

WHITEWASHING WITH GREENWASH LEADS TO EYEWASH

WHAT'S GREEN, TELLS PORKIES AND IS SLIPPERY? ANSWER—A LOT OF PRINTERS, PUBLISHERS AND PAPER MERCHANTS WHO ARE BEING 'ECONOMICAL WITH THE TRUTH'—GREENWASHING—WHERE GENUINE ENVIRONMENTAL CREDENTIALS ARE CONCERNED. KRISTINA HOLDORF IS WISE TO THE TRICKS GREENWASHERS GET UP TO AND GIVES SOME TIMELY ADVICE ON WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR, AND STAY CLEAN AS WELL AS GREEN.



Kristina Holdorf

HERE IN AUSTRALIA WE ARE SEEING A GOLD RUSH OF GREEN—THE ENVIRONMENTAL RUSH WHERE EVERYTHING THAT IS GREEN IS ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY! OR IS IT?

Should we believe everything we see and hear or is it time we sifted through the gravel, like panning for real gold, to find out what's of value and what's not in terms of environmental credentials. Be warned! There is fool's gold out there.

In the last 12 months the number of businesses, including products and services, claiming to embrace the concept of 'sustainable development' has risen sharply. This is evident from the number of advertisements which use images of pristine nature to sell a product, or claim outright that certain products or practices are 'eco-friendly' and 'sustainable.' But how do you, or even your customers, distinguish between genuine business efforts to 'come clean,' and cynical, superficial public relations marketing known as 'greenwashing.'

GREENWASHING PAPER

In the paper industry there are a number of terms that are used to describe a product's environmental features and by analyzing them one by one we can determine what they actually mean and they should be valued in terms of environmental attributes.

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

What does this mean precisely? Does it mean it has great social skills? This is a typical example of a greenwash statement and should only be used as a generic term. What ever you do, don't state, "This was printed on environmentally friendly paper," on the next annual report!

WELL MANAGED PLANTATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE FORESTS

This term is one of the favourites used by mills and merchants to describe from where the pulp has been derived. If you have a look at any paper green guide you will notice 90 percent of all products have ticks in this box. That means it's good, right? Well maybe, maybe not. You see, to have pulp derived from well-managed or sustainable forest means that it does not come from old growth areas and has been planted for pulp production. But is that enough?

To illustrate this, I have a veggie patch in my garden which I planted and I water in accordance to water restrictions and so forth. I don't use any spray which is harmful to the environment and I give away what I can't use. Am I being sustainable? Well without a third party coming out and having a look, I failed to tell you that I make my two young boys pull the weeds out on 42 degree days without a break

and got them to put fertilizer on the garden beds without gloves or a mask. It changes the picture a little now.

So if you see a product has a claim that it is derived from sustainable sources, do a Pauline Hanson, "please explain." Has it been independently certified and by whom? Is it an internationally recognized organization or is it a state or government based scheme?

RENEWABLE RESOURCES

A term proposed by the paper industry for virgin paper made from renewable resources such as managed tree plantations. It does not ensure environmentally-sound paper and is another term for the above.

RECYCLED

It's annual report season and the designer has received a brief from their client stating they want to print on recycled paper so they can use the recycled logo. Currently, there is no agreement on what the term means, beyond the fact that it contains recovered fiber which may be pre- and/or post-consumer.

Always ask your supplier what percentage of post-consumer waste is in the product. If you are going to use the recycled label, which is in public domain and any one can use it, my suggestion would be to state the percentage of post-consumer waste.

MAKING THE DECISION

So how can a purchaser verify that a paper meets an expectation that it has sound credentials. The following were some recent comments made at a paper listening study:

"Trust. And a healthy dose of skepticism, with verification." —Michael Snyder, Forester

"Clear and unambiguous labeling with percent content by source." —Robert R. Bryan, Forest Ecologist, Maine Audubon

"Currently, FSC is the only widely accepted international certification program among independent environmental advocacy groups." —Victoria Mills, Project Manager, Corporate Partnerships, Environmental Defense.

We've just briefly covered paper here but the same principle applies when purchasing inks or any other materials. By asking your suppliers for more detailed information you can compile your own environmental register of products that have been verified. ●

"Kristina Holdorf is an advocate for environmental innovations within the print and paper industry with in-depth understanding of environmental certification systems, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Green Procurement Policy writing. She is also a registered FSC Chain of Custody Auditor for Scientific Certification Systems, California." For further information visit <www.urbanfreshservices.com>



LEAN AND GREEN