

Gil-Son Construction Merch Store: Strategic Launch Research

What employees actually want isn't what most companies think, and the gap between "tolerated swag" and "coveted gear" is largely about quality and brand recognition. This research synthesizes findings from Reddit communities, Printful users, promotional products forums, Canadian suppliers, and competitive intelligence to provide Gil-Son with a data-driven merchandise strategy. The core finding: **invest in fewer, higher-quality items from recognized brands** (Carhartt, YETI, Bella+Canvas) rather than a broad catalog of forgettable items. Printful serves well as the POD backbone for basic apparel and low-risk testing, but premium items and construction-specific gear require specialized Canadian suppliers. (Do Dropshipping)

Recommended product catalog with specific items and pricing

The following catalog balances Printful's no-minimum convenience with specialized suppliers for premium and industry-specific items. All prices are in CAD unless noted.

Apparel tier structure

Premium T-Shirts should anchor the store. The **Bella+Canvas 3001C** (4.2 oz, 100% Airlume cotton) is the industry gold standard—soft, modern fit, excellent DTG print surface. (Corporate Gear) Available through Printful at \$12-15 base cost; recommend \$29.99 retail for public, \$19.99 for employees. The **Comfort Colors 1717** (6.1 oz, garment-dyed) provides a heavyweight vintage option at \$18-22 base through Printful, retailing at \$34.99. Avoid cheap Gildan G500 for public retail—acceptable only for bulk crew giveaways at \$15-18 decorated.

Hoodies drive the highest perceived value. The **Independent Trading Co. IND4000** (10 oz, cotton-face fleece) is Printful's best option at \$35-40 base cost, retail \$64.99-74.99. For construction credibility, nothing beats **Carhartt CTK121 Midweight Hoodie** at \$62+ decorated through Carhartt Company Gear (MOQ 6 units)—employees will actually wear these for years. The Carhartt Rain Defender option (CT100617) at \$75+ adds water-repellent technology (Corporate Casuals) essential for Halifax's climate.

Headwear is the highest-margin category. The **Richardson 112 trucker** is the bestselling cap in North America at \$8-15 blank, \$20-28 decorated, with 75+ colorways and excellent embroidery durability—available through Printful. For winter, the **Carhartt A18 Watch Hat** (\$12-18 blank, \$20-25 decorated) carries instant brand recognition among trades workers. Add **CornerStone Hi-Vis Beanies with 3M reflective stripes** (\$12-20) for safety-compliant winter gear.

Drinkware program

Premium tier creates the strongest impression. The **Stanley Quencher H2.0 40oz** (\$50 NET through PCNA/GiftAFeeling) went viral for good reason—11-hour cold retention, cupholder-compatible handle, 90% recycled steel. The **YETI Rambler 20oz/30oz** (\$35-45 decorated through YETI Corporate Sales or TPS Promotions) offers legendary durability and brand equity. (Pinnacle Promotions) Both require **MOQ 24 units per**

color and aren't available through Printful. For budget-conscious additions, **RTIC 30oz** delivers YETI-comparable performance at half the price ([Engrave It Houston](#)) (\$15-20 decorated).

MiiR tumblers (\$25-32) add a sustainability angle as a B Corp with 1% for Planet commitment—strong appeal for environmentally-conscious staff and customers. **Printful's sublimation mugs and basic tumblers** work for no-minimum testing but lack the brand cachet of premium drinkware.

Construction-specific essentials

Hi-vis safety apparel is mandatory for job sites and creates walking billboards. ([Clothes2Order](#)) **Carhartt Force Hi-Vis Class 2/3 shirts** (\$35-60) and **Charles River ANSI Class 3 jackets** (\$55-80) meet ANSI/ISEA 107-2020 compliance while looking professional. Budget alternative: **CornerStone ANSI Safety Vests** at \$15-30 decorated. These are NOT available through Printful—use EZ Corporate Clothing, Hi-Viz.com, or Carhartt Company Gear.

