

Being green

We talked to three printers that have put their environmental policy at the heart of their business.

Printing, or at least the kind of printing that requires an offset or digital press, is an industrial process. For many people that word industrial means waste and pollution. But those of us working within the print industry know that this isn't always the case, and that printing is capable of being a green and sustainable activity. But there can be a world of difference between the theory and the practice so we talked with three printers in the UK that have chosen to put their environmental policy at the forefront of their business. Their stories provide excellent examples of the types of steps printers in other geographies might take towards more environmentally friendly production. More importantly they explain what this could mean for the business.

Only a few years ago this might have been unusual but nowadays many printers do have environmental policies in place. David Pealing, sales director for Severnprint in Gloucester, UK, says this is good news if they are genuinely interested but questions whether some companies are just doing it as a marketing exercise. He says: "People assume that you are a green printer if you have ISO 14001 but you just have to have an action plan and it doesn't require you to be at a high level when you start."

He adds that customers do assume that all printers have now implemented environmental policies and are less willing to pay a premium to ensure a green approach to their printing.

Severnprint operates its own environmental scheme that it calls Sylvapack. Pealing explains: "We try to reward customers that consider the environment when they place an order and if they choose a green paper and don't do anything to make it difficult to recycle, we then donate money to Tree Aid." This money is used to help communities in Ghana and Mali establish tree-based economies, such as selling nuts from the trees.

Severnprint has raised around £20,000 in the last 11 years.

Some people have questioned whether recycling paper is the best way to cut its carbon footprint but Pealing believes that there's still a place for recycled papers,

This article is part of the Verdigris series of stories about understanding the environmental impact of print. The Verdigris project is supported by founder members Agfa Graphics, Canon Europe, Digital Dots, drupa, HP, Ricoh and Unity Publishing, and associate members EFI, Pragati, and Xeikon.

saying: "I think now that most paper manufacturers agree that it's more energy efficient to recycle paper than to start again from scratch and now that the papers are deinked and not bleached so much I hardly ever hear the argument that it's better to use a new paper and throw the old away."

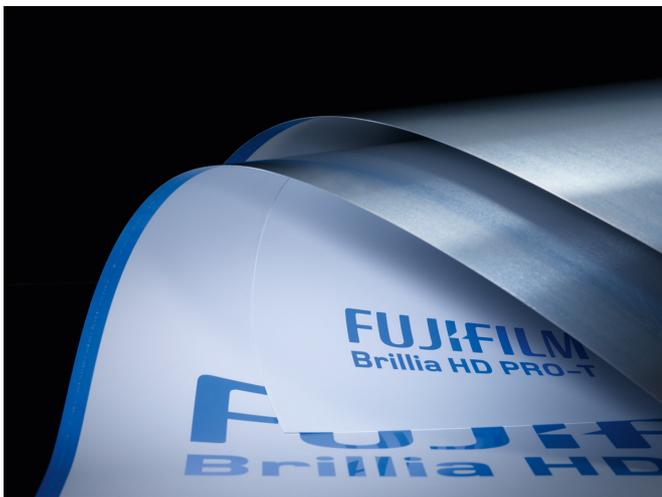
Severnprint itself has been looking at environmental issues since 1997. It started when a customer asked for a job to be printed on recycled paper. Pealing explains: "We managed to find a recycled paper that we could print onto, and built up a list of papers but it seemed a little bit wrong just to look at recycled paper so we looked at things like waste recycling"

Some years ago Severnprint signed up with Ecotricity, a supplier operates its own wind and solar farms to generate green electricity, and which back in 1997 had just started operations close by to the print factory in Stroud, UK. By this time Severnprint had started buying electricity wholesale, which enabled it to deal directly with Ecotricity and to have the energy piped directly to Severnprint without it going via the British National grid.

Severnprint has also managed to eliminate alcohol from its presses. Generally IPA is added to the fountain solution to break down the surface tension on a plate but because it evaporates at a very low temperature operators have to keep adding IPA to the press, with the result that

the printing industry as a whole has emitted an awful lot of IPA into the environment. The alternative is to use a surfactant, which also helps to break the surface tension, but is only really effective if the presses are kept extremely clean. Peeling says that this makes the press more difficult to operate because it must be kept clean and ink can build up on the non-image area of the plate.

