



By Derek Smith

Life After Certification: Where to Now?

The astonishing growth in participation and interest in the environmental business market and paper and print, has caught many companies in the industry somewhat flatfooted. The fact is that today all the major national merchants and most of the regional merchants are dual or even triple certified by SFI, FSC and PEFC. More than 800 printers are certified, one way or the other, and in both cases the demand for certification is far exceeding the availability of the certifying companies.

At some point, all the merchants across the nation will be certified and the vast majority of printers will too, and the question will then be – where to now? What's next?

The real truth, as any merchant will know, is that none of the certification programs require any environmental adjustment by the participants in merchandising or in print. Documentation systems and space are the prime requisites. They are, simply put, a means to an end and the end is not necessarily what the trade perceives it to be. In truth for many merchants and printers, the end doesn't seem to be very clear at all, particularly to the sales people in both industries. "Going Green" is a phrase that can have many meanings.

If companies in the paper supply chain become certified simply because one or more of their key customers have told them that this is what they want from their trading partners, the business sense is obvious.

If printers and merchants believe that certification is the future in business trends they may be partially correct but in both cases they may not address the real issue. That is that the emerging environmental business market is not about certification, it is about *environmental performance* and that is quite a different matter.

Too many merchants and printers seem to think that "getting certified" is enough or is even the basis of the new market. It is probably much closer to the starting point than the end. This market is just beginning and it is not ultimately going to be about certification although the need of the ultimate consumer to demonstrate environmental responsibility by the display of the SFI, FSC and PEFC logos is essential.

I have worked with a large number of corporate end users across the country, and it is perfectly clear that the paper and print industry as a whole has still not done an effective job in promoting, not only the links between the pulp, paper and

printing industries and the environmental issues we all face, but also the outstanding environmental performance of the American papermakers and many of the printers, especially when compared with many foreign companies currently exploiting the domestic U.S. market.

Certification fundamentally is about sustainable management of forests and this is critically important to the defense against global warming, sustaining the industry, protecting more than 1 billion people who live in the forests of the world and, of course, the biodiversity that exists alongside them and that serves humankind so exceptionally well.

For the foresters, the pulp mills and the paper mills, certification programs like SFI and FSC are important indicators of environmental responsibility. But it is what the pulp and paper mills do in the treatment of energy, water and those forest products *in addition to the forestry protection programs* that shape the environmental message which printers and paper merchants can pass on to corporate end users. For those perceptive merchants and printers it is their own environmental profiles that will, when added to the mills they represent, lead to the environmental business market.

Market experience suggests that there are few merchant and printer sales people who are knowledgeable enough and are equipped with the technical background of the very complex issues of environmental performance both here and in allied industries. As a consequence, they are not as proficient in establishing the links between paper, print and the environment and the performance of mills and printers, in the minds of Corporate America in such a way as to drive paper and print back into the United States market, even with the advantage of a severely weakened dollar.

Chinese printed paper and board imports have grown more than 15 percent each

year since 1997 and a significant amount of this growth has found its way into books for school children. If that printed material is sourced from forests, pulp and paper mills and printing organizations that do not meet the standards that are set for mills, printers and merchants, then it is perfectly clear that not only are they putting children at risk because of the consequences of unsustainably managed deforestation. But that they are taking business away from the very people who are protecting us. Consumers of paper and print need to know these facts.

There are so many reasons to be proud of American paper and print. The recent initiative by the PIA — The Sustainable Green Printing Partnership — is an outstanding example of what the industries are doing.

Is it perfect? Probably not. But no one can doubt that they have made tremendous strides in the United States, and that they can compete environmentally with the very best in the world.

Let's take the true value of American products to the markets, do what is right for the environment and at the same time be profitable and make money. They actually work together if the approach to the environmental business market is based on knowledge and expertise. Certification alone simply doesn't and won't cut it.

The issues will, in the end, rest on the overall environmental performance of businesses and certification for a merchant or printer is only a small but important part of this.

This is a prime example where the dictum that "Knowledge is Power" is really applicable. ●

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