

Reducing the
environmental
impact of printed
communications



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Environmental sustainability is increasingly important for organisations within the public and private sectors. Pressure to adopt more sustainable working practices is mounting in the wake of government targets and rising levels of environmental awareness among stakeholders. Paul Buchan, Environment Manager for the Williams Lea Group, sets out a roadmap to help you reduce the environmental impact of your printed communications.

By reviewing the way your communications are made, printed and delivered you can make significant changes to the effects your organisation has on the environment. Addressing issues such as the type of paper used or the energy consumed in the printing process will improve the sustainability of your communications without affecting the quality of the service you provide. The changes you make to your communications will also be highly visible to stakeholders, delivering a strong statement about your commitment to the environment.

TSO and Williams Lea have developed an environmental roadmap to help you identify options for information and publishing solutions that will benefit the environment, your stakeholders and your organisation.

The communications life cycle

Many organisations have only limited time and resources available to dedicate to issues surrounding environmental sustainability, but if used effectively they can still have a big impact.

Firstly, it is essential to ensure you are concentrating your efforts in the right place. By identifying which aspects of your communications have the greatest impact on the environment, you can channel your resources into making changes in the areas where they will make the most difference. The Customer Communications Life Cycle will help you identify where improvements are most needed.



Customer Communications Life Cycle

The Williams Lea Group's environmental roadmap sets out a framework to help you explore the improvements you can make at each stage of the life cycle, focusing on:

- Available options
- The cost/benefits of options
- Timescales for implementation
- Environmental metrics for measuring results.

Some of the changes you make may be relatively straightforward 'quick wins,' while others will need careful planning before you can redesign your information and publishing solutions in a way that meets your requirements while improving environmental sustainability.

Stages of the Customer Communications Life Cycle

1. Planning
2. Data
3. Design
4. Printing
5. Consumption

Strategies for each stage of the life cycle

There are options for increasing the sustainability of your regular communications and one-off campaigns throughout all five stages of the life cycle from planning to consumption. Below you will find more information about the changes you can make at each stage:

1. Planning

At the planning stage you can:

Measure the environmental impact of your activities

The impact of your communications on the environment can be measured in a variety of ways. Research by Trucost identifies the three main direct environmental impacts of the print industry as:

1. Greenhouse gases
2. Waste
3. Volatile organic compound emissions.

Greenhouse gas emissions are increasingly used as a measure of environmental impacts and form the basis of government targets such as the reduction of CO₂ emissions by 12.5% by 2010. It can also be used as a metric to determine the impact of your printed communications, but you can use the other methods if you feel they are more appropriate.

Studying the greenhouse gas emissions associated with your communications will help to identify the areas where the most significant changes are needed. TSO recently did this for the publications that we produce for a major public sector client. We commissioned The Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Management to investigate the emissions associated with each stage of production. This revealed areas for improvement where changes can be made which will lead to significant savings on the emissions associated with energy and paper.

To help our clients identify the greenhouse gas emissions associated with their communications, the Williams Lea Group has commissioned the development of a carbon estimator. This tool is used to assess the level of emissions associated with printed communications before changes are made and then provides ongoing data so our clients can track the impact of their changes over time. For example after changing the type of paper used, one client has been able to observe a clear reduction in emissions each year while the amount of paper used has remained the same.

Consider alternatives to print

You can also consider alternative communication channels, for example using web-based or emarketing solutions.

There is no definitive proof that digital communications have a smaller carbon footprint than printed information so you will need to evaluate the benefits of using digital channels for each piece of information you need to communicate.

You may find that certain types of information, such as brief updates or messages designed to direct people to a website are best conveyed digitally, while your

stakeholders may prefer to receive some communications in a printed format, for example they may find long reports easier to read on paper. You will also need to consider how many users are likely to print out your digital information themselves. The environmental costs of this may be greater than if you were to print the documents centrally. It is also important to consider that some citizens do not have access to digital channels and any information designed for them will need to be printed.

2. Data

Improved data efficiency

By using your data more efficiently you can accurately target the information you send, reducing wastage. If you segment your database by lifestyle and behavioural factors you can build a profile of each individual stakeholder, ensuring that you only send them relevant information. This will reduce the wasted paper and printing used to send communications to those who do not need them. It is also vital that you keep your database up-to-date to avoid further wastage from sending information to people who have moved or are deceased.

