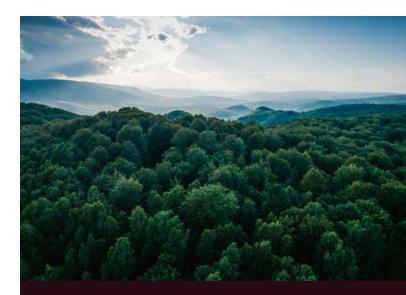# THE IMPACT OF GREENWASHING

Consumers are increasingly aware of the impact their choices have on the environment and are influenced by environmental and/or green claims made by trusted organisations. These claims are called greenwashing. Greenwash is defined as **"Behaviour or activities that make people believe that a company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is"**, (Cambridge Dictionary).

Banks,utility companies, telecommunications providers, and many other organisations consumers deal with on a daily basis are urging their customers to go paperless with claims that paperless bills, statements, and other electronic communications save trees, are "greener", and better for the environment. These statements are often greenwashing as they typically are not specific, and/or do not cite reliable scientific evidence. Without evidence to support these claims, the communication also contravenes advertising regulations in most European countries. Most commonly, the driving reason for this move to digital communication is cost reduction.

Examples of misleading statements; 1. Go paperless, save trees and help save the planet 2. Move to email away from tree-mail 3. Go to digital statements and protect the environment

These statements are not just misleading in many cases, but are damaging to an industry that employs in the UK alone, 116,000 people (1,096,000 EU), in more than 8,400 businesses (115,700 EU).

Greenwashing is costing the UK printing and postal industries an estimated £10 million per annum. This information sheet will provide you with valuable facts and statistics that you should consider before encouraging your customers to switch to digital communication for environmental reasons.

MYTH GOING PAPERLESS SAVES TREES AND STOPS DEFORESTATION

It's common to see organisations make statements such as "save trees and stop deforestation" to encourage their customers to move from paper communications to electronic communications. In fact, these statements simply aren't true. Here's why: A healthy market for forest products, such as paper, encourages the long-term growth of forests through sustainable forest management. Which, in turn, helps to mitigate climate change by absorbing CO_2. Between 2005 and 2020, European forests, which provide 90% of the virgin wood fibre used by the European paper industry, grew by 58,390 km2 – an area bigger than Switzerland and amounts to 1,500 football pitches of forest growth every day (United Nations FAO, 2020). Providing an organisation is sourcing its paper from responsible producers, they should not be concerned about saving trees.

MYTH PAPER IS WASTEFUL AND BAD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Paper is one of the most recycled materials on the planet. In Europe, a total of 57.5 million tonnes of paper was collected and recycled in 2019, resulting in a recycling rate of 72% (Cepi, 2019). Paper packaging has an even higher recycling rate at 85% (Eurostat, 2019).

Paper making is an inherently sustainable process. Based on wood, a natural renewable material, the papermaking process is a sustainable cycle. Both virgin fibres, sourced from sustainably managed forests, and recycled fibres, recovered from curbside collections, are used to replenish and maintain the process. Paper for recycling is an essential raw material for the paper industry and should not be classed as waste.

57.5M TONNES OF PAPER WAS COLLECTED AND RECYCLED IN 2019

MYTH ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION IS BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT THAN PAPER-BASED COMMUNICATION

Electronic communication is not consequence free and has an environmental impact which cannot be ignored. The energy consumption required for digital technologies is increasing by 9% each year. The share of digital technologies in global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions increased between 2013 and 2019, from 2.5% to 3.7% of global emissions. In comparison, the paper, pulp and print sector is one of the lowest industrial emitters of greenhouse gasses, accounting for 0.8% of European emissions (CEPI, 2019). The CO_2 emissions of the European pulp and paper industry reduced by 25% between 2005 and 2017. The European pulp and paper industry is also the biggest single user and producer of renewable energy in Europe, with 60% of its energy consumption coming from renewable sources (CEPI, 2018). The electronic waste problem is growing.

