

The Merch Matrix

Product Reference Guide

What Scores Well — and What Usually Doesn't

A practical starting point for choosing branded merchandise and apparel with more confidence.

The Merch Matrix Product Reference Guide

This is a practical starting point, not a set of fixed rules. We highlight product types that generally perform well — and products that often need more careful thought — against each of the eight Decision Drivers in The Merch Matrix. Use it to build a shortlist, then weigh those options against what matters most for your own project!

1. Value

Value is about the return a product delivers over its life, not simply the price on the invoice.

Products That Generally Score Well

Product	Why it generally scores well
Stainless steel insulated drink bottle	Higher upfront cost, but daily use can deliver excellent value over years.
Premium polo shirt	Repeated wear creates long-term brand exposure.
Reusable tote bag	Affordable, practical and often reused for work or shopping.
Ceramic coffee mug	A simple everyday product.
Quality notebook	Relatively low cost and useful across meetings, training and onboarding.

Products That Are Usually Less Suitable

Product	Why it is usually less suitable
Disposable plastic giveaway	Low price, but brand exposure generally ends quickly.
Cheap novelty toy	Can create a moment of fun, but is rarely kept for long.
Poor-quality pen	Little value if it fails after a few uses.
Single-use promo item	Its value disappears as soon as it is used.
Fragile acrylic keyring	Easily broken, lost or thrown away.

2. Durability

Durability is not about buying the toughest product available; it is about choosing one that lasts long enough for the job it has to do.

Products That Generally Score Well

Product	Why it generally scores well
Stainless steel insulated drink bottle	Built for years of regular use.
Quality polo shirt	Good fabric and stitching can handle repeated washing.
Backpack	Designed for daily commuting, work or travel.
Quality umbrella	A well-made umbrella can stay in use for years.
Power Banks	Practical and often built to last 2 years minimum

Products That Are Usually Less Suitable

Product	Why it is usually less suitable
Thin non-woven tote bag	Fine for a one-off event, but limited for regular use.
Cheap plastic keyring	Often cracks, scratches or breaks quickly.
Low-cost stress ball	Can split or lose shape after regular handling.
Disposable rain poncho	Designed for short-term use only.
Budget sunglasses	Frames and hinges can fail quickly.

3. Perceived Value

Perceived value is what a product feels like it is worth to the person receiving it — which is often very different from what you paid.

Products That Generally Score Well

Product	Why it generally scores well
Premium insulated drink bottle	Retail-style finish and performance make it feel valuable - think “Frank Green” value.
Wireless charger	A modern, useful item with strong retail appeal.
Premium notebook	Weight, finish and presentation make it feel considered.
Branded power bank	Practical technology that often feels more valuable than its
“Retail Quality” apparel	Familiar retail brands bring instant credibility.

Products That Are Usually Less Suitable

Product	Why it is usually less suitable
Economy plastic pen	Useful in a pinch, but rarely feels special.
Basic ruler	Functional but not usually memorable.
Disposable poncho	Little emotional or lasting value.
Cheap keyring	Often seen as promotional clutter.
Budget fridge magnet	Can be useful, but generally has modest perceived value.

4. Brand Alignment

Every product carrying your logo says something about your business, so it should support the story your brand is trying to tell.

Products That Generally Score Well

Product	Why it generally scores well
Organic cotton apparel	A strong fit for brands with genuine sustainability values.
Recycled notebook	Reinforces an environmentally conscious message.
Solar power bank	Connects innovation with more thoughtful product choices.
Premium gift set	Suits businesses positioned around quality and service.
Locally made product	Can reinforce Australian identity, provenance and quality.

Products That Are Usually Less Suitable

Product	Why it is usually less suitable
Cheap plastic giveaway	Can undermine a premium brand position.
Single-use plastic item	A poor fit for a brand talking about sustainability.
Novelty toy	Often feels out of place for professional or premium brands.
Budget acrylic keyring	May not reflect a quality-led business.
Poor-quality apparel	Fading, shrinking or poor fit reflects badly on the logo it carries.

5. Usefulness

The strongest promotional products are usually the ones people reach for without thinking.