Workwear jackets for Halifax's variable climate should include the **Carhartt Duck Active Jacket (J140)** with 3M Thinsulate (\$90-120 decorated) ([Corporate Casuals](#)) and the **Carhartt Sherpa-Lined Coat** (\$100-130) for deep winter.

Hard hat stickers offer massive ROI at \$0.50-2 per unit (MOQ 20-100). Use **HatHuggers conformable vinyl** from MyHardHatStickers.com or StandOut Stickers for proper curved-surface adhesion. Include certification stickers (OSHA trained, First Aid certified) for compliance visibility.

Tool-adjacent items that construction workers actually want: **tape measures** (\$2-8, MOQ 25+), **Rite in the Rain waterproof notebooks** (\$8-15), **LED flashlights/headlamps** (\$10-25), and **Klein Tools 17-Quart Coolers** (\$65) that double as seats on job sites. ([Chicago Masonry](#))

Hockey and sports gear for Atlantic Canada

Hockey is non-negotiable for Atlantic Canada engagement. **Custom sublimated hockey jerseys** from **TEAMCO Sportswear** (Toronto, Made in Canada) run ~\$60 all-in including logos, numbers, and names—MOQ 6-10 jerseys, 3-4 week turnaround. ([Teamcosportswear](#)) **Gitch Sportswear** offers similar quality with free shipping over \$100 and no minimums for reorders. ([Getgitch](#)) **Conway+Banks** has a useful online customizer with 10-unit MOQ (\$60-70/unit).

Laser-engraved hockey pucks make excellent desk gifts and sponsor giveaways. **Sona Arts Toronto** has no minimums with volume discounts (55% off at 50+ units), 3-4 day production. **Victoria Custom Laser** requires MOQ 24 but offers hand-painted color fill options. Budget \$8-15/puck depending on quantity.

Sports duffels round out the category: **Carhartt Legacy 20" Gear Bag** (\$55-70) with Rain Defender tech, ([Corporate Casuals](#)) or **Under Armour Undeniable 5.0** (\$40-55) for broader appeal.

Kids and family items

Youth apparel must be **CPSIA compliant** with safe inks and tracking labels. ([Screen Printing](#)) **Gildan Heavy Cotton Youth T-Shirt (5000B)** at under \$6/unit wholesale (MOQ 6) through Totally Promotional or 4imprint

offers affordable family outfitting. [Totally Promotional](#) **Bella+Canvas Kids Collection** (\$8-15) delivers premium retail-quality feel with third-party lab testing documentation. [Bellacanvas](#)

Custom coloring books from **Dynamic Gift Canada** (\$1-3/unit) are Made in Canada with 16 stock designs and custom cover options—[Dynamicgift](#) consider construction equipment themes for brand alignment. **Mixam Canada** prints custom coloring books with no minimums for POD flexibility.

Premium executive gifts (\$50+ range)

YETI Daytrip Lunch Bag (\$65-75 corporate) and **YETI Hopper Flip 8 Soft Cooler** (\$150-175) work for milestone/years-of-service awards. [Pinnacle Promotions](#) **Leatherman Wave+** multi-tools (\$60-100, laser engravable) are universally beloved by trades workers. For premium apparel, **Patagonia corporate sales** offers quality but has restrictions—they banned finance and oil company co-branding in 2019 [Green Queen](#) and only allow embroidery on back yoke/sleeve locations since 2023.

Bags and accessories

Backpacks: **Carhartt 28L Foundry Series** (\$75-95) with Rain Defender and Duravax base for durability; [Corporate Casuals](#) **OGIO** (\$50-90) for tech-forward styling. **Tote bags:** Invest in **12oz cotton canvas zippered totes** (\$15-25, MOQ 25-100) over cheap non-woven polypropylene—employees report low-quality totes "get destroyed with 3 cans of tuna." [Swag](#) Printful offers basic totes but quality concerns exist.

