

# A Quick Guide for Responsible Apparel

HOW TO CREATE MERCH FANS LOVE – WITH LOWER ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

## 1. Manufacture Mindfully

- **Make only what you're confident you can sell** 🚫 don't over produce, scarcity is better than waste
- **Question minimum order quantities** that push you into excess inventory
- **Avoid producing for single-use** promotional purposes
- **Design for longevity** 🕒 the shirt a fan wears for a decade is worth a hundred that end up in landfill
- Consider **product end-of-life** when purchasing (upcycling, recycling, downcycling)

### WHY IT MATTERS

→ Overproduction is one of the biggest environmental risks in merchandise. Unsold garments are often heavily discounted, landfilled, or destroyed. Making less, and making it well, reduces waste at every stage of the supply chain.

## 2. Lower Impact Materials

- Opt for certified **organic, regenerative, or recycled** natural fibres
- Blends of natural and synthetic fibers cannot be recycled 🚫 avoid where possible
- If synthetics are unavoidable, **recycled polyester (rPET) reduces reliance on fossil fuels** – but be aware it can shed more microplastics than its virgin counterpart, and is difficult to recycle at end-of-life

### WHY IT MATTERS

→ Raw materials are typically the largest contributor to a garment's footprint. Conventional cotton can be water and chemical intensive, while synthetic fibres rely on fossil fuels and shed microplastics. Choosing better fibres reduces emissions, pollution and end-of-life challenges.

## 3. Print Responsibly

- Use **water-based inks** wherever possible
- Avoid plastisol inks unless there's a clear durability or aesthetic requirement
- Consider **DTG or on-demand printing** for small runs or online sales

### WHY IT MATTERS

→ Printing methods affect water use, chemical exposure, worker safety and recyclability. Plastisol inks are made with PVC, a fossil-fuel-derived plastic, that makes garments harder to recycle at end-of-life. Water-based systems generally use fewer hazardous substances.

## 4. Make Local. Ship Slow.

- Plan production timelines to **avoid air freight**, which is costly and has high emissions
- Manufacture as close as possible to where merch will be sold
- Choose manufacturers that: Use renewable energy, Manage waste responsibly, Can clearly explain material choices, Uphold strong labor, health and safety standards across their supply chain

### WHY IT MATTERS

→ Freight can quickly erase gains made through better materials. Air freight has significantly higher emissions than sea or land transport. Producing closer to where merch is sold reduces transport impacts and strengthens supply chain transparency.

## 5. Choose Plastic-Free Packaging

- Avoid plastics and bioplastics as product wrappers
- Use **recycled, recyclable, or FSC-certified protective packaging, paper mailers, and paper tape**
- Decline single-use plastic garment bags

### WHY IT MATTERS

→ Single-use plastics remain a major source of pollution. Many bio-plastics don't break down as advertised and still contribute to plastic waste.

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## If You Only Do 5 Things:

1. **Don't overproduce. Sell out instead of throwing away.**
2. **Choose organic or recycled natural fibers.**
3. **Prioritize water-based inks.**
4. **Make local. Ship slow.**
5. **Skip single-use plastic packaging.**

\* Remember there's nuance to every decision; the full guide provides more clarity.

## Certifications & Greenwashing: A Quick Guide

Not all eco and ethical labels mean the same thing. Some examples: "Recycled" claims aren't always verified. "Sustainable" means nothing without evidence.

### TAKE A "PROOF, NOT PROMISES" APPROACH:

- Ask for certificate numbers and scope, not just logos
- Use reputable certifications like GOTS, OEKO-TEX, and Bluesign for blanks
- Seek out Fair Trade Certified or WRAP certification for labor standards
- If a claim isn't provable, don't repeat it in your merch story

## Resources

[The Responsible Merch Guide](#) is our portal where you can get the detailed guide, view case studies, and browse our Supplier Database to find **manufacturers, printers, suppliers and production partners** who can help deliver lower-impact merchandise. Already have a supplier? Ask them about these recommendations.

