

KERMIT WAS WRONG!

It *Is* Easy Being Green(er)

Ten ways to improve your environmental footprint without breaking the bank.

By Thomas P. Trutna



Thomas Trutna is a former ad agency executive who purchased Eagan, Minn.-based BIG INK Display Graphics in 1999. Trutna quickly learned the business and strives to provide a start-to-finish hassle-free experience for his customers. He can be contacted through the BIG INK Web site at www.inkbig.com.

I see one more reference to Kermit the Frog and his insipid slogan, "It's not easy being green," I may just *croak!*

That prerequisite Kermit headline is usually followed by an article detailing the obstacles and expense that must be endured in order to make a digital print operation more earth friendly (or at least somewhat responsible). The truth is it's really not that hard to start doing things today

that, over time, will make a difference and hopefully lighten our environmental footprint.

LOOK GREEN, BE GREEN

And there are business benefits as well. In our shop, certain clients are already asking about environmentally friendly options, and I believe that more and more will ask about it in the near future. By bringing this conversation out to clients, you're positioning yourself as a leader. This could potentially bring in new business, or may help ensure that your company's name is top-of-mind when someone decides they need a "greener" printing solution.

Technical advancements in our industry are certainly starting to support this ef-

fort. But, until we can all afford to replace equipment, and manufacturers offer more "environmentally sound" materials, I'd like to suggest 10 ways to be kinder to our earth without harming the budget.

After the first few calls came in from clients looking for more green options, our sales team sat down and came up with the following list of ideas to pass along. And we haven't stopped there, we now have a "Green Committee" that works on ways we can improve internally, as well as provide more options for our clients.

A 10-STEP ECO-PROGRAM

Although several of these suggestions are not completely without consequence, they most certainly reduce them. Most require the simple ECO formula: Engineer to use; Counsel your customers; Open mindedness.



Big Ink Display Graphics is located in Eagan, Minn.



Using standard poster paper instead of PVC banner material lightens the environmental impact.

This shipping insert reinforces Big Ink's brand message and explains the reuse of packing materials.



1) **Print double sided** — A large retailer ordered 50 "Coming Soon" signs and 50 "Now Open" signs. I suggested we print each banner double sided for half the substrate cost and waste. You'd be surprised how often this idea can be used.

2) **Utilize paper-based prints and substrates** — For one-day events, it seems wasteful to use an environmentally-questionable poly-vinyl- (petroleum) based substrate. If your client requires a heavy duty solution to withstand high winds, discuss white-faced cardboard, reinforced paper or lighter-weight mesh fabric that will likely break-down faster.

3) **Design artwork to be timeless** — Encourage customers to avoid using dates on large artwork, emphasizing cost savings and reusability. Brainstorm with them about additional uses. If dates are essential, suggest applying with cut-vinyl that can be changed whenever needed.

4) **Utilize "alternatives" to solvent-based inks** — While low-solvent and soy/corn-based inks are helpful, they don't eliminate the VOCs in the drying process. Certainly, UV-cured ink technology is leading the way toward greener digital

printing. Don't forget about good old aqueous inks if your print doesn't require more than a couple of weeks longevity.

5) **Donate end rolls and obsolete materials** — I was surprised to learn that our waste was a huge asset to local schools, daycare centers and art centers. Stuff we're tossing out can be used as a canvas for budding young artists. The same holds true for material that has been printed on only one side.

6) **Donate MDO and structure signs to reuse centers** — This could be as easy as a listing on Craigslist. We had a response from someone who builds sheds from our cast-off 4' x 8' site signs. We also found a reuse center that recycles the material for construction projects. Check with Habitat for Humanity in your area.

7) **Maximize your image placement to reduce substrate waste** — Counsel customers about standard widths of media to reduce material waste. Sometimes it's as simple as mentioning that a 120" width is more efficient than 136", thus significantly reducing the amount of material waste (as well as production time).

8) **Use a certified recycling firm to dispose of all solvents and ink** — Be-



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Since MDO and plywood can't be recycled conventionally, this playhouse was made from a printer shipping crate and an old leasing sign. Craigslist is also a good place to give away scrap materials for free.



While both of these graphics were printed for an annual golf event, leaving the date off the large banner allowed the customer to re-use the print, saving them money, and reducing waste.

fore we found a recycling firm that turns our waste into energy, we paid to dispose of solvents and inks at a recycling center. Now it's less costly and far easier to have it picked up on a monthly basis. Explore local options, including Safety Kleen, a nationwide company that provides waste management solutions.

9) **Reuse shipping materials and roll cores** — Who says shipping materials need to be used only once? Your customers will appreciate their part in your conservation effort if you explain that you reuse bubble wrap, cartons, etc. And if you include a note in each package, you just may earn points for being green.

10) **Research recycling options** — I was surprised to find that there are several pallet and scrap wood recyclers within a few miles of our shop. Soon, I anticipate we'll see more ways to recycle banner and film products. DuPont is currently sponsoring a nationwide campaign to recycle its Tyvek material into things like park benches as a sound alternative to wood.

NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

I admit, none of this is rocket science. We often miss the most obvious things while concentrating on the more sizable challenges of new equipment purchases, converting older systems or sourcing new materials.

In the recent release, *The Green Book: The Everyday Guide to Saving the Planet One Simple Step at a Time*, by Elizabeth Rogers and Thomas M. Kostigen, the authors highlight hundreds of little things we can all do each day to make a difference in our world. Once again, much of it is far from revolutionary, but it's amazing to see how small changes in our daily consumption can have such a huge long-term effect on our earth.

So far, the clients interested in green products have responded positively, especially when the suggestion benefits their bottom line as well. And there are currently upcoming projects being discussed, which means customers are looking to us as a partner in finding solutions, which is a great position to be in. I'm sure as you look around your shop you'll find many more.