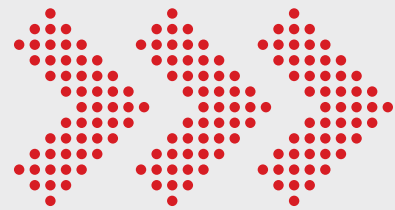


8 Steps To Kick-Start Your Promo Business and Generate Instant Profit



> In a digital-focused marketplace, it's time to give customers something they can feel: promotional products. Worth \$26.1 billion annually, the dynamic world of promotional products provides tons of opportunities for entrepreneurs like you to generate profits and be successful. Promo products are useful items, like T-shirts and earbuds, imprinted with logos that businesses like banks, hospitals and schools use to enhance brand visibility and improve customer loyalty. As a promo distributor, you can sell logoed products to businesses and organizations and see profit margins as high as 40%!

Starting a promotional products business is easier if you're part of a promo membership organization. These groups provide members with business-building services and support and guide you through the process of running a successful business. The largest promo membership organization is ASI®, which has 25,000+ members.



Here are eight steps on how to kick-start your promo business and generate profits fast.

➤ **Step 1: Understand the Promo Industry & Supply Chain**

Educating yourself on how the industry works is an important part of starting your promotional products business. The promo supply chain includes these key players:

- ▶ **Distributor** – That’s you! You sell promo products to customers.
- ▶ **End-buyer** – Your customer! Could be a business, organization or individual who will use the promo for marketing purposes.
- ▶ **Supplier** – Warehouses blank products (and sometimes manufactures them). This is who you will order products from. In most cases, they’ll imprint the products with your customers’ logos.
- ▶ **End-user** – The person who ultimately receives and uses the promo product.



To further learn about the industry and how to best run your business, it's a good idea to:

▶ **Take industry-specific courses taught by experts.**

Great classes for industry newbies include understanding discount codes and decoration methods. A good membership organization will offer digital and in-person courses to help you expand your knowledge. The membership organization, ASI, has ASI University for members, which not only offers courses, but provides you the opportunity to earn industry-recognized certifications. Once earned, you can add the certification letters after your name and boost your credibility within the industry.

▶ **Stay on top of industry and business news and trends.**

Subscribe to newsletters and visit news websites on a regular basis so you can be in the know. A membership organization like ASI has a dedicated editorial team that publishes industry and business news daily.



➤ **Step 2: Present Solutions To Drive Orders**

Selling based solely on price is a recipe for disaster. You need to position yourself as a branded merch expert and present solutions to help your clients reach their goals. Before you start selling, research the most popular products and learn why they are so effective. Gain a basic understanding of what demographics like which products so you can tailor your presentations to your audience. Learn how long the most popular products are kept so you can weave that into your discussions too.

For example, if your customer is looking for a good, long-standing item, you can suggest drinkware, polos and calendars because all of those products are held on to for a long time (as outlined in the 2023 ASI Impressions Study). Customer on a tight budget? Present keychains, lip balm or magnets, all low-cost items. When your customer is unsure exactly what they want, give them options at different price points by using the good, better, best method. This provides them with the freedom to select the exact product they need. These are just some examples of how to present solutions backed up by facts and research to close the sale.



➤ **Step 3: Source High-Quality Promo Products**

Quality matters, especially when it comes to reusability. Your clients want promos that last and repeatedly position their brand in front of customers. To find quality products, you need to develop relationships with reliable, trustworthy suppliers.

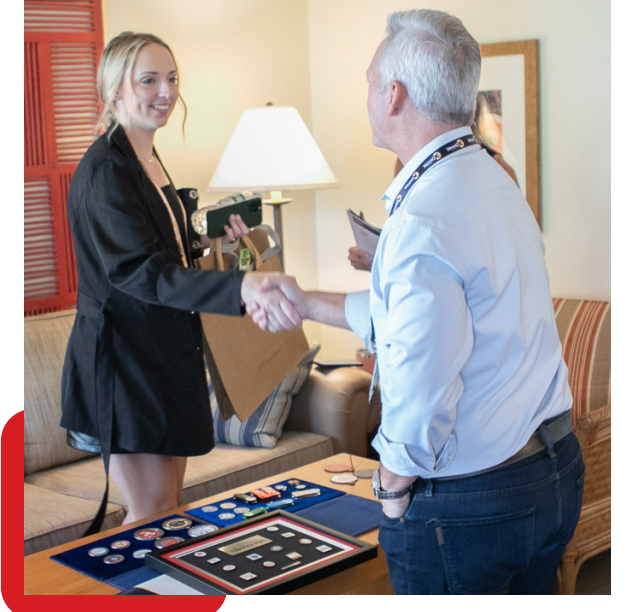
There are two excellent ways to locate top-notch suppliers:

