

Welcome to Verdigris!

Verdigris is a project to provide the graphic arts, printing and publishing industries, as well as print buyers, with information about print media's environmental impact. This is the first of a regular series of articles looking at all things green for printers. If you're looking for ideas about how to improve your carbon footprint or want to understand more about what other printers are doing, Verdigris is on your side.

So why do we need to raise the visibility of environmental concerns in this industry? Of course there is a tremendous amount of work being done throughout the industry: Kodak has its Green Knights, HP has introduced an alternative to solvent-based inks with its aqueous latex ink, while Agfa and Fujifilm are working hard to get

This article is part of the Verdigris series of stories about understanding the environmental impact of print. The Verdigris project is supported by Agfa Graphics, Canon Europe, Digital Dots, drupa, Fujifilm, HP, Ricoh and Screen.

processless plates adopted throughout markets. These are all excellent initiatives, but we don't have many facts about the difference it all makes to printers. Nor do we have much of an idea about the environmental impact of specific media products, such as a newspaper or a website. It is difficult to know just how print compares to digital media; there simply isn't enough data to substantiate claims about print's impact on the environment.

Currently the printing industry's green credentials are limited to the efforts of pioneering suppliers and printing companies. Such organisations have long since recognised the importance of minimising our carbon footprints, because shareholders and individual directors believe in looking after the environment and because it's good for their image. But this goes further than fact gathering and keeping our own houses in order. At a time when the whole world seems to be getting caught up with being green, the printing industry has come in for some heavy criticism because it uses paper, destroying trees and wrecking forests in the process. But in Europe

at least, the paper industry doesn't cut down trees to make its product; it plants trees in order to do so. This rather nuanced distinction is important but often overlooked.

We know that printing is not just about dead trees, polluting paper production, greasy ink and stinking landfills. But unfortunately this is still the received wisdom for all too many people, particularly wireheads who believe that the Web is the ultimate media environment. Anyone who loves print is reluctant to believe the print-phobic eco-warriors are right, but how do we really know this, beyond subjective instinct and habit? It is, of course, impossible to know, because there simply aren't enough facts to substantiate a claim that print is a sustainable medium and, indeed, that it may well be the most eco-friendly of them all.

Around the world and in addition to supplier and printing company initiatives, there are many small organisations doing their bit to offer advice to printers who want to improve their carbon footprint. For example, in the United States there is an organisation specifically dedicated to helping printers, publishers and packaging producers to be less environmentally hostile. This is quite ironic given the US's quite abysmal response to global warming and climate change, and the bulk of its citizens' ingrained dedication to excessive consumption and profligate waste production. Nonetheless, the PNEAC (Printers' National Environmental Assistance Centre) helps printers with standards compliance, pollution prevention and training, through various resources and information archives to help answer common questions. In the UK the Carbon Trust is an organisation set up by the British government to respond to climate change. It offers free energy surveys to companies throughout industry with an energy bill of more than £50,000 year. In Sweden the Respect Climate organisation is a division of a consulting company, Respect, which helps businesses with corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The objective for organisations such as the Carbon Trust and the myriad consultancy firms specialising in CSR is to provide generic advice, but it is not industry specific. The PNEAC is a resource for American printers, and similar domestic organisations, also offer

advice at local levels. However the international printing industry needs something more, perhaps something championed by national associations working together, perhaps by press or paper manufacturers. By whatever means, a coordinated response and raised awareness of print's sustainability will have a long term benefit for the industry, not least because it could well be about the survival of the medium.

As corporations strive to demonstrate proactive CSR, they will also expect to be able to demonstrate their sustainability throughout their supply chains and for all aspects of their business, including media communications. If the view that doing away with paper-based communications is perceived as a good thing for the planet, the printing industry will indeed be doomed. So a positive carbon message is also about building a sustainable future for the printing industry, and providing good print citizens with a competitive advantage over other media and over competing print producers who may not be so concerned about the environment and sustainability. This could encourage further uptake of sustainable print production and a reduction in the industry's overall carbon footprint.

The Eco Story So Far

There are some slow and distant rumblings of progress. The paper industry has the Forest Stewardship Council, which oversees the responsible management of forests worldwide. Its certification mark on print confirms that the paper has been produced using raw materials from sustainable sources. Europe has an Emissions Trading Scheme which provides permits allowing energy intensive companies to emit carbon dioxide. These permits can be bought and sold, so those companies who reduce emissions effectively have an asset they can trade with companies who don't have sufficient permits for the emissions they want to make. If companies do produce more emissions than they are allowed, a fine of €40 is levied for each excess tonne. This is what carbon trading is all about, and the pulp, paper, printing and publishing industries are included in the Emissions Trading Scheme, which covers around 40% of the European Union's emissions. The scheme has however come under fire because it creates an asset that can be exploited for

profit, and this is not what carbon neutrality should be about, at least not directly.

Green printing and sustainability are about more than cutting down carbon emissions. Minimising waste and energy use cuts costs, so it should be the goal of any business or individual who cares about the state of the world we are creating for future generations. This somewhat simplistic view contributes to some extent to sustainability. However, caring for the planet and fulfilling our wider commitment to social responsibility must extend to all areas of corporate activities. Companies will not only need to tout their ISO14001 and FSC accreditations, but will also need to demonstrate that goods and services are produced benevolently. And this will include third party supply chains. Corporations which use a lot of print and packaging to support their core business will need to be able to demonstrate that those supply lines too are sustainable.

Over the next few months we will be covering workflows and how printers and publishers are planning investments towards a greener future. Verdigris is about developing ideas to help print improve its environmental impact and its image in a fast changing media landscape. It's about helping media customers understand more about their investment choices. Let us know (lb@digitaldots.org), if you come across anything you think we should see, or if you've opinions on green issues you would like us to share with readers.

– Laurel Brunner

