



3D render

PRACTICAL GUIDE

Trade marketing item development process
- Stages top brands never skip (and why)

Create extraordinary On and Off Trade marketing items step by step – From budget allocation to shipping the final product

dekkers
INTERNATIONAL

Introduction

Allocating budgets, monitoring plans and shipping your innovative marketing items all around the globe: being a marketeer is a great job but a challenging one as well. Juggling a hundred balls in the air may be second nature to you, but maintaining a balance is not always easy. By outlining the ideal trade marketing item development process, based on our long-lasting experience working with international top brands, our practical guide helps you keep an overview and efficiently manage your branding processes.

This guide breaks the marketing process down into distinct phases and provides pragmatic advice regarding:

- **Keeping a grip on your expenses** by making sure you don't exceed your budget or fall below it
- **Aligning and informing all stakeholders** involved throughout the process
- **Staying in control of your planning** to ensure set deadlines and lead times are met
- **Developing innovative and effective trade marketing items** that attract and engage consumers
- **Gathering all necessary information** and documentation in a timely manner
- **Ensuring quality and sustainability standards** are met throughout the process

Following the phases outlined in this practical guide will ensure that you keep control of your branding plan throughout the year. This will allow you to create innovative, high quality and sustainable branding items, and thereby realize the highest possible ROI.

The trade marketing process: a quick glance

The ideal trade marketing item development process unfolds in accordance with the consecutive phases outlined below. To draw up a realistic and complete process planning, keep in mind that the longest lead times come at the end of the value chain! Aligning your planning accordingly lets you inform your stakeholders properly as well as manage expectations.

Naturally, these lead times depend on various factors. However, with a clear vision and thorough preparation, you won't have to worry.



The rest of this guide covers each phase in a detailed fashion. It provides expert advice to help reduce your Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and realize the shortest possible lead times – all while maintaining optimum quality and sustainability standards.

STAGE 1: Prepare your **briefing** while selecting a **preferred supplier**

Having a clear vision regarding your marketing objectives is essential in order to give suppliers a complete briefing that provides all relevant context. The first item on your to do list, therefore, is to conduct an internal assessment. This assessment constitutes **the foundation for the remainder of the marketing process**, so you should take the time to perform it thoroughly. Also, call upon important stakeholders within your organization to collect all the relevant information.

Ideally, an internal assessment should include clear documentation regarding:

- **Your brand's mission and vision**
- **Brand guidelines and corporate identity**
- **Marketing objectives and KPIs**
- **Target groups, target markets and locations**
- **Internal values regarding quality and sustainability – and how these should be reflected in the process**
- **Available budget, planning and deadlines**
- **High resolution vectorized artwork**





Create a **vision** of your **ideal partner** profile

As you perform this internal evaluation, think of a possible partner who, in your opinion, would be a good fit for this project. Then arrange a meeting at which you can bring your internal assessment to the table. The more extensive your assessment, the better your potential partner will be able to form a complete picture, not only of your brand, but also of your objectives and target markets.

