

Time to go green

Smart print buyers are making the move to environmentally friendly methods, and their printers are already ahead of them. Alex Blyth investigates

“Too few print buyers take the environment into consideration,” says Geoff Neal, managing director of print company Geoff Neal Litho. “We got the environmental accreditation ISO 14001 about four years ago, and we’ve reduced the amount of waste we send to landfill by about 75%, but still I reckon only 10% of buyers we encounter take any notice.”

Neal is one of a growing number of printers who are becoming more aware of the industry’s harmful impact on the environment, and taking action to minimise it. Although he may not yet have reaped much financial benefit from his decision to go green, there are signs that this could be changing as more and more print buyers include environmental criteria in their purchasing decisions.

There are several reasons for a buyer to do this. For some it is simply about doing the right thing. However, as Scott Mitchell, director of on-press consumables at printing equipment manufacturer Presstek puts it: “No one ever got promoted because they hired an environmentally aware supplier. You won’t be thanked for telling colleagues that while your print supplier missed the delivery deadline, at least it didn’t waste any paper.”

In fact, most of the buyers that choose to “go green” do so for sound business reasons. In some cases this is to attract that growing breed of consumer who prefers companies and brands that are doing more than just looking after their own bottom lines. This in turn is driving marketers and sometimes even shareholders to demand that purchasing be made more socially responsible. But it’s also true that companies without a strong environmental brief are choosing environmentally aware printers—because



How it's done at Co-operative Financial Services



Liz Thompson

In 2004 Co-operative Financial Services commissioned just over 4,100 tonnes of paper to be printed. This included chequebooks, credit and debit slips, sales and marketing literature, and stationery. Liz Thompson, CFS’ environmental adviser, says that the environment is an important factor whenever the

company is deciding on suppliers of these printed products. “Many of our customers are with us because of our ethical stance,” she explains. “So we do things like using vegetable- rather than solvent-based ink, and printing on recycled paper.”

The exact environmental requirements vary

between each print job. In a recent tender for its stationery contract CFS stipulated the use of remanufactured toner cartridges and recycled paper. But the organisation is not always so stringent. Thompson comments: “Quality and service are also important factors in the purchasing decision. So, while we want suppliers to tick the environmental boxes, it isn’t the be-all and end-all.”

CFS uses a third party to screen suppliers on their environmental credentials before it even begins working with them, and conducts quarterly audits to ensure that standards are maintained. Thompson says the organisation has never had to end a relationship with a print supplier as a result of it failing on environmental management.

going green can save money, improve quality and increase profits. Those that have done so point out that reducing waste always reduces costs, and that those costs are likely to reduce still further as the government looks to use taxation to deter environmentally harmful activities.

Becoming greener

There are several ways in which printing can be made more environmentally friendly. One important way is through the reduction or elimination of the pollutant isopropyl alcohol (IPA) from fountain solutions on an offset litho press. Making the switch is not necessarily easy – sometimes it can mean re-kitting the press out – but it is certainly technically feasible and becoming much more common.

The second is the minimisation of waste. This is a big issue for Jasper Scott, group manufacturing director at IPC Media, who offsets his greener printers by reducing materials and energy wastage. Improvements in the press technology help, he says: “Because printers find it hard to know exactly how many copies of a magazine are printed, we’ve always tended to over-order, but on-press technology is changing this and now we only order as many as we need.”

Lastly, it’s easy to forget about the impact of transporting print. It is necessary to consider the deliveries from the printer to the customer, and then out to the consumer, but also the deliveries from original sources to the printer and then possibly even from the end-user to the recycler.

Transport savings

Anything a buyer can do to reduce transport miles is a good thing – so buy locally wherever possible. Key things that can be done are making sure a vehicle is refuelled on its return journey, and using delivery vehicles with low emissions – diesel is a lower-emission fuel that’s also less harmful to the environment than petrol. A range of AFVs (alternative fuel vehicles) are becoming commercially available, using various less harmful power methods including fuel cells, electricity and LPG.

Different buyers use different methods to ensure that their suppliers are doing all of this. One method is de-

Environment: some tips



PrintBuyer asked one in-house buyer in a major utility provider for tips on environmentally responsible buying

- Ensure that your suppliers are recycling their consumables
- Check that your printers are using vegetable-based inks that don't produce polluting emissions
- Ideally the printer should be ISO 14001 accredited. I don't stipulate this, but I do ask them all to demonstrate an environmental management plan, which I check and audit
- Get advice from peers and industry bodies. Look at what other firms in your sector are doing. Ask the BPIF for help. Consult with paper merchants and ink manufacturers
- Be realistic about the cost of implementing policies. If we were to use only recycled paper it would add 20% to our costs, so instead we go for paper from sustainable sources
- Don't forget to let your customers know about your environmental policies, but don't overdo it

scribed by Lee Humphreys, director of operations at print management company HH Associates: “By being involved at the creative stage, we’re able to make suggestions for print and packaging stock. We work to minimise the cost of production and by changing specifications of a print job, we are often able to use less paper and print using materials which conform to the green requirements of the job.”

Alternatively, buyers can focus on the other end of the process and conduct environmental audits. Andy Seal is the head of print, publishing and distribution at the Department for Transport. He describes how he ensures the print he buys is environmentally responsible: “I always look for assurances from my suppliers that they meet general government standards. They should have an environmental management plan, and they should understand the business benefits of acting properly in this area. It’s

“It’s important to work in partnership with suppliers to mutually develop green credentials”

Rachel Roberts
Environment and special projects manager, M-real

only a part of our assessment, but an important one. While we mostly trust that suppliers are doing what they say they’re doing, we do conduct site visits and include environmental factors in our regular performance reviews.”

Devising standards and ensuring compliance is time-consuming and many firms lack the expertise to do it. An option for them is to require suppliers to have external environmental accreditation. The best-known of these are ISO 14001 and EMAS. Both are difficult to get and require regular re-accreditation, and so are widely respected. However, as Rachel Roberts, environment and special projects engineer at paper manufacturer M-real, argues, such standards are not the sole definition of environmental responsibility: “Having ISO 14001 does not necessarily mean a company is squeaky clean when it comes to the environment. Besides, other companies may work with an environmental management system but just decide not to get certified. I think it’s more important to work with suppliers to mutually develop green credentials, but if they have an environmental management system it does make it easier to audit them.”

An alternative for buyers is the Environmental Assessment Scheme run by the BPIF and PPA. Launched in 2002, this is an electronic tool that allows print suppliers to assess, monitor and reduce the environmental damage of their businesses. BPIF advisers conduct an assessment on the printer’s premises and then provide reports on the firm’s environmental position and how to improve it. There are eight levels to the BPIF/PPA scheme, so printers can gradually improve environmental performance and be rewarded for doing so. It costs £750 for BPIF/PPA members per report and £950 for non-members.

Companies should act, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is fast becoming part of best practice and, as Mike Barclay, environmental projects manager at WWF concludes: “The government is becoming ever more enthusiastic about legislating on the environment. Surely it’s better to go voluntarily and pick your time and route than to be forced into it. Hence the smart firms are getting started on this now.” ■