Tech accessories: **Anker PowerCore 10000mAh** (\$35-50 through Custom Charged, the official Anker partner) is the only reliable power bank option—cheap alternatives fail quickly and damage brand perception. **5-in-1 braided charging cables** (\$6-12) offer practical daily use. Printful does NOT carry tech accessories.

Office items: **Moleskine Classic Hardcover** notebooks (\$18-30, MOQ 50 flexible) carry the Hemingway/Picasso legacy association. **Alpha Soft Touch Stylus Pen** (\$2-5) is a bestseller with engrave-proof finishing—better than throwaway BIC pens.

Supplier recommendations with Printful integration

Printful as the POD backbone

What Printful does well: Embroidered hats and caps (consistently praised for clean stitching), [G2](#) Bella+Canvas 3001 t-shirts (best DTG results), embroidered hoodies on premium blanks, sublimation mugs and drinkware. The Ontario fulfillment center eliminates customs hassles with DDP shipping [Printful](#) and 0.24% reship rate (industry-leading quality control). [Style Factory Productions](#) No inventory risk.

Where Printful falls short: Dark garments with vibrant colors (white underbase causes shifts), neon/pastel colors (print duller than mockups), all-over prints (inconsistent on seams), Atlantic Canada shipping times (up to 12 business days), no premium brands (no YETI, Stanley, Carhartt), no tech accessories, realistic margins are tight (10-28% on t-shirts after \$5 shipping).

Atlantic Canada shipping reality: 2-5 business days production (Printful) + 3-12 business days transit. (Printful)
Build **2-3 week delivery windows** into customer expectations.

Tier 1 Canadian suppliers (Premium brands, drop-ship capable)

TPS Promotions (Markham, ON) is the top pick for YETI—authorized partner with full product line, Canadian warehousing, and clients including Amazon, Toyota, and Scotiabank. (tpscan) PPPC member. Contact: 1.877.387.7226.

GiftAFeeling offers 287 brands including YETI, Stanley, Nike, Carhartt, Columbia, and The North Face (giftafeeling) with low minimums and drop-ship to 170+ countries. (SwagMagic) Named one of Canada's Top 5 e-commerce businesses by CanadianSME. Contact: 1-888-994-4438.

Carhartt Company Gear (companygear.carhartt.com) is the direct corporate program— (Carhartt Company Gear) no minimums for some embroidery, Groundbreakers Loyalty Program available in Canada. 30-day turnaround typical for decoration.

Fairware (Vancouver, certified B Corp) is the authorized Patagonia partner in Canada (ASICentral) with strong sustainability credentials— (Fairware 2024) (Fairware 2024) good for eco-conscious positioning but premium pricing.

Tier 2 Canadian suppliers (Specialty categories)

Hockey: TEAMCO Sportswear and Gitch Sportswear (both Toronto) for sublimated jerseys; (Teamcosportswear) Sona Arts Toronto for laser-engraved pucks (no minimums).

Gift boxes: SwagDrop (ships from Toronto, full fulfillment services), (SwagMagic) Coastal Reign (\$15-30 shipping to Canada, MOQ 12), (Coastal Reign) The Happy Box (supports Canadian small businesses, free shipping \$99+).

Kids coloring books: Dynamic Gift Canada (Made in Canada, custom covers), Mixam Canada (no minimums, POD).

