

# Redefining green print

In his role as print buyer for two eco charities, David Shorto picks through the environmental smokescreens and attempts to find print that is genuinely green

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Over the years, the green lobby has had some unlikely champions, ranging from the tunnelling antics of '90s eco-warrior Swampy through to the rather more erudite born-again environmentalist Al Gore. Where David Shorto fits into the pantheon of green luminaries is open to debate.

He may not be as high profile as some of his fellow environmentalists (although he did make a debut appearance in *PrintWeek's* annual power list this year), but Shorto's work is just as important and far-reaching. In his role as print buyer for environmental pressure groups Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (FoE), he not only has the responsibility of sourcing environmentally friendly print, but also on educating other buyers so that they can follow suit.

Shorto's CV makes him the ideal custodian of this position. He started out working in estimating and production roles in commercial print before growing "sick of the printing industry" and undertaking a four-year environmental science degree in the early '90s. Towards the end of the course, he began working part-time as a buyer for FoE and then, in spring 2000, he also took on the role of buyer for Greenpeace.

Both organisations have periods where demands on Shorto's time are more pressing, especially around the time when the organisation's respective supporter magazines are published (Greenpeace's magazine is quarterly whereas FoE's goes out three times a year).

However, Shorto says there are only subtle differences in his role at the two organisations. "At Greenpeace, we have a much more diverse product range," he explains. "We have leaflets, posters, reports, supporter magazines and supporter mailings. If Greenpeace has an event or some kind of activity involving its supporter network, then a whole raft of

material will be produced in support of that event. This happens at FoE too, but the product range tends to be narrower – although it is broadening."

Shorto's remit is to deliver quality work at a value-for-money price, in the most environmentally friendly manner possible. While some might suspect that such an organisation would have a complex set of environmental guidelines that suppliers must adhere to, Shorto's basic demand is that the 20-odd companies currently on his print roster must hold UKAS-accredited ISO 14001 status, despite the fact he thinks the standard has its shortcomings.

## A better measurement?

He says: "While recognising that ISO 14001 is far from perfect, it's the most useful mechanism that exists right now. In an ideal world, there would be something else out there that allowed buyers to environmentally evaluate printing companies in terms of their day-to-day environmental performance."

Shorto says he had high hopes for the BPIF's own carbon footprint standard, which he sat on the working group of, but it has taken a lot longer than many people hoped it would to develop and bring to market (according to the BPIF, it is currently due to launch in late summer/early autumn 2008).

One of the things he detests most is the "gimmick" of carbon neutrality, which he doesn't feel has any use from a buyer's point of view.

"All of the calculators that I have seen so far are badly inaccurate and there are far too many variables," explains Shorto. He advocates an approach similar to the one used by environmentally progressive printing company Beacon Press.

"They would annually publish key performance indicators that would look at things like power usage,

## FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

- The first Friends of the Earth (FoE) group was established in the US in 1969

- The group campaigns on a number of different issues, including climate change and recycling

- FoE has one of the most extensive environmental networks in the world, with close to one million supporters across five continents

- In 1971, a small team of activists set sail from Vancouver, Canada, in an old fishing boat to take non-violent direct action against US nuclear weapons testing in Alaska. Greenpeace was born

- Greenpeace shares many of the same aims as FoE and in the past has been successful in raising awareness of issues such as illegal whaling and logging
- One of the most famous incidents associated with Greenpeace was the sinking of its ship the Rainbow Warrior by the French Secret Service, in Auckland Harbour in 1985



## Case study Palm oil campaign

One of Greenpeace's more successful campaigns in recent years has been to raise awareness of the destruction of Indonesian rainforest to grow palm oil. This has been achieved through the use of numerous different types of media, but one of the more important forms has been mailshots.

In June this year, David Shorto was tasked with producing a palm oil pack that would educate the public about the extent of the palm oil problem, outline Greenpeace's campaign to stop the practice and try to garner £50,000 in donations, with a further £25,000 of income in the 12 months following the mailing. The pack also had to thank donors for previous support, motivate and inspire the target audience to show them why Greenpeace needs their help and to show them that Greenpeace's work really can make a difference.

Shorto says it took just under two weeks to design and deliver the 60,000 packs to the organisation's mailing house with the main difference to previous campaigns being the use of a reverse window. Each of the different elements



(letter, educational poster, envelopes) were printed by different companies, with Bespoke Envelopes Direct, Pureprint and Park Communications all involved. The pack's components were printed on different stock, but all were made from 100% post-consumer waste materials.

As to whether or not the pack achieved its aims, Shorto says that it was a success on all levels. "Because of the campaign, Unilever, the biggest buyer of Indonesian palm oil, got on side and agreed to support our call for a moratorium on all rainforest destruction for palm oil in Indonesia," he explains.

"Unilever also agreed to write to other companies buying Indonesian palm oil and ask them to support the moratorium too. In terms of direct marketing, we met our income targets and also prompted many of our supporters to take online actions and to begin to support us in a different way."

[www.ppe.uk.net], which aims to dispel the myths about print and the environment.

But while the site has made major inroads in terms of addressing some common myths about issues such as recycling, Shorto believes that he can still do more to cut through the confusion that is still out there.

"PPE has been a worthwhile resource. It has helped to push the environmental agenda and has advised and informed a lot of people, but I'm disappointed that it hasn't been more successful in terms of getting the environmental message through," says Shorto.

He recalls a recent encounter with an ISO auditor and says he was horrified when the auditor stated that he had a number of concerns about recycled paper because of the bleaching process. "It staggered me that someone who moves in environmental circles could still hold that opinion, which belongs in the 80s."

The reason for his dismay is because Shorto says a number of people have overlooked the fact that the key reasons for using recycled paper in the first place are landfill and forestry issues, not because recycling has less of an environmental impact than creating paper from virgin fibre (though he claims it does).

Another pet hate relates to misleading marketing messages that are bandied about by printers. He recently lodged a complaint to the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) in response to Borcombe SP's claim that it was the "Britain's leading eco-friendly printer". The complaint was upheld.

"The reason I did what I did was because it was just so unhelpful," Shorto explains. "So many people want to do the right thing from an environmental point of view, but it's really difficult for them when printing companies are making these claims, especially when they are not true."

### Correcting misinformation

To counter some of this misinformation, he is pulling together a pile of printed items bearing environmental statements that Shorto says may seem impressive but in reality are completely meaningless. These will be added to the PPE website over the coming months with an explanation as to why the comments are ultimately meaningless.

The upkeep of the website will undoubtedly keep him busy, as will managing his day-to-day print buying chores, because although print volumes have fallen during the period he has worked for Greenpeace and FoE, both look committed to a printed future.

"Electronic mechanisms for reaching our supporters have certainly made inroads into our print volumes, but people still want to hold print," says Shorto. "If you've got a direct marketing piece that arrives through your letterbox, then that's a lot more noticeable and attention-grabbing than yet another email that may disappear into your spam." ■

water usage, recycling rates and the number of sheets printed per year, which would give you a good idea of their environmental performance. It was something that I tried to introduce to other printing companies, as I thought that it would be a great way for buyers to look at printing companies' performance on not just energy, but on water usage and recycling rates as well, which carbon footprints don't look at. Unfortunately, the printers I spoke to just didn't want to be involved and nothing got off the ground, which is a real shame."

### Crucial dialogue

It's not the first time Shorto has tried to establish a dialogue with printers and it certainly won't be the last. Where he has arguably been more successful in setting up the Paper Print Environment (PPE) website