Severnprint has switched to process-less plates, using Fujifilm's Pro-T, which has considerably cut down on the amount of water being used. Peeling explains: "We



Process-less plates, such as Fujifilm's Brillia Pro-T, do away with the need for chemicals and cut down the cost of specialist waste disposal.

use to use chemicals to wash the plates which would contaminate the water which then had to be sent as special waste but that's all been eliminated now. We save about 400,000 litres of water a year."

Another area is transport, with the company running Toyota's hybrid Prius cars, and with one director even using a rechargeable motorbike to travel to work.

Cambrian Printers

Cambrian Printers takes its environmental lead directly from its chairman Robert Read, who is keen to preserve the pristine nature of its Welsh surroundings. Doug Gray, managing director of Cambrian Printers, says that this has become the major ethos of the business: "When we look at equipment, we look at the environmental impact of running that kit. We carry out duty of care visits to all of our suppliers. We monitor the life of our equipment

and where it goes so that we have a chain of custody. We get our work force to segregate all of our waste to various streams and have reduced the amount we send to landfill by 25 percent in the last two years."

Cambrian is careful to only use FSC-certified paper and will carry out duty of care visits not only to the suppliers but also to the mills themselves. Some of the paper is recycled, both fully and partly, but Cambrian is looking into how much energy is used to deink and recycle the papers and how helpful this really is. However, the company has monitored traffic in and out of its site and altered its paper ordering patterns to reduce the number of deliveries.

Cambrian monitors the electricity used across the plant, dividing this by the amount of paper used to get a measure of the carbon footprint of each ton of paper produced. The company has looked at green electricity tariffs but questioned whether or not they were actually getting the green electricity it was paying for. Gray says: "We have looked at our own windmills but have been told we are in the wrong place to get enough consistent wind to satisfy our needs." Cambrian has also asked the Carbon Trust, a British NGO, to assess the possibility of solar panels but so far this is unlikely to produce enough electricity. He adds: "We are exploring ground source heating, possibly for our paper store."

Gray is adamant that every environmentally friendly initiative also has to contribute to the bottom line, adding that it's getting harder to justify some steps given how much the company has already achieved.

Gray points out that many customers use Cambrian to boost their own green credentials but says that it's less important now, partly because many printers have improved their environmental policies, and partly because customers often buy on price due to the current economic conditions.

Formara Print

Formara print in Southend, Essex, UK is another early champion of environmental printing. Managing director Freddie Kienzler explains: "It just felt that it was the



Freddie Kienzler, managing director of Formara Print, says: "It's not difficult to run an environmentally sound business and lots of printers have proven that you can do that."

right thing to do. Printers used to drop all sorts of things down the sink but you can't do that, it's not right. Also, as we have become a much more consumer-orientated society there are finite resources on the earth and we have a moral responsibility to look after them. It's not difficult to run an environmentally sound business and lots of printers have proven that you can do that."

Kienzler says that the key to maintaining environmental standards is to make it commonplace: "Train everybody and it becomes part of your working practice."

He says that some environmentally friendly measures do cost more to implement but that there can be benefits to offset this such as recycling paper and aluminium

plates. Kienzler says: "Over the years we have increased the amount we recycle. We have cut the amount going to landfill by about 75 percent as our suppliers get better in their recycling. More and more of the waste elements of the machines are taken back by the suppliers for recycling. Our air conditioning and heating have become much more efficient. We have changed our plates for waterless ones and that makes a huge change to what we are trying to dispose of because the less we are having to recycle the less it costs us. Machines use less electricity and generate less heat."

Kienzler says that it's not realistic to charge a premium based on having an environmental policy. "All the research that was done was that customers do say they like environmental suppliers but when it comes down to it price was top of the list." However Kienzler goes onto say that some customers do want to use the environmental credentials of their printer to demonstrate that they have an environmental chain of supply.

In conclusion, some obvious common themes emerge from talking to these companies. Firstly, an environmental policy is not a matter of ticking boxes to a written standard, but rather it is something that must be ingrained into the DNA of that company, right down to the way that each process is carried out, something that is not always reflected in the various standards. It's also obvious that, despite what they might say, most customers don't really understand enough to check on how committed a printer might be to implementing an environmental policy, or how this might benefit them and that price is still the driving factor in winning jobs. But it's equally obvious that by reducing waste and by recycling more these companies have made their environmental stance work for them.

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