

# A greener machine

Publishers and booksellers are striving to cut waste in the ways they bring books to readers. Tom Holman gathers advice on how to make the supply chain more environmentally friendly

As pressure mounts on everyone to do their bit for the environment, publishers and booksellers are feeling the heat more than most. With its copious and conspicuous use of paper and energy, the book supply chain has a sizeable carbon footprint that is drawing increasingly close attention, both within the industry and outside of it. And as awareness of climate change and other environmental impacts spread, the challenge is on for this and all industries to not just talk green but act it, too.

One reason publishing faces particular pressure is that book buyers are a greener bunch than their non-reading counterparts, as research agency Book Marketing Ltd (BML) found in its recent Book Lovers and the Environment survey. According to BML, the number of book lovers who have considered whether buying books is bad for the environment has doubled to 10% since 2007, while more than a third have thought about buying fewer new books because of their environmental impact. The message is becoming clear: publishers risk losing sales unless they can be seen to be green.

While some are only just waking up to eco issues, others in the industry have been taking action for some time. The Environmental Action Group (EAG), run by the Publishers and Booksellers Associations and chaired by Penguin m.d. Helen Fraser, has provided companies with practical support since setting the challenge of reducing carbon emissions by at least 10% by the end of

2015. The Publishers Green Network (PGN) is a forum for sharing grassroots information among some 30 members who, as in the EAG, range in size from multi-national giants to small independents.

PGN chair Ashley Lodge, corporate responsibility manager at HarperCollins, says the success of both groups proves that the publishing industry is committed to the green agenda. But he points out that publishers need to involve their entire supply chain in their efforts, too. "Even if we as publishers are doing our best, we've got to make sure we're fully scrutinising our suppliers to make sure everyone is reaching the right standards."

## Greener on paper

The link in the chain receiving the most attention is books' biggest ingredient—paper. A recent survey in the US by the Book Industry Study Group found that more than three-fifths of publishing's carbon foot-

print came from the forest impacts of sourcing paper, with another quarter from paper production and printing.

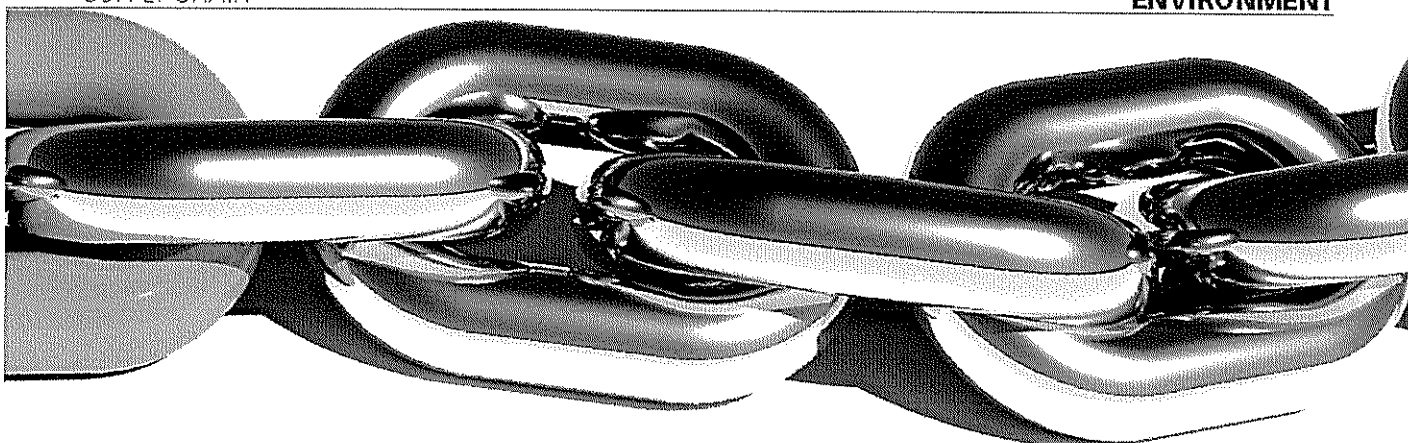
Simon Miller, principal consultant at Best Foot Forward, an organisation that helps companies map their carbon footprints, agrees that paper and production are publishing's biggest environmental impacts by far. He recommends analysing all stages of the paper supply chain, from plantations to mills and printers, and investigating the history and sustainability of all paper bought.

But getting the right materials for books isn't as straightforward as it seems. Recycled paper doesn't always equate to environmentally-sound paper, since the process soaks up energy and chemicals. Likewise, abandoning paper altogether and publishing digitally isn't necessarily a greener option, since the energy used in producing, distributing and reading e-books soon tops up. A recent study by Reed Elsevier of one of its electronic journals, for example, found that it was no greener than its print equivalent.

