

As a country, we're making better choices of late on our planet's behalf. Every week there are more stories about organizations taking steps to change their manufacturing methods, purchasing requirements or corporate policies, all in an effort to think green and help sustain our environment.

Fortunately, eco-minded promotional product buyers have the ability to make a difference as well. You now have the option to select merchandise made partly or entirely from recycled, biodegradable or organic materials. To achieve maximum impact and truly "wow" your target audience, however, your best bet is to use your imagination when integrating environmentally-friendly promotional products into your activities and campaigns.

In this report, you'll find a variety of promotional product ideas designed to help organizations present their offerings in a meaningful, memorable and environmentally-friendly manner. These suggestions should result in the spreading of positive messages about your organization, ultimately leading to stronger ties with clients as well as new client relationships.



Since 1993, Printable Promotions has been recommending creative products and powerful strategies for acquiring and retaining clients. Our goal with this report is to help businesses of all sizes and types establish an environmentally-friendly promotional marketing program. If the examples given aren't applicable to or adaptable by your organization, we invite you to contact us at 1-800-PRINTABLE for additional eco-friendly promotional product ideas that will work with your marketing strategies.

Know What Eco-Friendly Means

When the time comes to select promotional merchandise for your marketing programs, keep in mind that any move towards positively impacting our environment will be lauded by your clients and prospects. But before you can begin mapping out a plan to launch an environmentally-friendly promotional marketing program, it's important to know your eco terminology:

Bamboo

Bamboo is a woody grass-like tree and is one of the world's most prolific and fastest-growing plants (up to 4 feet per day!) Bamboo reaches maturity in about four years, compared to the typical 25 to 70 years for most other trees. Bamboo is typically grown without pesticides or chemicals, and grows best in poor soil that is unsuitable for other crops.

Made in USA

Did you know that products made in the USA are more eco-friendly than identical products made overseas? The reason: the shorter shipping distance reduces the amount of fuel needed to transport the product.

Biodegradable

Biodegradable products can easily and naturally decompose or rot into the earth without having a negative affect on the environment. You might be surprised to learn how long it takes some products to break down, however. For instance, paper takes 2-5 months to dissolve and plastic bags take 10-20 years.

Corn Plastic

Plastic made from corn, also known as PLA (polylactic acid.) Producing corn plastic uses 65% less energy than conventional plastics, generates 68% fewer greenhouse gasses and contains no toxins. PLA is in principle compostable, meaning that it will break down under certain conditions into harmless natural compounds within 90 days.

Green

Describes practices, products or lifestyles that work with nature instead of against it, and are intended to ensure that one's impact on the environment is as minimal (or as positive) as possible.

Natural/All Natural

Products or materials which do not come from man-made origins. Examples would be wood, leather, cotton, beeswax.

Organic

Organic fibers (used to manufacture apparel and other cloth items) are produced by farmers who follow standards that nurture the soil and do not use toxic insecticides, herbicides or fungicides. To achieve organic certification, a farm must have been inspected by an accredited certification organization abiding by national/international standards.

Post-consumer Recycled Content

Product or materials which have been recycled or reused from residential and consumer waste. Examples would be plastic bottles which have been recycled into new plastic bottles or other products, converting wastepaper from offices into corrugated boxes or newsprint.

Post-industrial Recycled Content

Waste materials generated during the manufacturing process which have been recycled or reused before they have become a consumer product. Examples would be collected PET plastic bottle waste from a factory floor which is put back into the production process to be used to make new plastic bottles, paper scraps off of a paper mill floor going back into the next batch of paper.

Solar Power

Energy derived from the sun. Commonly used to power small electronic devices such as calculators, eliminating the need for batteries.

Earn Esteem When Announcing Environmental Initiatives

Many of the benefits of implementing an eco-friendly promotional marketing program are obvious. Equally important, however, is capitalizing on the opportunity to generate goodwill stemming from your efforts. Letting clients and prospects know what you're up to is a sound public relations move.

For example, imagine that the first step your organization takes is to replace all incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient Compact Fluorescent bulbs designed to reduce CO2 emissions (while saving money on electricity in the process). You could announce your new mission and this action in the next company e-newsletter. But why not go one step further? Send clients and prospects a light bulb shape recycled Post-It® note pad announcing your new focus on preserving our planet.

Or, suppose your organization owns the building it's housed in and you are responsible for the grounds. You might select a landscape firm that practices greenscaping, resulting in a new landscape that reduces water usage, encourages groundwater recharge, protects our water supply and reduces stormwater pollution. A small potted plant designed to attach to computer monitors sent to clients and prospects with a letter explaining your plans will set a positive tone.

Reward Employees' Efforts

Your eco-friendly plans and goals will affect your employees. Perhaps you need your purchasing team to identify vendors who take back packaging materials for reuse. Or you've asked every staff member to remember to turn off their computers and printers at the end of the day.

Keeping employees apprised of your corporate mission is only half the battle. Planning ways to show your appreciation of their buy-in will make accomplishing your objectives much easier.

Here are a few ideas for encouraging employees to remain on board with your cause:

After hours, place a calendar that blooms or seeded bookmark on employees' desks.

