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BEST PRACTICES FOR GREENING PRINT MARKETING

These days, it's all about going green. For some people, it's a personal and philosophical commitment. For others, it's important for their brand image. Whatever your reason for greening, the question is the best way to go about it. This white paper will look at some easy best practices as they relate to print marketing.

First, it's important to understand that there are many components to greening. You don't have to be 100% carbon-neutral or using all soy and vegetable-based inks and coatings to improve the greenness of your marketing. Taking even small steps in one or two areas is a positive step forward.

Of course, there are some obvious choices like using recycled paper and specifying paper with environmental certifications, but there are a wide variety of factors along the entire print marketing lifecycle you can consider, as well. Even small changes in any one of these areas is a good thing.

Among them:

- *Design (reducing weight and bulk of print jobs, optimizing product dimensions to maximize use of the sheet)*

- *Materials sourcing (choices in paper, ink, coatings)*

- *Prepress (eliminating film and other consumables)*

- *Print process (offset, toner-based digital, inkjet)*

- *Process controls (press chemistry, wastewater, emissions reduction)*

- *Energy use (volume, as well as use of alternative sources)*

- *Print volumes (reductions using targeting and personalization)*

- *Impact on the solid waste stream and contribution to landfill waste*

- *Vendor environmental certifications*

There are softer issues to consider as well. Among them is chain of custody (CoC) for paper, which includes not just harvesting of the fiber, but the impact on indigenous peoples. (This is a big issue in many forestry certifications.) There is also supplier commitment to broader sustainable initiatives. For example, for marketers, do your printers use sustainable practices in other areas of their businesses (use of solar power, internal recycling, or energy reduction programs)?

This is why there is no official standard for "green" printing or marketing (although there have been attempts at creating one, such as those set by the Sustainable Green Print Partnership). There are many factors that come into play, and it's impossible to accommodate them all. That's why the first best practice is to focus on the factors you can control and the net benefits of various options within your goals and budget.

Greening is not all about the warm and fuzzies of helping the planet, either. There are real bottom-line financial benefits, too. For printers, these include cost savings like those from reductions in energy use and management of solid waste. For marketers, they include reduced print and mail costs, brand positioning as a "green" company, increased customer loyalty, and more. (One printer, for example, working with its state Manufacturing Extension Program, invested $200,000 in new products and processes, but saved $500,000 as a result.)

Let's look at some of the best practices for greening print marketing.

BEST PRACTICES YOU CAN REALLY IMPLEMENT

When we think of greening print marketing, we often think about the production of printed pieces—the printing process, consumables, and recycling. But greening print marketing can be seen holistically, starting with the fiber harvesting, moving to the design of the printed piece and vendor commitments to sustainability, and extending all the way to the final disposal or recycling of the product.

In other words, we should look at greening as a lifecycle, not as a set of individual points. This is important because there is a lot of uncertainty in the issue of sustainability. Which is greener? Print or e-mail? Lifecycle analysis is, frankly, inconclusive. Which is greener? Recycled paper or tree-free paper? Once again, nobody knows. Without knowing the environmental impact of every component along the lifecycle, we cannot make fully informed comparisons.

Thus, we look at greening print marketing in terms of those things that are conclusive and that we can control.

1. Start with structural design.

Design the structural portion of your printed pieces in ways that minimize environmental impact. For example, set your dimensions so that you maximize the use of space on the press sheet and use local vendors and materials as much as possible to minimize the environmental footprint from transportation. Reduce or eliminate unnecessary packaging, and reduce substrate thickness where possible without compromising strength or quality. Consider using biodegradable packing materials, then educate end users about composting them so they don't end up in a landfill alongside the non-biodegradable ones.

To get ideas, you may want to attend conferences such as Greener by Design and look at initiatives like Design Can Change, which help businesses green their print marketing from the very earliest concept and planning stages.

2. Select consumables wisely.

The basic idea here is to control what you can control. Look for suppliers and order consumables with environmental certifications to ensure that your consumables are properly sourced and handled in a sustainable way.