You may benefit from using a service such as TSO's variable data printing solution if you send transactional information to stakeholders. This will use your segmented data to add relevant messages to transactional mailings, eliminating the need to send separate communications.

3. Design

Balancing stakeholder expectations with environmental focus

Communications are designed for maximum impact, but you can also build environmental focus into the design process, for example by using recycled or FSC certified paper or specifying paper sizes that minimise waste in the printing process.

It is vital to balance the quality expected by stakeholders with the environmental advantages of your designs. For example, organisations are often concerned about switching to recycled paper as they perceive it to be of lower quality than their existing supply. Your print management supplier may be able to help you source paper which meets both your environmental and aesthetic requirements.

TSO and Williams Lea work with our clients to test papers with varying levels of recycled content. This enables them to find a paper which is of sufficient quality while still having a beneficial impact on the environment. For one client we sourced a paper with 50% recycled content. This was of a similar quality to their previous stock and reduced the emissions associated with their communications by over 500 tonnes.

What is ISO 14001?

This international standard requires printers to meet independently audited standards. So far, only 6000 organisations have achieved the accreditation. TSO has gained ISO 14001 accreditation at our Parliamentary Press and we are currently working to extend the scope of the certificate to include all TSO locations.

4. Printing

The printing process may be responsible for a significant proportion of the environmental impacts associated with your communications. The study into the production of publications for a major public sector client, conducted by The Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Management on behalf of TSO and Williams Lea, discovered that approximately 30% of emissions related to these publications could be attributed to the printing process.

There are a number of approaches that you can take at the printing stage to reduce the impact of your organisation on the environment:

Suppliers' environmental standards

Ensure that your printers are as environmentally focused as you are. Standards such as ISO 14001 indicate their commitment. TSO's Parliamentary Press has achieved the award as have many of the print companies that make up our supply chain.

The Williams Lea Group can leverage its power as one of the leading global print purchasers to ensure the environmental focus of print suppliers. One client with a highly developed environmental focus recognised the need to set goals for suppliers. As part of our print management solution we increased the number of ISO 14001 accredited suppliers. The percentage of the client's print spend going to ISO 14001 accredited companies increased from 2% in January 2006 to 75% in September 2007.

Stock management

Careful stock management can also yield significant results. By reviewing past print jobs you can estimate the potential demand for new publications and reflect this in your print quantities. This will ensure that you do not print an excess of copies, reducing the waste of paper and energy in producing copies that will not be used, as well as saving you money on storage costs. You could also consider a Print on Demand solution to eliminate the need to store printed copies of your publications.

A warehousing and distribution solutions provider, such as TSO, will be able to provide you with regular and detailed management reports which will help you monitor the demand for your publications.

Print on Demand

For suitable publications you could use a Print on Demand solution, initially producing only the copies you need for the launch. Once these copies have been distributed stakeholders can continue to order their copies in the normal way, they are printed overnight and dispatched the following day instead of being retrieved from storage. This ensures that only the required number of copies are printed, eliminating wastage and storage costs while still providing the level of service that stakeholders require.

TSO provides this service for a number of high-profile public sector organisations helping them to save money and the environment and ensuring that publications can be updated regularly.

Find out more

For more information on how TSO can help you reduce the environmental impact of your printed communications email insights@tso.co.uk.

To find out more about our solutions visit: www.tso.co.uk/solutions

5. Consumption

It is important that your efforts to reduce the environmental impact of your actions are recognised by citizens and other stakeholders, as this will raise awareness of environmental issues as well as your attempts to address them. You could put messages on the publications themselves, for example 'made from recycled paper,' or use specific logos to show you are complying with certain standards e.g. the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logo which confirms that virgin paper comes from well-managed forests.

You could also use off-product statements, for example on your website, informing people of your environmental focus. If you have a suppliers' section on your website you can outline your requirement for print suppliers to have attained ISO 14001 and include this in tenders and your sustainable procurement policy.

A continual process of improvement

There are many ways for you to reduce the environmental impacts of your printed communications through the redesign of your information management and publishing solutions. TSO and Williams Lea are committed to working with our clients to develop carefully tailored, sustainable solutions that will ensure the quality of communications is retained while their impact on the environment is reduced.

It is important to remember that the reduction of your organisation's greenhouse gas emissions is an ongoing process. Once you have successfully reduced the environmental impacts at one stage of the communications lifecycle, TSO can help you to identify the next most significant area for improvement, and develop the solutions to help you address it. This will enable you to develop a process of continual improvement.

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