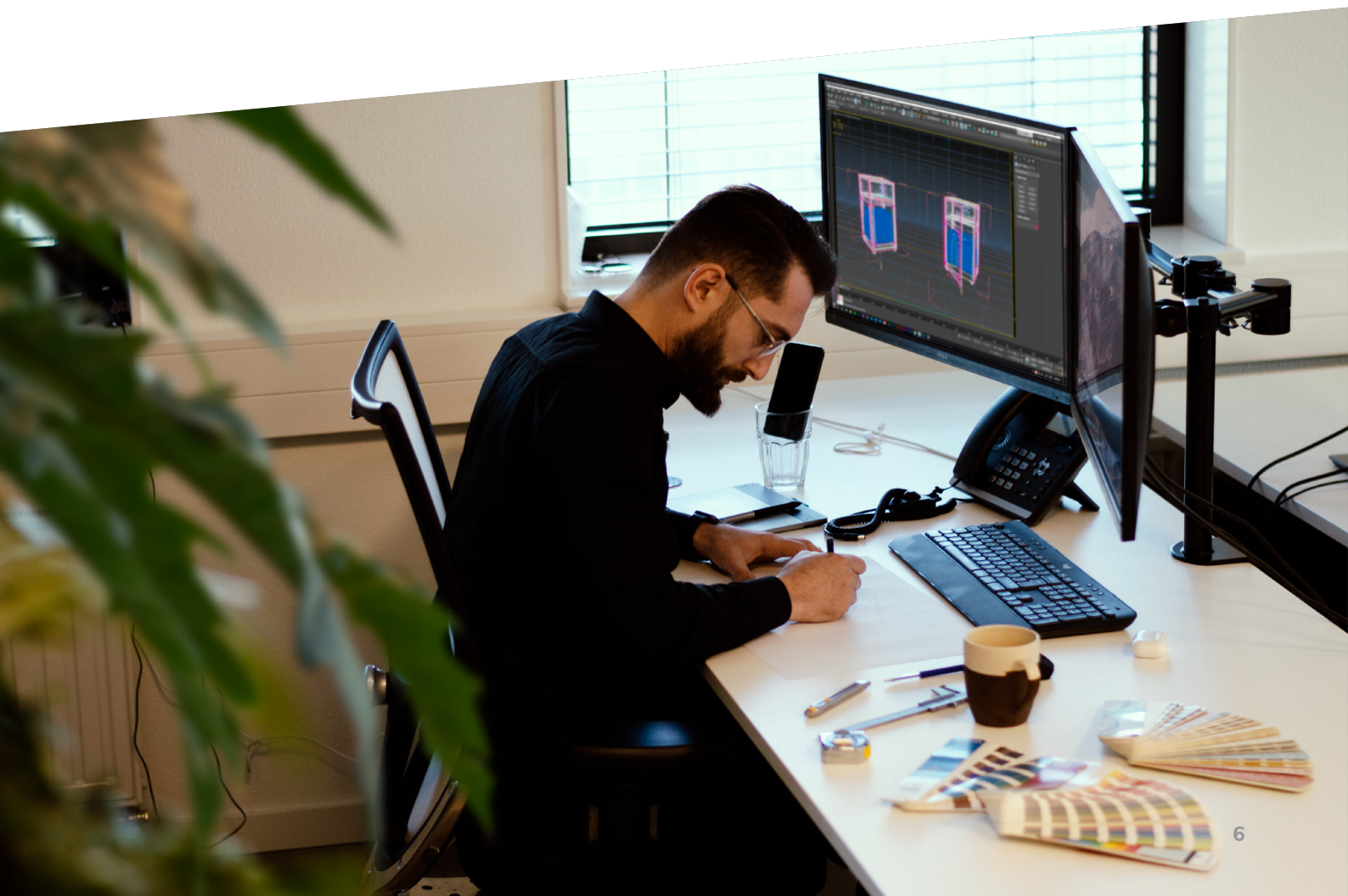
This may sound like a no-brainer, but the more information a supplier receives upfront, the easier it will be for them to present design ideas that match your needs and wishes. On top of that, you're enabling them to select materials which are in line with your **quality and sustainability standards**. In addition, familiarity with your brand identity and marketing objectives allows a supplier to act as a worthy sparring partner throughout the design and branding process, rather than just playing the role of an executing party.

Presenting a full-blown assessment during the briefing phase is the first step toward developing a valuable partnership with your supplier.

STAGE 2: Present **your briefing** to suppliers who translate ideas into **groundbreaking designs**

At this point: It's time to start initial talks with your supplier(s). A concise assessment together with your brand guide and artwork files provide an excellent foundation for an efficient briefing, and give the experts an opportunity to pose additional questions and fill in the blanks.

Pro tip: List important details, but leave room for your partner to engage in the creative process and material selection with you. If you keep an open mind and use your partner's expertise to your own advantage, they will most likely come up with innovative suggestions which would never have occurred to you!