In addition to including recycled content and elimination of chlorine (Totally Chlorine Free or Process Chlorine Free) in your paper (Print Buyers Online recommends at least 25% post-consumer waste for coated paper stock and 50% post-consumer waste for uncoated paper stock), give priority to low-VOC, water-, and vegetable-based inks, coatings, and laminates. Look for adhesives and coatings that are recyclable without requiring a special waste stream. Inks can be heavy-metal-free, as well.

There are trade-offs for many of these benefits, however. UV coatings, for example, are low-VOC but require higher energy use. They may also be technically recyclable, but recycling is more difficult and requires a separate waste stream (without which the environmental benefits disappear).

3. Keep your database up to date.

Why should you print mail that isn't going to be delivered? Or that uses the wrong name of the addressee so the mail is thrown away? Not only are you wasting money, but you are being environmentally wasteful.

Make your database efforts both backward-looking and forward-looking. In your existing database, make sure you're running addresses through NCOA on a regular basis. Cull out duplicates (and triplicates) so you aren't sending multiple pieces to the same address. Looking forward, make it easy for people to update their addresses on invoices and other customer communications. Add forms to your website that enable people to update their contact information. One online community used the green angle to do just this — asking people to update their information to help the community "green" and prevent unnecessary landfill waste. Smart!

4. Choose your channels wisely.

Email may not be greener than print, and print may not be greener than email, but you don't need to send either unnecessarily. Ask your customers which channel(s) they prefer for invoicing and marketing, then use it. Likewise, when they respond to your campaigns, track which channel they use, then learn from their behavior. For example, if a customer does not respond to email, but does respond by direct mail, contact them by direct mail first. Or if they don't respond to direct mail, but they do respond to email, then start by contacting them by email first.

By matching the right channel to your customer's preference, you earn customer appreciation and reduce your carbon footprint, too.

5. Use targeting and personalization to reduce print volumes.

Switch from mass mailings to smaller, more targeted and personalized mailings. Just as you don't want to mail envelopes or postcards that never make it to their intended destinations, you don't want to mail packets of irrelevant information to people who will never read it. If you have an offer for a high-priced product, don't send it to customers who've never spent more than a few dollars with you. If you have a customer who only buys from your catalog at Christmas, don't send them catalogs in the spring, summer, and fall. If your customer only has Insurance Policy A with you, don't send packets of information covering every policy you offer.

Some people call it "right sizing" your communications. We might also call it unintentional greening.

J.C. Penney implemented unintentional greening when it discontinued its Big Book in favor of smaller, more targeted catalogs. The retailer replaced the hefty volume with slimmer, more targeted specialty catalogs with content targeted based on the recipient's past purchases. J. C. Penney didn't simply reduce its print volumes. It made smarter use of print. It reduced its catalog paper use by 25% - 30% while increasing relevance to its customers. Its slimmer catalogs also used fewer consumables and less energy to print and transport, further reducing the catalogs' environmental footprint. (One can imagine that J.C. Penney saved on postage costs, too.)

6. Look for the deeper environmental commitment.

Whatever print process you choose (offset, digital), give priority to vendors with sustainability plans. Printers with environmental certifications (including the recently developed Green Supplier Network) are a good place to start. Even if the printer does not have a formal certification, work with those that document their goals and accomplishments and that have taken real, measurable steps that they can quantify and discuss with you.

Digital production offers many benefits, but don't be a digital snob, either. Offset printers can also make environmental process improvements, such as switching to safer press chemistry, staggering production to minimize energy use, use of purposeful building design (such as LEED), sourcing renewable energy policies (wind, solar, hydro, biomass, landfill gas), and establishing recycling programs, among many others.

7. Look for independent verification.

There are lots of ways for vendors to move toward a more environmentally responsible model. However they choose to implement that, you want to work with those who can quantify their efforts and not just make a lot of fancy claims. If possible, work with companies that keep records (whether they have official environmental certifications or not) and have those records independently verified.

8. Measure the benefits according to net impact.

Remember that greening requires a holistic approach. You might feel that you are forced to compromise in one area, but in total, the sum of the parts may end up being greener on the whole. Work with your suppliers at the outset to get suggestions and tap into their expertise in this area. Prioritize and focus on things within your control.

