

How to Design a School Uniform

A uniform tells a lot about a school, so make sure your uniform is stylish and distinct.

Functional requirements of a uniform

- Durability (two years wear or more)
- Washability with little or no ironing or dry cleaning required
- Suit all figure types
- Not inhibit students from becoming involved in normal activities
- Adjustable
- Patterned fabric needs to be a small two-way pattern for economical use of fabric
- Sun safe

Other considerations

- Is within the price range of all students in the school. **Be careful** about introducing too many styles and fabrics – It can result in significantly higher cost and you will not be very popular with other parents with students at the school!
- Available for sale from an accessible outlet.
- Retail prices set at a level that is profitable and fair to parents.

Does your school or P&C Committee have the budget to afford the new uniform?

- Do you have a cashflow forecast?
- Where will uniforms be stored?
- And how long can you afford to store them? (Many fabrics have a shelf life of approx. 2 years and we recommend not more than 2 years of stock held).

IMPORTANT: If your school aims to generate income from sale of uniforms, then it is strongly recommended that you brand all uniforms with the school logo otherwise parents will be more likely to source substitutes elsewhere.

Be careful about the varying objectives of your uniform committee members. Many will consider the uniform from the perspective of a parent. What might be ideal for their siblings may not be suitable for most students. Also be careful of committee members who suggest setting retail prices just above costs. **THIS IS NOT VIABLE FROM A FUNDRAISING PERSPECTIVE. Consider the uniform shop as a business**, and determine styles and prices accordingly.

Logos make it yours. Ensure that the school logo is a registered trademark that can only be reproduced by authorized parties.

We advise schools to start modestly and add items gradually. Schools will tell you that it is always easier to add items than it is to try to eliminate them.

Prepare and give your uniform design brief to a professional uniform design / manufacturer for the purpose of obtaining a uniform design concept – P&C Uniforms is such a company, and will create a mock up of how the

uniform would look. This saves lots of time and money with sampling. You are not obliged to purchase from the design company, but it is ethical to advise your intentions. Some design companies may request that you pay for samples, so make sure that you ask first. In your brief, offer a description of styles, fabrics, colours, logos to be incorporated in your school uniform. Your uniform designer should be able to provide you with a catalogue of styles and fabrics for both the summer and winter school uniforms, sports uniforms, and accessories. After you have selected preferred styles and fabrics, being careful to maintain consistency of colour and theme, discuss the functional and aesthetic requirements of the design that you have used.

How to Select a Uniform Provider

Once a school community has decided to move into uniforms, they need a set of criteria to help them select a uniform provider. Here are some uniform basics schools should consider when making the decision to choose a provider and implement a successful program.

- **Cost is important, but certainly not everything.** Beware of service programs that sound too good to be true. Some school uniform companies offer service programs or rebates that can be helpful to schools. In fact a great deal of cost goes into servicing schools well and providing high quality garments. I know many school administrators who chose a supplier based on large rebates and then were disappointed by the company's delivery, quality, and service. Make sure that you completely understand the benefits offered. Is the rebate simply tacked on to the price of the garment? Or is the company providing lower quality service to compensate for the rebate? Always ask for a written description of your benefit program.
- **Look for longevity and check references.** Don't underestimate longevity. If a school uniform company has been around for many years and has an established client list, then they are probably doing something right. I have seen dozens of new companies try to gain entry into the industry with unrealistic sales strategies. They tend to over-promise and under-deliver, which results in great frustration for school administrators. Always visit the store of a potential provider to evaluate its condition and convenience, and like a good employer, check references and review track records. You would be surprised how many schools forego these very important steps.
- **Choose a supplier with maximum control over production that delivers optimum value for money.** P&C Uniforms takes great pride in the fact that we are a manufacturer with our own successful import program established in 1998. Our own office in Shanghai (China) employs 5 experienced quality control staff who purchase materials, qualify garment manufacturers, allocate production to manufacturers that specialize in the respective garment, check production to ensure standards are met, and manage shipments.
- **Not all polo shirts are created equal.** The old adage "you get what you pay for" holds particularly true in the school uniform industry. School uniforms need to last, withstand rigorous wear and washings, and hold their size and color. They also need to be designed for growth and to complement all shapes of young people. Ask your vendor what sets their products apart. If you get the line, "they are the same as everybody else's, just less expensive", find another provider. A great uniform company should be able to clearly elaborate on the features of their line. You will learn quickly that there are vast differences between a \$10 polo shirt and one that is more expensive. Put simply, the quality is markedly better.
- **Don't be afraid to sign a contract.** Sign a contract once you have selected a provider. Agreements are intended to protect both parties by outlining the expectations and limitations of the relationship. They also exist to provide a transparent view of how a company conducts business and serves the customer. A good contract reflects the highest level of professionalism and a commitment to providing you with the best service possible.