Discuss **your quality** and **sustainability requirements**

Your counterparts shouldn't be the only ones gathering information. A supplier's proven track record working with leading brands is often a good indicator of quality, so don't hesitate to devote some time to becoming acquainted with your future partner. Thorough preparation on your part before the meeting enables you to ask in-depth questions regarding quality and sustainability. A supplier may claim that they deliver [high quality products](#), but you must then ask: Can this supplier substantiate this claim using concrete processes and business policies? The same applies with regard to sustainability: how does this supplier [integrate sustainability](#) into their production process? Can they provide sustainability labels? All of these are key questions that will help you find out who you're dealing with, and this will allow you to select the partner that best reflects your values.

STAGE 3: Let your **potential partners** present you with **inspiring proposals**

AVERAGE LEAD TIME: 1 WEEK

At this point: It's up to your potential partners to come up with creative ideas that reflect your needs and wishes. Be sure to be clear as to when you expect the first designs, and set a precise time in this regard. This will allow you to stay in control of your planning. An experienced partner should be able to deliver designs within one week. Quotations should follow a couple of days later, depending on the scope of the project.

We all know that qualitative and sustainable products have become a prerequisite for successful brand experiences. It is therefore wise to only continue the process with partners who are transparent about quality and sustainability regulations. As you may notice, these kinds of partners don't shy away from integrating those important values into their design presentation, or from making the promise to hold on to them throughout the manufacturing process.





Involve a **specialized supplier** at the ideation phase to **reduce Total Cost** of Ownership

If you want to be certain you're [spending your allocated budget](#) on the actual product rather than on intermediaries, be sure to involve a specialized supplier with extensive product and design knowledge during the early stages of the process. Such a partner will add significant value by taking into account the product's feasibility. As a result, you'll receive more accurate quotations at a later stage (stage 4). Not only does bringing a specialist benefit the process in terms of speed, it also saves you thousands of dollars.

STAGE 4: Work with the supplier who'll lead you to the most impactful trade marketing items

AVERAGE LEAD TIME: 1 WEEK

At this point: Proposals from all potential partners are on your desk. Now, it's time to make the final call: Who are you going to do business with? Be sure to take the time you need to carefully evaluate each and every proposal and quotation submitted, since this decision will determine the further course of your branding plan.

A good starting point is compare these proposals and quotations to your briefing on the other. Then, ask yourself a few questions: Do the designs capture the essence of your brand? Are they meeting your expectations in terms of innovation, quality and the use of sustainable materials?

Pro tip: Don't hesitate to discuss adjustments with your supplier if you're not completely satisfied. The way a supplier processes your feedback can give you a good impression of their flexibility and ability to successfully translate feedback into new, improved designs.

To prevent files from languishing on a desk, schedule a meeting with all stakeholders involved in order to evaluate proposals. This way, you'll avoid unnecessary delays, and you'll market your products as quickly as possible.

STAGE 5: Request a **prototype** to ensure a **premium product**

AVERAGE LEAD TIME: 4 TO 6 WEEKS

At this point: Based on the designs and quotations received, you and your team have opted for a credible partner whose values regarding quality and durability are aligned with your own company's standards. Now, it's time to come back to the table and get into execution mode. But first, we'll explain why a prototype is an extremely valuable next step in the process.

Requesting a prototype is an ideal way to visually examine (and approve) your products' appearance before commencing series production. This provides a valuable opportunity, since it could save you the unpleasant surprise of discovering that your product series actually deviates from the design. More importantly, a prototype eliminates the risk of having to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars reproducing your goods because they don't match your brand guidelines.

Picture this: a prototype will cost you approximately 500 dollars. Producing 5000 items at 100 dollars each will cost you approximately 500,000 dollars. If you are actually unlucky enough to discover imperfections in your prototype prior to manufacturing, you will have achieved a 100,000-fold return on your initial investment - and you'll end up with, well... an unimaginably valuable prototype!