Safety/Hi-vis: Hi-Viz.com, EZ Corporate Clothing, Carhartt Company Gear. (Carhartt Company Gear)

Supplier selection matrix

Category	Primary Supplier	Backup	MOQ	Drop-Ship
Basic apparel	Printful	-	None	Yes
Premium apparel	Carhartt Company Gear	GiftAFeeling	6-12	Limited
YETI drinkware	TPS Promotions	GiftAFeeling	24	Yes
Stanley drinkware	PCNA/DezineCorp	GiftAFeeling	24	Through distributors
Hockey jerseys	TEAMCO	Gitch Sportswear	6-10	Yes

Category	Primary Supplier	Backup	MOQ	Drop-Ship
Laser pucks	Sona Arts Toronto	Victoria Custom Laser	None/24	Yes
Safety/Hi-vis	EZ Corporate Clothing	Hi-Viz.com	6+	Yes
Gift boxes	SwagDrop	Coastal Reign	None/12	Yes

Products to avoid: The drawer-dweller hall of shame

Apparel failures: Cheap polyester polo shirts (employees universally prefer premium hoodies), [Brand Spirit Blog](#) stiff/boxy promotional tees (Tultex specifically cited for inconsistent sizing and shrinkage), DTG on dark garments with neon colors through Printful (prints duller than mockups).

Accessory failures: Stress balls and squeeze toys ("convention swag is just birthday party junk for adults"), [The Cool Down](#) cheap plastic keychains, single-use chapstick, low-quality tote bags (they tear), sleeping eye masks, USB flash drives (cloud storage made them obsolete), another branded mug ("one year we got ANOTHER mug").

Tech failures: Generic power banks (fail quickly, damage brand perception), cheap earbuds (quality expectations are too high now), phone cases through Printful (inconsistent fit reports).

Printful-specific cautions: All-over print products (seam/pocket inconsistencies), designs with semi-transparent elements (drop shadows render poorly), black designs on black shirts (appear grayish), products requiring neon or vibrant pastel colors.

Statistical reality: 60% of promotional swag ends up in trash according to British Promotional Merchandise Association. [Jaapi](#) 80% of employees say practicality is their top priority [VistaPrint](#) (VistaPrint 2025 study). Quality perception directly transfers to company perception.

Pricing strategy for dual-audience store

Margin structure by channel

Employee purchases: Target **15-20% gross margin**. Employees expect subsidized pricing and forcing full retail "breeds resentment" per company store research. [Brandscape](#) Consider annual swag allowance (\$50-75/year) plus 20-25% discount on purchases beyond allowance.

Public retail: Target **30-40% gross margin** for sustainability. Corporate buyers accept premium pricing for branded items. This yields approximately 15-25% net margin after platform fees, payment processing, and shipping costs.

Corporate bulk orders: Negotiate per order, typically **20-25% margin** with volume discounts.

Recommended price points by category

Item	Printful Base	Employee Price	Public Retail
Bella+Canvas T-shirt	\$14-16	\$19.99	\$29.99
Premium T-shirt (Comfort Colors)	\$18-22	\$26.99	\$39.99
IND4000 Hoodie	\$35-40	\$49.99	\$74.99
Carhartt Hoodie	\$62+	\$69.99	\$89.99
Richardson 112 Hat	\$19-25	\$24.99	\$34.99
Stanley Quencher 40oz	\$35 NET	\$45.99	\$59.99
YETI Rambler 20oz	\$35-40	\$39.99	\$49.99
Hockey Jersey	\$60 all-in	\$69.99	\$89.99

Shipping policy

Free shipping threshold: CAD \$75 for metro areas. This slightly-above-average threshold protects margins while staying psychologically "under \$100." 82% of Canadian consumers shop more with free shipping retailers. Canada Post

Below threshold: Flat \$9.99 rate for orders \$25-74.99; \$12.99 for under \$25.

Employee orders: Lower threshold to \$50 for free shipping as an additional benefit.

Atlantic Canada surcharge: Consider additional \$5-10 for Newfoundland due to ferry transit times. Be transparent about exclusions.

Build shipping into pricing for items over \$30—creates perception of "free" even when absorbed into product price. Printful

Bundle strategy

Bundles reduce decision fatigue and increase average order value. Target **15-20% discount perception** while maintaining 25-30% actual margin.

Welcome Kit Essential: T-shirt + drinkware + notebook = **\$39.99** (20% off components). Company-funded for new hires.

