



Personal Protective Equipment

5 Tips for Customizing Your Workers' Safety Gear

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Metalworking and machine shops are required by the U.S. government to provide a variety of personal protective equipment to their workers, and they're beginning to realize the rules create a valuable branding opportunity—one with some surprising fringe benefits.

Along with the promotional pluses of drawing more attention to a business, the extra investment can increase employee compliance with safety rules as well as strengthen morale, suppliers say.

"Putting your logo on PPE can make workers easily identifiable," especially in an emergency, says Brad Lohse, a senior national account manager for Milwaukee Tool, which is among companies including 3M that offer customizable gear. "Plus, when people are wearing their company's logo, it gives them a sense of pride in their work."

Selecting the Right Hard Hat

When it comes to protecting your workers, hard hats are a vital tool in preventing traumatic brain injuries and even death. So how do you pick the perfect head gear to brand with your logo? There are three things to consider.

1. **Type:** There are two hard hat types, which indicate the level of impact protection. Type I hard hats protect the top of a worker's head, while Type II has added protection for the sides.
2. **Class:** Hard hats are categorized by class depending on the level of electrical protection they provide. Class C hats do not provide any electrical protection. Class G hats can protect workers from up to 2,200 volts, while Class E hard hats provide protection from up to 20,000 volts of electricity.
3. **Fit:** Hard hats have an inner suspension system to keep the hat securely on a worker's head and absorb the shock from impact, providing an extra layer of protection. Hard hats with both four-point and six-point suspension meet safety requirements for head protection from the *Occupational Safety and Health Administration* and the American National Standards Institute, but six-point harness systems, which have three harness points on each side of the head, can provide additional protection from blows and impacts.

Other advantages include fostering employee loyalty and promoting unity and equality, suppliers say. Workers are also more likely to wear customized gear, which lowers the risk of severe injury in accidents or fines for violating government safety standards because they left it off.

With the range of safety equipment required for American industry, the opportunities for adding logos are virtually unlimited. There are safety glasses, lab coats, hard hats, full-body suits and more.

To make customizing simpler, *Milwaukee* created an *online tool* accessible through its personal protective equipment portal that lets buyers customize safety vests, hard hats and helmets virtually, check out the results and make adjustments if needed before placing their order.

The tool accepts most graphic file types, and customer support is available for converting uploaded files to higher-resolution images, if needed, the company says.

"When a person is wearing an uncomfortable hard hat, they are more likely to take it off."

Bill Veeninga
3M

If you're interested in learning more about customizable gear for your employees, here are five tips that can help you maximize the benefits of the switch while avoiding some expensive drawbacks:

Create a kit that covers all employee needs

Under U.S. Occupational Safety and Health *Administration rules*, employers are responsible for providing personal protective equipment that guards workers against job hazards, with the exception of

prescription safety eyewear and steel-toed boots. Providing a complete kit to new hires that includes all the branded PPE they need to stay safe on the job can help prevent oversights. You might also consider regularly refreshing the gear of employees who have been around for a while with branded options to ensure optimal safety and performance.

Prioritize comfort

When your employees have to wear safety glasses, hard hats and gloves all day long, comfort is key. “When a person is wearing an uncomfortable hard hat, they are more likely to take it off,” says Bill Veeninga, a senior account executive at 3M, whose customizable equipment includes hats that clients can design on its *website*. That would negate the benefits of buying branded safety gear as well as put you at higher risk of violating OSHA rules that can lead to costly fines, preventable injuries, higher workers’ compensation expenses and lost work time that hampers productivity. Choose tech-forward safety wear that ensures an optimal fit for employees, such as 3M’s hard hats, which use *SecureFit* suspension technology to keep workers’ hats on their heads comfortably.

Opt for easy customization

When it comes to branding your PPE, be sure to choose a vendor that provides a simple, streamlined process. “We heard from customers that it can be a frustrating experience when they have to fax or email logos and don’t get to see the design in real time,” Lohse says. In response to that, Milwaukee Tool’s system is built so that “users can *upload their logo* and see a 3D visual of their custom order, then order easily without added fees.”

Keep shipment times in mind

Supply chain issues have disrupted American markets from new cars to baby formula. Safety gear, unfortunately, is not immune. Luckily, most manufacturers have caught up to the pandemic-fueled demand for PPE: “We’re capable of producing over 3 billion respirators per year,” notes Veeninga. But PPE is a growing industry, with *Grand View Research* forecasting the global market will be \$112 billion by 2028. As manufacturers ramp up production to meet it, some items may take longer to ship because of a shortage of truck drivers, high shipping demand caused by growth in online shopping and relocation of factories to avoid violating global sanctions. That means you’ll need to pay close attention to delivery times to ensure you have the gear you need when you need it. Adding your company’s logo to the products may delay arrival further, so take that into account as well. When you order custom PPE through Milwaukee’s PPE portal, most orders arrive within two to three weeks.

Establish a policy for branded gear

When your employees are on the job, branded equipment has the double benefit of looking professional and making employees easily identifiable. If workers wear the branded gear, especially face masks, in public during their off hours, however, their conduct then will reflect on your business even though they’re not at work. In the wrong setting, that can quickly generate negative publicity. Drafting a *written policy* that covers such situations can protect both your brand and your employees.