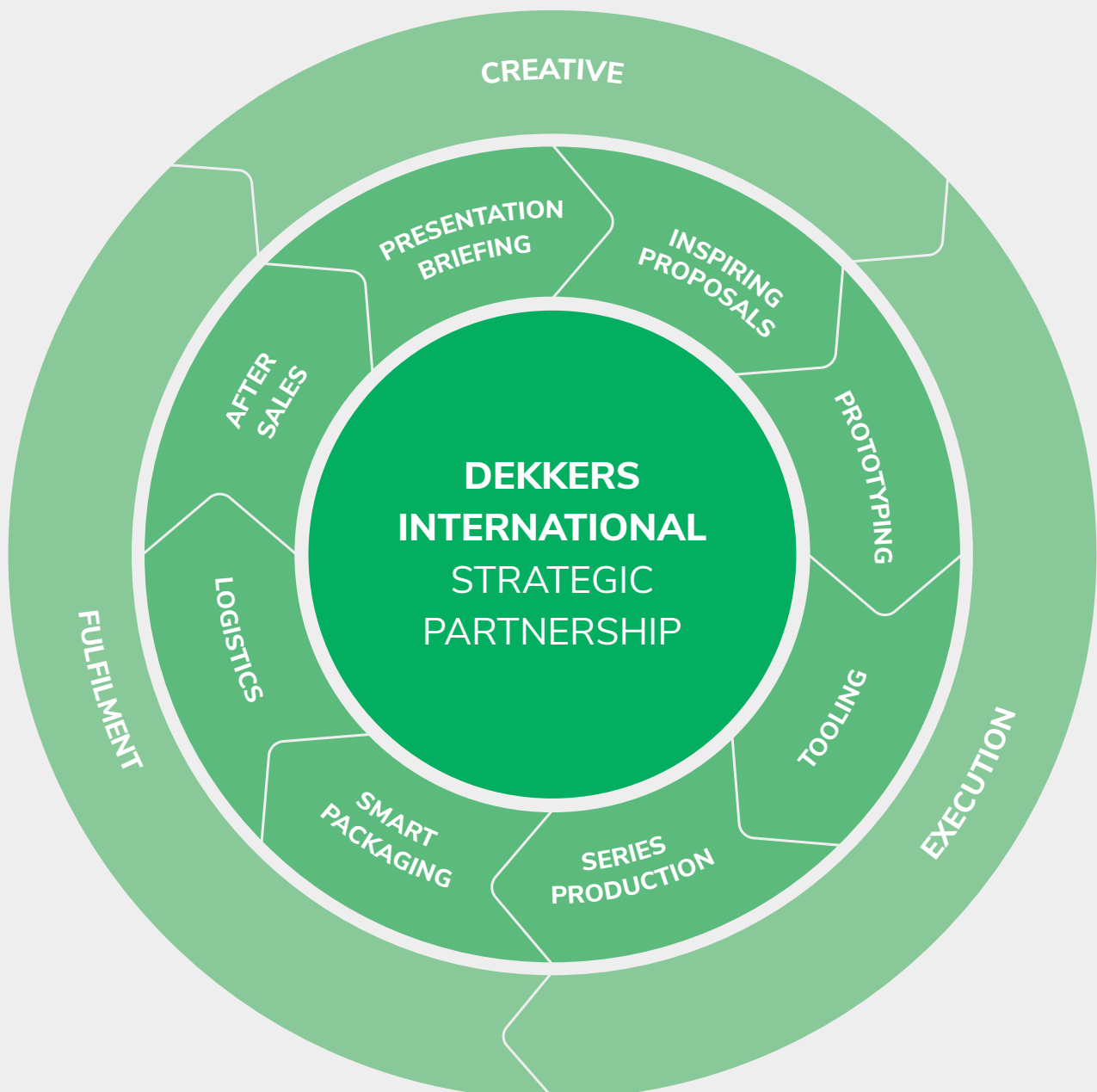
Don't settle for less than **the best possible prototype**

Once you receive your prototype, be sure to inspect it carefully. Are the colors in line with your corporate identity? Do all components work properly? If the prototype doesn't meet your expectations, speak up and request that your supplier make some adjustments. Minor deviations can be easily corrected during series production, but for larger issues, we highly recommend that you request a second prototype. This may take a few weeks extra, but keep aware that after the start of series production, there will be no room for major alterations. Never settle for a prototype with which you're not fully satisfied.



