

# polluting the argument



Friends of the Earth

GREENPEACE

*David Shorto, print buyer for Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, makes his own frank assessment on how misinformation and misleading marketing surrounding print and paper is creating a huge barrier to environmental progress.*

**“Greenwash: the unjustified appropriation of environmental virtue by a company to create a pro-environmental image or to sell a product.”**

Our increasing awareness of environmental issues has seen many positive changes. Sadly, it has also given rise to environmental opportunism, in the form of Greenwash. Greenwash invades many aspects of our everyday lives and paper and print is no different; in fact, it could be argued that it is worse.

It is true to say that there are unprecedented levels of informed, positive action in terms of environmental progress in the print and paper industry. However, if it wasn't for Greenwash, this progress would be much greater.

## The UK's top environmental printer

In my experience, at least five (there are probably more) printing companies are currently claiming to be the UK's top environmental printing company. This is a pointless, sales-based claim that cannot be substantiated, and in many cases only serves to further cloud the issues for buyers looking to make informed decisions.

## We have an environmental policy

Printing companies are not experts in environmental issues. Most environmental policies consist of vague claims and aspirations. There is no substitute for independently-verified environmental accreditation, via a regulated auditor.

## It's eco/ environmentally-friendly

Both these commonly encountered terms are vague and, therefore, meaningless. In most cases, even if the product or process does what is claimed, 'less environmentally damaging' might be a more accurate phrase; but I suppose that's not so catchy.

## It's bio-degradable

It sounds great, but is it really biodegradable? And, even if it is, this isn't always the best option environmentally. In some cases the use of a bio-degradable product still represents a one way flow of natural resources into landfill – choosing a recyclable product would be far better. There are EC standards that test bio-degradability, but all too often the marketing material produced by printers fails to mention this.

If you choose to use a bio-degradable product, make sure it meets the standards.

## It's produced from sustainable forestry

This is classic Greenwash, but it can be a good gauge: the use of this phrase confirms a lack of environmental awareness. In these times of forestry accreditation schemes and fibre tracking, and elimination in many aspects of the industry, it's alarming that this phrase is still so commonly encountered.

The FSC Logo, however, is one to look out for. There are an ever increasing number of printers gaining certification in the UK - 169 are currently listed on the International database, not including those certified under a group scheme. There is currently a group scheme set up specifically for small printers in the UK. According to the Forest Stewardship Council, there is common misuse of the FSC logo within the print sector, often through ignorance of the tight rules on the FSC trademarks. Many printers are not aware that they need to have FSC Chain of Custody certification in order to use the trademarks on FSC certified paper. Sadly, there are some printers who

are aware of the rules but still try to make claims such as "This paper is sourced from an FSC certified paper mill" - when the paper itself might not even be FSC certified, let alone the printer.

## It's Carbon Neutral

'We're carbon neutral', they claim. Typically, however, this simply means that they've taken the easy option of investing money in offsetting projects – the detail of which is never shown, and may be of dubious benefit – instead of investing further (or at all, in some cases) in reducing their own emissions. Remember that money invested in offsetting is money that could be invested in reducing the emissions associated with producing your own printed material. A focus on reduction (perhaps together with offsetting investment, in worthwhile schemes) can, of course, be positive. If this is what they are doing then why do so many printers fail to set themselves apart from the rest by detailing this in their marketing material?

According to the DTI's Green Claims Code a Green Claim should be: Truthful, accurate and able to be substantiated. It's worth bearing that in mind next time you read or hear one.