

Hot Promotional Apparel Trends For Fall

A look at the most popular apparel trends for the upcoming season.

By Andraya Vantrease

With another fall season quickly approaching, industry suppliers are gearing up for a warehouse wardrobe change – carefully curating new silhouettes, color palettes and decoration offerings. It's clear the old theory of supply and demand has been reversed: Manufacturers now base their product supply on the ever-changing demands of their end-users, and they're expected to react very quickly, as trends can come and go in a matter of months due to social media and celebrity influence.

Customers are also increasingly educated on the latest trends in retail, often citing specific lifestyle brands they'd like to mimic when they approach their distributors with order inquiries. So what does this mean for promo? Well, you should always value the basics, of course, but it behooves you to capitalize on certain styles while they're popular. Here's a look at apparel trends that are gaining momentum.

Packable Outerwear



Vantage Apparel carries this packable jacket (7163) in men's and women's silhouettes. Thanks to companies like Patagonia, The North Face, Marmot and other popular outdoor brands, outerwear has become a lucrative category in the promotional industry. Active lifestyles and minimalist values have drawn consumers to packable outerwear for the versatility it offers.

Vantage Apparel (asi/93390), for example, offers a water-resistant jacket that folds into a self-pouch, making it easy for the wearer to toss it into a backpack or purse when they're on the go.

“We've had great success with our packable jackets because clients are looking for garments that fit their end-users' active lifestyles,” says Lauren Cocco, director of merchandising at Vantage. “Think about the number of impressions your brand receives when the wearer has a multi-season jacket that's functional, light and compressible. It goes everywhere with them.”

Patches



Redwood Classics designed this patch decoration on a raglan $\frac{3}{4}$ -sleeve T-shirt (W897) for subtle yet effective branding.

Vintage always remains in style, and this fall, suppliers and decorators expect patches of all kinds to increase in popularity. “Patches are fun because they can be subtle or they can be the center of attention,” says Kathy Cheng, founder and president of Redwood Classics (asi/81627) in Toronto. “I always thought it would be cool to honor a company's anniversary by decorating with several generations and versions of the company's logo on different patches. I'm still waiting for that opportunity, but we've had a lot of clients leaning toward that old-fashioned, worn look that patch branding provides.”

Other suppliers offer a modern take on patch decoration with laser etching on leather, felt or fleece, creating a tone-on-tone finish that provides a sleek, upscale look. When kept small in size, patches can give the garment just the right amount of brand recognition without going overboard.

Private Label



Redwood Classics specializes in private label for customers who want to fully own their brand. Branding the inside yoke with a client's logo makes it appear as if the shirt is completely customized for the brand, and gives their brand top billing. Redwood Classics, which designs and manufactures for lifestyle brands such as J. Crew, Roots Canada and Bonobos, is creating both single-branded tags and co-branded tags. "We believe private labeling is an integral part of the branding and merchandising process," says Cheng. "It creates a cohesive narrative for the client and adds value in order for them to resell it in their marketplace."

From a distributor's standpoint, private labeling prevents the customer from shopping around and competing on price, since it's harder to find the exact garment without a factory tag. "In an industry where people can find a lot of the same products, it's not so much what we sell but what we do to differentiate ourselves," says Mark Corscadden, national sales director at Dei Rossi Marketing (asi/178198) in McKinney, TX. "Forward-thinking distributors are going the private label route much more than they used to."

Tactile Fabrics



The high-pile fabric of this two-toned Sherpa quarter-zip pullover (Q10) from Boxercraft offers a tactile feel. With the rise of categories like athleisure and lifestyle sportswear, it's apparent people are becoming more aware of the materials and textiles used to construct their apparel. Materials as diverse as Sherpa, tri-blend, ringspun cotton, slub and mélangé provide an ultra-soft hand that entices customers, and decorators are using washes and water-based inks to soften prints before the final product reaches the customer. "This evolution began with T-shirts, and we're not seeing as many thick, rough tees as giveaways anymore," says Shelley Foland, CEO of Georgia-based supplier Boxercraft (asi/41325). "Our new Cuddle Soft line is a blend of rayon, polyester and elastane. It breathes like Hacci fabric, which is popular in loungewear, and the goal is that the wearer can be super-comfortable all day while also looking fashionable."

Colorblocking/1990s Throwback



This orange and granite slub tee (T66OGR) from Boxercraft adds a rich pop of color to any wardrobe. Colorblocking is back in a big way. Companies like Cotopaxi flaunt bright jackets and backpacks while promotional suppliers are adopting the trend in different ways: contrast pockets, two-tone leggings, hats with different-colored brims and crowns, and more. Colorblocking comes in many shapes and sizes: It can be subtle or extravagant and undoubtedly allows brands to have fun and show off their personalities.

“The ’90s-inspired clothing is definitely back in our markets with schools and spiritwear, and that seems to be trickling down from what we see with celebrity styles and retail stores,” says Foland. “Bright colors are in, and people are pairing them in bold, exciting ways, whether it’s jackets, oversized sweatshirts, lounge pants or even accessories. It’s a way to express oneself through apparel, and the colorblocking conveys vibrancy and energy.”

Patterns



Richardson's trucker snapback (112) from Kati Sportcap comes in 67 color and pattern options. Florals, plaid, camouflage, animal prints – the fashion world is seeing plenty of busy designs for fall lines, and the promo industry is right on its tail. Considered timeless by many fashion connoisseurs, suppliers are having success with plaid styles on shirts, lounge pants, accessories and outerwear. Bold patterns play into the layered look many consumers are going for, wearing several different colors, prints and fabrics to give the outfit a very textured and comfortable appearance.

Even headwear companies are confident that patterns are gaining momentum. Gary Mosley, owner of Kati Sportcap & Bag (asi/64140) in Houston, has seen a surge in sales of its Richardson-style trucker cap, which allows customers to mix and match brim patterns, like camouflage, streaks, plaids and florals with bright mesh backs. "It's an old favorite, but the trucker craze isn't going away any time soon," says Mosley. "They're our biggest sellers, especially the patterned styles."

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