



Marketer's Primer Series: Greening Print Marketing

INTRODUCTION

These days, it's all about going green. For some people, it's a personal and philosophical commitment. For others, it's important for their brand image. Whatever your reason for greening, the question is the best way to go about it. This white paper will look at some best practices as they relate to print marketing.

First, it's important to understand that there are many components to greening. For printers and marketers, it means looking beyond recycled paper and environmental certifications and considering a wide variety of factors along the entire product lifecycle.

Among them:

- **Design** (reducing weight and bulk of print jobs, optimizing product dimensions to maximize use of the sheet)
- **Materials sourcing** (choices in paper, ink, coatings)
- **Prepress** (eliminating film and other consumables)
- **Print process** (offset, toner-based digital, inkjet)
- **Process controls** (press chemistry, wastewater, emissions reduction)
- **Energy use** (volume, as well as use of alternative sources)
- **Print volumes** (reductions using targeting and personalization)
- Impact on the **solid waste stream** and contribution to landfill waste
- Vendor **environmental certifications**

But greening isn't restricted to the production process. There are softer issues, such as chain of custody (CoC), including the legal sourcing of materials and the impact on indigenous peoples (a big issue in many forestry certifications). There is also supplier commitment to broader sustainable initiatives. For example, for marketers, do your printers use sustainable practices in other areas of their businesses (use of solar power, internal recycling, or energy reduction programs)?

This is why there is no official standard for "green" printing or marketing (although there have been attempts at creating one, such as those set by the Sustainable Green Print Partnership). There are many factors that come into play, and it's impossible to accommodate them all. That's why the first best practice is to focus on the factors you *can* control and the net benefits of various options within your project goals and budget.



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Bottom-line advantages

The good news is, greening is not all about the warm and fuzzies of helping the planet. There are real bottom-line benefits, too. For printers, these include cost savings like those from reductions in energy use and management of solid waste. For marketers, they include reduced print and mail costs, brand positioning as a “green” company, increased customer loyalty, and more.

Let's look at some of the best practices for greening print marketing.

Best practices you can really implement

When we think of greening print marketing, we often think about the production of printed pieces—the printing process, consumables, and recycling. But greening print marketing needs to be seen holistically, starting with the fiber harvesting or consumables mining process, moving to the design of the printed piece and vendor commitments to sustainability, and extending all the way to the final disposal or recycling of the product.

In other words, we have to look at greening as a lifecycle, not as a set of individual points. This is important because there is a lot of uncertainty in the issue of sustainability. Which is greener? Print or e-mail? Lifecycle analysis is, frankly, inconclusive. Which is greener? Recycled paper or tree-free paper? Nobody knows. Without knowing the environmental impact of every component along the lifecycle, we cannot make fully informed comparisons.

Thus, we look at greening print marketing in terms of those things that are conclusive and that we *can* control.

1. Start with design.

Design printed pieces in ways that minimize environmental impact. This means setting your dimensions so that you maximize the use of space on the press sheet and using local vendors and sourcing local materials to minimize the carbon footprint from shipping. To get ideas, you may want to attend conferences such as Greener by Design and look at initiatives like Design Can Change, which helps businesses green their print marketing from the very earliest concept and planning stages.

2. Select consumables wisely.

The basic idea here is to control what you can control. Look for suppliers and order consumables with environmental certifications to ensure that your consumables are properly sourced and handled in a sustainable way. In addition to including recycled content in your paper, give priority to low-VOC, water-, and vegetable-based inks, coatings, and laminates. Look for adhesives and