1. Networking events.

Many membership companies offer incentives to attend their networking events. ASI, for instance, has trade shows and smaller private events where you can meet suppliers. These events include airfare and a hotel stay (sometimes meals too!).

In addition to connecting with suppliers face-to-face on the trade show floor, every ASI Show® also has networking events like happy hours and galas where you can meet suppliers in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Smaller private events, called hosted-buyer events, occur at beautiful locations around the country. Here, you'll have one-on-one private meetings with suppliers who have the specific products you sell. It's a great way to learn about their overall product line, services, decoration methods and the materials in their products, including environmentally friendly options (recycled materials can be big selling points for your customers).



2. Ratings systems. Membership companies that have rating systems for suppliers are a huge help to distributors like you. ASI uses a 5-star system based on feedback from its distributor members. A supplier's rating is on full display in ASI's ESP+ marketplace, where you can go to search over 1 million promo products from 2,850 suppliers. You can even filter your searches based on supplier rating, ensuring you only see products from top-rated suppliers. This is just another way you can ensure quality products are delivered to your customers.



➤ Step 4: Grow & Diversify a Client Base

Promo products are used by just about any market you can think of, including finance, healthcare, education, nonprofit, manufacturing, real estate, hospitality and many others. As a distributor, you can choose to work across multiple markets, but you also may find it more beneficial to target your efforts on a niche, especially in the beginning. Just like any other industry, promo sales often come from relationships.

Market focused. If you already have many customers or know a lot of people in a certain market, that's a great place to start. For example, if you know a real estate agent, ask to be introduced to other agents. As you establish yourself, you can start asking for referrals and branch out to other niches, like mortgage lenders, construction companies and even interior designers. That's how you can start with what you know and branch out to diversify your base.

Product focused. You can also target a niche by focusing on the product type first. Want to sell school sports uniforms? Start by targeting local schools in your area. You can use uniforms to get in the door, and from there, most school sports teams need items for fundraising. Family members and fans need swag. Sporting events need rally towels and pom-poms. Most teams also have end-of-season awards ceremonies where they'll need trophies but also items for the actual event, like napkins, cups and decorations. Before you know it, you're selling more than uniforms, but it's all possible because your strategy was to start with one product.

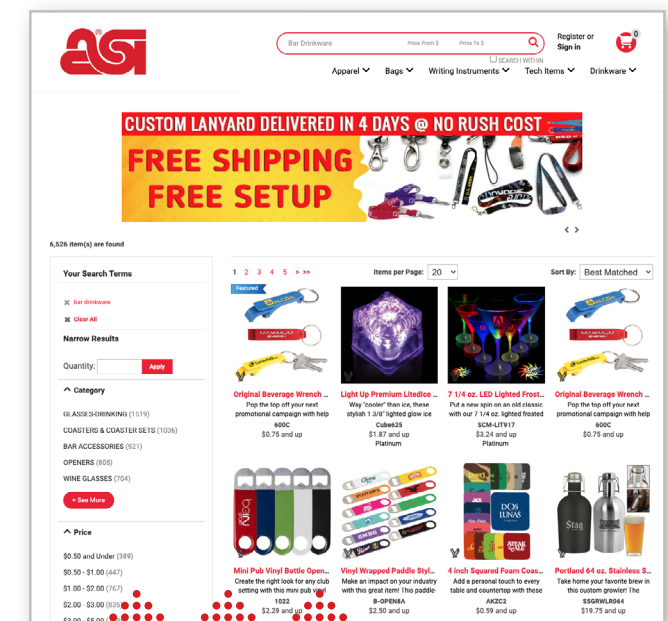


➤ Step 5: Create a Strong Online Presence

Make it easy for customers to interact and do business with you by having a social media presence and an e-commerce website.

