How Green Are You?

A new *IPG* survey of in-plants reveals that while sustainability is important to in-plants, it's not always viewed as crucial.

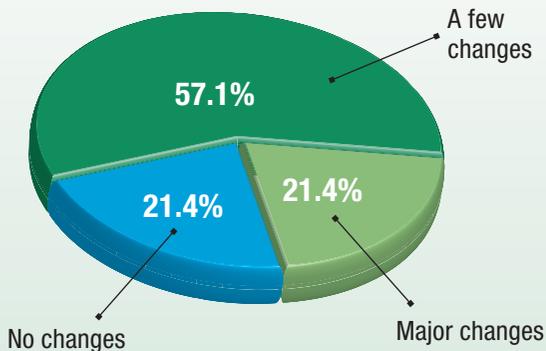By Bob Neubauer

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY has been an issue for printers for decades, but perhaps never more so than in the Internet age, when the public took hold of the misguided notion that print "kills trees" and that online posts were better for the environment. (Digital data is stored on a "cloud" after all. What's more "natural" than that, right?)

Printers have had to work hard to dispel this notion, and in the process promote their own sustainable attributes. In-plants, because of their position inside an organization or company, are especially aware of the need to be good stewards of the environment to make their organizations proud. But as our recent sustainability survey revealed, concern about sustainability varies widely, with only nominal interest by some parent organizations.

Our survey brought in 155 responses from a range of in-plants, though the majority serve educational or government organizations. With environmental issues so important on college campuses, it's no surprise that college and university in-plants responded in great numbers, making up 38% of respondents. School district in-plants comprised 16% and government in-plants made up another 14%. The remaining respondents hailed from manufacturing, healthcare, nonprofit, retail, banking and insurance industries, plus a few others.
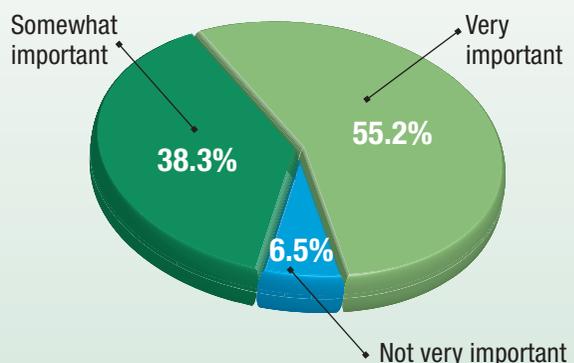
Though the West Coast is known for its focus on the environment, its in-plants made up only 18.5% of our respondents. Midwestern in-plants comprised 31.5%, followed by those in the Northeast with 30% and the South with 20%.

Green Changes at In-plants

A few changes — 57.1%
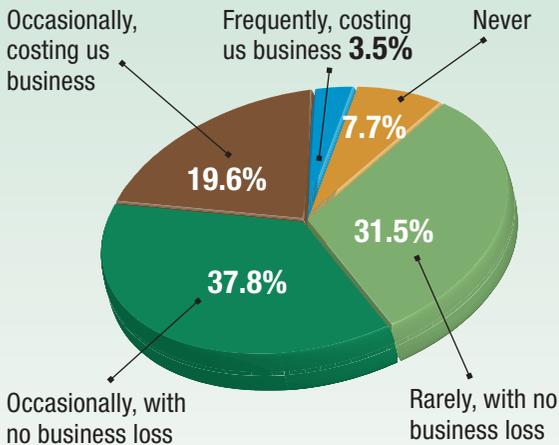No changes — 21.4%
Major changes — 21.4%

When we asked in-plant managers whether they had made any changes over the past four years to be more sustainable, more than three quarters (78.5%) said they had. Most of these changes, however, have been minimal. The same percentage (21.4%) made major changes as made none at all, leaving the majority — nearly 60% — to make just a few environmentally conscious alterations. As you'll see in the next section, this is a missed opportunity.

