

5 Ways to Complete an Outfit and Get Brands Noticed

Offer fashion accessories to complement your apparel programs and watch your sales grow

By Lisa Horn, CAS

"What you wear is how you present yourself to the world, especially today, when human contacts are so quick. Fashion is instant language."

- Miuccia Prada

WHAT'S ONE OF the easiest ways to make a fashion statement? With accessories. From flashy and formal to subtle and relaxed, accessories can transform any outfit from day to night, work to play.

When it comes to corporate fashion, accessories give brands another touch point—one that complements garments in a traditional apparel program. For distributors, accessories offer an additional revenue stream that may have been overlooked. Here are five of our favorite ways to add accessories to your apparel promotions and get brands noticed.



The GUESS Hazelton Ruby Set from Castle Merchandising Inc. (516) 292-4143, www.castlepremium.com

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The Women's Scarf from Diane Katzman Designs. (314) 997-3553, www.dianekatzman.com

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The Chill Watch from Intelligent Galaxy LLC (914) 428-3329, www.intelligentgalaxy.com

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1 TIE INTO A THEME

For buyers that want a “wow” factor, look no further than custom neckwear from St. Louis-based Diane Katzman Designs. Diane Katzman, president, is mindful of trends and works with her artists to create tasteful yet fashion-forward designs. “Developing a design where the logo is subtle makes it a much easier sell for distributors, because recipients will actually want to wear them,” she said. “There’s a delicate balance to designing a banner for your brand without the logo being overtly in your face.”

Katzman developed a men’s tie and a ladies’ scarf for H&R Block that incorporated the company’s black and green color scheme and square logo in a tasteful and on-trend design that was featured in an online company store. To complement these, she added green square earrings for a corporate event and hand-beaded bracelets that were used as customer gifts. All the pieces worked in conjunction with one another in style and color so they could be mixed and matched depending on the occasion. [The scarf is pictured on page 22.]

One of the benefits of custom neckwear, Katzman said, is exclusivity. “Because every design is unique, no one else can have them,” she explained. “This protects the brand from being copied by rivals, and it protects distributors from competitors.”

2 WATCH FOR TRENDS

Watches are one of the most functional fashion accessories out there. But just because timepieces are traditional doesn’t mean they have to be boring. At least not if Vito Ciaravino, president of Intelligent Galaxy LLC, White Plains, N.Y., has anything to say about it.

“We don’t like boring watches,” he said. “Every year, a person will look at his or her watch 5,000-plus times, so each instance the time is checked and the logo is seen, it must be memorable.”

Want to be on trend? Check out the company’s Chill line of watches. The 11 colors run the spectrum from bright (blue, cyan, green, lime, magenta, orange, purple and yellow) to traditional (black, red and white). But there’s more to these watches than good looks. “The Chill was developed by a New Zealand-based sportsman who is very into the outdoors, and he needed a timepiece that can get wet and dirty, and be durable enough to be knocked around,” Ciaravino explained.

“The adjustable bezel makes the Chill great for divers, swimmers and runners who want to time their workouts,” he continued. “And the silicon band does well in health care markets because it can be easily cleaned, keeping bacteria from embedding themselves into something like leather.”

There’s universal appeal in sports and leisure markets, and there’s opportunity with schools and

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universities, since the wide variety of colors match most teams and styling is appropriate for a younger demographic. With many decoration and customization options there’s something for every brand.

“For the price of a nice sweatshirt, you can get a quality watch with high perceived value,” Ciaravino added.

3 ADD SOME BLING

From a promotional standpoint, emblematic jewelry’s high perceived value makes it a welcome gift—and one that will be kept for many years. And it can be a natural extension of an apparel program for the right target market.

Airlines, police departments and fire stations often have uniform jewelry programs, according to Neil Berman, president of Cranston, Rhode Island-based Stylecraft Co. Inc. These programs are usually centered on rank and/or length of service. Occupations where employees wear suits and ties can easily incorporate lapel pins, cuff links, tie tacks, necklaces or bracelets.

“We’ve also done nursing pins that are worn by RNs with their uniforms as well as rings for pharmaceutical companies,” Berman said. “Truck-driving companies as well as oil and gas firms even use belt buckles for safety programs and sales awards.”

What makes emblematic jewelry so versatile is the variety of metals available—pewter, brass, sterling gold fill and 10-, 14- or 18-karat gold—as well as manufacturing techniques such as die struck, silk screen, lost-wax casting and color graphic to achieve the intended creative effect within the desired budget. And for those with more flexible funds, add semi-precious or precious stones.

Another plus: Once the emblem is made, it can easily be turned into a pendant, lapel pin, tie tack or cuff links, because they are all the same size. This gives distributors the opportunity to create tiered promotions or continuity programs that last a number of years.

However emblematic jewelry is used, Berman noted that most end-buyers won’t automatically think about adding it to their apparel programs. “Many companies have apparel programs in place, but they’re ignoring the potential to add on jewelry,” he said. “These are missed opportunities for distributors to not only be of more service to their clients, but also to generate an additional revenue stream. The key is to be proactive and ask about it.”

If you’re looking for a more casual sparkle, try rhinestones. While these little crystals continue to be stylish decorations for T-shirts and hoodies, they’re gaining popularity as fashion accessories in the form of lanyards, bracelets and even earmuffs, courtesy of Vegas Golf/Foxyware.