Premium Starter Pack: Hoodie + Stanley tumbler + Richardson cap = **\$99.99** (15% off).

Hockey Fan Pack: Jersey + laser-engraved puck + cap = **\$119.99**.

Family Pack: Adult tee + youth tee + drinkware = **\$59.99**.

Construction Crew Kit: Hi-vis shirt + hard hat stickers + tape measure = **\$49.99**.

Competitive insights worth stealing

Figma's store (store.figma.com) treats merch like fashion with "seasons" and "collections"—Season 4 collection creates excitement and scarcity. They invested 8 months with professional design studio G.E.O. and created pop-up stores at conferences with massive lines. The store UX mirrors their actual product experience.

Steal this: Treat launches as events, rotate seasonal collections quarterly.

GitHub's Octocat demonstrates the power of an adaptable mascot—Halloween versions, Pride versions, conference-specific versions. The Octodex gallery documents variations. **Steal this:** If Gil-Son develops a mascot (construction-themed character?), make it adaptable for seasons and occasions.

Clark Construction (clarkconstructionstore.com) shows trade-appropriate execution with dedicated conference/career fair categories and member account systems. Their 2-week made-to-order lead time is a weakness. **Steal this:** Segment by use case (job site, office, events, gifts).

Carhartt Company Gear proves brand credibility matters—construction workers actually want to wear Carhartt because they trust the quality. ([Carhartt Company Gear](https://carharttcompanygear.com)) **Steal this:** Co-brand with recognized workwear brands rather than generic blanks.

DPR Construction uses Single Serve Merch for on-demand manufacturing with no inventory risk, including educational games for community engagement. **Steal this:** Consider non-apparel community items.

What fails consistently

Expecting employees to pay full price. Low-quality decoration with inconsistent logos. ([Eddy](#)) Rushing launches without testing samples. Generic products that don't reflect company culture. No ongoing promotion after launch—momentum dies without regular engagement.

Canadian compliance checklist

PIPEDA privacy requirements

Designate a Privacy Officer. Identify and document data collection purposes before collection. Obtain meaningful consent (implied is acceptable for standard e-commerce; express required for marketing). Publish a clear Privacy Policy explaining data practices in plain language. ([Office of the Privacy Commissi...](#)) Respond to access

requests within 30 days. [\(HIPAA Journal\)](#) Report breaches causing "real risk of significant harm" to the Privacy Commissioner. [\(HIPAA Journal\)](#) **Penalties:** Up to \$100,000 CAD per violation. [\(HIPAA Journal\)](#)

CASL anti-spam requirements

Obtain consent before sending commercial electronic messages [\(Pandectes\)](#) (express opt-in recommended for marketing; implied consent valid 2 years after purchase). Every email must include sender name, physical mailing address, and contact method. Include working unsubscribe link processed within 10 business days. Keep unsubscribe mechanism active for 60 days. **Exemptions:** Order confirmations, shipping notifications, warranty info, responses to inquiries. **Penalties:** Up to \$10 million per business violation.

Bilingual labeling

Federal Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act requires bilingual product identity, net quantity, and safety warnings on all consumer products. [\(Stikeman Elliott\)](#) Numbers and metric units are considered bilingual. Non-French trademarks don't require translation if registered. **New Brunswick:** 32% Francophone population—[\(The Canadian Encyclopedia\)](#) consider basic French website option but not legally required for private e-commerce. **Quebec (if expanding):** Bill 96 requires French to be "markedly predominant" on packaging as of June 2025. [\(Stikeman Elliott\)](#)

Tax configuration

Province	HST Rate	Effective
Nova Scotia	14%	April 1, 2025
New Brunswick	15%	Current
PEI	15%	Current
Newfoundland & Labrador	15%	Current

Configure e-commerce platform to calculate based on shipping destination. Register for GST/HST if annual sales exceed \$30,000 CAD.

