



Going green with your marketing

Global warming—or climate change—has created the specter of an eco-catastrophe so significant that many people now understand the urgent need to reduce, reuse and recycle. But realistically, what can business owners and managers do? Outsource Marketing's Marketing Integrator and in-house "green guru" shares her firm's approach that adds a new layer of responsibility to every aspect of marketing.

By Cassandra Allen

As consumers, we can all practice carbon conservation. We can buy EnergyStar appliances; separate the glass from the plastic; drive less; walk more and actively seek out products manufactured in accordance with sustainable and environmental guidelines.

But what about at work? Businesses need to get involved in addressing global warming, but what actions are appropriate? How should smaller and mid-market firms prioritize the options available to reduce their environmental impact?

At Outsource Marketing, we believe companies of all sizes—no matter what their category—have a responsibility to become better stewards of the environment. As part of our commitment to that goal, I've been recently dubbed Chief Green Marketing Officer. My job: head up an organizational initiative to help our partners, staff, affiliates and clients understand the opportunities to conduct leaner, greener marketing.

We've been recognized by King County (Washington) as one of the [Best Workplaces for Recycling](#), but we know that's only the beginning of a long journey.

Here's our plan, with some key initiatives we've undertaken to minimize our clients' and our impact on the environment.

A seven-step strategy

1. Be strategic. Before even thinking about printing on recycled paper, evaluate your objectives within marketing communications. Being strategic means considering your audience, marketing to those who want to or need to hear your message.

It also means delivering the message to your target audience in the ways they prefer, which is often a phone call or an e-mail. Not only would that save printing thousands of brochures if your targets aren't likely to give it a second glance, but it also increases the odds your message will ultimately get their attention.

2. Target your audience. If you decide to mail your message, think about who receives it. Whether you use an in-house list or buy one, spend the time to clean it up. Make sure the mailing is going to the right person at the current address.

For example: Victoria's Secret mails out more than a million catalogs a day. Imagine the paper wasted sending that catalog to people who have moved or to non-prospects. Worse still is using

"uncleaned" lists that allow multiple copies to be set to a single address or arrive with the wrong name, title or department. Making sure the list is as up-to-date as possible is the responsible thing to do.

3. Print smart. Of course, we can't avoid printing altogether—often, it really is the best way to communicate. But when a project calls for printing, we try to source paper that minimizes environmental impact.

That's because in many forests worldwide, illegal or unsustainable logging contributes to habitat destruction, water pollution, displacement of indigenous peoples and violence against people working in forestry. Many businesses that use wood, paper and forest products understand that forests can be managed and protected at the same time.

We have partnered with printers recognized for their use of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified and post-consumer content recycled paper. In order to use the FSC logo as an environmental claim on paper, the product must have flowed through the FSC chain-of-custody from the FSC-certified forest, to a paper manufacturer, merchant, and finally to a printer who has FSC chain-of-custody certification.

Equally important, we advise our clients to print only what they need. By determining ahead of time how many new brochures are needed, they save money, save storage space and mitigate destruction of forest resources. Printing in higher quantities may save

money upfront, but the storage costs for 10,000 brochures must be considered—especially if only 100 or so a month are actually used.

4. Print locally. When possible, we work with local printers, paper mills, binderies, CD duplicators and other support vendors to minimize shipping by truck or air freight—resulting in a smaller environmental footprint.

We also try to use packaging that is durable. If it's sturdy and well-designed, the package is more likely to be reused. Maybe it will become that special box that everyone wants to get their birthday present in.

It's all about finding ways to reuse—the first of the three Rs. The recipient will remember you and your message will stick around too.

The second R is recycling, and we make it a priority to source and use materials that can be recycled. We search for materials that suit the Postal Service but which can also recycle easily. That means it's best to use materials without a coating, heavy ink coverage or metallic content.

5. Consider electronic files. As bandwidth continues to increase, more people are comfortable receiving brochures, product data sheets or newsletters electronically. Creating electronic files not only allows for new ways to communicate with customers and prospects, but allows for easy updating.

One caution we can share: When transitioning a newsletter to an electronic format, invest the resources it takes to develop a piece that functions online. People read differently on a monitor. Don't just turn your paper newsletter into a PDF. Think about ways you can get your audience to interact with you and make it easy for them to provide feedback.

6. Schedule virtual meetings.

Technology can help even the smallest of businesses with online meeting programs and virtual meeting software. Consider a Web meeting or video conference the next time you need to share ideas verbally with the team. With chat features, shared keyboards and even mini-survey tools available, video conferencing can take meetings to the next level—and save time, travel and the associated environmental impacts.

Web-based virtual meetings for a group of up to 10 people (usually less than \$500 per year) cost only a fraction of the cost of business travel—never mind the productivity gains involved in eliminating time spent traveling to the airport and waiting in security lines.

7. Reuse old or unused materials.

When we updated our corporate communications, we didn't throw out the reams of letterhead with the old address. Instead, we turned them into pads of scratch paper by taking the boxes of letterhead to a bindery. They trimmed off the old address, bound it at the top and voila! We now have new notepads on high-quality paper for a few dollars.

Ever since we've made going green an organization-wide priority, we use opportunities as they arise to let our clients know what we're doing. You can do likewise. For example, put a small footnote about the type of paper you're using on a brochure, or if your piece qualifies for FSC certification, add their logo to further promote sustainable forest practices. Spreading the word about our efforts toward sustainability has gradually become integrated into our organizational culture.

However, many companies are jumping on the green bandwagon, and we felt it was imperative to be truthful about the limits to our environmental efforts. We are straightforward about what we actually do and we're honest about scope and timelines about our green objectives. Clients and consumers are getting smarter and they will ask questions that every company must be prepared to answer.

Almost 600 U.S. cities have now signed on to voluntarily comply with the Kyoto Protocol, an international set of standards to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In many cities, there are partnerships with local businesses to effect those goals. Consider becoming the green leader in your industry. It will provide a forum to share information with other local business leaders and help you access creative ideas to accelerate your green initiatives.

In the end, it's not just about saving a tree or reducing your company's waste, but about being smart with your marketing and using your resources wisely. After all, being green isn't just good for the environment, it's good for your business.

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