

What's the worst thing that could happen to an environmentalist? No, this isn't the latest joke being put about by tree loggers and coal miners. This is serious. What is the worst possible outcome for somebody who puts the environment first?

Surely the worst thing that could happen is that after all the dire warnings, the doomsday scenarios, the cajoling and encouragement, the threats and pleading, after all that effort, the world just shrugs its shoulders and goes back to business as usual, resulting in an environmental cataclysm; the polar icecaps melt, fertile land turns to dust, the oceans boil, storms and tempests rage throughout the land. Wouldn't that be just terrible? To make all those predictions and then have them turn out to be true.

On the other hand, the best thing that could happen is to be totally and utterly wrong. Much better to discover that the threat of impending doom is in fact way off the money, not even close. Global warming? Nah. Loss of biodiversity? Nothing. Contamination of air, land and sea? No big deal. What could be better than to realise that no matter what we may fear and dread, no matter what we do, everything in the end turns out rosy. Beautiful.

At its most extreme, this is the paradox of environmentalism: that in order to win the argument—to be able to say 'Look, we told you so'—it is necessary to lose the battle. Lose the argument and, sure, it's a bit embarrassing but surely that's better than witnessing the Apocalypse?

The challenge for environmentalism though is to do both—to win both the argument and the battle; to convince hearts and minds, change behaviour and save the planet even if it means that, by doing so, none of the doomsday predictions will come true. In fact we will never know if indeed they would have come true if we hadn't all switched to solar energy and recycled water. We'll just have to take it on faith that they would have happened because nobody really wants to take the risk that they won't happen if we continue on the way we have been for the past few hundred years.

LOOK WHO'S NOT TALKING

Environmentalism is full of such paradoxes and conundrums. It's what makes it such a prickly subject on all sides, to the degree that, as *Mitchell Jordan* discovers in this issue (see p34), many would prefer not to talk about it at all, even if they are doing what might be considered the right thing

CLEARING THE AIR

It's a mess, isn't it? With so many claims and counter-claims, knowing what to think, who to believe and, most importantly, what to do in order to be environmentally responsible seems ever more complex and confusing. Well, there are good reasons for this state of affairs but they shouldn't be used as an excuse for inaction, writes Print 21 editor, *Simon Enticknap*.

for the environment. It's all become just a little too difficult—even for the Greens themselves who declined the opportunity to discuss Green policies and the printing industry for this issue.

Uncertainty breeds fearfulness and a bunker mentality. Scientists can gather the data and make extrapolations, report on what has happened and what, as a consequence, is likely to happen but, in the end, no-one knows what will come to pass when all the variables are played out. This is particularly true of a system as complex and unmanageable as the environment and it applies not only to the 'do nothing' scenario but also to the 'do something' scenario.

Sometimes measures that are introduced with the best of all intentions can have unpredictable and unintended results. We see this with reports about initiatives that have been launched to address specific problems—or perhaps just to cash in on consumer sentiment—that end up simply adding

to the problem, a phenomenon that ranges from plastic shopping bags to hybrid vehicles. In this issue, for instance, *Joan Grace* raises the issue of food miles, how far produce must travel before it reaches the dining room table, and the impact this has on carbon emissions (see page 46). However, as Joan points out, the relationship between distance traveled and the amount of CO₂ pumped out is far from straightforward. How do you compare, for instance, produce grown in Australia and New Zealand and exported by ship compared to food grown in hothouses in Europe or by using intensive farming techniques?

This is not a simple question and yet, not surprisingly, it hasn't stopped businesses or politicians from cashing in on the idea in order to exploit green concern. The dressing up of online annual reporting and e-statements as an environmental initiative rather than a cost-cutting measure is another example. Issues such as these are not just theoretical questions for the printing industry—there is always somebody willing and able to use a bit of misinformation to grab market share—but they highlight the need for constant vigilance in the battle between claim and counter-claim, between coming clean or being 'greenwashed'.

JUST JOIN THE DOTS

But really, who has the time or resources to do that? Separating fact from fiction, truth from hype is beyond the means of most business owners who probably have a thousand other more pressing concerns. Among all the names that are flung about concerning environmental action or inaction—sceptic, hardliner, realist or fanatic—perhaps the most appropriate one for the majority of people is 'muddler'. We muddle through, trying to do the best we can. No sane person sets out to deliberately destroy the world in which they live and most reasonable people, once alerted to their harmful activities, will do their best to ameliorate the effects; the problem, as always, is just knowing what to do.

In this issue, you will find more than a few 'dot' points of things you can do to become cleaner and more efficient, some of them extremely simple and effective. This is happening now and there is no obstacle to anybody doing likewise.

In the 90s, the big issue for the printing industry was VOC emissions, and while it hasn't gone away entirely, there's no doubt that the industry has moved well away from the worst excesses of chemical usage. In all areas—fount



Simon Enticknap



solutions, blanket and roller washes, plate processing, even solvent-based inkjet inks—there is now no reason why printing should not be a cleaner activity. It's not hard—just talk to the suppliers.

Similarly paper has always been a 'hot' topic and continues to be so but again, there is now no reason why the process of making paper, let alone putting ink on it, cannot be a sustainable, non-polluting activity. The know-how is there, examples can be found throughout the industry and all it requires is the effort to search them out.

As *Phil Lawrence* points out in his article (see p28), the printing industry has come a long way on the past 20 years, thanks largely to improvements in technology and the drive for greater efficiency. The bad old days truly are a thing of the past, and that's not a reason for complacency nor a plea for special treatment in the future but rather a reminder that change can take place for the better.

