Beyond the Plain White T-Shirt
Trends and styles to consider when investing in promotional shirts.

STAPLES Promotional Products®
Today's T-shirt Trends

At a glance, the T-shaped shirts we wear today don’t look much different than they did in the early 1900s. But try a few on, or even just touch an assortment of T-shirts at any popular retail store, and you will realize they are not all the same. Hundreds of T-shirt styles are available from Staples Promotional Products alone. Four of them are among our top-selling products online. What makes all these shirts so different?

There are three basic elements to any T-shirt:

- What it’s made of
- How it wears
- How it is decorated

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE T-SHIRT

1900s
Soldiers begin wearing plain, white T-shirts as undergarments or as a single layer in tropical climates.

1920s
The word T-shirt appears in the Merriam Webster Dictionary.

1940s
Following WWII, veterans are often seen wearing T-shirts as casual clothing.

1950s
Marlon Brando and James Dean wear T-shirts on the big screen, setting a new fashion standard.

1960s
Printed T-shirts become popular articles of self-expression and as souvenirs.

It should come as no surprise that the world’s most popular garment is also the top-selling promotional product. A T-shirt is always in style. And when adorned with your company’s logo or messaging, it can become a powerful advertising tool.

Three billion T-shirts were sold in the U.S. last year. That means American consumers bought an average of 9 shirts each. Customized T-shirts are also the top-selling item in the promotional products industry. However, all T-shirts are not created equal. Consumers are picky about the shirts they buy. Promotional products buyers should be, too.

On the following pages, let’s look at what’s now trending in T-shirts.
FABRIC

The classic cotton T-shirt is changing. Normally 5-6 oz. per square yard in weight, a classic Hanes®, Gildan®, or Fruit of the Loom® crewneck T-shirt is quickly being replaced in consumer preference by lighter weight (3-4.5 oz) T-shirts. These new shirts come in softer fabrics made of ringspun cotton and finer yarns or triblends that create more heathered looks. Also popular: “burnout” fabrics that have an almost sheer look and feel.

Performance blend fabrics are also trending, for athletic wear and everyday “athleisure” wear. These synthetic blend fabrics offer easy care and color that never fades.

Get the T-shirt style that your employees, customers, and brand advocates want to wear for your next promotion and beyond.
Boxy and oversized is out. Today’s consumers want slimmer fitting, lightweight shirts that neither drape nor cling too much.

Unisex sizing can be a good option for promotional products buyers, but forget one-size-fits-all. Whenever possible, offer companion styles for both sexes. People want to wear clothes that fit and flatter their bodies.
Just like the fabric and fit, lightweight is the preference for T-shirt decoration today. Screen print inks and methods have evolved to the point that in the trendiest styles you can barely tell the difference between the fabric and the print. This is especially convenient at a time when oversized decoration – think imprints that cover almost the entire garment – is trending.
POPULAR T-SHIRT DECORATION METHODS

Digital Transfer
Ideal for full-color, intricate designs printed on lightweight performance fabrics.

Screen Print
Versatile, typically affordable and involves printing designs directly onto garments.

Distressed
The distressed technique lends a vintage, weathered look to ordinary designs.

Simulated
Ideal for rendering photorealistic images, and oversized decoration.

Discharge Screen Print
This process renders decorations by removing ("discharging") a garment’s original dye. The resulting design has a soft, slightly faded look.

Puff Ink
Creates designs with a slightly raised texture.
WHY T-SHIRTS?

Promotional product buyers have infinite choices. With the help of expert custom merchandise providers you can put your brand on pretty much anything, from pencils to sports equipment. Yet, time and again, people choose to put their marketing dollars into customized T-shirts. They have been the promotional products industry’s top seller for decades.

Iconic and versatile, T-shirts are for everyone. Men, women, children and even some dogs love to wear them. Whether used for uniforms, special events, customer giveaways or internal promotions, every industry needs customized T-shirts for something.

If that doesn’t convince you check out these stats from Advertising Specialty Institute.

- 48% of U.S. consumers own a logoed shirt.
- On average, logoed shirts generate 2,450 impressions.
- Consumers keep promotional shirts for 6 months or more.

Need help choosing the right T-shirts for your next brand promotion? Get help from the promo experts at Staples Promotional Products. We fulfill thousands of T-shirt orders every year for organizations of all sizes. Let us help you choose the right shirt and decoration technique for your brand or event.

Find more T-shirt inspiration at YourBrandPartner.com

POPULAR T-SHIRT DECORATION METHODS

Foil
Foil creates attention-grabbing designs with a metallic tone or a pearly sheen.

Metallic
Metallic and jewel tones to make for eye-catching designs.

Clear Ink
A small amount of dye is added to clear ink, which gives designs a subtle tone-on-tone appearance.