

## HOW GREEN ARE YOUR PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS?

When is a plastic bag eco-friendly? When it replaces a different type of plastic bag!

Green is the buzz word now in the promotional products industry, and some of the items labelled eco-friendly are somewhat perplexing. What actually is green is hotly debated! However this trend shouldn't be ignored, it is a concern that is well and truly mainstream.

According to a world-wide study in 2007 by Tanberg, 52% of Australian consumers prefer to purchase from a company with a strong environmental reputation.

“The findings clearly suggest a relationship between a company's environmental reputation and its brand value” said Tandberg CEO, Fredrik Halvorsen. “In addition to the ethical reasons for ‘going green’, there is a tremendous incentive for companies across the globe to focus efforts on environmental responsibility to attract customers, recruit and retain strong talent, and positively affect their external brand perception.”

In 2007 luxury fashion designer Anya Hindmarch released her “I’m not a plastic bag” recycled canvas tote. It sold out in hours in the UK and USA. The exclusive bags became collectible, confirming eco was fashionable. They are still being resold by collectors on eBay today.



*People want to see companies doing the right thing. This impacts the choice of products companies should choose to promote themselves and their brands.*

So, when putting together a campaign using promotional products, what should you consider?

### **ELEMENTS THAT CAN HELP A PROMOTIONAL PRODUCT CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY TO THE ENVIRONMENT?**

These include:

- Recycled content
- Sustainable content
- Reduce use of resources or decrease wastage
- Locally Produced
- Environmentally educating or increase awareness of environmental issues
- Longer life

**Recycled Content** — using recyclables for raw materials conserves virgin raw material and saves space in landfills. Unless you buy products made with recycled content, and ‘close the loop’, recycling simply doesn’t work. *For example PET bottles being recycled into bags, caps and polo shirts. Many paper products, such as repositionable notes, writing pads, are available as recycled. Also consider recycled for your packaging.*

**Sustainable Content** — use renewal resources and include traditional cotton and wood, along with relative newcomers jute, hemp, bamboo and other vegetable fibres which seem to offer reduced use of water and pesticides, with increased speed of growth and CO2 absorption. *For example jute bags, bamboo bathrobes, cornstarch pens.*

**Locally Produced** — items made in Australia save fuel to transport.

**Reduce use of resources or decrease wastage** — for example solar or water powered items such as clocks, calculators and torches; items that can be refilled instead of disposed of.

**Awareness/Educating** — items that by their use increase awareness of environmental issues. *For example seed sticks, shower timer.*

**Longer life** — items that replace short life or disposable items. *For example refillable metal pens rather than disposable plastic pens; multi-use coffee carriers replacing single-use cardboard trays, thermal mugs replacing disposable coffee cups.*

## **USAGE IS KEY TO BEING GREEN**

Probably the item that has led the green drive has been the non-woven polypropylene carry bag; the ubiquitous often green coloured bag many shoppers are seen with or at least fill up their car boots with! On first look the ‘green’ bag’s main environmental credential is its multi-use in place of the single-use plastic bag.

However both are made from fossil fuels, don’t break down and are mostly imported. Certainly other factors are involved for the single use bag: damaging effects on animal life and waterways and litter creation. However these bags are fully recyclable. But less than 5% are recycled in Australia. Groups who are in favour of the traditional plastic bag argue it is how it is used, or rather disposed of, that has created the problems. Once again use influencing environmental impact.

People in favour of non-woven polypropylene suggest it is preferable to cotton, nylon and polyester as it has a cleaner manufacturing process and uses less water and chemicals. But its environmental impact greatly depends on how many *times* it is used.

So if *use* of a product has a major input into its environmental impact, then it is important to have your promotional products used! Now more than ever a well created and targeted promotional products campaign is needed for it to be successful. Otherwise the items will end up thrown away – which is environmentally damaging even if they are recycled, sustainable, local and biodegradable!

In 2007 Open Space asked 125 artists from around the world to donate their time and talent to custom design tote bags for charity.



We live in a consumer based society and promotional products are used to keep a brand or company in a consumer's mind.

It is easy to pick apart any eco-friendly campaign – it was highlighted by some that Anya Hindmarch's bag was made in China. But given the results of the Tanberg study, it's a step in the right direction that is likely to gain you fans. It creates a win-win situation – your company looks good and the consumer looks and feels good while using your promotional product.

When evaluating promotional products for your company consider options that have one or more of the elements that can help contribute positively to the environment. For example if you are looking for mouse mats consider recycled ones. Or present an executive gift in recycled or bamboo packaging. Currently eco-friendly options are more expensive. They are still produced in smaller numbers and hidden costs which were previously passed on to the environment are borne by the user. So this needs to be factored into the cost of the campaign. To offset this the item should be better received and more likely to be used. Tell your recipients why you have chosen the item, point out the environmental benefits. They may not be obvious to everyone.

When putting together a promotional products campaign, quality, price and creativity have been the main concerns for companies. Now 'green' should be added to that list.

Tanberg Study

<http://www.vcinsight.com/default.asp?artID=5070>

Open Space

<http://openspace.bscientific.org/>