9. Develop a questionnaire.

Begin to document the areas of importance to you and create a questionnaire for your suppliers. Start by asking if they have an environmental program, and if so, how they handle compliance issues. Ask what environmental certifications they have. Ask how they handle recycling and waste disposal, whether they use renewable energy, and if so, from what source.

Don't just take a company's word that they are green. Make sure they can provide back up to their claims with policies, certifications, and documentation that shows their commitment and progress.

SMARTER DATABASES EQUAL GREENER PRINTING

One way to green your print marketing is to make smarter use of your databases. By selecting out a portion of your customer list and creating more customized or even fully personalized campaigns, you can produce campaigns that are both more effective and green your marketing at the same time.

For example, if you send to 20% of your database, you just reduced your environmental impact by 80%. At the same time, if the personalization is done right, you are actually getting a better return.

Take the example of Club ABC Tours. In the past, the company mailed static 30- to 72-page catalogs to hundreds of thousands of people. Then it tried something new — personalization.

The company selected out 20,000 high-value targets (chosen based on age demographic, income, home ownership, and other factors) and created personalized mailers based on customer status (active member, dormant member, prospect).

It created custom messaging based on customer segment and layered on personalization by prospect or customer name.

To boost effectiveness, it used a series of personalized emails to prime the pump for the offer and nudge non-responders into action.

The results? By precisely matching the messaging to the prospect's demographic profile, the campaign was more relevant and therefore more effective for each recipient. In fact, the campaign generated a return of more than 10 times Club ABC Tour's initial investment in just the first month's sales.

The cost? The new self-mailer boasted a lower cost per piece than that of Club ABC Tours' typical catalog of trip options.
So the campaign was more effective, less expensive per piece, and greener. What more could a cost- and environmentally conscious marketer ask for?

PRINT BUYERS ONLINE SUSTAINABILITY CHECKLIST

If you're looking for a quick checklist for green printing, you might want to look into Print Buyers Online (PBO)'s sustainability checklist. In PBO's proposed legislation providing tax breaks for such projects, it suggests that to be declared a qualified "sustainable print project," the project must meet 13 of 15 criteria. These criteria can be used as a terrific guideline. The 15 criteria PBO uses are as follows:

1. The materials used in the print project must be recyclable.

2. The print project cannot include inks which contain heavy metals, such as metallics and fluorescents, scratch off devices, foils, plastic polystyrenes and/or polyesters.

3. The print project must contain verbiage that encourages the reader to recycle the printed piece.

4. The print project must contain verbiage that allows prospects/ customers to opt-out from further printed communications.

5. The paper or substrate must contain over 25% post-consumer waste for coated paper stock and 50% post-consumer waste for uncoated paper stock.

6. The paper or substrate must be legally harvested.

7. The print project must not use paper or substrates from endangered forests or areas of high conservation value.

8. The paper or substrate must be produced Totally Chlorine Free (TCF) or Process Chlorine Free (PCF).

9. The paper or substrate must be certified by a credible third-party chain-of-custody certifier, such as The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

10. The ink, coating, laminates and/or adhesives must emit no more than 2% volatile organic compounds (VOC) for sheetfed printing, no more than 30% VOCs for heatset web printing, no more than 10% VOCs for coldset web printing, and no more than 5% VOCs for flexographic printing.

11. If a coating is applied to the print project, the coating must not be either a UV-cured ink or a film laminate.

12. If a print project is 96 pages or less and is bound as a book, the book will be bound as saddle stitched rather than perfect bound.

13. Print projects that are mailed via United States Postal Service:
    • must contain the +4 extension for ZIP codes
    • must be processed for de-duping or merge/purge
    • must have been updated in the last six (6) months for National Change of Address

14. The printer who manufactures the print project must not have been fined for violations in the past five years from the Environmental Protection Agency, Occupational Safety & Health Administration, or by state or federal regulators for environmental, health or safety issues.

15. The printer who manufactures the print project must use renewable energy (either directly using wind, solar and/or biogas, which is optimal) or by purchasing renewable energy credits.

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