You need to be where your customers are looking, so research to find out where they're spending time on social media. Put together a plan for social posting on your desired platforms, and make sure to share a combination of visually grabbing promotions along with impressive promo facts. Showcase your work (with your customer's permission) and tag your customer so you can reach their contacts too. Ask questions. Take polls. Post short product videos. These are all ways to engage with your customers. Don't be afraid to post other things too, like pets, kids or when you spill your coffee. You want to remind customers there is a human behind your business so they connect with you more!

Make it easy for customers to order from you with an e-commerce-enabled website. While there are services that can help you with this, membership organizations like ASI already have websites for you. You simply select a template, customize it with your logo and brand colors and launch. ASI's websites are called ESP Websites™, and they allow your customers to search an end-buyer-friendly version of ESP+ (with over 1 million promo products). To drive traffic, make sure you provide customers and prospects with a link to your website, which should always be on your social media profiles, in your email signature, on your business cards and on any marketing materials you send out.



➤ **Step 6: Ensure Customer Satisfaction**

Tips to ensure your customers stay happy include:

- ▶ **Talk less, listen more.** Ask questions to find out exactly what your customer is looking for. Don't tell them what they want, present options that align with what they've outlined. For example, if they are on a budget, respect that and propose solutions that will make financial sense for them.
- ▶ **Maintain open communication.** Keep your customer in the loop with an order status and set realistic timelines. You don't want any surprises, but if one arises, tell your customer immediately.
- ▶ **Confirm each step in your order process before advancing.** Never assume you know what the customer will want or think. Always ask your customer to confirm something is okay before proceeding.
- ▶ **Be accountable and take responsibility.** If you make a mistake, apologize and present possible solutions. Although your customer may still be upset, if you can fix the issue or work around it, you may be able to save them in the long run.
- ▶ **Plan ahead. Shipping takes time.** Don't wait until December to call on customers for holiday gifts. Start at least 2-3 months ahead of time and explain to your customers why it's so important to get their order in early.



➤ **Step 7: Ask for Referrals To Grow Your Business**

A fantastic way to get more customers is to get referrals from current customers! You'll want to specifically ask every customer for a referral, but also make sure to put a reminder on any other communications, like invoices and email signatures. It's not a bad idea to send out quarterly or semi-annual emails asking for referrals. If you want to sweeten the deal, offer something in exchange for a referral, like \$X off a future order.

Don't be afraid to ask prospects who don't buy from you for referrals either. Maybe you couldn't help a certain customer, but you can always ask if they know of someone else who may need your services. It could be a family member, friend or coworker, but if you never ask, the answer will always be no.

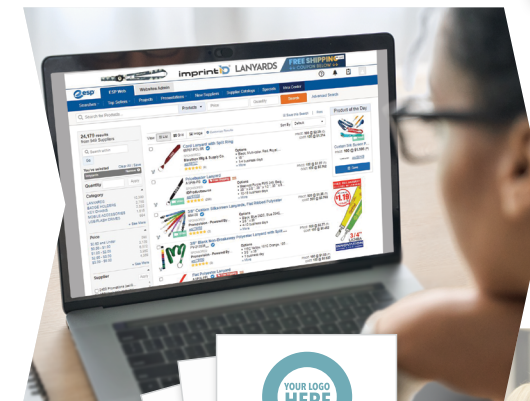


➤ Step 8: Join a Promo Product Membership Organization

Starting a business is hard to do by yourself – the good news is you don't have to. When you join a membership organization, they'll help by providing you with resources and tools to help you run your business.

ASI is the largest membership organization in the world with more than 25,000 members. As an ASI member, you get access to:

- ▶ A Customer Success Manager who will guide you through the onboarding process, make sure you're signed up for any important trainings and help you explore all member benefits.
- ▶ News and research so you can stay on top of trends and important issues affecting your business.
- ▶ Education that expands your industry knowledge.
- ▶ ESP+, an online marketplace where you can search over 1 million promo product to find the right ones for your customers.
- ▶ Marketing solutions like custom websites and promo catalog direct mail programs.
- ▶ Trade shows and networking events where you can connect with other distributors and expand your relationships with suppliers.





It's time to kick-start your promotional products business and generate instant profit.

Book a demo to see ASI's ESP+ marketplace for yourself.
Connect with suppliers and manage your customers' orders all in one place.



Ready to join ASI? Get started today.