



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



Merchandise Policy

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1. Introduction

The way we communicate with external audiences affects our reputation and influences how well people understand our messages. Communication strategies consider target audiences, key messages, the issues we are addressing and the call to action. Based on this analysis, the strategy will then recommend a mix of activities carefully selected to help the audience do something with the message - for example, apply for a grant, visit a website, change behaviour or learn about a new policy.

Merchandising (also called promotional products) is one of many activities that can be used to do this. However, the efficacy always needs to be carefully considered as external facing communication and media activities can attract a great deal of scrutiny.

[Communication and Media Branch](#) manages all activities in approved communication strategies, and activities that support the priorities of the department.

What is a promotional product?

Promotional products are commercial items usually branded with a logo and/or tagline that are given away to promote a company, corporate image, brand, event or programme. Common products include:

- stationery (notepads, sticky notes, pens, rulers, erasers, letter openers)
- apparel (caps, hats, t-shirts)
- publications (calendars, bookmarks)
- information technology (USB Flash Drives, electronic business cards)
- novelty items (mugs, key chains, stress balls, bottle-openers).

Merchandise should only ever be one component of a communication strategy. It is just a product until it is linked with broader promotion.

If you are thinking about sourcing merchandise quotes, you need to meet first with your [Communication Account Manager](#). They will help you go through the attached checklist to determine whether a promotional product suits your needs.

IMPORTANT NOTE: DSS policy is that promotional products must not be produced without written approval from Communication and Media Branch. This ensures that an assessment has been conducted that confirms the products will help achieve the aims of a strategy. It will also help provide a robust rationale for development and production of the products should the purchase be scrutinised.

2. Policy

Step 1: Approval

You must get written approval from your [Communication Account Manager](#) before allocating funds to promotional products. Your Account Manager will help you to determine whether promotional products are appropriate, effective and value for money in the communication mix.

The Communication and Media Branch will only approve products that are aligned to a communication strategy or can be shown to be critical to achieving business goals.

Step 2: Spend wisely

Line areas are responsible for managing contracts and organising procurement according to:

- Department Procurement Policy (including use of the Printing and Promotional Products Panel*)
- Commonwealth Procurement Rules
- *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013.*

All staff are responsible for spending public money wisely. Ask yourself these important questions when considering promotional products:

- Is it a cost-effective way to deliver the message?
- Is spending proportionate to the overall communication strategy and programme budget?
- How will the target audience perceive the spend? (For example, they may be concerned the funding isn't going towards a grants programme)
- Does it adhere to the relevant procurement guidelines?
- Am I adhering to the APS Code of Conduct?

All procurement must be completed in [Procurement ESSentials](#). Ask your [Communication Account Manager](#) about the process and documents required. Failure to comply with these policies will result in a breach recorded in the department's certificate of compliance. This will be attributed to your branch.

* The Printing and Promotional Products panel includes two preferred merchandise suppliers, Intandem and Yetimo Marketing Pty Ltd. They should be approached for quotes first. Procurement should only go off-panel if they cannot meet requirements (or if the item can be found for better value elsewhere). A file note is required if using another supplier.

Step 3: Set a goal

What is the basic aim of your communication strategy, and what results do you want? Do you want to increase web visits, remind people about important dates or raise general awareness about an event? These are different purposes needing different communication activities. Knowing what you want to achieve is key to choosing the right activity - whether it be advertising, editorial, a publication or a promotional product.

It's also important to think about timeframes. Promotional products shouldn't replace information or educational activities that could have a longer-term impact.

Step 4: Confirm your audience/s

Your [Communication Account Manager](#) will work with you to identify who you want to reach. For example:

- What's the demographic? Are they male/female, young/old?
- Where do they live?
- What do they do?
- What's their cultural background?
- Do they have accessibility issues?
- If you want to change behaviour, what's the behaviour now and how do you want to influence it?
- Why should they be interested in what we have to offer?
- What do you want them to do with your message? How can they take action?

Step 5: Determine WANT and NEED

One of the most important things to keep in mind is whether the audience will WANT and NEED a promotional product.

WANT: will it appeal to them? Is it something *they* will like, or something *you* like? For example, you might enjoy using that leather notepad cover you recently got at a trade event. However, your target audience of new mums aged 25-40 is likely to give it to someone else or store it away for later. If it doesn't help them keep their baby warm, fed or asleep, they probably don't want it.

NEED: will it be useful - will it be practical? You don't want to go to a conference and see hundreds of DSS-branded pens in a rubbish bin because all the attendees are taking notes on their smartphones or tablets.