Products That Generally Score Well

Product	Why it generally scores well
Drink bottles - All types	Useful throughout the working day, at the gym and while travelling.
Polo shirt	Regularly worn for work, events or weekends.
Reusable coffee cup	Fits naturally into many daily routines - travels with you.
GPS Trackers	Real life usefulness - suits modern daily routine trends.
Notebook	Useful in meetings, training and onboarding.

Products That Are Usually Less Suitable

Product	Why it is usually less suitable
Novelty toy	Fun in the moment, but limited practical use.
Decorative trinket	Rarely becomes part of everyday life.
Promotional flag	Built for an event, not ongoing use.
Foam hand	High event impact, but little life afterwards.
Disposable item	Used once, then usually discarded.

6. Visibility

Visibility is not just about logo size; it is about how often your brand will be seen, and by whom.

Products That Generally Score Well

Product	Why it generally scores well
Polo shirt	Creates regular public exposure at work and events.
Cap	A simple mobile branding product that can be worn
Tote bag	Visible while shopping, commuting and travelling.
Umbrella	Large branding area and strong public exposure.
Drink bottle	Seen on desks, in meetings, at gyms and around the home.

Products That Are Usually Less Suitable

Product	Why it is usually less suitable
USB drive	Usually stored away rather than displayed.
Cable organiser	Useful, but mostly hidden from view.
Mouse pad	Seen regularly by one user, with limited public exposure.
Phone stand	Usually has a small audience beyond the recipient.
Desk-drawer item	Out of sight means limited brand exposure.

7. Distinctiveness

Distinctiveness is not about being strange for the sake of it; it is about giving people something worth remembering.

Products That Generally Score Well

Product	Why it generally scores well
Plantable seed paper product	Unexpected, useful and easy to remember.
Bamboo drinkware	A familiar product made more interesting through material choice.
Artisan gift pack	Feels personal and can create a genuine talking point.
Custom patch cap	A different decoration method can lift a familiar item.
Premium presentation box or branding method	Turns the product into a more memorable experience.

Products That Are Usually Less Suitable

Product	Why it is usually less suitable
Standard plastic pen	A common choice that can easily blend in.
Basic notebook	Often looks much the same as competitors' giveaways.
Generic stubby holder	A saturated category unless it has a strong twist.
Plain stress ball	Common at events and rarely remembered afterwards.
Standard lanyard	Useful at the event, but not generally distinctive.

8. Audience Fit

The right product starts with the person receiving it, not the product you personally like best.

Products That Generally Score Well

Product	Why it generally scores well
Employee drink bottle	A strong fit for workplace wellbeing and daily routines.
Conference notebook	Relevant, practical and easy for delegates to carry.
Construction cooler bag	Useful for trade and outdoor audiences.
University hoodie	A natural fit for students and campus communities.
Premium client gift box	Appropriate for executive or high-value client relationships.

Products That Are Usually Less Suitable

Product	Why it is usually less suitable
Product chosen for personal taste	Your preference may not match the audience's needs.
Trend-based gadget	Can lose relevance before the campaign has finished.
Children's toy for corporate clients	Usually a poor match for the recipient and setting.
Premium gift for a mass giveaway	May exceed what the project or audience requires.
Highly niche product	Limited appeal outside a very specific group.

Best All-Round Performers

These products generally score highly in at least three of the eight Decision Drivers. They are not automatically right for every project, but they are versatile starting points when you are building a shortlist.

Product	Decision Drivers it commonly performs well in
Stainless steel insulated drink bottle	Value; Durability; Usefulness; Visibility; Perceived Value
Quality polo shirt	Durability; Visibility; Brand Alignment; Usefulness
Reusable tote bag	Value; Usefulness; Visibility; Brand Alignment
Premium notebook	Value; Usefulness; Perceived Value
Backpack	Durability; Visibility; Usefulness
Reusable coffee cup	Usefulness; Visibility; Brand Alignment
Premium umbrella	Durability; Visibility; Value

Final Thoughts

This guide is not designed to tell you which promotional product to buy. It is designed to help you ask better questions.

A product that performs strongly for Visibility may not be the right choice if Audience Fit is your highest priority. Likewise, a product with modest Perceived Value may still be exactly right for a high-volume brand-awareness campaign.

There is no perfect promotional product. There is only the product that best aligns with your objectives.

Start with what you are trying to achieve, decide which Decision Drivers matter most, then use The Merch Matrix to find the product that fits.