

Chapter 18

Be Choosy about Suppliers

■■■ With thousands of suppliers in the promotional products industry and new ones entering every day, how can you choose wisely? **Learn how to choose suppliers that provide value and unique benefits and make them partners in YOUR success!**

Make suppliers partners in your success

As a business owner your reputation is your most valuable asset. It will get you repeat business and drive customers to you. No matter how talented you are, unless you surround yourself with quality suppliers, it will impact your success and your ability to make more money. That is why you must choose carefully.

Conduct interviews

With thousands of suppliers in the promotional products industry and new ones entering every day, how can you choose? Many suppliers have the same products, so that can make it even more challenging, especially for a novice in this industry. I believe that you **should interview your suppliers the same way your customers interview you.** The same product does not equal the same value.

Quick Tip

Yes, you can work with hundreds of suppliers, but it will only increase your paperwork and confusion. Many suppliers sell similar products. Choose a limited number of suppliers that do superior work in each category.

Added value and benefits

Choose suppliers that offer added benefits such as quality guarantees, outstanding customer service, event date guarantees and order tracking support.

Call new suppliers before sending an order to see how responsive their customer service team is to your questions.

Look for additional help, such as case histories, free catalogs and a user-friendly website. Check out the supplier's reputation in the industry by consulting with others via an email support group such as the one for readers of this Manual or through a supplier rating system such as the ASI[®] system, or look for suppliers that have won industry awards for outstanding service.

The best suppliers are partners in your success. The more wisely you choose, the more profitable you will be.

Choose the best supplier for your needs

Use these questions to help you narrow your suppliers down to those that meet the needs of your business:

- How responsive are they? How quickly do they return calls?
- How well are the customer service representatives trained? Can they answer your questions quickly and easily?
- How well do they keep their promises? Do orders arrive on time?
- Do they offer quality and event date guarantees?
- What is their procedure for handling problems on orders?
- What do others in the industry say about them?

The benefits of limiting suppliers

You can improve your bottom line by **limiting the number of suppliers** you work with. How will this impact your business?

- You will qualify for better pricing
- You will become more familiar with the products
- You will receive free or low cost samples
- You will be able to maintain better quality control

- You will form a personal relationship with the supplier

Suggested categories

Here are some suggested categories – you may wish to add more. Choose three or four suppliers in each category:

Apparel

Paper Products

Writing Instruments

Office Essentials - mouse pads, computer items, clip holders, staplers

Travel - tote bags, luggage

Mugs and Cups

Automotive Supplies

Calendars

Food

Screen Printers and Embroiderers

Conventions and Meetings

Buttons and Lapel Pins

Fulfillment Companies

Direct Mail Ideas

Made in the USA

► *What Can You Do Now?* ◀

- Prepare a **preferred supplier list** for your company. Ask your colleagues for referrals to their favorite suppliers.
- **Join a regional or national association** for the industry where you will have a chance to meet suppliers face to face.
- **Attend industry trade shows** and get to know your suppliers.
- Keep your **preferred suppliers catalogs** easily accessible.
- Keep **preferred supplier telephone numbers and email addresses** in a visible location.
- Know the **names of the customer service representatives** from each company.
- Find out if there is an **outside multi-line representative** who can call on you.