Case study: thoughtful and useful

In 2010 Alzheimer's New Zealand won the Cannes silver lion advertising award for its 'Alzheimer's Erasers'. Erasers were hollowed out and fitted with USB memory sticks, with the organisation's logo and website on the reverse. They were sent to local politicians and companies to increase awareness of the disease's early warning signs. This is a great example of a simple product with perfectly matched message.



Not more pens! Pens are often one of the first merchandise choices organisations make. They're cheap to produce, light to mail and useful. Or are they? Think about how many pens you have sitting in a desk drawer, or a big bucket near your computer, under a mountain of other pens. If it doesn't do something out of the ordinary, it's probably headed to the bottom.

Step 6: Make it appropriate

Think carefully about whether the merchandise:

- relates to what you're trying to promote
- appropriately represents your programme / policy and DSS' image.

Resist the urge to purchase a fad novelty item and instead select something that's appropriate for your audience (don't forget cultural considerations). The best products have brand recall and positively associate a name with an item.

Ask yourself: would I be proud to hand this out? If I got it, would I use it or throw it away?

Case study: packaging matters

A government department ordered thousands of rubber wristbands to promote an environmental message. When the wristbands arrived they were individually wrapped in plastic. If the wrapping made it to the ocean, it would have been a serious risk to the very animals the department was trying to protect.

Step 7: Make it accessible

Departmental promotional products must be accessible to all Australians. We have a responsibility to ensure the information we provide can be accessed and understood by **all** members of the community. There is a range of accessible formats to consider when planning a product such as easy English, large print, Braille or audio recording.

Consider the needs of the intended audience for your product in the planning phase to ensure alternative formats are factored in (where necessary) from the start. You should also consider where it is appropriate to provide translations for particular documents and audiences.

Contact your [Communication Account Manager](#) for more information about accessibility considerations.

Step 8: Identify the call to action

Raising general awareness is one of the most common reasons cited when buying products. However, it can be difficult to link them to a change in awareness (or behaviour) if you don't include a 'call to action'. Ask your audience to *do* something with the information on the freebie you just gave them - for example, visit a website, apply for a grants round or get their local community talking.

Most promotional products have limited space for anything other than a logo and a small amount of text, so maximise your message. Give your audience a way to reach you, whether it be a URL, a phone number or email address.

Reminder: don't lose sight of your goal. Get your product to the people who want/need it, and will take action.

Step 9: Choose QUALITY, check RISKS

Merchandise can be expensive and take up a large portion of a communication budget. If you get approval to proceed, go for quality over quantity - you will get what you pay for. Choosing the cheapest USB memory stick could leave you with a product that breaks before it even gets to the recipient. This is not value for money, and may impact organisational credibility/reputation.

You should also consider any potential risks before deciding on a supplier. Where is the product manufactured? Are you supporting Australia-made products? How are they packaged? Are they environmentally friendly? Do they meet health and safety guidelines? Will they be used with their original intent?

A poor-quality product will cheapen the brand, damage reputation and potentially end up in Senate Estimates or media headlines.

Case study: make it safe

One statutory authority bought boxes of bouncy balls for parents to pass onto their children. With its logo stamped inside, the agency hoped the balls would be a fun way to raise awareness of some legislative changes that affected families. However, staff discovered the balls easily broke apart and could become a choking hazard to kids. They were sent to a warehouse un-used.



Case study: check it, then have someone else check it



An American primary school bought pencils printed with the words “Too Cool to Do Drugs.” The print started next to the tip of the pencil, rather than the eraser. As it was sharpened, the message changed – as shown below. Not quite what the school was hoping for...



Ask yourself: does it work? Is it tasteful? Does it have a long shelf life? Are there any risks or ‘worst case scenarios’ I need to think about?

Step 10: Get the branding right

The department has guidelines to help designers apply our visual identity to products, presenting a professional and consistent image to the community. The guidelines set out clear and consistent rules that must be applied when using logos, taglines, colour palettes, iconography, font styles and imagery.

All departmental, Australian Government and Whole-of-Government branded merchandise must adhere to the:

- Corporate Style Guide
- Australian Government Style Guide

Your [Communication Account Manager](#) can advise which branding applies.

Designers on the [Creative and Design Panel](#) have access to the department’s photo library, including copies of Style Guides and other useful documents.