PAPER PACKAGING HAS A RECYCLING RATE OF 85%

MAKING MISLEADING STATEMENTS CONTRAVENES ADVERTISING REGULATIONS

Organisations should be aware that misleading environmental claims contravene both, Defra's guidance on green claims and the UK CAP Code administered by the Advertising Standards Authority. Regulations by The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). For more information click here and should not be classed as waste.

Regulations by The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) DEFRA publishes principles for making environmental claims. This is general guidance for businesses that want to display a green credential in marketing, packaging or other communications. When a green claim is made, it should be:

- **RELEVANT TO ANYONE BUYING OR USING IT.**
- **CLEARLY AND ACCURATELY STATED.**
- **JUSTIFIABLE.**

For more information click here

CONSUMER PROTECTION LEGISLATION

With growing concerns about how organisations mislead consumers, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is now tasked to develop consumer protection legislation to tackle false or misleading environmental claims. This legislation will extend beyond advertising and marketing to cover customer communications and service messages.

Find out more here

WHICH IS ENVIRONMENTALLY BEST – PAPER OR DIGITAL?

The simple answer is both have impacts, and it is not possible to easily determine whether one is better than the other. To satisfy DEFRA and other Green Claims criteria, there would need to be a complete and detailed Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) of the two alternative processes for a true comparison. These are notoriously difficult to complete. To make an accurate comparison it is critical to consider that any form of communication has two ends, one sending and one receiving.

For digital communication the recipient must open the communication on a device, the device must be charged and also has its own life cycle to consider. It is important to understand what actions an email may trigger; opening attachments, storing, sharing and many consumers print at home, with consequential impact. 59% of UK consumers say they regularly print out documents at home if they want a hard copy (Two Sides/Toluna, 2021). When paper communication is received it may be stored, recycled, burned as a bio-fuel or thrown away to biodegrade. When an organisation claims digital has a lower environmental impact, the consumers interaction must be factored into the LCA. A recent LCA published by La Poste (National French Postal Operator) undertaken by independent research organisation Quantis, to ISO standards for life cycle assessment (ISO 14040-14044) assessed 16 relevant indicators in 5 impact areas including; ecosystems, resources, human health, water and climate change. It looked at a variety of different formats from catalogues to billing and statements where, in most cases, print came out as the most sustainable option. For more information, click here

Source: Go Green, Go Paperless Messages Are Misleading from Two sides. For more information visit www.twosides.info

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Defaulting people to go paperless without choice will impact those most vulnerable and at risk in our communities. In the UK, 4.5 million adults have never used the internet (Office of National Statistics, 2018). Often, it is the most vulnerable members of society that depend on traditional, postal, transactional mail. The move to an onlineonly society risks leaving older people, the disabled, rural dwellers and those on low incomes disconnected. A survey commissioned by Two Sides of European consumers, undertaken by Toluna in 2021 showed that responsible organisations should not remove the right from consumers to choose whether they receive paper or digital communications. They should also demonstrate good Corporate Responsibility by making no surcharges or making it difficult for consumers to continue receiving paper communications. To find out more about a consumers right to choice, please visit: keepmeposted.org.uk

How can my business spot Greenwashing?

We all want to do our part to be environmentally conscious and help curb climate change and there are businesses that are trying to do the right thing. But, it can be difficult to know what are genuine claims and what claims are being made to reduce costs and virtue signal. The following tips will help.

- **KEEPING AN EYE ON CONTENT OF THE ARTWORK YOUR CLIENTS SEND WILL HELP COMBAT GREENWASHING**
- **USE TWO SIDES RESOURCES TO UNDERSTAND THE BEST WAY TO APPROACH YOUR CLIENT**
- **KEEP YOUR CLIENT UPDATED AND INFORMED ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF PAPER TO EDUCATE THEM AND HELP PREVENT GREENWASHING CLAIMS**