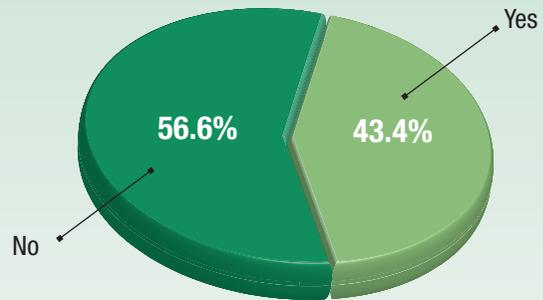## How Important is Sustainability To Your Organization?

Somewhat important — 38.3%
Very important — 55.2%
Not very important — 6.5%

More than half of in-plants would characterize their parent organization's interest in sustainability to be "very important." Yet according to the previous chart, only 21% have made major changes at their in-plants to support this organizational priority. Promoting the in-plant's sustainable actions is a great way to show dedication to the organization's goals, as many in-plants understand.

Do Customers Perceive Print as Environmentally Harmful?

Occasionally, costing us business

Frequently, costing us business **3.5%**

Never

19.6%

7.7%

31.5%

37.8%

Occasionally, with no business loss

Rarely, with no business loss

Are You Telling Them Why It's Not?
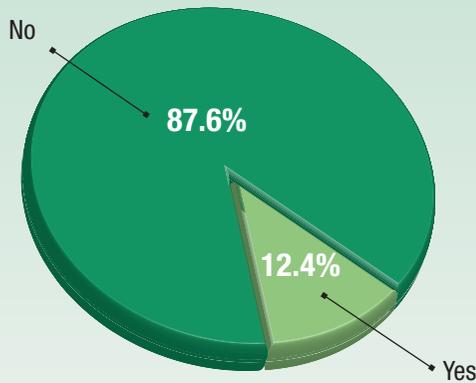
Yes

56.6%

43.4%

No

Print has gotten a bad rap over the years, with uninformed people insisting that it "kills trees" and clutters landfills. In fact, print is a far more sustainable process than many in the general public realize, as much of the paper used is made from recycled content and from trees planted by paper mills, and most ends up in a recycling bin. (Plus, the carbon footprint of the supposedly innocuous alternative, email, is significant when considering the energy needed to move it and store it using air conditioned data centers.)

Still, 61% of in-plants have encountered customers who perceive print as not environmentally friendly. And 23% have lost print work because of this perception. Fortunately, 43% are working hard to change that view by reaching out to their customers to spread the message that print is a sustainable process. They are sharing information on sustainability practices such as reforestation provided by paper vendors along with sustainability facts from Two Sides North America and ChoosePrint.org. Here are some of the ways they're promoting the sustainability of print:
- One-on-one discussions to share data on the renewability of paper and sustainable sources
- Invitations to private tours to show off the in-plant's sustainable practices
- Open house focus on sustainable tree harvesting
- Infographics posted in the customer service area
- Posters around the campus touting print's sustainability
- Free pads of paper with a cover sheet highlighting the in-plant's sustainable accomplishments
- A table at the college sustainability festival for distributing handouts
- Presentations at company retreats
- Sustainability messages on in-plant's website
- Targeted campaigns to customers with sustainability information coupled with information related to the effectiveness of print and mixed media campaigns
- Presentations of sustainability facts while marketing the in-plant
- Work with college sustainability office to market in-plant's sustainability accomplishments
- Social media postings of in-plant sustainability accomplishments and facts from Two Sides NA
- Used data on replanting and recycling to confront corporate communications team after it sent emails about reducing print to be more environmentally friendly
- Calling out incorrect statements on email footers and websites that tell people to "help the environment" by not printing, and notifying the senders about sustainable forestry practices
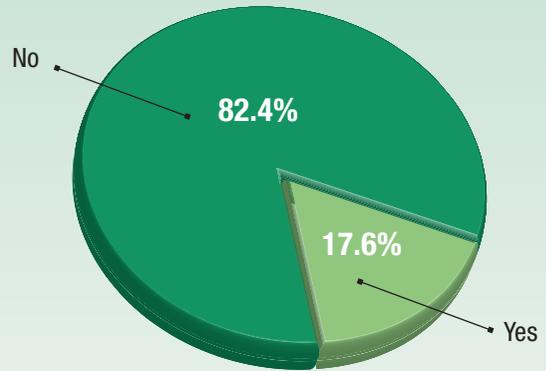
Are You FSC Certified?

