

The greenest man in print

As paper and print buyer for Friends of the Earth (FoE) and Greenpeace, and fresh from a weekend up close and personal with nature in the Scottish mountains, David Shorto is a man enthused about his newly unveiled website, www.ppe.uk.net.

The middle letters identify the words 'paper, print and environment' and it was Shorto's concerns about all three that spurred him into launching PPE's predecessor 'Twig', an environmental website dedicated to helping people reduce the environmental impact of their print, just over a year ago.

However, in March this year, he relaunched the website with a new name, enhanced features and new options to ensure smooth usability and a more dynamic approach. "Twig was started in early 2006 and it was basically a good idea, but it was not particularly user-friendly and was unwieldy in terms of data management from the users' point of view. The new website is more flexible, user-friendly and easier to maintain," says Shorto.

While the site has the support of major environmental groups such as the World Wildlife Fund, FoE, Greenpeace, the British Printing Industry Federation (BPIF) and the Soil Association, it receives no direct funding and is a totally independent venture that has to be self-funded. All the companies listed on the site pay a small annual fee to be featured and this income covers programming, updating copy and the time Shorto spends on promotion.

Material status

Customers can search the website by criteria to identify materials' environmental status and environmentally accredited printers and, according to Shorto, it offers the most up to date and exhaustive list of UK printers with environmental accreditations.

For a material to be featured on the site, it has to contain a percentage of recycled fibre and/or be FSC (Forestry Stewardship Council) Chain of Custody certified. There are different definitions of the term 'recycled' within the industry, so it is important to check the fibre detail of a material. It is quite normal, for example, for a paper to be called 'recycled' when only a small percentage of the fibre is actually recycled. Shorto's definition of 'recycled' covers a product that has reached the consumer, been used for its intended purpose and then been recycled. "I think that is the ideal – we are talking about post-consumer waste."

Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth's print buyer talks about his new website and getting the right accreditations for your business.
By Alison Carter

FSC is by far the best-known environmental accreditation, and if a printer holds FSC and the paper being used in a project is FSC-certified, then the end product can be labelled as FSC-certified. This certificate is about tracking printed products all the way from wood pulp and ensures that there is no contamination between FSC and non-FSC material. This scheme is material-focused and nothing to do with the environmental performance of the company in question.

FSC's domination, says Shorto, has come about because of its early arrival in the marketplace, which coincided with support coming from the green NGOs. In his opinion, FSC is currently more stringent in its environment accreditations and social accreditations than PEFC, but he thinks that PEFC's profile is increasing and this is leading to competition.

Appropriate to size

On the print side of things, there is no specific entry criteria, but Shorto says a company must have an appropriate accreditation for its size. "It is difficult for print buyers to evaluate a company's environmental status, but to start with, it must have a level of accreditation and then you have to question whether it is an appropriate level of accreditation for the company's size. For example, a company that has an annual turnover of £1m-plus should definitely be going for ISO 14001," says Shorto.

Only companies that have ISO 14001 via the UK Accreditation Service (UKAS) www.ukas.org are listed on the site. UKAS is the sole national accreditation body that is recognised by government to assess, against internationally agreed standards, organisations that provide certification, testing, inspection and calibration services. Shorto's personal opinion is that the UKAS certification is crucial, as he says there are companies in the marketplace that offer firms the ISO 14001 accreditation within 90 days, but these accreditations are not covered by the UKAS organisation. "This is a ridiculous situation as gaining the UKAS accreditation will normally take 18 months. The government is having an information drive about this, but people should appreciate there is a difference," he says.

While ISO 14001 is good, the award does have its limitations says Shorto. "There is not enough detail, and it is not about standards as it focuses on environmental awareness and improvement, companies can be performing on different →



Claire Waffel



levels. Though having said that, it is by far the best environmental accreditation in the market so far.”

But what about smaller companies that are doing their best, but have less well-known accreditations, such as the Greenmark award developed by the London Environment Centre (LEC) or the BPIF Environmental Assessment Scheme. Greenmark is a scheme for smaller or medium-sized companies, used as a stepping stone towards ISO 14001 and it is aimed at assessing, monitoring and reducing environmental impact and consists of eight levels.

Shorto does not dismiss any attempt by smaller firms to improve environmental qualifications: “It is not a case of not covering Greenmark or other similar accreditations, but it just happens that all companies currently featured on the site have ISO 14001, this may change.”

Overwhelming response

The industry’s response to the new website has been in Shorto’s words “absolutely amazing and overwhelming”. The tally of hits on the new site, in one week earlier this month, reached 4,000, overtaking within two months the total number of hits on the Twig site in its entire lifetime.

“The print industry is waking up to the environment and people are taking the time to give me very positive feedback. It is a much stronger resource now and the grapevine is doing a marvellous job in getting the message out,” says Shorto.

However, there has been one disappointment, which he hopes will dissipate as the site gains in popularity. Potential customers are able to get direct access through to companies featured on the website, but he says some companies have been very slow to respond, something he finds extremely disappointing. “I have to say the responses to some enquiries have not been particularly quick. This frustrates me immensely; I want companies to gain by taking a far more proactive part in the website and they can maximise opportunities. To monitor this I use the site myself to check to see how responsive companies are to email enquiries. The website is independent and I am putting forward opportunities for the industry.”

Shorto has a rather unusual work life. He spends most mornings at FOE and afternoons at Greenpeace, scooting between the two with a 10-minute bike ride. He has worked at FOE for 13 years and Greenpeace for seven and holds the same paper and print buyer title at both organisations.

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“We don’t have print budgets as such in either organisation, but each campaign has a budget of which some is spent on print,” says Shorto. “We don’t have the volume of print that people may expect – for example only one project for each company has the volume to be printed web.”

Rather surprisingly, the impact of transportation on the environment worries him less than a printer’s environmental status. His ethos is that the supply is more important and he will choose environmental status over geographical location. “I think the transport issue is not as important as environmental performance. But I do take all factors into consideration when sending a job out. For example, I use a printer in Yorkshire for magazine inserts as they are the best printer for the job, but the job does not come back down to London, so there is no additional transport involved.”

Shorto deliberately uses a wide range of companies and has a roster of around 25 companies on his books. For both organisations he produces a wide range of products, from digital postcards through to leaflets and brochures, but all his print runs are getting smaller and, in particular, the quantity of marketing materials is dropping.

Explosion of interest

As a print buyer does Shorto think the paper industry is doing enough to provide a range of recycled papers for customers? “My answer is a big ‘yes’. There has been an explosion of interest in the past couple of years and there is now a good range of all papers, with a few exceptions such as FSC-certified or recycled material for large-format digital print – there is nothing out there in this sector at all. I don’t know why, but I guess paper companies respond to demand.”

Shorto says FOE and Greenpeace are going to get around this problem and are looking to get specific papers made. “We are investigating the issue with a couple of merchants and will get them to get papers cut in different sizes. This may mean extra cost for us, but it might kick start something”

But what of the immediate future? Plans in the pipeline for the PPE site include an update on inks and their environmental impact, an investigation into vegetable inks, the issue of biodegradability, and there will be new printing companies and new materials added on a regular basis. “Overall, I am positive. Signs for the continuing growth of environmental awareness are encouraging right now and further progress is quite likely,” says Shorto. ■