Not every supplier is able to produce a prototype. If your partner cannot supply one, one possibility is to hire an external party. Nevertheless, it is much more beneficial to work with an experienced supplier who offers the full package: from design to prototyping right to manufacturing. This ensures that your safety, sustainability and ethical demands are met throughout the process, while maintaining a healthy budget.

Unless additional tooling is required, your goods are now ready to be manufactured!



STAGE 6: Optional tooling activities before starting series production

AVERAGE LEAD TIME: 4 WEEKS

At this point: You've carefully inspected the prototype and, after making a few alterations where necessary, you've agreed upon the final version of your product. Oftentimes, a particular portion of your product has to have first taken shape before the manufacturing process can take off.

If your trade marketing products contain electronic components, such as [a LEDNeon© sign](#), it may be necessary to prepare the mold for the compartment that stores the electronic parts. This procedure will extend your branding process by a couple of weeks, so be sure to take this time period into account. Additional tooling costs may also be involved, so be sure to obtain appropriate information regarding the need for molds in advance.

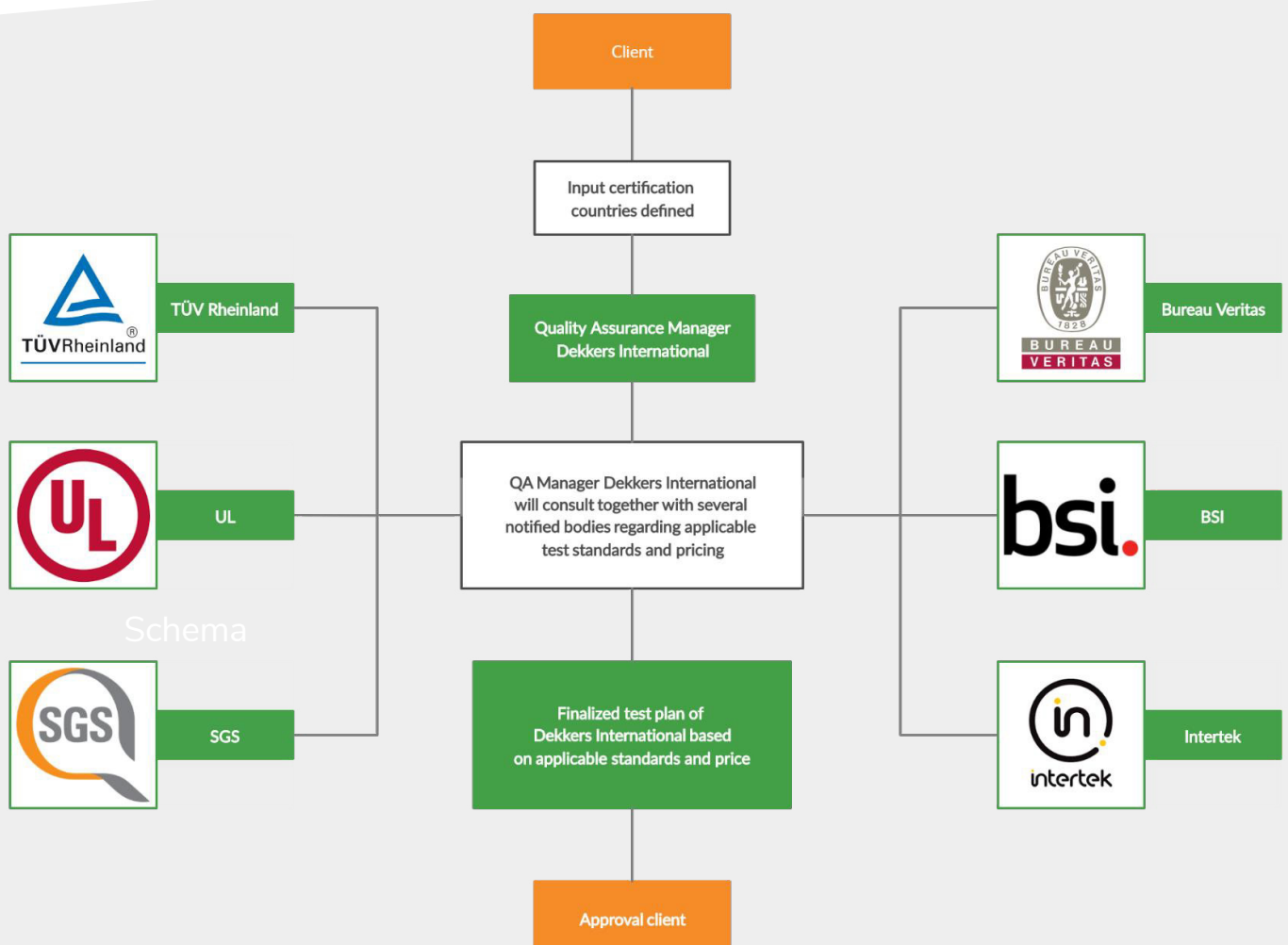


Electronic **trade marketing** items require mandatory **quality labels**

Products containing electronic components must comply with strict requirements. Therefore, an additional quality label (the Low Voltage Directive), issued by one of the leading Notified Bodies is mandatory. Rely on the expertise of your partner when it comes to this matter. An experienced supplier is able to tell you exactly which [quality tests and documents](#) are necessary, and can help you to obtain them.

Experienced manufacturers who retain in-house quality experts can even take the whole quality testing off your hands, which will save you some valuable time, as well as a good deal of money and stress.

Now, all you have to do is wait for your first marketing items to roll off the belt!



STAGE 7: Kick off **series production** and **experience it firsthand**

AVERAGE LEAD TIME: 6 TO 7 WEEKS

At this point: You've achieved full alignment regarding the prototype and any optional tooling has been completed. Your products are now entering the production phase. Tune in ahead as to when you can expect the first batch of your items, since lead times may take longer depending on the size of your order.

