



**Rocket  
Bags**

# A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO ETHICALLY SOURCED BAGS

**Including checklists that will help you  
choose an ethical supplier.**





# HOW TO ENSURE YOUR BRANDED BAGS ARE SOURCED RESPONSIBLY

Ethical manufacturing is at the forefront of the public's mind, so it should be for your brand as well. Consumers are asking more questions than ever before of the brands they support, and it's critical that today's leading brands and organisations take the necessary steps to ensure their products are sourced in the most ethically responsible way.

Branded bags have become a key component of the modern promotional strategy, and establishing ethical practices within your supply chain is crucial to protecting your brand's image and reputation. Unfortunately, supply chains are notably complex and opaque, so it can be very difficult for even the most well-intentioned company to have complete transparency into how, where and by whom their branded bags are made. However, there are steps you can take to proactively protect against unethical practices.

One of the best ways to start is by establishing clear ethical purchasing guidelines and getting to know your suppliers.

By developing your own ethical credentials and sharing them with suppliers, you can begin to influence from where and how your products are sourced. Also take the time to ask your suppliers about their own social accountability. A reputable supplier will already have established ethical sourcing policies and practices in place, as well as a network of fully audited factories.

**In order to set out ethical policies and evaluate the ethical integrity of suppliers, you need to be aware of and have a thorough understanding of the ethical issues that can arise within the supply chain.**

There are many elements to consider when it comes to ethical sourcing - from child labour and fair compensation to safe working conditions and discrimination.

Here, we outline four key ethical factors brands should consider when sourcing branded bags, as well as core principles for ensuring ethical practices.

# MODERN SLAVERY

Modern slavery - which encompasses slavery, servitude and forced or bonded labour and human trafficking - is a crime and a serious violation of fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, it's also one of the fastest growing criminal industries in the world. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that there are 21 million people in forced labour globally.

Product prices that look too good to be true, most usually are. Often, next-to-nothing price points are met by severely cutting production costs, which in turn increases the likelihood of the use of modern slavery by increasing working hours and forcing workers to meet unrealistic time-scales.

Beyond recognising initial red flags, there are several other ways brands can help fight modern slavery. In October 2015, the UK Parliament passed the Modern Slavery Act, which requires organisations to report on the steps taken to combat modern slavery in the supply chain.

Be sure to check your supplier's Modern Slavery Statement to assess their commitment to preventing slavery and human trafficking in their corporate activities and supply chains. A truly reputable supplier will also be able to provide copies of their policies, procedures, questionnaires, ethical declarations and quality certificates.

## Modern Slavery Checklist



- ☐ Suppliers must uphold basic human rights



- ☐ No forced, bonded or involuntary labour



- ☐ Workers must be free to choose to work for their employer and free to leave the employer



- ☐ No lodging of deposits or identity papers by employers or outside recruiters

# CHILD LABOUR



Another key factor to consider when it comes to ethical labour practices is the exploitation of children.

The ILO estimates that there are around 218 million engaged in child labour, which the UN defines as “work for which the child is either too young - work done below the required minimum age - or work which, because of its detrimental nature or conditions, is altogether considered unacceptable for children and is prohibited.”

**Often, child labour victims are exposed to hazardous work environments, slavery or other forms of forced labour.**

Child labour deprives children of their basic rights, and though forbidden by law in most countries, it's still very prevalent in today's supply chains. To help abolish child labour, there several principles you can put in place within your own procurement policies.

## Child Labour Checklist



- ☐ Suppliers must ensure that all workers have attained the minimum age required in order to be legally employed



- ☐ All young workers adhere to the international standard for acceptable working hours



- ☐ No labour is conducted by young workers that jeopardizes their physical, mental or moral well-being



# FAIR WORKING HOURS & COMPENSATION

Countries where branded bags are typically made, such as Bangladesh and China, are popular places to operate because they tend to offer lower wages than other nations. However, without the proper oversight, factories have been known to pay their workers far below the minimum wage or require forced overtime in order to increase profits.

Fair wages and working hours are critical components in responsibly sourcing your branded bags, and also help combat against modern slavery. Be sure to check your suppliers' stance on paying living wages and refuse to work with suppliers that do not comply with key compensation principles.

## Fair Working Hours & Compensation Checklist



- ☐ Worker wages and benefits should meet industry or national legal standards and must be sufficient to meet the basic needs of workers and their families; no disciplinary deductions



- ☐ Voluntary overtime should be paid at a premium rate, and not exceed 12 hours per week on a regular basis; overtime may be mandatory if part of a collective bargaining agreement



- ☐ Working hours should comply with industry or national legal standards, but in any event, not exceed 48 hours per week with at least one day off for every seven-day period



- ☐ Holiday allowances should comply with industry or national legal standards

# SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS

Beyond fair wages and working hours, it's also important to check the condition in which your branded bags are manufactured. Part of being a socially responsible organisation is providing workers with a safe and healthy working environment. Not only does this mean protecting workers' physical safety and health, but also providing a workplace that's free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

**When crafting your ethical policies, be sure to consider all aspects of ensuring a safe, secure and healthy work environment.**



Many manufacturing factories are located in distant countries with developing economies, so it's essential to monitor working conditions on the ground. A common misstep in ethical manufacturing is to assume that the initial working conditions will be upheld throughout the production process. However, it's not uncommon for factories to change the production location without the knowledge of the supplier. Conducting independent audits throughout the process can help you catch and resolve any ethical-related issues before they become a larger problem.

## Safe Working Conditions Checklist



- ☐ Suppliers must take steps to prevent injuries and provide regular health and safety worker training



- ☐ Suppliers must have a system in place to detect threats to health and safety



- ☐ Workers must have access to bathrooms and potable water



- ☐ Suppliers must not discriminate based on race, caste, origin, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, union or political affiliation, or age



- ☐ Suppliers must not use corporal punishment, mental or physical coercion or verbal abuse



# ENSURING ETHICAL MANUFACTURING

When it comes down to it, tackling the ethical issues in today's supply chains will take a unified effort.

Many brands rely on branded bags to bolster their marketing and sales efforts, however, the industry itself is complex and high-risk. It requires a significant amount of work and commitment to ensure that your branded bags are produced in the most humane and ethical environments.

Brands can take a proactive approach by becoming more informed of the issues in ethical manufacturing and developing long-term relationships with trustworthy and reputable suppliers. It starts with brands developing their own ethical policies and asking the right questions of their suppliers. It continues with frequent inspections, strict auditing processes and a continued commitment to abolishing inhuman and unethical manufacturing practices.

## Get in touch!

At Rocket Bags, we take ethical manufacturing very seriously. All of our suppliers are required to pass strict auditing processes, such as Sedex SMETA, and conform to our strict code of ethical trading. You can learn more about our ethical practices at [www.rocketbags.co.uk/ethical-policies](http://www.rocketbags.co.uk/ethical-policies)

If you have any questions about ethically sourcing your branded bags, we'd be happy to help! Give us a call on **0333 7000 133** or email us at [hello@rocketbags.co.uk](mailto:hello@rocketbags.co.uk)



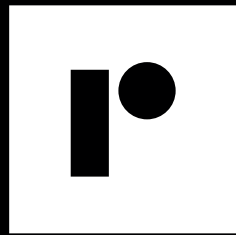
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