Step 11: Get the timing right

It’s critical that you consider production time in the planning phase of your communication strategy. Timelines to create merchandise vary depending on what you buy. For example, a simple notepad with a logo may take two weeks to produce while apparel or IT products could take months. You may need to factor in more time for large quantities, and consider the impact of public holidays or if using an overseas supplier.

When sourcing quotes, provide the relevant supplier (editor/designer/typesetter/printer) with a draft timeline and ask them to confirm that they can deliver to your deadline.

It is not wise to rush a job to balance an underspend in your budget. This shows a lack of strategic thought, which may lead to poor quality products and reputation damage.

Activity	Approximate timeframe
Quotes	3 working days
Official order	3 - 7 working days
Design concepts	10 working days
Production	Up to 8 weeks, depending on complexity and product availability
Delivery	Up to 8 weeks, depending on location of manufacturer
Distribution	2 – 3 weeks, depending on location of audience

Step 12: Confirm promotion/distribution

The right distribution strategy is critical to the success of any promotional product. It's not efficient or cost-effective to mail fridge magnets to every Australian household, so remember who your target audience is and where and when you should reach them.

The department's warehousing, fulfilment, distribution and related services contract includes physical product distribution and email distribution. Your [Communication Account Manager](#) can help you arrange a quote once you've agreed on appropriate quantities and have a distribution plan in place.

Tip: bulky items like drink bottles might seem cheap to buy, but will be expensive to send out because of their size. Don't forget to factor in potential mailing costs.

Hint: make sure you regularly review what's in the warehouse. Obsolete products are removed, recycled or pulped to reduce warehousing costs.

Step 13: Evaluate

Did the promotional product work? Did you achieve your goal? Evaluation is an important part of a communication strategy. It needs to be done throughout the process to make sure your message is being understood and if you need to make any adjustments. It can also help you re-direct funds elsewhere if you're not getting the result you want.

Your [Communication Account Manager](#) can help with an evaluation plan that might include:

- baseline research (before you order products)
 - desktop research on past reports or public opinion surveys
 - current web visits, blog traffic, media coverage etc.
 - analysis of feedback from stakeholders and other key players
 - concept testing the message and promotional product with your audience.
- tracking research (during promotional activities)
 - evaluate success at a particular milestone – for example, halfway through distribution - against the baseline findings
 - either quantitative (a numerical measure) or qualitative (reveals more about the effects, and can be more meaningful).
- final review (after the project is finished)
 - evaluate success at the end of the activity
 - share what you learnt with others.

Evaluation can be outsourced at a cost to you, or done 'below the line' by the Communication and Media Branch as part of your overarching communication strategy.

3. Responsibilities

All Staff

Promotional products must not be produced without written approval from the Communication and Media Branch.

Managers/Delegates

Line areas are responsible for managing contracts and organising procurement. All staff are responsible for spending public money wisely.

Policy Owner

The Communication and Media Branch will only approve products that are aligned to a communication strategy or can be shown to be critical to achieving business goals.

4. Sanctions for non-compliance

All product orders must be completed in [Procurement ESSentials](#) and must comply with the Commonwealth Procurement Rules.

Failure to comply with the Commonwealth Procurement Rules may result in a breach being recorded in the Department's certificate of compliance. This will be attributed to your Branch.

Failure to follow the correct approval process may result in a procedural breach.

5. More information

A few final tips:

- Promotional products must not be produced without written approval from the Communication and Media Branch
- Have a clear goal – the Communication and Media Branch will only approve products that are aligned to a communication strategy or can be shown to be critical to achieving business goals
- Make sure the product is WANTED and NEEDED
- Think about quality and potential risks
- Consider the quantities you need, and have a distribution plan in place
- Spend public funds wisely.

For more information contact your [Communication Account Manager](#).

Attachment A: Checklist

You must tick 'yes' to the following mandatory requirements before going further

	Yes	No
Have you met with your Communication Account Manager?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the products part of a broader communication strategy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has the Communication and Media Branch given you written approval?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do the products align with the DSS Priorities Plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the products the most cost-effective way to deliver your message?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Plan

Do you have a communication goal or objective?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you know who your audience is?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a WANT and a NEED for a promotional product?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the product appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the product accessible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the product have a 'call to action' (audience will <i>do</i> something)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the product high quality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you considered possible risks and 'worst case scenarios'?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Execute

Does the design use the correct branding?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you factored in appropriate production timeframes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a distribution / promotion strategy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evaluate

Do you have an evaluation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Please keep a copy of the completed checklist for your records and provide an electronic copy to your [Communication Account Manager](#).