

Print and Paper have a great environmental story to tell

Promoting on line billing and communications may not be a sustainable way to market your business!

A briefing note for advertising and marketing professionals.

Encouraging customers to get their bills online and also stating that this is better for the environment is increasingly being questioned. In the past two months, faced with being reported to the Advertising Standards Association, (ASA), several very large nationally known UK organisations have stopped similar messages, having accepted they were being made without adequate research, contravening CSR Europe and CAP (Code of Advertising Practice) guidelines.

Whilst the efficiency of electronic communication is clear and initiatives to reduce waste are to be encouraged, the Two Sides organisation, which exists to explore the Myths and Facts concerning the sustainability of Print and Paper, and has members spanning the whole Graphic Communications Value Chain, is concerned that incorrect and damaging impressions are being given if 'go paperless' initiatives are promoted as 'green' or seek to gain credibility by purporting to aid sustainability at the expense of the print and paper industry.

It is increasingly clear that electronic communication and in particular the energy requirements of the increasing worldwide network of servers which are necessary to store all the information needed for immediate access, has a significant and increasing carbon footprint. Electronic document storage must be recognised as delivering efficiency but not sustainability. In the UK it has been suggested that PC's and servers may consume up to 50% of household energy requirements in the next 10 years. Greenpeace has reported that electronic waste is the fastest growing waste stream and there are extremely serious disposal costs emerging.

All those who encourage customers to switch to e-billing, or any other form of electronic communication, largely to reduce costs, should re-examine their messages as it is certainly questionable whether e-billing or e-communication has a lower carbon footprint. In fact, with all the environmental costs of electronic communication and with many customers printing out their bills at home for reference, (a recent study has assumed this between 10% and 30 % depending upon whether you are a business or private consumer), at a possible higher environmental cost than a centrally produced and distributed bill, print and paper may well be the environmentally sustainable way to communicate.



Paper is a renewable and recyclable product that, if responsibly produced and consumed, is an environmentally sustainable media. It is often surprising to learn that in Europe, where 93% of our paper comes from, the area of forest has grown by 30% since 1950 and is increasing at a rate of 1.5 million football pitches every year.

And with 55% of the worldwide forest harvest being consumed for fuel and 34% for construction and other uses, only 11% is actually directly used for making paper.

So, if your organisation is using messages that e-billing, or any other form of electronic communication, is more environmentally friendly than traditional print and paper, please check that you have not only calculated your own savings but also accurately assessed and calculated the downstream consequential costs.

Misleading environmental claims are not only increasingly being examined by regulators but jeopardise the livelihood of the many thousands of people employed in the Graphic Communications Value Chain.

It is encouraging that responsible organisations are now thinking carefully about the statements they make and ensuring that they are not simply repeating old misconceptions.



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4th June 2010

