

PRINT SERVICE PROVIDERS

ARE BUILDING THEIR SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS



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Companies wanting to learn about the environment and print's impact on it have ample choice to meet their carbon footprinting needs.

Almost every day another consulting group states that they can help printing companies become more environmentally accountable. Offerings range from some sort of sustainability scheme or service, to overpriced environmental consulting. There is a bandwagon cranking up and lots of people are in line waiting to board.

It is all very entrepreneurial and innovative. And it is great that new businesses and services are springing up to support the graphics industry as it transitions to a more sustainable future.

Print Service Providers (PSPs) are building their sustainability credentials because it is what print buyers expect. If a printing company has credentials, such as certification to ISO 14001 (Environmental management systems), they increase their chances of getting the work. If they have got an environmental policy of some description, that is brownie points too. But the PSPs who haven't a clue how to have the sustainability conversation, provide an excellent opportunity for organisations offering environmental and sustainability advice to do a little business.

Caveat emptor, because it isn't always necessary for PSPs to bring in outside advisors because sustainability is about common sense. The basics all printers, especially digital printers, should keep in mind when it comes to their sustainability messaging are just that: basic. Print has a one time carbon footprint during production, unlike electronic media which needs energy to view.

Print also has the quality and experiential edge, in that is unmatched on screen and it can be touched and felt. It makes a great companion to digital campaigns, acting as a catalyst for online actions, for instance through QR codes. Print is also based on a sustainable resource: paper can be recycled up to seven times. Recycling and reprocessing plants are established and functioning and the resource, trees, is renewable. The rare earth metals and plastics based on petrochemicals and used in electronic devices, are not.

Consultants can help printing companies with carbon footprinting their businesses and the print they produce. Carbon calculators for print abound but they mostly come with strings attached: certifications that cost, sharing the data and signing up for a membership. Creating communities is what the online and live business worlds are all about. However, the data sharing dimension is about data not community and developing priority data sets is another new business the sustainability industry is developing.

Aggregate data can only be trusted if it is based on a common model. Fortunately, there is a calculator for measuring a print run's carbon footprint: ISO 16759 lays out the requirements for quantifying and communicating the carbon footprint of print media products. PSPs who want to create accurate and trustworthy carbon footprinting data should start with this document. Or if working with an external organisation, check that their calculator is based on the standard. Within the graphics industry only Ricoh and Heidelberg have developed certified calculators based on ISO 16759.

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