No
87.6%

12.4%
Yes

If So, How Has It Helped?

Aligned in-plant with parent organization goals **70.6%**

Improved in-plant's reputation **41.2%**

Generated new business for in-plant **23.5%**

0   50   100

Only about an eighth of all in-plants have earned chain-of-custody certification from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), but the benefits have been great for those that did. About 70% of those who are certified say that it aligns the in-plant with the parent organization's desire to be seen as environmentally conscious, and even gives the organization an opportunity to brag about the in-plant. About 41% say it improves the in-plant's internal reputation, particularly among customers focused on sustainability. Some of those customers have even sent more work to the in-plant, solely because of its FSC certification.
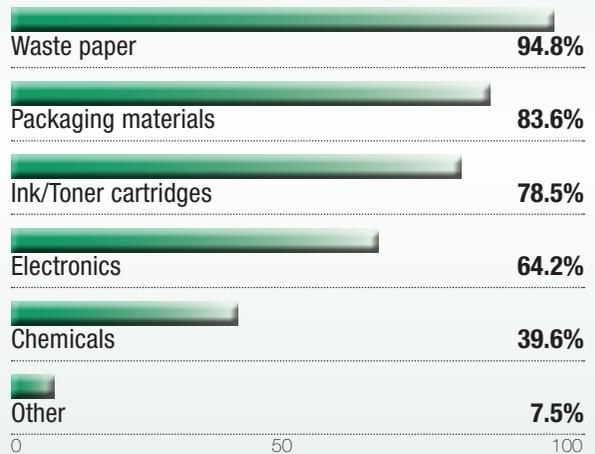
Interestingly, however, several respondents noted that they were once FSC certified but did not renew it due to the cost and perceived apathy of customers. "It was not a priority for most customers, and the return was not worth the time/cost/energy," noted one. Another felt that attaining FSC certification did not help the in-plant at all.

Does Sustainability Bring Business?

No
82.4%

17.6%
Yes

Though most in-plants would insist they are not enacting sustainable measures to gain business, sometimes it helps. Almost 18% say that their sustainability efforts have gained them business from like-minded customers.

What Do You Recycle?

Waste paper **94.8%**

Packaging materials **83.6%**

Ink/Toner cartridges **78.5%**

Electronics **64.2%**

Chemicals **39.6%**

Other **7.5%**

0   50   100
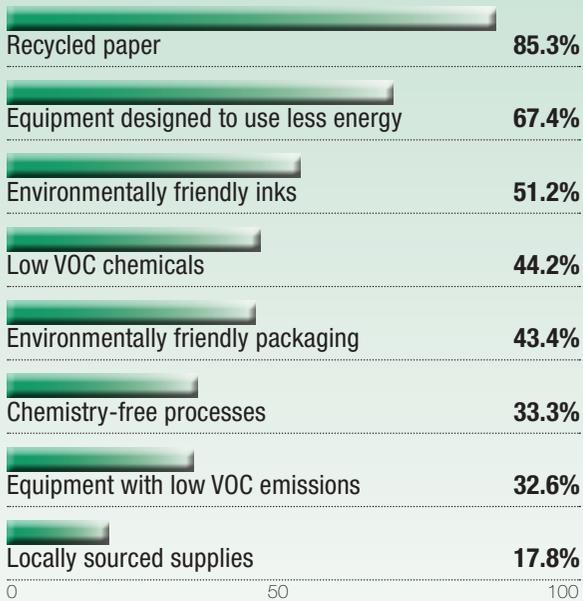
Recycling is one of the simplest and most visible ways for in-plants to demonstrate sustainability. Paper, obviously, is the No. 1 most recycled item, with about 95% collecting waste paper for recycling. Packaging materials also top the list, with about 84% recycling them. Other items that in-plants recycle are scrap metal, aluminum, litho plates, plastics and batteries.
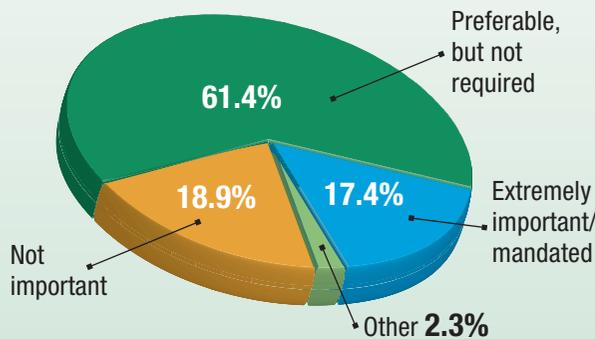
Sustainable Products Used

