

WINNERS AND WASTERS IN THE PAPER CHASE

Shrink project report on paper reduction by UK companies, May 2009

The result of a project to persuade major UK paper buyers to address paper efficiency shows that fewer than half are on the right track and too many are using paper wastefully.

The Shrink project, run by a coalition of environmental organisations, has scored some of the largest UK supermarkets, magazine publishers, catalogue retailers and finance companies for paper efficiency. Only one company achieved Gold, three scored Silver and six Bronze in terms of efficient paper use, compared to 11 companies that failed to show adequate activity on paper efficiency. The scores are the result of a challenge put to 20 UK paper buyers, as part of the Shrink project, to cut their current paper use by half.

SETTING THE STANDARD

Top of the league and setting a great 'standard' is finance company Standard Life, which has pledged to reduce its paper use by half. It has already made great strides towards this goal, with green teams within the organisation slashing paper consumption by more than 20%. Of its one-and-a-half million shareholders, only 6% want the company to send information out by post, which means that it can save money, trees and climate by sending out less mail.

THE WASTERS

Bottom of the heap is catalogue retailer Freemans which is responsible for sending out thousands of tonnes of unwanted catalogues that go straight from our post boxes into the bin. Freemans has not responded to any of our communications and shown no interest in making more efficient use of paper.

MAKING A START

In between, our score card shows that some companies are getting the idea that saving paper can help them cut their carbon footprints and save money, while others lag behind. Some of the finance companies have been the first to take efficiency steps. We have been pleasantly surprised by some of the responses we have had from the magazine companies, which despite paper being their core business, are getting serious about reducing waste by trying to reduce the number of unsold magazines they produce and taking paper saving measures in house as well.

MUST DO BETTER

Most companies, however, need to do much better. Packaging is a huge source of trash in our society, yet overall the supermarkets have performed woefully in the project. Littlewoods has shown that even catalogue companies can cut their paper use by encouraging customers to shop online, but the rest of the catalogue retail sector stands out for not only junk mailing us all, but apparently not caring that we wish they would stop. What will we have to do to stop their flagrant paper waste?



photo by IPC Media

The project targeted a range of big paper consumers and companies with strong corporate responsibility values. We have written to them, phoned them, emailed them, invited them to meet us, made presentations to them, offered them space on our website, given them hints and tips and guides, calculated the environmental benefits of paper savings and done everything we could think of to try to win them over to paper saving. One year on, this is how they have scored.

COMPANY SCORE-CARD

FINANCIAL
COMPANIES

SUPERMARKETS

MAGAZINE
PUBLISHERS

CATALOGUE
COMPANIES

>90%



Standard Life

76-89%



IPC Media/
Time Warner
Haymarket
Littlewoods Shop
Direct Group

50-75%



Barclays
HSBC
Halifax/
Bank of Scotland
Asda
Tesco
National Magazines

0-49%

FAIL

Triodos Bank
Morrisons
Somerfield
Sainsbury's
Bauer
Future Publishing
Ikea
Argos
Boden

0%

WASTERS

Freemans

The scores are a combination of marks assigned for three criteria: a) how co-operative the companies have been with the Shrink project (20%), b) their level of commitment to paper saving (30%) and most importantly, c) their action to reduce paper consumption (50%). Details of scores are available on request.

We hope that some of the companies who have done badly so far will improve their scores by making commitments and taking action to cut their paper consumption. We are happy to help companies who contact us for guidance.

Why does paper matter? In the UK, paper use is 4 times the world average, far more than our fair share of this limited resource. Our 'paper footprint' is excessive: around 80% of the paper we use is imported from forests in other countries. In the UK, we are swamped by paper products that we neither want nor need, like junk mail, advertising and excessive packaging. Far too much paper use is wasteful: almost half of all UK office paper is in the bin by the end of the first day it is used. Paper production, use and disposal are responsible for three times as much climate change emissions as aviation. Half of the trees cut commercially around the world end up in paper products, yet much of this paper use is wasteful and unnecessary and it is linked to human rights abuses, forest destruction, pollution and climate change emissions.

Check out our website: www.shrinkpaper.org for more information.

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