

Know your goal, pick your 'green' paper

Contributed by By Gregg McLachlan
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I was asked this question recently: Do you really need to use paper that has, for example, the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) logo on each sheet, or will any recycled paper be OK?

It's a great question. But, like any effective communications plan, before it can be answered you must think about your goals and objectives. Answering some simple questions should help provide insight:

How important is it for you to convey to the world that you are using environmentally responsible paper products?

Do you need people to see your products and immediately know you are using responsible choices?

Do you simply want to use environmentally responsible paper products for your own satisfaction, knowing that you are doing your part to help the planet?

The two key elements here are whether you are concerned primarily with internal and/or external communication.

These questions are all key because you can easily purchase paper products that are environmentally friendly at stationery and office supply stores. But there is a catch that may matter to you. The packaging may denote that the product is made from 100% recyclable material, or be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), or Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). However, the actual paper inside (ie. envelopes, sheets of paper, business cards, etc) will bear no logo to attest to this fact.

This means that communicating externally about your sustainability efforts may not be as clear as you like.

If you're a business, you'll likely want to use products that are clearly identified with a symbol on each and every piece. This means you'll have to consult with a professional print design company that can provide such material.

Remember: if you're a business, your material will end up in someone else's hands. You'll want them to see a symbol that instantly communicates your commitment.

Products with no identifiable symbol on each and every piece, will not communicate that commitment as clearly as you'd like.

There are several credible and respected symbols today that can demonstrate this: FSC. FSI. Bullfrog Power, 1% For The Planet.

If you are a non-profit, you may be perfectly happy purchasing products that are identified by packaging only as being derived from sustainable sources. That's fine. In this case, your objective is likely more of an internal corporate social responsibility effort to do the right thing.

In a 2010 survey by FSC and Toronto-based Traffic Design that gauged how businesses and organizations are communicating 'green' to their customers, the following point was made: "While producing a company's marketing

materials on eco-friendly FSC-certified paper is not the only measure of a firm's green marketing initiatives, it's clearly one of the easiest and least expensive ways to demonstrate sustainable leadership."

Bernard Hellen, president and creative director of traffic marketing + design inc., added: "When it comes to marketing green in this case, the medium really is the message."

Once you know the message you are trying to communicate, you can choose which approach fits your needs.

Either way, you'll be making a responsible choice. And that's a good move.

Gregg McLachlan is founder of WorkCabin.ca, and a communications consultant specializing in helping organizations and companies tell effective stories that embrace their stewardship and sustainability.