Recycled paper	**85.3%**
Equipment designed to use less energy	**67.4%**
Environmentally friendly inks	**51.2%**
Low VOC chemicals	**44.2%**
Environmentally friendly packaging	**43.4%**
Chemistry-free processes	**33.3%**
Equipment with low VOC emissions	**32.6%**
Locally sourced supplies	**17.8%**

0   50   100

Using recycled paper is the most popular method of demonstrating sustainability, with 85% of in-plants doing it. As for equipment used, more than two thirds are picking machines designed to use lower amounts of energy. Chemistry-free and low-VOC emission equipment is also important to about a third of in-plants. Buying supplies from local sources to reduce emissions does not seem to be of high concern with in-plants, with only 18% doing this. Notably, one respondent was brutally honest about his in-plant's lack of sustainable practices: "Being environmentally friendly is expensive. I need to keep costs as low as possible, so I have no interest in eco-friendly processes or products."

Sustainable Practices

Encourage reduced paper usage	**56.5%**
Repurpose obsolete/scrap paper inventory	**88.7%**
Use low/no-emission delivery vehicles	**11.3%**
Use software to reduce print waste on copiers	**26.6%**

0   50   100

Some 31% of in-plants indicated they have implemented new processes to improve sustainability. These include repurposing scrap paper (89%) and encouraging customers to use less paper (56.5%) even when this means less print work for the in-plant. This might mean suggesting smaller run lengths printed on demand or duplexing a job. Some in-plants have added app design services to enable customers to print less. More than a quarter employ software on fleet devices that requires users to swipe a card before their job is printed, reducing the waste of printed jobs that are never retrieved. And 11% are using electric vehicles or even bicycles to deliver work. Other ways that in-plants have changed to be more sustainable include:

- Moved from offset to all digital to reduce chemical use
- Clean equipment using fewer chemicals
- Repurpose mail cartons and other packaging to deliver print jobs
- Instituted the PrintReleaf program to automatically replant trees based on paper usage in copiers
- Reduced water usage
- Replaced shrink wrapping with paper banding
- Moved to a location with higher energy efficiency

Does Your Organization Value Environmentally Responsible Paper?

61.4% Preferable, but not required

18.9% Not important

17.4% Extremely important/mandated

Other **2.3%**

Most organizations do not mandate the use of environmentally responsible (e.g., high post-consumer waste content) paper. Only 17% say there is a mandate or strong preference for it. The majority (61%) say their organizations like the idea of environmentally responsible paper, but don't require it. Nearly 20% say it's not important at all to their organizations.
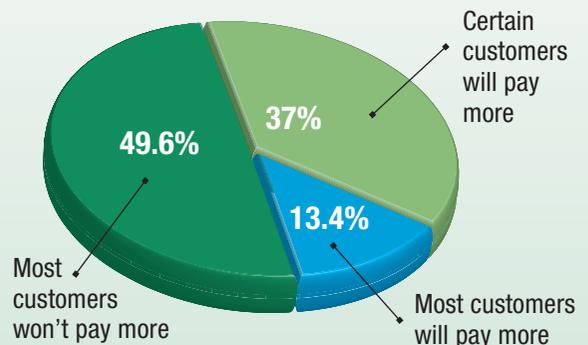
More Green for Green Sheets?

49.6% Most customers won't pay more

37% Certain customers will pay more

13.4% Most customers will pay more

Using Recycled or FSC-certified paper can come with a cost. Some in-plant customers are willing to pay that price for the privilege of appearing more environmentally friendly. But half say customers will not. Interestingly, these numbers are almost identical to those published in our Oct. 2013 paper buying survey, showing that attitudes toward recycled and FSC-certified paper have not budged in four years.