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Catalogues don't grow on trees!

Environmental issues are heating up in the United States with the latest activism on those in the catalogue industry. Forest Ethics, an environmental organization protecting America's endangered forests and wildlife, "harness's the power of the marketplace to reform ecologically unsound business practices". But have these antics worked and what does it mean for those in this industry?

According to Forest Ethics this form of activism has had extremely pleasing results such as environmental commitments procured from some of the largest corporations on the planet, including Starbucks, Johnson & Johnson, and Kinko's. Their latest campaign has been America's largest lingerie company, Victoria Secret., with the ad (pictured) in *The New York Times* on January 21st 2005.

Victoria's Dirty Secret

Victoria Secret mails more than one million catalogues a day, which Forest Ethics claims to be printed on paper made from some the world's last remaining endangered forests. Victoria's Secret prints 395 million catalogues a year, which if you're on their mailing list, you receive, on average, a catalogue every two weeks. According to their website "two years of investigative research has revealed a direct link between Victoria's Secret catalogues and the destruction of the Canadian Boreal, the third largest forest wilderness in the world, a critical regulator of global climate and one of the world's greatest conservation opportunities."

Lafcadio Cortesi of Forest Ethics stated that "The proof of Victoria's Secret's environmental commitment is in its paper, the majority of which has no recycled content and is coming in large part from the world's last Endangered Forests, such as the Canadian Boreal,"

Who else's secret is it too?

Although there has Victoria Secret has been targeted it poses the question, How many other catalogue companies in the world purchase their paper stocks in the same manner? Statistics show that in the U.S alone retailers mail out around 17 billion catalogues a year which equates to 59 catalogues for every man, woman and child in the U.S. most of which go unread and sent to landfill. Yet almost none of this paper contains any recycled content or comes from certified forests. The use of so much paper obviously comes at a significant cost in environmental terms especially when you consider the

complete supply chain from source to disposal and as paper consumption increases so do the environmental impacts.

Here in Australia it seems to be the same story with one of the country's largest publishing companies having no formal policy in place for green procurement, giving assurances that they worked closely with overseas mills who had all the necessary accreditations. They declined however the opportunity to divulge further where the product was sourced and with what certification, stating their main concern was "price because of the sheer volume".

So what responsibility do Corporate companies and retailers have to the environment? Well according to a latest survey many large paper / print buyers have recognized the environmental impacts associated with paper and printing and are slowly changing their practices. Whether driven by consumer demand, government directives, cost savings, or management commitment these companies are buying more recycled or certified paper and above all encouraging their suppliers to adopt cleaner production methods and environmental management systems.

But is that it? A global initiative which is currently being introduced here in Australia is that of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) which is designed to reduce waste from consumer goods and its impact on the environment. EPR involves producers taking more responsibility for managing the environmental impact of their products throughout their life including waste disposal.

The natural approach.

Who came up with that bright idea? Well I guess someone who studies nature, naturally. The mimicking of activities observed in nature is often referred to as Bio-mimetics. Engineers are now turning their attention to nature, seeking to mimic or copy the design. In reference to waste reduction, companies are now looking to nature for answers. To demonstrate this, on a simple scale every organism's waste is another's food source. A common example of this is manure. If you can not eliminate a waste you produced you should convert it to a resource by finding something useful (and economically rewarding) to do with it. Organisms in nature though, excrete their wastes and then do something with it. It is often up to the ingenuity of other organisms to find something useful to do with it. Something to look out for when you're in the garden next!

The Challenge

Companies are now realizing that their environmental reputation is closely linked to its overall reputation and that it is an increasingly important element to switching brands. If a company's environmental commitment is better than its competitors, it has the power to differentiate its products or services,

putting pressure on it's competitors to copy at additional cost. So I guess the question is, Are you a follower or a leader in environmental innovation?