CUTTING DOWN ON CARBON

The next big issue on the horizon (and not that far away) is reducing carbon emissions in response to the problem of global warming. At some point in the not too distant future (if they are not doing so already) your customers may well start asking what you are doing to cut your carbon footprint. Don't say you weren't warned; this issue has been around for a long time.

I wrote my first article about greenhouse gases 20 years ago. That is to say, I was writing about domestic appliances and the growing debate about the importance of taking energy consumption into account when comparing different types of fridges, washing machines and dishwashers. Back then, the focus was on annual running costs—how much more it would cost per annum to run a particular appliance based on average use—and there were indeed significant differences between certain brands and models.

At the time, energy consumption

still came fairly low on consumers' lists of priorities when making purchasing decisions—after price, performance and brand reliability—but there was a push to make comparative information more easily available so that people could take it into account. It was also about this time that people (not just scientists or greenies) started to make the connection between power consumption and CO₂ emissions, and the possible consequences for the environment.

Australia was in fact one of the first countries to introduce mandatory comparative labeling of domestic appliances. Fridges and freezers began in NSW and Victoria in 1986, followed by air conditioners (1987), dishwashers (1988), clothes dryers (1989) and washing machines (1990). The scheme became national during the 90s and was overhauled towards the end of the decade to take account of the fact that appliances had indeed become a lot »

more efficient and were starting to score off the scale.

From a printing perspective, the introduction of mandatory labeling was a boon because just about the only cost associated with its introduction was the printing of the labels. Most appliance manufacturers already knew how much energy their products consumed and even made that information available in manuals etc, albeit in a form that made it hard to compare like with like.

SIMPLE BUT EFFECTIVE

It was such a simple measure and yet over the years, the impact of energy labeling has been immense in terms of promoting reduced energy use. Since its introduction, the energy star system for domestic appliances has been adopted on a worldwide basis and in every country it has been shown to raise efficiency standards through competition. It has been estimated that the average fridge today uses about a

quarter of the electricity consumed by a fridge 30 years ago even though, today, the fridges are, on average, bigger and have more features. A report by the International Energy Association has calculated that without the introduction of labels and associated minimum standards, electricity consumption in OECD countries in 2020 would be about 12 percent higher than is currently predicted, a saving worth billions of dollars and thousands of tonnes of CO₂.

Now there are moves overseas to introduce carbon labeling on other products such as foodstuffs to tell consumers how much carbon has been generated by an item's production and distribution. Such a scheme is fraught with difficulties—in the UK, attempts to introduce carbon labeling have so far been limited to a single brand of plain chips—but with an agreed method for calculating emissions, it may provide a more accurate measure of greenhouse gas emissions than, say, food miles.

If and when consumers do start to include energy efficiency in all their purchasing decisions, either through choice or necessity, then the ripple-on effects will be profound. That's when all manufacturing companies, including printers, will have to sit up and take notice—and become a lot more vocal about what they are doing.

POINTING BOTH WAYS

Online or print, hard copy or soft—which is better? For the environment, that is. This is a debate that flared again last year when the Federal government announced that it was introducing legislation to allow annual company reports to be posted on the internet with only the option for a printed copy. Since then the issue has been bumping around, occasionally reappearing like a bad smell that won't go away. Not that there is anything new about it; the question of print shifting online and eating away at market share has been around for as long as, well, the internet.

What really seems to stick in the craw of printers though is that this push to go virtual is usually presented as being better for the environment, using fewer precious resources and operating in a clean, low impact manner. When it comes to pointing the green finger, it seems online media has the upper hand over print. After all, printing has a history and it doesn't take much to convince the uninformed that print is responsible for poisoning the air and water, not to mention stripping the earth of any last remaining trees.

Well, finger pointing can work both ways. Market Research company, IDC, estimates that in 2005, business spent \$US 26.1 billion on powering and cooling servers worldwide and that between 1.5 and three per cent of all electricity in the US is now being used to power data centres. Electricity has now out-stripped real estate as the major cost of running data centres in the US even though about 60 percent of the power used to cool equipment is simply wasted. That's an awful lot of greenhouse gases.

Mind you, the source for this interesting snippet of information was an article in CIO magazine about a printer—namely VistaPrint, the worldwide company featured in Andy McCourt's article this month about online printing. It seems that VistaPrint had a problem with its own data centres that were growing quickly and sucking up too much juice. In response, it re-designed its Bermuda data centre and switched to energy-efficient servers, cutting energy usage by 75 percent. It also decided to build a new data centre in Canada using hydro-electric power as a renewable source of energy, thereby cutting the company's power bills by another 70 percent. A win for the IT industry—or the print industry?

When it comes to cutting through the smokescreen of competing environmental credentials, it can sometimes be hard to find clean air. ●

When energy labels were first introduced, appliance manufacturers argued that it would have a negative effect on the local industry because they would be unable to compete with more efficient overseas-made brands and models. They were right; once consumers started factoring in energy efficiency to their purchasing decisions, the more inefficient products were doomed, as were any manufacturers who were unable make efficient appliances or make them cheaply enough.

Does the local printing industry face the same future? There's no reason why it should and, indeed, there may be advantages in calculating a carbon input in comparison with other countries and other media (and a long way to go before we know either way). Ultimately though, it will not be a question of who is clean but who can be clean most cost-effectively. Amidst all the 'green' confusion, the political jockeying on public policy and competing claims, that economic fact of life remains incontrovertible. ●

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(*Lomandra Longifolia*)

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