The bottom portion of the calendar or bookmark can be planted; the gift itself can be imprinted with a message thanking employees for their assistance in launching and sustaining your initiative.

Give employees office supplies that support your mission.

Imagine your "Green Team" has compiled a list of new eco-friendly practices to follow, ranging from making double-sided copies to turning off equipment when it isn't in use. To help remind your staff to adopt these new behaviors you could print the list on an office accessory that gets used throughout the work week, such as a desk caddy or mouse pad. Also know that some desk accessories, including rulers and letter openers, are now manufactured from corn-based plastic. Corn-based plastic products are among the hottest offerings at the moment because they break down naturally by composting.

Pass out "You Did It!" gifts.

Suppose your goal for the second quarter of 2008 is to get as many employees as possible to print e-mails only when necessary. If paper consumption drops dramatically by the end of June, you'll ensure employees' continued support by rewarding them for their past support. A computer screen duster made from recycled materials will be a constant reminder of the accomplishment.

Promote an eco-friendly atmosphere.

Present all employees with a hot/cold (reusable) mug imprinted with your company's logo. Be sure to leave space for employees to write their name with a permanent marker.

Many of your employees are probably already eco-minded. If so, they'll be glad to help your company establish itself as a caring organization.

When it becomes clear that your staff has embraced its new operating philosophy, be sure to remind your human resources staff to promote this company characteristic when meeting with prospective hires.

Eco-Friendly Product Choices are Plentiful

Remember when printing letterhead on recycled paper was the boldest move an organization could make towards showing concern for the earth? Those limitations are long gone, and the possibilities are only going to continue to expand.

Incorporate Green Products into your Existing Campaigns

Be aware that it's easier than ever to show your concern for the environment while you are hosting special events or exhibiting at trade shows. For example, regardless of your industry or target audience, visitors to your trade show booth will appreciate the gift of an eco-friendly badge holder. Recycled notebooks and pens can be placed on meeting room tables. And if your company sells a technology product, or your target audience includes engineers, a recycled circuit board luggage tag holder is also a useful giveaway.

Wear only the best (for the planet).

At your next company outing, give attendees a T-Shirt manufactured using organic material. Your options include organic cotton, hemp, bamboo and Ingeo, the world's first man-made fiber made from corn. Be sure to ask that the shirts are decorated using soy-based or water-based inks. And for added exposure, make sure your message emblazoned on the shirt promotes that your organization thinks green.

Make sure your first impression is green

You may wish to explore opportunities for presenting visitors to your office with environmentally-friendly promotional items. For example, instead of filling a paper envelope with sales literature, use a Poly String Re-usable Envelope or an Eco-Friendly Tote Bag.

Today you'll find hundreds of items manufactured from recycled products, biodegradable products or organic materials. There are also innovative items that are solar, hand powered or do not require batteries. Whatever your marketing objective – to introduce a new product or service, recruit employees, thank clients, reward employees or entice prospects to give you a chance – it can be done in a manner that doesn't hurt the planet. Making this choice and promoting your investment towards this global endeavor will speak volumes about your company.

We hope you found some valuable information in this report that you can use to build your brand and increase the effectiveness of your marketing and promotions.

We invite you to contact us at 1-800-PRINTABLE for customized product solutions to YOUR promotional challenges!



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About the Author:

On the heels of receiving his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the University of Illinois, Mitch joined Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) as a change management consultant. After growing weary of crisscrossing the country developing employee communications and sales materials for Fortune 500® companies, he joined Printable Promotions in 1997.

In 2001, Mitch was named to Counselor magazine's "40 under 40" list of people to watch in the industry. Today, he oversees the marketing function at Printable Promotions which includes the role of Chief Architect for the company's two-time award-winning website.

In his spare time, Mitch guest lectures about the value of promotional products marketing and likes to listen to music (especially 80's compilations left over from his mobile DJ days), collect Pez dispensers and spend lazy evenings around the house with his wife and two daughters eating popcorn and watching American Idol.

Special Report Extra: Green Products in Action

PRODUCT: Recycled Circuit Board Bookmarks
CUSTOMER: A University's Student Environmental Club
OBJECTIVE: The Go Green Club wanted to find a fun and functional item to distribute at their Spring Cleaning event at a campus park. The club searched and settled on bookmarks made from recycled circuit boards and imprinted with the club's name, event date and a website that students could visit to learn more about how to protect the environment. After planting trees and picking up trash, every student at the event received a recycled bookmark.



OUTCOME: The event was a huge success and more than 30 new students decided to join the club. The following year, participation in the event increased 20%.

PRODUCT: Various Eco-Friendly Products
CUSTOMER: A Food Service Company
OBJECTIVE: A food service company created a "Partnership Earth – Our Commitment" recycling campaign to create public awareness of its commitment to eco-friendly and recyclable packaging. Theme-imprinted promotional products such as organic cotton t-shirts, environmental slide guides, and seeded confetti in a terra cotta coffee cup were given away. Other products used included Plant-A-Tree terrarium kits, and recyclable key tags.



OUTCOME: The company projects a reduction of close to 10 million disposable cups used in its locations. In addition, recycling centers are now receiving 80% of the company's cans, 30% of its glass, 5% of its polystyrene and 90% of its cardboard.