Branded, you can browse categories that cover these everyday essentials. The key is to filter by what suits the audience you identified earlier. A tech conference audience might prefer a power bank or a phone stand. A food and drink event crowd might appreciate a branded bottle opener or a set of reusable straws. There is no universal best item, only the best item for your specific situation.

Get the branding right without overdoing it

Once you have selected the product, the next decision is how to apply your logo or message. Subtle branding often works better than a large, loud print. A small logo on the side of a mug or the chest of a polo shirt feels more like a quality mark than an advertisement. People are more likely to use and keep an item that looks like something they would have bought for themselves, rather than a walking billboard. Consider the colour of your branding against the product colour. High contrast can help legibility, but a tonal or embossed approach can look more premium. If the product is a pen or a notebook, a simple debossed logo or a foil stamp can add a touch of elegance.

Also think about the placement. On drinkware, the logo should be visible when someone holds the item, not hidden under the handle or on the bottom. On clothing, standard positions are the left chest, the sleeve, or the back of the neck. Avoid putting a logo in a place that will wear out

quickly, such as the cuff of a sleeve or the rim of a cap. The goal is to make the branding part of the item's design, not an afterthought. A well-placed, well-sized logo tells people your organisation pays attention to detail.



How to pick branded merchandise that works for your next event

Plan the logistics ahead of time

Even the best merchandise is useless if it arrives late, runs out too quickly, or is difficult to hand out. Order with enough lead time to allow for production, personalisation, and shipping. Most suppliers, including bulkbranded.co.uk, offer a range of turnaround options, but it is safer to assume you need several weeks, especially for large quantities or custom colours. Check the delivery address and confirm someone will be there to receive the shipment. If the event is in a different city, you might want the merchandise sent directly to the venue or to a local hotel. Have a plan for storing the items before the event starts, and make sure the team on site knows how many to give out per day or per hour. Running out on the first morning is a missed opportunity.

It is also worth thinking about how the items will be presented. A pile of loose pens on a table looks less appealing than a neatly arranged display. If the budget allows, consider simple packaging: a branded box, a drawstring bag, or even a tissue wrap can make the giveaway feel more like a gift. People tend to value something that looks like it was prepared for them, rather than something grabbed from a bulk box.

Measure what matters after the event

The work does not end when the last item is handed out. If you can, track how the merchandise performs. This does not require complex systems. Simple observation works: did people pick up the item eagerly? Did they comment on it? Did you see your bottle or bag being carried around the venue after the event? Some organisations include a QR code on the product that leads to a special offer or a feedback form. That can give you a direct sense of how many recipients engage further. Even without such a mechanism, you can ask your team for their impressions and compare the response to previous events. Over time, you will build a sense of which products and styles create the most lasting impression.

Keep a record of what you ordered, for which event, and what the reaction was. That information becomes a valuable reference for future planning. You will start to notice patterns: perhaps drinkware works better at trade shows while clothing suits internal team events. Maybe a certain colour or logo placement gets more compliments. Small observations, collected over several events, can sharpen your choices considerably.

 How to pick branded merchandise that works for your next event

Think beyond the one-off event

Branded merchandise can also serve as a bridge between events. If you are hosting a series of conferences or annual gatherings, consider using a consistent product line that people recognise. A attendee who received a well-made notebook at your spring event might look forward to a matching pen at the autumn one. This kind of continuity builds a sense of connection and professionalism. It also simplifies your ordering process, because you already know what works. Over several cycles, you can refine the design, the colour, and the packaging until the merchandise becomes a signature part of your brand's presence. Bulk Branded, like many suppliers, can keep your artwork on file and re-order the same product with consistent quality, which makes repeat orders straightforward.

Finally, remember that the best branded giveaways are the ones that make someone feel good about receiving them. That feeling comes from a combination of thoughtful selection, quality materials, and appropriate branding. When you get those elements right, the merchandise stops being a free item and starts being a genuine tool for building relationships. The event may last a day, but a well-chosen piece of branded merchandise can stay useful and appreciated for much longer.

Bulk Branded on social media LinkedIn Facebook