THE GREEN PRINTING OPPORTUNITY

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If you’d asked most people five years ago to predict the biggest impetus to change within the printing industry for 2007 and beyond, I doubt many would have been able to pick the environment. But that’s where we are, climate change is upon us and the environment will continue to demand that we reshape businesses globally.

SUSTAINABILITY NOT MANDATORY, YET

Governments will increasingly impose further legislation upon businesses regarding sustainability and emissions. But business can’t afford to be complacent and wait for this to happen, or they will be left behind. Consumers are demanding this level of accountability now and will vote with their feet. The customers I speak with are increasingly concerned about these issues and there is a growing impetus within their organisations to change their purchasing to become more sustainable and move towards carbon neutrality.

Goldman Sachs JB Were recently announced that stock market analysts are already anticipating higher electricity prices caused by the imposition of some form of price on carbon emissions. So it’s only a matter of time before this is a real cost of doing business.

Customers are voting with their feet. The crowd swell of public opinion about global warming and concern for the environment is growing. Increasingly, my team is seeing a change in attitudes of purchasing personnel in large corporate and government organisations.

WON’T GOING ‘GREEN’ COST MY BUSINESS TOO MUCH?

Often what I hear from resellers and the channel is margins in the printing industry are increasingly tight, and I know they fear that green considerations will just add cost to their bottom line. This really isn’t the case. To be successful in this market you have to listen to what your customer is telling you, be able to adapt, and always be looking at ways to add value. Fortunately we have a significant edge in environmental sustainability as our products have been designed with the environment in mind. It’s a huge advantage, as technology like ECOSYS means customers can replace the toner only, rather than drum and developer unit, reducing unnecessary waste and costs drastically.

There are a number of ways businesses, and resellers in particular, can incorporate green policies into their everyday operations that will not only save the business money but will make you a more appealing vendor to your customers and a more sustainable entity. We have commissioned a number of E-Waste surveys - the first in 2002 and most recently in 2006. In both surveys it was obvious people are environmentally responsible in the home, but when it comes to the office environment they are confused about what to do and often feel exasperated and give up. Well, it shouldn’t be so: we’ve made some very simple changes as well as some more sophisticated ones. Simply separating our waste into three bins, recyclables, paper and general waste, saved us 27 per cent on our waste disposal costs. Movement sensors on our lighting, so it switches off when you leave the room, slashed our electricity costs. Running screen savers is another good one.

Our head office in Japan has solar panels on the roof and now puts electricity back into the grid. We’ve been associated with Clean Up Australia for over six years now and our staff has shown incredible commitment in cleaning up local Brush Farm Park. It was polluted with cars, scrap metal, toxic waste and weeds. It took us five years, but through an annual Business Clean Up Day event, we’ve restored it to a pristine state so all the native wildlife has returned. I can’t tell you what a kick the staff got out of that and the enthusiasm they demonstrated. It’s something we’re really proud of and has certainly been a great way to build team spirit.

ADDITION RESSELLER VALUE

Resellers who are proactive, can add value and can reinvent themselves, are the ones who will survive and thrive. The marketplace offers a great opportunity today as consumers are savvy and deeply concerned about the environment. Visionaries like Al Gore and Rupert Murdoch, who have the foresight to give the environment the benefit of the doubt and the courage to make brave decisions (Rupert recently announced all his Telstra NewsCorp Corp businesses worldwide to be carbon neutral by 2010), are raising awareness of the environment to the masses and this is rocking consumers’ beliefs and changing their buying behaviour drastically. We’re just starting to see the beginning of this shift, and the businesses that can harness this and offer consumers what they want will thrive. You have to be very careful about ‘green washing’ here as there are a lot of companies doing that right now. Consumers are smarter than this and they’ll see through it.

It’s an exciting time for resellers because a couple of years ago it was a harder sell in many ways, a proliferation of brands and tight margins. Today, a customer understands that orphan brands may offer a cheaper quick fix, but there are bigger costs down the track both for the consumer and the environment. That product is unlikely to be robust, and good quality, but it may not have readily available parts, service and support, and more likely questionable manufacturing methods. Let alone the manufacturer taking charge of the responsible disposal of the product at the end of its life.

Now, more than ever, customers understand the benefit of paying a premium for quality products. It makes it a much easier sell for the reseller as not only can they show the cost savings of buying a ‘green’ printer, for instance, but the end user now understands the value attached to a product which creates less waste, uses responsible packaging, and is broken down and reused at the end of its life.

I presented to a corporate group at a recent seminar and used the example of the less wasteful nature of our toner cartridges and their ability to reduce waste to landfill, due to the elimination of the need to replace the drum cartridge and other components. One of them approached me later and said that alone was reason for him to spearhead a project to replace all their current printers.

I’ve been in this business a long time and I’d certainly call this a major mind shift in customer attitudes and buying behaviour. It’s a new driver.

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