

# Misconceptions and Myths of Green

**This is the first of a two part Verdigris article examining some of the myths and misconceptions preventing printing companies from adopting a more aggressive environmental strategy for their businesses.**

There are still many printing business owners who believe that leading the company towards a more environmentally friendly direction is expensive and difficult. Printers want to improve the environmental footprint of their

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businesses, but they may hesitate for fear of unknown costs and consequences. They and their customers can be discouraged by a range of misconceptions and myths relating to print's green agenda.

Some of these concern problems beyond the control of most printers and print buyers, however there are some misconceptions and myths that are less difficult to dispel. We look at the myths in the second part of this article, and deal here with some of the most common misconceptions.

## **Misconception 1 - A green agenda will cost too much for my business.**

Cost is the most frequently cited reason for a printing company to avoid taking steps to reduce its environmental impact. However, cost doesn't need to be a barrier. Of course, there can be costs associated with, for example, installing solar panels or insulation. However, most investment into green initiatives should eventually generate a return.

For companies who are not in a position to make capital investments, encouraging staff to turn off unnecessary lights, air conditioning and heating will at least help cut energy bills. Setting up recycling bins in offices, reception areas and canteens, and improving production workflows to reduce waste are also obvious aids to a reduced environmental footprint. The cost of such efforts is trivial and easily affordable. Indeed they may even save the business money.

## **Misconception 2 - A green agenda is too complex for me to implement.**

Complex systems can begin with a simple idea or target, perhaps something as basic as a ten percent reduction in energy bills, or reduced fuel consumption for delivery vehicles. Deciding what you want from an environmental impact strategy is the starting point for your environmental policy, and this process is not complex.

Establishing the policy, liaising with customers, briefing staff are all relatively simple steps you can take to improve your environmental impact. You might find the thought of this complex or even overwhelming, but once you know where to start ideas for implementation will come in accordance with your business values and goals. It might perhaps be difficult to get started, but the process is as complex or as easy as you want to make it.

## **Misconception 3 - A green agenda is unnecessary for the printing industry.**

Ignoring the market's interest in the environment will ultimately undermine a printing company's success, whether it's a newspaper printer or a producer of sign and display work. Giving up on print in the belief that it is doomed to disappear is a dismal and shortsighted response to market changes, and especially to the rise of digital media. Print and digital media are mutually supportive and print will be around for as long as it provides a value addition to other media. Consider the success of print titles such as Simon's Cat ([www.simonscat.com](http://www.simonscat.com)) which started life as a YouTube video or digitally printed photobooks ordered via the Web. Both

of these examples demonstrate how digital and print media can be mutual beneficial.

Whether one accepts the climate change reality or not, all industries must understand that their activities contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. The printing industry needs a green agenda, if it is to take its environmental responsibilities seriously and wants to be in line with the concerns of its markets and those of consumers. Printers should drive and participate the conversation, rather than be subject to the whims of the wider market.

### **Misconception 4 - A green agenda will slow down my production.**

Adopting a green agenda does not mean less efficient production. There is no reason why prepress and press technologies need to be slower in order to reduce their impact on the environment. In fact a more efficient and fully automated prepress workflow is likely to be faster and produce less waste on press. The time taken to automate a workflow or improve colour management should be treated as time spent in improving cost effectiveness, production capacity and profitability. This is part of managing the business and reduced environmental impact is a positive side-effect.

### **Misconception 5 - A green agenda will make my business less efficient.**

Removing inefficiencies is a key goal for any successful business so, of course, a green policy that makes the business less efficient is worse than useless. However green initiatives do not have to make processes inefficient. The objective is to develop and adapt an environmental policy that improves production and management processes to be more efficient and less wasteful. This can be achieved through such initiatives as optimising delivery schedules and routes, and ensuring that all machines and digital systems are fully functional.

### **Misconception 6 - Reducing my company's environmental impact is pointless.**

For many years print has had a positive and relevant story to tell when it comes to the environment. Paper is

a sustainable resource, based on a harvested crop that is continually replenished. It can also be recycled up to six times.

A PhD thesis published earlier this year by Phil Lawrence, of Sydney Australia's University of Technology, confirms that printing has indeed made huge progress when it comes to the environment. He reports that quantitative and qualitative research showed a substantial reduction in the printing industry's environmental impact over the



*Efforts to improve cost effectiveness generally have a positive impact on the environment, from the design of airliners to digital presses. Cost savings drive business improvements, and environmental impact improvements.*

last 20 years: "Printers have been forced to adopt new and highly efficient technologies into their businesses ... the printing industry has become about 97% less environmentally damaging than [it] was in the Kyoto base year 1990". These efforts have been made in the interests of efficiency and cost reductions, but the knock-on effect has been an extremely positive environmental impact. And printers continue to work to reduce their impacts across all sectors so environmental efforts are not pointless.

### **Misconception 7 - Adopting a green strategy is a waste of money.**

Reducing waste is what a green policy is always about and that includes saving costs rather than wasting money. In any enterprise however, money is wasted if it is invested without establishing a means of return or of measuring that return. From human resources to



*There are other mountains harder to climb than coming up with an environmental policy for your business.*

capital equipment, business investments must be made wisely, with risks managed and implementation fully resourced. An environmental policy is no different and requires management to ensure a good result. Low cost initiatives, such as organising spaces for optimum energy use, or deals to sell waste materials are unlikely to be a waste of money. The waste comes when investments of time or equipment are not fully leveraged.

### **Misconception 8 - Efforts to reduce the environmental impact of print are unlikely to have an impact.**

As Phil Lawrence's work has shown, there is a very high likelihood that environmental efforts will have an impact for the industry as a whole. More interesting for print company owners is the impact a green effort will have on their businesses. The impact is directly related to the commitment of the company to the policy and to communicating it effectively to customers. If this is well done, there will definitely be an impact!

### **Misconception 9 - Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is not print's problem.**

The worldwide rise in greenhouse gas emissions is every business owner's problem, since it is of concern to consumers and governments. The printing industry accepts this, which is why so many companies have developed green business strategies. Hiding behind the press is no way to face the environmental threats all industry must face. Managing environmental impact is every business's responsibility, and ultimately consumers expect responsibility from their service providers. This reaches to all links in media supply chains, from prepress to distribution.

In part two of this story we look at some of the myths surrounding environmental initiatives in the printing industry.

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