During the briefing and quotation stages, you reached agreement regarding qualitative, sustainable and ethical values that must be observed throughout the process. Your supplier outlined the specific actions they take to guarantee compliance with these values. During the production phase, you'll get a couple of opportunities to see what this looks like in practice:

I. Pay a visit to the production facility

A factory inspection provides an excellent firsthand opportunity to witness the circumstances in which your products will be manufactured. It gives you insight into the personnel's working conditions and sustainability measures taken to reduce environmental pollution and waste. You'll be able to see how the quality and safety of your products are safeguarded throughout the whole production process. Experienced manufacturers usually employ an on-site quality inspector who continuously and thoroughly checks your items before they leave the factory.

Instead of visiting the factory yourself, you can also have a Notified Body perform the inspection on your behalf, as part of the certification process. Otherwise, your supplier's [SEDEX pillar certification](#) gives a reliable and trustworthy indication of their compliance with ethical and environmental values, and values related to quality.

II. A final quality check before shipping your products

Once your first series of marketing items is manufactured, you can ask your supplier to send you a single item from the very first batch. This gives you the opportunity to examine the newly produced item, and compare it with your prototype. Although this additional step may extend your initial planning by a week or so, it will allow you to rest assured that your customers will receive high-quality branding products.

Pro tip: Think a step ahead and decide on packaging material before starting the production process. This will allow the supplier to produce your items and their packaging materials simultaneously and save a very substantial amount of valuable time in the distribution process.

Now, it's time to arrange the shipments and delight your customers with brand-new trade marketing items!



STAGE 8: Reduce Total Cost of Ownership by making smart packaging and distribution choices

AVERAGE LEAD TIME: 6 WEEKS

At this point: The manufacturing process is complete and you have received the necessary documentation regarding quality. You've decided on the type of packaging and your order is now ready to leave the factory and be shipped to its final destination. This packaging and transport stage yields many benefits that boost your budget and contribute to efficient planning, particularly where sustainability is concerned.