One trustworthy standard in paper sourcing is the accreditation scheme run by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). FSC-approved paper pulp comes from properly managed sources and is responsibly handled at the processing and conversion stages, too. More and more publishers are demanding FSC-endorsed paper and it is now easier than ever to find

## TEN GROUPS AND AGENCIES THAT CAN HELP CUT YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

- Environmental Action Group ([www.green4books.org.uk](http://www.green4books.org.uk)). News and practical advice from the BA-PA initiative
- Publishers Green Network ([www.green4books.org.uk](http://www.green4books.org.uk)). Sister forum to the EAG with quarterly meetings
- PREPS ([www.preps-uk.com](http://www.preps-uk.com)). Database to help publishers source the right paper
- Prelims ([www.prelims.org](http://www.prelims.org)). Group to help publishers produce their books ethically
- Forest Stewardship Council ([www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)). Advice and accreditation for paper
- Programme for the Endorsement of Forestry Certification ([www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org)). Europe-wide scheme for sustainable paper sourcing
- E4Books ([www.bic.org.uk/e4books](http://www.bic.org.uk/e4books)). Trade-wide campaign to replace paper transactions with electronic ones
- Envirowise ([www.envirowise.gov.uk](http://www.envirowise.gov.uk)). Government agency supporting businesses' efforts to reduce waste
- Lovely as a Tree ([www.lovelyasatree.com](http://www.lovelyasatree.com)). Independent guide to paper and printers for designers
- Green Press Initiative ([www.greenpressinitiative.org](http://www.greenpressinitiative.org)). America's version of the EAG and a useful source of ideas



a forest-friendly printer. The FSC says the number of accredited firms more than doubled last year, and the premium in price that certified paper carries is coming down as demand rises too. Fifteen UK publishers, meanwhile, collaborate on PREPS—a database of pooled information about the environmental credentials of various paper pulps and sources.

#### Cutting book miles

After paper and printing, the supply chain's next biggest environmental impact is transportation. Andy Keith, partner at supply chain consultancy Total Logistics, says the shift towards printing overseas has only added to the number of legs in a book's journey. "With all the shipping, trucking and warehousing, it's easy to see how a book could be handled six or seven times," he says.

Printing closer to home might help cut publishers' carbon footprints, and not just because it would reduce the miles a book has to travel. Presses in the UK are generally much more energy efficient than in the Far East or Eastern Europe where publishers have turned for cheap deals lately. With some exceptions, ethical standards in paper sourcing and care of staff are likely to be higher, too.

One publisher to have acknowledged this is the book arm of the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT). Graham Preston, publications officer at the company, says it prints

locally using businesses with sound environmental policies, using only recycled or FSC-accredited paper. He admits that it costs up to a fifth more to do so, but thinks prices will fall if more publishers demand the same. "It might cost us a bit more, but we stick to our guns on this. It's all about making publishers aware of their damage and encouraging everyone to do their bit."

Like most observers, Best Foot Forward's Miller is baffled by the levels of waste generated in the supply chain by returns and the disposal of unwanted stock. "If books are being shipped around the world and then driven around the country only to be pulped, it's an enormous waste," Andy Keith suggests that better forecasting of sales and more efficient pulping of books—perhaps shifting the responsibility away from publishers to retailers—would help. The increasing popularity of print on demand may also reduce the number of books printed only to be pulped.

Progress on returns has been promised by Waterstone's, which hopes to cut them by as much as 30% once its new consolidation centre is up and running. It predicts financial and environmental savings once books can be delivered to its Burton upon Trent warehouse rather than to multiple stores and then recycled within the chain. Across the trade, Book Industry Communication's Industry Returns Initiative is trying

to make headway, though without wide agreement on firm sale, returns will continue to gather book miles.

#### Fuelling change

Quicker wins in reducing waste in books' progress from printer to bookshop will come through more efficient use of packaging. Reusable totes and recycled packing materials are becoming more popular, and distributors and carriers are making concerted efforts to consolidate consignments and ensure their vehicles are full. Efficiencies in transportation are also being driven by the steep rise in fuel prices over the last two years, says Hugh Jones, director of solutions at the Carbon Trust. "With oil prices hitting new highs, saving energy and reducing carbon emissions should be a priority for every business now more than ever."

Jeremy Hammant, partner at supply chain consultants LCP, which numbers Waterstone's among its clients, agrees. "Transport costs haven't always been very high up companies' agendas, but they're very much in focus now. And if you can reduce your fuel bill you can legitimately say you're greener, too."

These sort of financial incentives are essential if companies are to become more energy efficient, he adds. "It's a brave person who tells their m.d. that they've reduced their carbon footprint by 25% but increased their costs by 5%."

So while progress is being made, as long as going green costs money, much more remains to be done.

Julia Hailes, a sustainability consultant and author of *The New Green Consumer Guide*, believes the industry needs serious collaboration if it is to substantially reduce its energy and paper consumption and waste. "Publishing is behind a lot of other industries in terms of doing something about its environmental impacts. At the moment, the efforts seem a bit tokenistic—it needs to make changes across the board."

### TEN WAYS TO A GREENER SUPPLY CHAIN

- 1 **Measure your footprint** Assess the biggest environmental impacts and prioritise actions accordingly.
- 2 **Plan** Write an environmental policy and set short- and long-term targets.
- 3 **Pressure suppliers** Ask every link in the supply chain to reach the same standards you set.
- 4 **Pick the right paper** Ask about the eco-impact of every paper on offer, and look for FSC or PEFC accreditation.
- 5 **Reduce packaging** Insist on recycled and biodegradable materials and reuse as much as possible.
- 6 **Transport efficiently** Consolidate consignments so that trucks and ships carrying your books are full. Avoid planes if together.
- 7 **Trade online** Cut down on paper by ordering, invoicing and paying electronically.
- 8 **Cut returns** Better forecasting, greater liaison between publishers and booksellers and supporting the Industry Returns Initiative can all help.
- 9 **Offset** Schemes including Climate Care enable you to compensate for your emissions.
- 10 **Get some help** There are plenty of green consultancies and government agencies ready to advise or help with specific tasks.

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The Supply Chain Supplement | 3 October 2008 7