The era of FSC certification

Printers who have not yet achieved FSC certification stand to lose business when their customers demand sustainable supplies. By Jade Ollis

As companies and their customers become increasingly more eco-conscious, the FSC stamp of approval carries a large amount of weight, and if a printer is going to be the weakest link in the chain, causing the company to forfeit the accreditation on its products and packaging, the printer will be replaced. The good news is that the paper industry is ranked as the third most ‘carbon positive’ sector around the world, because the process of planting new trees, making, transporting, using and finally discarding (recycling) paper actually absorbs more greenhouse gasses than it releases. The FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) is the body which monitors, checks and certifies that companies act in an environmentally-responsible manner. Although FSC certification is not yet a legal requirement, almost all of the major paper suppliers worldwide are certified.

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A paper is FSC-certified when it has gone through a system of forest certification and product labelling that identifies wood-based products originating from well-managed ecological and economical sources. At all these sources, forestry
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not adopted FSC certification policies as enthusiastically as paper industry suppliers. It is important that they consider becoming certified to meet demands for sustainable products from their customers. Corporate customers now understand the relevance and importance of FSC and want to be able to use the logo on their products; however this is only possible if the printer/print shop used is also certified. It is in a printer's best interest to become certified so as not to miss out on potential business.

A possible stumbling block for printers may be the many misconceptions as to what is required to be FSC certified. Some printers believe that in order to achieve certification, all paper used in a print plant must originate from certified suppliers or forests. The actual regulations are somewhat less stringent: all that is required is that FSC certified paper must be kept separate from non-certified paper and that a chain of custody is maintained for the FSC paper. Another misconception that some printers have is that FSC can only apply to recycled paper. In fact, both recycled and virgin (non-recycled) paper can acquire FSC certification, as long as the point of origin of a paper is known.

The process of becoming certified involves an initial audit of the printer, which results in a list of requirements and recommendations that set out the needs for the company to become compliant. The printer must then take the necessary actions, after which a follow-up audit will take place to ensure that these corrective actions have taken place. If this follow up audit is passed, the certificate can be issued. An annual check-up will be done to ensure that requirements are still being met year on year. Once a printer has been certified, they may use the FSC logo, subject to payment of an annual fee.

Paper producers such as Antalis have a wide range of papers; all of them manufactured using environmentally responsible processes by FSC certified paper mills. Antalis papers make ‘going green’ simple by ensuring that a company can limit or erase its impact on the resources of the planet. Antalis distributes papers that are sourced from Responsibly Managed Forests, carrying ISO 14001 and ISO 9001 as well as FSC certification on both virgin and recycled options. All Antalis’ suppliers subscribe to and comply with its environmental charter. The Antalis office paper offering is ‘green’, meaning that the trees used for this paper come from Kha-na-na (the farmers’ unused land between rice paddies). The production absorbs carbon dioxide, and reduces green house gas emissions. This sustainable and environmentally-friendly source of wood is used to produce the Antalis Double A Office paper. Natural by-products are used to generate renewable energy biomass electricity and steam for the plant and its local rural farming communities grow Double A trees. Antalis South Africa hold a FSC™ CoC multi-site certificate (FSC™ C100415).