Pro tip: Think about possibilities for [smart and sustainable packaging](#) and transportation. Making smart choices here will further lower your TCO, so it's definitely worthwhile to ask your supplier about your options, in order to reduce total logistics volume and environmental impact. This can be realized using smaller packaging and sustainable materials. Deciding on these issues before decisions regarding these issues are made before commencing the production process, lead times for this stage may even be shorter than six weeks!



Reduce your **total logistics volume** using **smart packaging**

A good supplier worries about the packaging for you, and proactively comes up with ways to reduce your total logistics volume. When it comes to this, sustainability and high quality go hand in hand: Items consisting of non-fragile and solid components eliminate the need for double packaging, which significantly reduces the size of your shipment. Just think of all the warehouses, trucks and shipping containers you will no longer need, let alone the very significant reduction of your carbon footprint!



Use **environmentally-friendly packaging** materials

Suppliers who care about sustainable packaging take matters one step further by considering their choice of packaging material as well. They make sure that no plastic is used and that packaging materials consist of recycled materials.

Once all of your items have been loaded for transport using the least amount of packaging possible, they can be shipped to on premise and off premise locations, creating impactful brand experiences worldwide!

Do you have a sustainability-related question? Are you looking for more information?

STAGE 9: Establish a **strategic partnership** to facilitate open and **proactive communication**

AVERAGE LEAD TIME: A LIFETIME

At this point: Your trade marketing items have arrived at their destinations as planned and are now yielding impactful consumer interactions in numerous locations around the globe. Both you and your supplier can look back on a successful item development process. However, the fact that your branding process has come to an end doesn't mean that this is also the case for your partnership...

Pro tip: Partner up with a supplier who engages in proactive, transparent communication, who takes responsibility and maintains good personal relationships with their customers – particularly after you have made your determinations regarding your project. Doing so will not only contribute to the overall success of your branding plan, it will also result in a stronger, more strategic relationship that will benefit both you and your partner in the future.



A **strategic partnership** forms a solid base for **future projects**

It works the other way around, too: Previous positive experiences with your partner may lead you to involve them in other marketing processes within your portfolio. Familiarity with your partner's product price, their standards regarding quality, ethics and sustainability, and the time required for the entire production process, facilitates the selection of a supplier for other products. In short, strategic partnerships benefit both your marketing plan and the [allocation of your trade marketing budget](#).



Conclusion & Key take-aways

A **strategic partnership** takes your branding items to **the next level**

Maintaining one strategic partner for all the different stages of the process – from ideation all the way to distribution – permits you to manage the branding process in a much more streamlined fashion. There is only one party with whom you must consult, considerably reducing any miscommunications and extended lead times.

Moreover, possessing familiarity with your trade marketing budget and planning enables your strategic partner to tune in at the right time and Your strategic partner's understanding of your brand helps them to quickly come up with tailored marketing solutions. The more transparent you are about your budget, the more likely your partner will be to avoid overstepping the mark and come up with designs that exceed the budget.

In this practical guide, we have outlined the ideal trade marketing item development process, and we have described the most important stages of the development of new trade marketing products. Going through each of these phases will help you maintain an overview and manage your branding processes efficiently.

We have also provided valuable pro tips to help you **reduce your lead times and lower Total Cost of Ownership** without jeopardizing the quality of your trade marketing items. As we have seen, a partnership with one specialized supplier throughout the branding process greatly contributes to achieving these objectives.

Take advantage of the in-house knowledge of a specialized partner

Dekkers International is precisely this specialized branding partner who values personal connection and investment in the development of strong relationships. With over twenty years of experience working with international top brands, our experts can take care of every stage of your item development process. Together with you, we create innovative, high quality and sustainable trade marketing items.

Curious as to how a global frontrunner pushes boundaries in order to create innovative and sustainable Trade Marketing items? [Download our case study](#) to find out how Heineken® is able to overcome challenges relating to cost-savings and sustainable growth by partnering up with a specialized supplier.

Do you have any ideas you'd like to discuss? [Contact us](#), so we can help you explore options and create the perfect solution in accordance with your budget.

