

# Think Product Lifecycle

When choosing a print company or writing a print specification there are the usual concerns about quality, price and the level of back up you get from your supplier, but you might also want to consider the environmental aspects of the product and the lifecycle of that product. The following are some of the areas you might want to think about:

## 1 The Printing Company

**What evidence is there that the printing company is managing the effect their activities have on the environment?**

- Check to see if the printing company has a recognised environmental management standard in place, such as ISO14001. This will indicate that they have examined their operations and have taken steps to control and minimise negative impacts.
- Does the printing company use computer-to-plate technology rather than conventional plate making? Film developer used in conventional plate making contains highly toxic silver crystals, CTP technology removes the positive film step, thereby reducing waste.
- Find out if the printing company uses alcohol free presses. Isopropyl alcohol is a volatile organic compound; these are highly evaporative compounds that can cause health problems such as lung irritation as well as harm to the environment.
- Is all the set-up and waste paper recycled?
- What sort of ink does the printing company use? Conventional printing ink is petroleum-based and mixes with alcohol-based solvents to release VOCs into the atmosphere. VOCs are hazardous to the environment and to human health. Vegetable and soya based inks offer a non-polluting and renewable alternative.
- Are used printing plates recycled?
- Are chemicals disposed of responsibly?
- Information on other aspects such as energy use, emissions, effluent and the disposal of solid waste should be available. The availability of this information is a good sign that the manufacturer is behaving responsibly.

## 2 Raw Material

**The main thing to think about here is the wood fibre used for papermaking and particularly whether the virgin wood fibre has been harvested with due care for the environment.**

- Look out for paper accredited to forest stewardship schemes such as the FSC or PEFC.
- Papers with a recycled fibre content mean there is less waste going to landfill as well as reduced pressure on forest resources. Establish what type of waste was used (pre- or post-consumer waste) and the proportion of recycled fibre. Look out for labels such as the NAPM Recycled Mark.

## 3 Use

**If a product is not up to the job, excessive waste might be produced. For instance higher quality office paper can be printed both sides without a problem, thus reducing paper consumption.**

- Make sure the product is fit for purpose and if in doubt perform trials before full production.
- When printing, consider aspects such as layout and design to make the most efficient use of material and avoid excessive ink consumption.

## 4 Disposal

**It's preferable to be able to recover waste rather than it ending up in landfill sites.**

- Can the product be recycled, incinerated for energy, biodegraded or composted?
- Can it be reused (e.g. making old stationery into scrap pads)?
- Consider encouraging the end user to recycle the product by including a line of text such as 'when you have finished with this document please recycle' or if appropriate 'please remove cover before recycling' (if the cover has been laminated).
- Has anything been done to the product to make it more difficult to recycle, such as adding a lamination? To achieve the same effect as lamination without the recycling implications you may consider replacing it with a UV Varnish.