# Sustainable standard

**It can be hard for individual printers to develop a measurable environmental policy but the forthcoming ISO 16759 should address this.**

For a growing number of printers, sustainability and working to protect the environment are becoming more important. This is not just because many printing company owners believe in helping the industry to be more environmentally friendly, but also because their customers are putting them under increased pressure to do so. Print buyers want to know that their media investments can make some contribution to their own corporate sustainability message. This matters more and more to their employees, to their shareholders and of course to consumers.

The problem is that running your business in an environmentally friendly way is not as simple as it sounds. Nor is it easy to explain to customers how sustainability initiatives at your company translate into a positive message for your customers' stakeholders. Unlike other areas of the graphic arts, there are as yet no international standards to guide printers through the specifics of carbon impact reduction. Many printers are compliant with ISO 14001, but this is a management standard designed to help the business in general to reduce its environmental impact. ISO 14001 does not provide the means of measuring the carbon footprint of individual products and it is not specific to the printing industry.

## What Printers Want

Printing company owners need help to adopt new ways of doing business and this is what international standards should provide. When it comes to sustainability, printers and their customers want a formal framework against which print media products can be measured and the results certified. Printers want to be able to confirm to their customers that the carbon footprint for the print they produce complies with an international standard. And print buyers want the assurance that a printer's

calculations are transparent, clear and comparable across sectors and geographies. They want fact-based assurance that print media are indeed sustainable.

So far, no such standard or universal tool for data collection has existed. Sustainability messaging and environmental impact improvements have come down to the initiatives of printing industry associations willing to invest in the development of their members' knowledge and in carbon calculators. Industry associations around the world are working hard to improve print's environmental impact. Their collective goal is to help printing companies reduce the carbon footprints of their businesses and of individual print media products.

But without an external target accessible to all printers, it is clearly impossible for print as a whole to position itself in universal terms of sustainability. Without an

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international standard, the printing industry has no means of capturing, reporting and tracking its constantly improving carbon footprint. This is why ISO 16759 for calculating the carbon footprint of print media is so important.

## ISO 16759

This international standard is expected to be complete in 2012 and is written for prepress, printers, print service providers, content publishers and other media companies. ISO 16759 provides a framework for carbon calculators, so that tools can be created specific to a given industry sector or geographical region. As long as the tools follow the framework methodology outlined in ISO 16759, the printing industry will have the means to track its international progress in reducing the carbon footprints of different media products, such as newspapers, magazines or books.

ISO 16759 is relevant for all sectors of print and for all geographies, so print buyers worldwide will be able to use ISO 16759-compliant carbon calculators to compare the footprints of different production processes. They will be able to evaluate, for instance, the carbon footprint of a particular print media product printed direct to a digital press, to a digital direct imaging press



*International standards are the walls guarding process consistency, transparency and repeatability, for industry progress is impossible to achieve without them.*

or to a conventional press. ISO 16759 has the flexibility to reflect the diversity of print media, regardless of production method, workflow, run lengths, media types, inks, coatings and finishing options.

## Working with ISO 16759

The standard has considerable flexibility in application. Users of ISO 16759 can define the basis on which they are calculating the carbon footprint of the print media product. The scope to write a specific definition of a print media product means that ISO 16759 can meet the needs of a constantly evolving industry, where product categories and types are changing as output and finishing technologies evolve. The print media product under study could be a 240-page perfect bound A4 book, a 16-page A3 newspaper section or a B2 sheet full of business cards.

Using an inventory of the various production processes used to produce a given piece of print, the user of an ISO 16759-compliant carbon calculator can then work out the carbon impact for each stage in the workflow.

This includes substrates, inks and other consumables used, for instance printing plates, and bindery materials. It can also include transport, laminating and ambient environment factors such as lighting or heat. The goal is to calculate a carbon footprint value for each stage in the inventory. This also provides the basis for comparison of the carbon footprints of different media products.

## ISO 16759 & ISO 14067

ISO 16759 is an implementation of ISO 14067, which provides a framework methodology for measuring the carbon footprint of products and services. The ISO 14067 standard was not written with any specific industrial sector in mind, and printing is the first industry to develop its own implementation.

ISO 16759 is expected to help demonstrate the extensive progress that has been made in the printing and publishing industries over the last 20 years to reduce their environmental impacts. For the most part these efforts have been incidental to the larger effort to reduce cost, improve efficiency and enhance competitiveness, particularly in recent years when print has faced stiff competition from electronic media.

## Sustainable Print

Digital production tools, extensive consolidation and efficiency gains in the paper industry, and substantially improved forestry management worldwide, combine to make the printed word the most sustainable media of all. Print is the only media that captures and stores carbon, that can be recycled multiple times, and for which end of life is essentially benign.

This all adds up to an extremely positive message for media professionals and producers and, of course, for their customers. And it is extremely good news for the future of print. ISO 16759 provides an international framework within which industry has the flexibility and scope to create sector-specific carbon calculators.

## ISO 16579 in Action

It is hoped that ISO 16759 will encourage media buyers and consumers to think more carefully about how

they invest in and use media. ISO 16759 provides the means of quantifying, communicating and reporting the carbon footprint of print media, so it is a means of facilitating the continuous monitoring of print's carbon footprint. This will lead to enhanced credibility of the printing industry's efforts to manage and reduce its carbon footprint and that of the raw materials used. The carbon footprint of various print media products can be benchmarked against similar products so that over time data will be available to assist media buyers in making media investment decisions. This data will also provide factual support for messages of print's sustainability.

Compliant tools provide print media buyers and consumers with a means of tracking the reduction in GHG emissions for different product types over time. This performance tracking will provide the printing industry with considerable data with which to defend itself against accusations of environmental hostility, particularly when compared with digital media. ISO 16759 can even be used to calculate the carbon footprint of non-print media, but that is another story.

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