Shipping compliance notes

Canada Post adds 19.5% fuel surcharge currently. [\(AMZ PREP\)](#) Atlantic Canada deliveries require realistic timeframes—Newfoundland shipments need ferry transport adding 2-5 days. Consider Maritime Bus Parcel Service for same-day/next-day within Maritimes at competitive rates. [\(Maritime Bus\)](#)

Risk factors and mitigation strategies

Risk: Printful quality inconsistency on certain products *Mitigation:* Order samples of every product before adding to catalog. Use Printful only for proven items (embroidered caps, Bella+Canvas tees, basic mugs). Avoid all-over prints and neon colors.

Risk: Premium supplier MOQs create inventory risk *Mitigation:* Start with popular colorways only (black, navy, company colors). Use YETI/Stanley for corporate gifting where bulk orders are known in advance. Partner with suppliers offering drop-ship (TPS, GiftAFeeling) to avoid warehousing.

Risk: Atlantic Canada shipping times frustrate customers *Mitigation:* Set clear expectations (2-3 weeks for Printful items). Stock bestsellers locally for faster Maritime delivery. Consider Maritime Bus for regional same-day option. Overdeliver by building buffer into estimates.

Risk: Employee store cannibalizes corporate gifting budget *Mitigation:* Separate budget codes and approval workflows. Make welcome kits company-funded (not store purchases). Track employee purchases vs. company-funded gifts distinctly.

Risk: Low adoption after launch *Mitigation:* Provide launch credits (\$25-50 per employee). Tie additional credits to recognition and milestones. Regular promotion through internal channels. Quarterly seasonal drops maintain freshness.

Risk: Cheap items damage brand perception *Mitigation:* Curate ruthlessly—fewer quality items beats broad cheap catalog. 60% of promotional swag goes to trash; be the 40% people keep. Never add items you wouldn't personally use.

Risk: CASL/PIPEDA non-compliance *Mitigation:* Double opt-in for marketing emails. Clear unsubscribe in every message. Privacy policy reviewed by counsel. Document all consent acquisition.

Risk: Bilingual complaint from NB customers *Mitigation:* Basic French product descriptions for top items. French email option for transactional messages. Full compliance with federal labeling requirements.

Research methodology and confidence levels

This report synthesizes findings from nine parallel research streams conducted February 2026:

Reddit and forum research (r/swag, r/corporategifts, r/promotional, r/humanresources, r/printful, r/printondemand, T-Shirt Forums) provided honest user experiences and specific product recommendations. Confidence: HIGH for consensus items, MEDIUM for niche recommendations.

Printful investigation drew from 7,000+ Trustpilot reviews, (Style Factory Productions) 85+ G2 reviews, 72+ Capterra reviews, and Reddit seller communities. Confidence: HIGH for product quality assessments and shipping times.

Product category research examined industry supplier catalogs, wholesale pricing databases, and promotional products publications for specific brand/model recommendations. Confidence: HIGH for established products, MEDIUM for newer items.

Canadian supplier research verified PPPC membership, Canadian fulfillment capabilities, and MOQs through direct website investigation. Confidence: HIGH for major suppliers, MEDIUM for smaller specialty vendors.

Pricing strategy research combined Printful margin calculators, Canada Post shipping data, Harvard Business School bundling research, and industry company store provider documentation. Confidence: HIGH for general principles, MEDIUM for specific thresholds (market-dependent).

Competitive intelligence examined live merch stores from construction companies and best-in-class corporate examples. Confidence: MEDIUM-HIGH for strategic lessons, subject to competitive change.

Canadian regulatory research verified current HST rates, PIPEDA/CASL requirements, and bilingual labeling laws through government sources. Confidence: HIGH for regulations, MEDIUM for enforcement interpretation.

Key data points cross-referenced across multiple sources. Where sources conflicted, recency and source credibility determined priority. All pricing should be verified with suppliers as market conditions change.