The Port Saint Lucie, Florida company has a line of sparkly accessories that ladies—and

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SCAN WITH LAYAR



The Maui Custom-Logo Flip-Flops from Neet Feet Inc. (760) 721-1944, www.neetfeet.com

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Emblematic Jewelry from Stylecraft Co. Inc. (800) 776-9944, www.stylecraftusa.com

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The Soapstone bag collection from Tagmaster/a division of Dard Products. (800) 323-2925, www.tagmaster.net

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brands—love. The rhinestones can subtly showcase a brand's logo with epoxy dome charms in any shape and any color. The result is a memorable fashion accessory that gets worn—and talked about.

Cosmetics and fragrance companies, cheer and gymnastic teams, and dance studios are popular target markets, according to Tami Cimperman, president. The entertainment market is also hot, as TV shows, movies, beverage firms and liquor companies like adding glitz and sparkle to their logos.

Other niches for rhinestones may surprise you. "Most people don't normally think of high fashion with NASCAR and gun show crowds, but these ladies also want their bling," Cimperman said. Schools, universities and nonprofits are also top markets. "We've done two-tone colors of rhinestones to match corporate, school or charitable organization colors," she explained. "For example, choose two different pink rhinestones for breast cancer awareness and augment it with a coordinating charm."

4 EMBELLISH WITH BAGS

Tote. Messenger. Backpack. Sling. Bags are a one-size-fits-all branding machine. And with the Soapstone line from Evanston, Illinois-based Tagmaster/a division of Dard Products, that debuted at The PPAI Expo 2014, building your own bag has never been easier.

The Soapstone bags use a six-step process for customization. It begins with choosing fabric and webbing, then moves to selecting zipper color, lining color, leatherette color and decoration method. The result is a retail-style bag built specifically to complement a brand's attributes.

"Many people don't want to carry a billboard around, while others are drawn to step-and-repeat patterns from designers such as Louis Vuitton and Coach," said Jason Emery, vice president of sales and marketing. "With Soapstone, both trends can be accomplished with a promotional bag that has low minimums and quick production that is suitable for typical orders."

For those looking for corporate gifts or incentives, a brand-name handbag will get ladies' attention. "Brand-name fashion accessories are meaningful to employees because of the retail brand appeal, and these items don't necessarily need further decoration because recipients know who gave the gift and why they received it," said John Costelli, vice president of sales for Castle Merchandising Inc., Garden City South, N.Y. "Because of the retail brand-name, there is a higher perceived value for these items, making them great for milestone, achievement or service awards."

Selling brand-name merchandise is a bit different than selling traditional promotional products, so Costelli noted some considerations when giving this kind of corporate gift. First, he recommended looking at the universal appeal of the item. "Most migrate toward black or camel colors, although on-trend colors, such as ruby, can make a statement," he said.

Also, determine the gift's presentation. Will it be given at an awards ceremony or banquet, or will the item be direct-shipped with a thank-you letter? "We can even host fitting events for handbags where recipients can consult with a stylist, try on various styles and choose the bag they want," Costelli explained. "We have inventory stocked on site so recipients can take the bag home with them. It's a fun, different event that gives instant gratification."

5 PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

Marilyn Monroe said, "Give a girl the right shoes and she can conquer the world." We couldn't agree more. And thanks to the folks at Oceanside, California-based Neet Feet Inc., women (and men!) can rule their realm in comfort—while sporting their favorite brands.

According to John Amsterdam, Neet Feet president, trade show giveaways are one of the top uses for promotional flip-flops. "Giving away flip-flops at a trade show will have attendees begging for a pair to replace their uncomfortable shoes," he said. "If you look at the unpleasant expressions of women at trade shows and then look at their choice of footwear, you can see what I am talking about." (For those of us who attend The PPAI Expo every year and walk the show for three days, we know all about pained feet!)

Amsterdam noted that travel groups are one of the top markets for logoed flip-flops, especially when the group is going to a warm locale where the "Logo Sole" can leave an imprint in the sand. Teams, schools, clubs, and reunions are other top users of logoed flip-flops, and often offer them as incentives or use them for fundraising. Gift-with-purchase is another popular option for logoed footwear. "Many high-end retail designers and cosmetics companies have discovered it and repeat the promotion ever year," he said.

While some may fear selling logoed sandals because of sizing issues, Amsterdam says that it's not a problem for savvy distributors. "Unlike regular closed-toe shoes and sandals, flip-flops don't have a critical fit," he explained. "They can be worn a little small or large and still fit. In fact, some buyers decide to only offer one size per gender to keep distribution simpler, or just one size—large—which can be worn by almost all." 



Rhinestone Ear Muffs from Vegas Golf Foxyware. (877) 241-6134, www.asisupplier.com/87605

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THE BEST ACCESSORY

Famed fashion designer Ralph Lauren once said, "Fashion is not necessarily about labels. It's not about brands. It's about something else that comes from within you."

When working with your clients, tap into what the promotion's end-users are all about—their likes, dislikes, hopes and aspirations. Guide clients to selecting accessories that easily fit into end-user lifestyles. Only then will accessories—and the brands imprinted on them—become a regularly worn, and hopefully treasured, part of the recipient's wardrobe.

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